

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2015

Agriculture

Question: 102

Division/Agency: Sustainability and Biosecurity Policy Division

Topic: Landcare Advisory Committee

Proof Hansard page: 20 (23.02.2015)

Senator EDWARDS ASKED:

Senator EDWARDS: You brought up Landcare. There is a fair bit of confusion out there about the various Landcare entities and what their roles are. What is the role of the new Landcare Advisory Committee?

Mr Glyde: I am sorry, I do not have that information. It would be something that we would cover under the sustainability biosecurity policy division which is appearing later in the day. They can give you more information.

Senator EDWARDS: Okay.

Mr Glyde: I will put them on notice if you like.

Answer:

The National Landcare Advisory Committee (the Committee) is a non-statutory body established by the Natural Heritage Ministerial Board (the Board), comprising of the Ministers for the Environment and Agriculture. The Committee exists to advise the Board on the development and implementation of the National Landcare Programme (the Programme).

The Committee will: provide advice on programme design to ensure effective and efficient achievement of Programme priorities; provide advice and feedback on implementation issues and risks including the effectiveness of investment in achieving outcomes; advise on options and opportunities for continual improvement particularly in relation to engaging stakeholders and maintaining community participation; and provide advice to the Board on any other matters. Further details are in the Committee's Terms of Reference at **Attachment A**.

The Committee comprises of 10 members and is chaired by Ms Sue Middleton. The duration of the Committee appointment is for 12 months, finishing 12 September 2015.

National Landcare Advisory Committee Terms of Reference

Introduction

The National Landcare Advisory Committee is a non-statutory body established by the Natural Heritage Ministerial Board (the Board), comprising the Ministers for the Environment and Agriculture, to advise the Board on the development and implementation of the National Landcare Programme.

Role

The Committee will provide advice to the Board on the National Landcare Programme including investment priorities, delivery, community consultation and engagement, and achievement of outcomes.

The role of the Committee will be to:

1. Provide advice on the design settings for the National Landcare Programme to ensure the most efficient and effective achievement of programme priorities and the Government's objectives for improving sustainable agriculture and Australia's environment.
2. Provide advice and feedback on implementation issues or risks for the National Landcare Programme including the effectiveness of investments in achieving National Landcare Programme outcomes.
3. Advise on options and opportunities for continual improvement of National Landcare Programme delivery, particularly in relation to engaging stakeholders and maintaining community participation.
4. Provide advice on any other matters requested by the Board.

Powers of responsibility

The Committee is a non-statutory advisory body to the Board in respect of the National Landcare Programme. It is not a decision-making body and does not have any specific powers.

Meetings

The Committee will meet face-to-face twice per year in Canberra. Matters to be considered by the Committee may also be dealt with by correspondence out-of-session, as required.

Secretariat

Secretariat support and meeting logistics will be provided through a joint arrangement between the Department of the Environment and the Department of Agriculture.

Termination of appointment

An appointed member may resign from the Committee at any time by giving written notice to the Board.

The Board may terminate a member's appointment to the Committee at any time by giving written notice in writing to the member.

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Question: 103

Division: Sustainability and Biosecurity Policy Division

Topic: Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement – horse industry

Proof Hansard page: 125 (23.02.2015)

Senator BACK asked:

Senator BACK: Would you go back to horse imports for a moment—and I recall your time at Animal Health Australia. Someone drew to my attention the other day that it was 2010 that the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement was signed for the horse industry. I think in that legislation there was to be a five-year review. How time flies. Would it fall now under your responsibility to undertake that review?

Dr Bond: No.

Senator BACK: Mr Glyde, since the officers have gone, I just wonder if you would be kind enough to take on notice—

Mr Glyde: That is very kind of you; I will take it on notice.

Senator BACK: Fortunately, we have not had occasion to call upon the EADRA, but I am keen to know what, if anything, is being done at the moment to honour that five-year review process.

Mr Glyde: Sure.

