

Select Committee on Regional Australia  
Answers to questions on notice  
**Agriculture, Water and the Environment Portfolio**

**Committee:** Select Committee on Regional Australia  
**Inquiry:** Inquiry into Regional Australia  
**Question No:** 1  
**Hearing Date:** 12 May 2020  
**Division/Agency:** Agvet Chemicals Fisheries & Forestry Division  
**Topic:** Forestry transport package  
**Hansard Page:** 1-2  
**Question Date:** 12 May 2020  
**Question Type:** Spoken

**Dr Haines asked:**

Dr HAINES: Thank you very much, Ms Deininger and staff, for your submission to the committee. I note, of course, that circumstances have changed dramatically since that submission was made. We have subsequently experienced, in rural and regional Australia, very, very serious bushfires, and now, of course, we're in the midst of the COVID-19 restrictions and the impact of those.

I want to ask some questions specifically about forestry in the context of the bushfires. On 17 March this year I wrote to the Victorian and Commonwealth governments detailing a proposal for funding from the north-east Victorian timber industry, which was specifically asking for a \$13 million contribution to a four-part timber salvage operation—harvesting salvaged timber, transporting salvaged timber, processing salvaged timber and rehabilitating logged land. So it was harvest, transport, manufacturing and rehabilitation; the \$13 million was split between those four phases. Yesterday the government announced a \$15 million forestry transport package to assist the forestry industry with the increased costs of transporting burnt salvaged logs over longer distances to surviving timber mills or storage sites in bushfire affected areas of Victoria and New South Wales. My question is: is there a reason why the \$15 million forestry announcement yesterday related only to transportation and not harvesting, processing or rehabilitation?

Ms Deininger: Thank you for your question. As you mentioned, yesterday there was an announcement from the government in relation to bushfire recovery. I'm just looking at my notes in relation to that. As you mentioned, it is to do with the transport of logs and so on. What areas were you concerned about that weren't covered?

Dr HAINES: Harvesting, processing and rehabilitation.

Ms Deininger: Certainly the government's announcement did cover, as I mentioned, the transport assistance. I will check if I can get some additional information on the scope of that particular announcement and if any reasons were given for not including those items.

Dr HAINES: Thank you; I'd appreciate that. While you are seeking more information, could you also find out for me please just how that \$15 million will be allocated between Victoria and New South Wales, between the different regions within each state and between the different actors in the timber industry within each region? It's not clear from the announcement, and our forestry constituents are very interested in that, of course. I'm also very keen to find out if there will be more funding coming through to our forestry industries, who have been so badly affected by bushfire, and, really, any other mechanisms in regard to requested funding. As you can imagine, the processing of salvaged logs is really problematic for the machinery, with carbon clogging the sawmills and so on. So processing is really problematic, and also rehabilitation of those forests is really important, so if you could chase that for me I'd be most appreciative.

CHAIR: Helen, we need to be a little cautious. The staff at the department can provide you with advice about the announcement that has been made. Other announcements and other things are really questions for the executive. For the benefit of the witness, I think what questions can be answered ought to be answered. Those that aren't, obviously, need to be directed to the relevant minister. If it assists you, Helen, I made similar inquiries yesterday regarding the minister, and he made it plain to me that this was the first tranche of support rather than the conclusive response.

Ms Deininger, could you take those questions on notice, and we can answer them where perhaps you're limited in your ability to do so given your role within the Public Service. I think you should clarify that as well.

Dr HAINES: Thank you; I'd appreciate that. While you are seeking more information, could you also find out for me please just how that \$15 million will be allocated between Victoria and New South Wales, between the different regions within each state and between the different actors in the timber industry within each region? It's not clear from the announcement, and our forestry constituents are very interested in that, of course. I'm also very keen to find out if there will be more funding coming through to our forestry industries, who have been so badly affected by bushfire, and, really, any other mechanisms in regard to requested funding. As you can imagine, the processing of salvaged logs is really problematic for the machinery, with carbon clogging the sawmills and so on. So processing is really problematic, and also rehabilitation of those forests is really important, so if you could chase that for me I'd be most appreciative.

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**Answer:**

*\$15 million in forestry transport assistance*

This transport assistance will support continued salvage timber harvesting activities by minimising downstream bottlenecks, and it will support the processing sector by delivering logs to mills that are facing supply shortages. In some fire-affected regions local mills have limited capacity to process the high volumes of fire-affected wood before it degrades, and several local processing mills have been damaged or destroyed. This has created a need for some logs to travel further to mills with available capacity.

