

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment portfolio

Question No: 55
Hearing: Budget Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 1
Programme: Environment Assessment and Compliance Division
Topic: STAFFING LEVELS - EPBC COMPLIANCE
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Question Type: Spoken

Senator Waters asked:

Senator WATERS: In relation to compliance jobs in the department, I think Senator Urquhart earlier asked and you said that there were 236 folk in the environmental assessment and compliance division.

Ms Carlos: That is correct.

Senator WATERS: She asked how many would be lost out of that division and you basically said that you are not sure just yet. I am interested to know, of that 236 how many are in EPBC compliance?

Ms Carlos: I think we would have to take that on notice. That would require us to look at the organisational structure within that division and outline what activities staff work on. It is a little bit more detailed than just the divisional number.

Senator WATERS: You don't have that to hand?

Ms Carlos: No.

Senator WATERS: If you could please take that on notice, and again ideally tomorrow because I am keen to pursue this in detail. Specifically, I am interested in conditions enforcement. So if I can have general EPBC compliance and also, underneath that, what proportion of that is conditions enforcement and compliance monitoring conditions. I am also interested in how many of the 184, or indeed the 250, will come from those positions.

Ms Carlos: That really has not been determined, because what we are doing with both our voluntary redundancy program and any capability assessment programs is to look to ensure that we move resources around the organisation. The line and area, in working through its budget, will have a view about its staffing levels—or the organisational unit—through the remainder of this financial year. But that won't be finalised for several weeks until we have done those budget bills internally.

Senator WATERS: How does that sit with the minister's commitment on 9 May that there would be a significant increase in compliance monitoring staff numbers?

Dr de Brouwer: I think the staff numbers in the compliance area have gone up significantly.

Senator WATERS: Since 9 May?

Dr Dripps: They have certainly gone up over the last couple of years. We now have a number of sections delivering post-approvals monitoring, and we can bring you the numbers of folk in each of those sections either later today or first thing tomorrow.

Senator WATERS: Thank you. Also if you could reflect on that commitment that after 9 May there would be a further increase and how that sits with the cuts that are going to be across the board.

Dr de Brouwer: Yes. The cuts are not mechanistic. Ultimately the department has to meet its responsibilities and deliver on the government's program. We will organise our staff and allocate staff according to those priorities. It is not that everyone has the same proportional cuts.

Senator WATERS: Yes, precisely. That is why I was asking what sections will bear the brunt of it. I look forward to that information.

Answer:

As at 20 June 2014 the Compliance and Enforcement Branch of the Environment Assessment and Compliance Division has 49 full time equivalent staff working on compliance and enforcement related activities.

The Independent Review of the Bund Wall at the Port of Gladstone, released on 9 May 2014, made reference to the number of staff monitoring projects in 2011. The number of full time equivalent staff working in the approvals monitoring sections of the Compliance and Enforcement Branch has increased from 10 in August 2011 to 24 at 20 June 2014.