Answer:

Section 35 of the *Horse Disease Response Levy Collection Act 2011* (the Act) requires the minister to ensure that at least once every five years there is a review of whether a levy on manufactured feed and worm treatments is the most appropriate way of raising money to meet the costs of any emergency response to a disease affecting horses.

This review is not required if regulations are in force under the Act providing for the working out of an amount (except a nil amount) of levy on a disposal of manufactured feed or worm treatment.

This is not currently the case. The levy rate is nil with no regulations in force under the Act. The department will ensure the review is undertaken in accordance with the legislation.

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Question: 104

Division/Agency: Sustainability and Biosecurity Policy Division

Topic: Regional NRM bodies

Proof Hansard page: 128-129 (23.02.2015)

Senator SIEWERT asked:

Senator SIEWERT: I want to go to NRM. First off I would like to ask about the regional NRM bodies stream. That went out, I understand, for application on 4 December. Am I looking at the wrong person?

Mr Thompson: You are looking at the wrong person. We have had some changes.

Senator SIEWERT: Okay. Sorry.

Mr Thompson: Yes, the regional applications went out just before Christmas.

Senator SIEWERT: And they closed on 5 December?

Mr Thompson: They closed, yes. There are two streams in there. Some of them were groups seeking new contracts. Others were renegotiating their existing contracts.

Senator SIEWERT: The renegotiation of existing contracts—they were New South Wales, were they not? They were only—

Mr Thompson: New South Wales were only renewed for 12 months because of the change in their status.

Senator SIEWERT: Which category do they fall into?

Mr Thompson: They would be new contracts, I think, because they are with new bodies.

Ms Standen: Their contracts were extended until February this year to allow time for them to put in applications for new contracts and for that to be settled.

Senator SIEWERT: That was just for New South Wales?

Ms Standen: No, there were some other regions included in that, but for different reasons—that is, they only had their contracts extended by 12 months. That included the Perth Region NRM, the Territory NRM, the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority and the Queensland Murray-Darling Committee.

Senator SIEWERT: All those contracts were extended to February while you make the assessment decisions?

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Ms Standen: That is right.

Senator SIEWERT: When are those assessment decisions due?

Ms Standen: I will have to take that on notice.

Senator SIEWERT: By the time you get back to me on notice, you will be a fair way down the track. Can you provide more information tonight?

Mr Thompson: We may be able to, but when the contracts are finalised they will appear on our contracting list, so that will be public.

Answer:

New applications were received from the 11 New South Wales regions that underwent a boundary realignment process undertaken by the New South Wales Government and six regional bodies not previously considered as having sufficiently strong applications to warrant funding to 2017-18. In addition, two newly-recognised regional NRM bodies (OceanWatch Australia and Peel-Harvey Catchment Council) were required to apply.

The contract with OceanWatch has been finalised. Contracts with the other regions will be finalised shortly and information will be made available on the Department of the Environment web-site (<http://www.environment.gov.au/about-us/accountability-reporting/grants-listing>) within 14 days of contracts being finalised.

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Additional Estimates February 2015

Agriculture

Question: 105

Division/Agency: Sustainability and Biosecurity Policy Division

Topic: Applications

Proof Hansard page: 129 (23.02.2015)

Senator SIEWERT asked:

Senator SIEWERT: Mr Thompson, you made a comment about existing ones seeking to renegotiate?

Mr Thompson: There are a number of NRM organisations, other than the New South Wales ones plus the four we mentioned, who had contracts until 2017-18. They have either had the option of applying under the new guidelines or they are renegotiating their old contracts to meet the new requirements under the new program.

Senator SIEWERT: So everybody has to renegotiate or—

Mr Thompson: Renegotiate or re-apply—whichever suits them.

Senator SIEWERT: Where are we up to there?

Mr Thompson: Those negotiations are well underway and we expect to have them finalised in the coming months. There are quite a few of them—about 40—and we have to work through them. But they already have existing contracts through until 2017-18. Our aim is to try to have them wrapped up in the next few months because the sooner we get that done the sooner they can move forward with their new arrangements.

Senator SIEWERT: How many of those 40 applied for a new contract rather than fiddling around with the old one?

