

Economics Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Industry, Innovation and Science Portfolio
Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing 2015-16
22 October 2015

AGENCY: COMMONWEALTH SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH ORGANISATION

TOPIC: Forest and forest product research

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard, 22 October 2015, page 51)

QUESTION No.: SI-10

Senator RICE: I want to talk about your forest and forest products research. Late last year, three respected and senior former CSIRO researchers published a paper that identified: ... a dramatic and damaging reduction in the level of research and development in the forest industry in Australia over the last 5 to 7 years ...

Dr Glen Kile and Alan Brown, the former CSIRO forestry chief, were two of the scientists involved. They state:

The fragmentation and serious decline of R&D capacity in Australia is a major weakness and a risk to business compared to other timber producing countries such as Canada, New Zealand, Finland, Chile and Brazil.

I want to get your response to that and what you feel the current state of forest and forest products research is.

Dr Marshall: I would have to take that on notice. That is the first I have heard of it.

Senator RICE: So you do not have any comments about the current state of forest or forest product research?

Dr Marshall: No.

Senator RICE: Okay, if you could take on notice your response to that and particularly what the current number of forest scientists and researchers employed by CSIRO is and how that compares to staffing levels 10 years ago and 20 years ago?

Dr Marshall: Will do. Sorry that we did not have the information for you.

ANSWER

CSIRO's "forestry" research occurs in four main areas: i) bushfire behaviour and risks; ii) carbon cycling and vegetation processes; iii) landscape and forest function; iv) forest genetics. The 37 staff working in these areas undertake research to inform forest management in Australia and abroad, greenhouse gas mitigation and climate adaptation strategies, as well as undertaking science focused on water, fire and environmental management relating to trees in landscapes.

CSIRO's forestry work contributed significantly to plantation forestry related CRCs for a period of 21 years, or three CRC funding cycles. In this period, CSIRO employed between 214 (2005) and 268 (1995) FTEs.

Demand for forest-related research in Australia, whether from industry or other sources, has been in long-term decline, reflecting the reduced share of the industry in the broader Australian economy. CSIRO has sought to adjust to this change by retaining skills in a range of areas that remain most important to Australian industry and science, and that complement those from other research providers such as universities. This reduces risks associated with fragmentation.

CSIRO is not the only contributor to forest science in Australia; of the estimated \$30 million spent on forestry industry research each year, an average \$1.2 million pa is received by CSIRO. CSIRO retains significant capability by drawing on appropriation funds (of the order of \$7.7 million pa) or by deploying forestry staff to related areas of work, such as agriculture. These approaches enable CSIRO to retain core capability that can expand in the event that demand for forest science skills increases in future.