

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

Question No: 228
Hearing: Budget Estimates
Outcome: Agency
Programme: Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA)
Topic: MDBA - Suite of programmes
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Question Date: 25 May 2015
Question Type: Spoken

Senator Singh asked:

ACTING CHAIR: I am interested in the revised suit of programs agreed by the basin states, how they have changed based on the revised contributions and where you are up to with that.

Dr Dickson: The programs for 2015-16 are very similar to the programs for this current year. Since 2011-12, when New South Wales unilaterally reduced funding, there have been significant changes across the programs, but this current year the core programs which are managing the River Murray, the salinity program, the Living Murray program and the supporting science programs are pretty much as they were for this current year and they are very similar for next year, so there has been little change from last year to this in terms of the nature and the scope of the programs.

ACTING CHAIR: Are you able to provide us with a bit more detail of that because you said 'very similar'? Could you provide on notice some more detail around what that revised suite of programs that has been agreed to by the basin states looks like.

Dr Dickson: Certainly. The basin ministers are due to formally sign off on their corporate plan for next year, so once that is done it could be quite a straightforward job and we can point out what was done this year and what the program is for next year.

ACTING CHAIR: Also, could you take on notice a little bit more detail around your work program?

Dr Dickson: What sort of detail would you be after in relation to the joint funded programs?

ACTING CHAIR: Just any other detail that you have. I am mindful of time. I do not want to take all my colleagues' time and the chair has returned, so she is probably going to stop me now anyway. We will put it in further questions on notice to you in terms of the detail.

Dr Dickson: We could very simply do just a summary of what is involved in each program. We have that information up on our web, so we could probably do a simple assessment like that.

ACTING CHAIR: Yes, if you could send that to us. We will have a look and then if we need any further information we can put it on notice. Thank you.

Answer:

1. Funding by the jurisdictions for the joint activities was approximately \$107m in 2011-12 and is approximately \$64m in 2014-15.
2. To provide a bit more detail about these changes:
 - (a) The budget for River Murray Operations (RMO) is \$54.71 million in 2014-15. In setting these budgetary parameters Basin governments have deferred some activities such as dam upgrades and asset maintenance and renewals.
 - (b) Funding for renewing (non-RMO) Joint Activities in transition to the current budget which was set at \$20.2m in 2014-15, joint governments have decided to:

- i. Cease to fund the Native Fish Strategy and the Sustainable Rivers Audit in 2012-13 and from 2013-14, the South East Australia Climate Initiative (SEACI) II climate change partnership and the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN) program.
- ii. Reduce funding for the Living Murray (TLM) program from \$17.8m in 2011-12 to \$13.7m in 2013-14 and \$10.6m in 2014-15. The 2014-15 budget has required reductions across all TLM program areas.
- iii. Reduce the budget for water quality monitoring from \$900,000 in 2012-13 to \$450,000 in 2014-15. Monitoring is now undertaken at fewer sampling sites, with a smaller range of parameters sampled and a reduced frequency of sampling.
- iv. Reduce funding for salinity management in the Basin (including reductions in cost of Salt Interception Scheme operations) by approximately \$1.7m. A new 15-year strategy is being prepared for Ministerial Council to manage salinity up to 2030.