Ms Standen: Those are not details we have to hand at the moment, so we will have to take that on notice.

Senator SIEWERT: If you could, that would be appreciated.

Mr Thompson: With the numbers, it is 56 minus 19.

Senator SIEWERT: That is what I presumed you were doing, so I will not hold you to that.

Mr Thompson: It is not exactly 40 but it is of that order.

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Answer:

A total of 18 NRM organisations applied for their allocated funding out to 30 June 2018. One other, the Northern Agricultural Catchments Council, in Western Australia, also re-applied for one particular component of their funding. The remaining 38 regional NRM organisations elected to renegotiate their current contracts, the Northern Agricultural Catchments Council renegotiating the contract for the balance of their allocated funding.

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Agriculture

Question: 106

Division/Agency: Sustainability and Biosecurity Policy Division

Topic: Staff leaving regional organisations

Proof Hansard page: 131 (23.02.2015)

Senator SIEWERT asked:

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. I have more questions in this area but I will hand over on the NRM shortly, Chair. In terms of the numbers of staff that are leaving regional organisations as a result of this process, have you done an audit under this new process that you are doing now, in terms of the new contracts and renegotiating the old contracts? Has there been any audit done on the number of staff that have been lost by regional organisations?

Mr Thompson: I do not believe we have done an audit of that. Senators have asked questions about this before. The only way we can do that is by going and asking all the regions, because the staff are employed by them. Regional budgets were reduced during this process and to meet the need for community grants that have had to reduce some in some areas. So there would be some reduction in staff; we know that, but we do not have those numbers.

Senator SIEWERT: That is why I am asking, and I would have thought it would have been a good opportunity to get a handle on that while you were renegotiating the contracts. That is why I ask now. I have sought this information before, I acknowledge that. I am asking now because you are undertaking this process now.

Mr Thompson: I would have to take that on notice as to whether we are doing that. I am confident that we have not undertaken that survey of the regions as we have in the past.

Senator SIEWERT: You have not?

Mr Thompson: We have not done it in the past and we have not done one in recent time. Whether people are collecting some of that information as part of contract negotiations I could not say. I will take that on notice.

Answer:

Employment decisions are a matter for regional NRM organisations themselves. The Australian Government does not routinely monitor regional body staff employment data. This information has, in the past, been provided by state and regional organisations on request, although its accuracy cannot be verified because the Australian Government is not the only source of funds for employing regional staff. Most regional NRM organisations also receive resources from

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state/territory governments and some also from private corporations and philanthropic bodies. Levels of contributions from all sources can expect to vary over time and will impact on local staffing levels.

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Agriculture

Question: 107

Division: Sustainability and Biosecurity Policy Division

Topic: Animals that may threaten the environment

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator BULLOCK asked:

Of the animals on your watch list is there any animal that, while not posing a threat to human, animal or plant health could cause such significant damage to Australia's environment, biodiversity or ecosystems as to constitute a national emergency?

Answer:

The Asian black spined toad (*Duttaphrynus melanostictus*) is an invasive animal that would cause significant damage to Australia's environment. It is a relative of the cane toad and would have potentially greater impacts due to the possibility it may establish in the cooler southern regions.

Should a population of this pest be detected in Australia, a response would be considered under the National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement. This agreement establishes national response arrangements, including cost sharing for pests and diseases of national significance.

Agriculture

Question: 108

Division/Agency: Sustainability and Biosecurity Policy Division

Topic: International fisheries organisations

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator BULLOCK asked:

Item 5.3.1 in your operational plan for 2014-15 states that you “engage at international meetings to ensure agreed outcomes can be implemented by Australia”. I understand that AFMA personnel participate at various meetings of five separate international fisheries organisations. In relation to each of these five fisheries organisations could you clarify the extent to which Australia’s membership protects or advances the interests of the Australian fisheries industries? What other national interests, such as assisting developing States in the relevant regions or advancing broad environmental goals, are addressed by our membership of these organisations?

