

Questions on notice for Universities Australia.

Committee: Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee inquiry.

Inquiry: Identification of leading practices in ensuring evidence-based regulation of farm practices that impact water quality outcomes in the Great Barrier Reef.

Hearing date: 28 August 2020

Session: 11.15am to 12.00pm.

Witnesses: Universities Australia (UA), Science & Technology Australia (STA), Australian Academy of Science (AAS).

Relevant Hansard excerpt

Senator KIM CARR: I'll go to this question of research misconduct that's been raised with regard James Cook. As minister I set-up a misconduct committee and review process. I don't believe any work has been done on any other process since that time—although I understand there's some speculation about a new process to be canvassed on that issue. How many occasions are you aware of where there's been reference to the misconduct review? **To get a sense of what the level of scientific misconduct is within the research community, do we have any numbers of allegations of scientific misconduct across the entire system on an annual basis compared to the number of actual research projects undertaken? Do you have any advice on that? Do you want to take that on notice?**

Ms Jackson: Thank you very much for the question. I can certainly take that on notice. My general view is it will be infinitesimal. However, the whole point of the process is that when there is misconduct it is identified and weeded out. It is a very robust process. There are a large range of codes of conduct, of guides for behaviour, of ethics processes. This is no walk through the park. It is a very complex process and a very robust process. If that evidence exists we can get it to you.

QUESTION 1 (p.40: Kim Carr):

To get a sense of what the level of scientific misconduct is within the research community, do we have any numbers of allegations of scientific misconduct across the entire system on an annual basis compared to the number of actual research projects undertaken?

ANSWER:

UA does not collate figures on this topic. The ARC and NHMRC are the principal public research funding bodies. An estimate of the rate of misconduct in projects funded by these agencies is a reasonable estimate of the rate of the total publicly funded research system.

In 2018-19, the ARC identified 35 new matters relating to actual or potential breaches of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (the Code), or research misconduct in 2018–19¹.

In 2018, there were 60,818 full time equivalent academic staff in Australian universities.²

There is no equivalent figure in the NHMRC annual report, however it does, in its 2018-19 annual report, note there were no instances of fraud in 2017-18 (latest available data).

¹ ARC 2018-19 annual report (p. 66).

² Department of Education, Skills and Employment, uCube.

Relevant Hansard excerpt

p. 40: Kim Carr:

Senator KIM CARR: Could you take it on notice. It's my observation that there has been a reduction in water research in this country from the period of, let's say, 2009 through, on the latest figures I've got, 2017. There might be better. It moved from about \$85 million down to about \$15 million in water research in that period. I wonder if you could confirm that trend line. **I ask whether Ms Jackson or Ms Schubert could comment on the adequacies of infrastructure support for marine science research given what's happening with this particular inquiry? How has that moved?** You might want to take that on notice if you don't have data immediately available.

Ms Jackson: I don't have data immediately available on that specific topic, but I'm sure senators will be aware there are some very serious challenges to funding for both the conduct of research and research infrastructure, courtesy of the COVID virus and the very serious revenue hits that universities and others in research agencies are facing. We estimate that between \$3.5 billion and \$3.3 billion will be lost to research this year and there could be a possible loss of up to 7,000 researchers just in universities, quite apart from the private sector and other public sector agencies. So all sorts of research is under genuine threat because of this extraordinary virus, which is closing our borders and stopping the flow of international students into the country.

QUESTION 2 (p. 40/41: Kim Carr):

I ask whether Ms Jackson or Ms Schubert could comment on the adequacies of infrastructure support for marine science research given what's happening with this particular inquiry? How has that moved?

ANSWER:

Universities Australia does not hold information specific to marine science research infrastructure.