The \$15 million will be provided to companies that are seeking to transport unprocessed logs from harvest to processors or storage and for further distances than normal. The funds will be supporting those that are required to transport burnt, salvaged logs.

The Victorian and NSW Governments will match the Australian Government funding for forestry transport assistance, and we are working together to finalise the details of delivery.

*Further assistance*

- The government continues to work with industry and state governments to identify opportunities for recovery actions and assistance at a local and regional level, so that the forestry industries are better positioned for their long-term recovery.

Select Committee on Regional Australia  
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**Agriculture, Water and the Environment Portfolio**

**Committee:** Select Committee on Regional Australia  
**Inquiry:** Inquiry into Regional Australia  
**Question No:** 2  
**Hearing Date:** 12 May 2020  
**Division/Agency:** Climate Adaptation & Resilience Division (CARD)  
**Topic:** Recent bushfires - department's priorities for climate adaptation  
**Hansard Page:** 5-6  
**Question Date:** 12 May 2020  
**Question Type:** Spoken

**Dr Haines asked:**

Dr HAINES: In the context of our recent bushfires, drought and the need to build resilience in the agricultural sector on a warming planet, could you outline the department's priorities for climate adaptation and agriculture.

Ms Deininger: I'll answer in general terms. We don't have anyone from our climate adaptation area here, so I'll certainly take on notice what I might be able to provide from them. But, certainly, the government has announced things like the Future Drought Fund, which is designed to try and assist our agricultural sector and our agricultural businesses to deal with any potential changes in climate or impacts such as drought. As we discussed earlier today, the government has also set up the National Bushfire Recovery Agency and established a fund of \$2 billion to assist our regional communities, businesses, farms and other groups in those communities to respond to bushfires and to rebuild and come back better in response to that devastation. We've also been working very closely with the states and territories, and I think that that's been a hallmark of not only the bushfires but of COVID-19 as well. Through things like the national cabinet and other coordination mechanisms, we have worked very closely with the states and territories, including in relation to food supply chains, to make sure that we are adapting the way government operates in the new environment. So I'm certainly happy to take on notice what we are able to say in relation to the climate adaptation aspect, but we didn't cover that in our submission, of course, because that aspect of the environment department wasn't with us at the time the submission was lodged with the committee.

Dr HAINES: Thank you. If you could take that on notice, that would be much appreciated. I'm particularly interested in key programs that you may be interested in funding or, indeed, are funding. I know our cattle industry in particular is very interested in incentivising methane reduction through vaccines and inhibitors, for example. So I'm curious to know if the department is looking at such work in a bid, really, for us to adapt and to thrive in the agricultural sector into the future.

Ms Deininger: We are certainly happy to do that, and I know that MLA, Meat and Livestock Australia, and our research and development corporations in the red meat sector are active in that area as well. So we are certainly happy to take that and come back to the committee.

Dr HAINES: Thank you very much

**Answer:**

The department is working with the agriculture sector through a range of government initiatives that support emission reductions and adaptation approaches to a changing climate.

The department, in collaboration with the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources, contributes to the development of methodologies and approaches to reduce emissions in the agriculture sector. This provides opportunities through the Government's Emissions Reduction Fund.

We are also progressing a coordinated national approach and work program with the states and territories to support the sector adapt to climate change and manage emissions. This approach was endorsed by Agriculture Ministers in October 2019.

Through working with industry groups and farmers the department is supporting the adoption of new practices and technologies and supporting farmers build their climate risk management capability. This includes through:

- the \$5 billion Future Drought Fund which will help farmers and communities become more prepared for, and resilient to, the impacts of drought. From July 2020, \$100 million will be invested annually in projects across Australia to strengthen drought resilience.
- the \$1 billion National Landcare Program is contributing towards sustainable agricultural outcomes including improving soil, biodiversity and vegetation, and increasing the capacity of our farms to adapt to climate change.
- the implementation of the \$34 million Agriculture Stewardship Program to reward farmers for the stewardship of their land and improved biodiversity.

There is also significant investments in research and development with approximately \$300 million being provided to Rural Research and Development Corporations (RDCs) each year in matching funding. Climate related research includes projects investigating seasonal forecasting, cover crops for water infiltration and reduced evaporation, and heat-tolerant genes.