

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2011-2012, 19 October 2011

Question: E11-257

OUTCOME 1: Population Health

Topic: CONSULTANCIES

Written Question on Notice

Senator Fierravanti-Wells asked:

There was a \$51,273 study on the seed digestion by birds:

- a) What did this study entail?
- b) Why was the study necessary for the health department?
- c) What information did it provide that wasn't already available through academic literature?
- d) Who authorised it?

Answer:

- a) The study entailed controlled feeding of common pest birds with seeds of wheat, barley, canola, ryegrass and white clover to determine if seed viability was affected by passage through the birds gut.
- b) As required by the *Gene Technology Act 2000* (the Act) the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR), located within the Department of Health and Ageing, aims to protect the health and safety of people and the environment by regulating dealings with genetically modified organisms (GMOs). In deciding whether to allow the release of a GM plant into the environment, the OGTR must consider the potential for the GM seed to disperse in the environment. The study provided important information that will assist this consideration for future applications to release GM plants.
- c) Scientific literature contains limited information on seed dispersal by birds in Australia. The study was used to validate the available information and provide new information on whether the three common pest bird species consumed the five types of seed in captivity and whether these seeds germinated after passage through the bird gut.
- d) The study was authorised in accordance with the functions of the Regulator under Section 27(h) of the Act which provide for him "to undertake or commission research in relation to risk assessment and the biosafety of GMOs".