



Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee  
Budget Estimates 2021-22  
Monday, 24 May 2021  
Daily summary

Here is the summary of today's proceedings in the Environment and Communications Legislation Committee estimates hearing.

The committee met from 9.00am until 11.02pm.

The committee examined the environment outcomes of the Agriculture, Water and the Environment portfolio, including:

- Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment; Threatened Species Scientific Committee; Australian National Audit Office; Director of National Parks; Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority; and Bureau of Meteorology.

Topics discussed by the committee included:

- environmental funding in the Budget 2021-22;
- Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) and the protection of matters of national environmental significance;
- timeliness of environmental approvals and resourcing of the single-touch approvals;
- funding for Natural Resource Management programs and the Indigenous Rangers Program;
- new funding for threatened species in the Budget, including specific funding for koala, Leadbeater's Possum and Swift Parrot;
- \$29 million in the Budget to supplement revenue for the Bureau of Meteorology's (BoM) aviation meteorological services program;
- number of roundtables hosted by the Minister for the Environment since May 2019;
- labor hire staffing arrangements in the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (the Department);
- number of freedom of information requests received by the Department;
- impact of delayed passage of EPBC Amendment (Standards and Assurance) Bill 2021 in relation to state and territory responsibilities;
- Government's proposed new Environment Assurance Commissioner;
- breakdown of funding in the Budget for the new Oceans Leadership Package;
- requirements in relation to organisations listed on the Register of Environmental Organisations;
- questions on the National Environmental Science Program (NESP) and the Threatened Species Recovery Hub;
- publication of the 'Spending to save: What will it cost to halt Australia's extinction crisis?' research paper and discussions within the Department on whether it would be published with or without NESP affiliation;
- update on the Leadbeater's Possum recovery plan;
- consultation with the Threatened Species Scientific Committee (TSSC) on the development of the EPBC Amendment (Standards and Assurance) Bill 2021;
- comparison of the environmental standards released by the Government with the standards recommended in the Final Report of the Independent Review of the EPBC Act by Professor Graeme Samuel;

- TSSC advice to the Department on the use of recovery plans and conservation advices, including specific advice in relation to the 167 species with outstanding recovery plans and the recommendation for 150 of these species to retain only conservation advices rather than receive a recovery plan;
- number of additional staff needed to advance the processing of overdue recovery plans;
- update on the changing status of threatened species over time and the drafting of a recovery plan for koalas;
- funding arrangements for Kakadu National Park;
- update on the amount contracted of the \$50 million for bushfire recovery funding;
- members on the wildlife and threatened species bushfire recovery expert panel;
- update on funding allocated and contracted from the Environmental Restoration Fund;
- details on the Government's 10-year Threatened Species Strategy;
- update on funding contracted and spent within the Regional Land Partnerships program;
- Federal Government's cessation of funding to the Save the Tasmanian Devil Program and an update on the status of the species;
- details on the criteria used for tender selection under the NESP for the six research hubs;
- questions on the Consultation Document on Eligibility for Delisting of the Humpback Whale;
- status of Senator Hanson-Young's request for an Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) audit into Western Sydney Airport offsets;
- details on the Auditor-General's report on Referrals, Assessments and Approvals of Controlled Actions under the EPBC Act, including whether there was consultation with Professor Samuel;
- ANAO's process for considering whether to conduct an audit and the audit process;
- details pertaining to the Auditor-General's report on the Implementation of the Great Barrier Reef Foundation Partnership;
- questions in relation to the Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs);
- Department's response to the ANAO's recommendations in relation to environmental offsets under the EPBC Act;
- Biodiversity Offset Delivery Plan, the Western Sydney Airport, and the Orchard Hills site;
- Department's response to the inquiry into shark mitigation and deterrent measures;
- delegation attending the UNESCO World Heritage Committee meeting on 16-31 July 2021;
- Department's response to the ANAO's recommendations regarding the Great Barrier Reef Foundation's fundraising shortfall;
- number of key threatening processes listed under the EPBC Act since September 2013 and also since the 2019 bushfires;
- number of threat abatement plans currently with the Department, what those plans are in relation to, and which ones are due for review;
- update on the feral pigs and feral goats threat abatement plans;
- update on the proposed ban on the domestic trade of ivory and rhinoceros horn;
- Ministerial Indigenous Heritage Roundtable on 21 September 2020;
- destruction of Juukan Gorge rock caves and the Department's response to improve protections of Indigenous heritage;
- update on the Recycling Modernisation Fund (RMF), plastic waste exports and Australia's recycling capacity by tonnage;
- Department's response to Adani self-reporting breaches of its environmental conditions for the Carmichael coalmine;
- clarification on the Moreton Bay Ramsar site boundary;
- co-regulatory approaches under product stewardship arrangements under the *Recycling and Waste Reduction Act 2020* and the issue of free-riders;
- process for voluntary product stewardship accreditation arrangements under the *Recycling and Waste Reduction Act 2020*;
- independent review of the National Environment Protection (Used Packaging Materials) Measure 2011 and the Australian Packaging Covenant;
- announcement of new marine parks in the Indian Ocean;
- update on the Government's Ghost Nets Initiative and the impact of ghost nets on threatened species;

- breakdown of the \$216 million funding package over 10 years to support growing tourism in Kakadu National Park;
- Department's response to the Northern Territory Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority accusation of illegal works on a sacred site near Gunlom Falls in Kakadu National Park;
- update on the draft Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan;
- funding arrangements between the Great Barrier Reef Foundation and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority;
- update on staffing at the Reef HQ Aquarium;
- threats to the Great Barrier Reef;
- funding in the Budget for the BoM;
- timing of BoM's weather and climate predictions for the upcoming spring and summer seasons;
- update on BoM's Aviation Weather Services and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- impact of the automation of processes within BoM on staffing;
- status of the new weather radar for Tennant Creek, Northern Territory;
- update on Australia's new Antarctic icebreaker vessel, RSV Nuyina;
- frequency of the Antarctic Division's inspections of Chinese bases on Antarctica; and
- update on the TasPorts risk assessment regarding the RSV Nuyina's ability to fit under the Tasman Bridge.