

Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE - CSIRO

Inquiry Hearing: Australian National Registry of Emissions Units Bill 2011; Carbon Credits (Carbon Farming Initiative) Bill 2011; Carbon Credits (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2011

Wednesday, 20 April 2011

REFERENCE: Question on Notice, Hansard, 20 April 2011, pages EC6-7

Senator NASH—Dr Keating, you mentioned ‘unintended consequences’ in your opening address. What do you see that those unintended consequences are?

Dr Keating—The ones that have been explored in CSIRO research would be things like relationships between forestry plantings and water flows, and negative biodiversity impacts potentially of forestry plantings or, for that matter, positive biodiversity impacts. Some of the consequences could be positive as well as negative. The issue that we have really been skirting around are the land contests, if you like, for agriculture and forestry—

Senator NASH—I do not think we have been skirting around that.

Dr Keating—Yes, sorry—trade-offs with food production and all those sorts of things. Land use is obviously a complex and highly interconnected issue. At one level, it is amazing that it changes so slowly. My colleague would tell me that the entire plantation forestry estate in Australia is two million hectares, as we sit here today—

Dr Polglase—Yes.

Dr Keating—and it has taken however long to get to that two million hectares, but while it does change slowly it has very far-reaching consequences.

Senator NASH—Okay. You also mentioned that this legislation ‘attempts’ to address it. Can you give us some more detail on notice on what ways you think it attempts to address it and also what ways, if any, you think that falls short?

Dr Keating—I can take that on notice.

ANSWER

For an authoritative and comprehensive response to this question, CSIRO feels it is best referred to the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency.

However, CSIRO is aware of significant changes in the proposed legislation that arose out of the public consultation process whereby the Minister would have the power to exclude carbon offset projects that pose a "significant risk" of adverse impacts on water availability, biodiversity conservation, employment and local communities in the project area.

CSIRO is conducting research on developing integrated approaches to assessing the carbon abatement, water availability, biodiversity and economic consequences to land use change. In time, this research or activities that grow out of it could help inform any future Ministerial determination of adverse impacts. However CSIRO is not aware of any shortcomings in the approaches to managing adverse impacts in the proposed CFI legislation at the present time and there are provisions in the legislation to accommodate new information such as this will provide.