Answer:

This response has been provided by the Department of Agriculture, as the lead agency on international fisheries engagement policy.

Australia’s engagement in regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs) is underpinned by our obligations under the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* and the *Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 Relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks* to cooperate with other countries in the management of highly migratory, straddling and shared fisheries resources.

The four RFMOs and one Agreement Australia is a party to are:

- the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC);
- the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT);
- the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC);
- the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO); and
- the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA).

Australia is also a member of the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources where the Department of the Environment leads Australian participation.

Question: 108 (continued)

As a member of these organisations, Australia influences, and is bound by, the decisions made by these organisations. Many of these decisions can apply to a fishery or area that is within Australia's sovereign jurisdiction, or to Australian fishing operations on the high seas.

Australia engages in these international organisations as a responsible regional partner to: meet our international obligations to conserve and manage highly migratory fish stocks; ensure continued access and future development opportunities for the Australian fishing industry; and prevent any significant adverse impacts on the marine environment from fishing. Engagement in these organisations also enables Australia to maintain cooperative relationships with other States in the relevant regions.

The extent to which Australia's membership of these organisations protects or advances the interests of the Australian fisheries industries depends upon a number of factors, including the; historical catch, role and degree of influence Australia has in that organisation, the extent to which Australian interests align with that of other members and the size, structure and decision making arrangements of that organisation.

The Department's primary aim of engagement is to promote sustainable fisheries management and within the sustainable fisheries envelope protect, Australian commercial interests in the relevant fisheries. The Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) participates or otherwise provides support to the Australian delegations to these organisations by delivering technical expertise and advice on implementation of management measures determined by the conventions, consistent with AFMA's functions under the *Fisheries Administration Act 1991*.

Australia also engages in order to protect our sovereign rights and promote sustainable fisheries management internationally for stock that migrate through or straddle the high seas and Australia's exclusive economic zone. Australia also has a long-standing commitment within these organisations to mitigate the impact of fishing on ecologically related species. For the WCPFC and IOTC this engagement fulfils national interests regarding assisting developing States in the relevant regions.

Australian delegations for each meeting of these organisations are supported by a Whole of Government approved engagement strategy, to ensure that all relevant national interests are addressed.

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Agriculture

Question: 109

Division/Agency: Sustainability and Biosecurity Policy Division

Topic: Borthwick Review

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator WHISH-WILSON asked:

In regards to the Review of Commonwealth Fisheries: Legislation, Policy and Management (Borthwick Review):

1. What has been done under the current Government to address the recommendations of the Borthwick Review?
2. What has been done to update the overarching fisheries framework to include a new pillar “addressing ecosystem impacts in a fisheries context” as recommended by the Borthwick Review?
3. Is AFMA aware of any specific efforts, and has AFMA been asked to support any ministerial directions or legislative amendments, to address ecosystem impacts under the fisheries framework as was recommended by the Borthwick Review?
4. What has been done under the current Government to follow the Borthwick Review recommendation to clarify the application of the precautionary principle?

Answer:

1. Parliamentary Secretary Colbeck advised stakeholders on 21 October 2014 that the government was considering the development of an overarching fisheries policy. This overarching fisheries policy will take account of government and stakeholder comments and input gathered during the review processes, as well as the review report.
2. All of the recommendations of the Borthwick Review are being considered in the development of the overarching fisheries policy framework, including the recommendation to address ecosystem impacts in a fisheries context within that framework.

Question: 109 (continued)

3. Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) is not aware of any specific efforts. However, all fisheries policy is designed, under the ecological based fisheries management framework, to underpin sustainable fisheries management. AFMA continues to use ecological risk assessment to assess the impact of fishing on all marine species in Commonwealth fisheries and has done so for almost a decade. Each Commonwealth fishery has undergone a risk assessment. In response to these assessments, AFMA has developed management measures to mitigate the impacts of commercial fishing to reduce the assessed risk to acceptable levels.
4. All of the recommendations of the Borthwick Review are being considered in the development of the overarching fisheries policy, including the recommendation to clarify the application of the precautionary principle.