

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2016

Agriculture and Water Resources

Question: 238

Division/Agency: Sustainable Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Division

Topic: Government support of RDCs

Proof Hansard page: 109

Senator RICE asked:

Senator RICE: What is the relevant RDC?

Mr Thompson: Forest and Wood Products Australia.

Senator RICE: How much of that is supported by government?

Mr Thompson: It is like the other RDCs: There is a levy that is paid by industry. I do not have the numbers with me at the moment, but the government does support it. I think the RDC had a total budget of around \$9 million to \$10 million, so around \$4 million to \$5 million. We will come back on notice on the exact financial details.

Answer:

The Australian Government provided Forest and Wood Products Australia (FWPA) with \$3 314 970 to match eligible expenditure on research and development in the 2014–2015 financial year.

This funding is provided in accordance with a statutory funding agreement made under the *Forestry Marketing and Research and Development Services Act 2007*. The Australian Government does not match FWPA expenditure on activities not explicitly provided for in the Statutory Funding Agreement.

Total receipts for FWPA from members and government for the 2014–2015 financial year were \$9 027 664.

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Additional Estimates February 2016

Agriculture and Water Resources

Question: 239

Division/Agency: Sustainable Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Division

Topic: Forestry Industry Advisory Council – discussion paper

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator STERLE asked:

1. Provide an update on the work being undertaken by the Forestry Industry Advisory Council's development of the discussion paper on the National Wood and Fibre Plan?
2. How is the department assisting with this work?
3. What have been the associated costs with the Council's work – travel, accommodation, hospitality?
4. Is there a reporting date for the discussion paper?
5. Has the Minister sought a briefing on the work and timeline of the discussion paper?

Answer:

1. The Forestry Industry Advisory Council met on 18 February 2016 to consider a draft of its discussion paper on the National Wood and Fibre Plan. The Council agreed to undertake additional work and to reconsider the draft at its next meeting, scheduled for April 2016.
2. The department is providing secretariat services to the Forestry Industry Advisory Council, including assistance in the drafting of the discussion paper.
3. The travel, accommodation and hospitality costs apportioned to the Forestry Industry Advisory Council members and observers, and attending departmental officials, for the period to and including 18 February 2016, including GST, total:

Travel \$22 206.81

Accommodation \$8 201.00

Hospitality (food and beverages) \$5 620.87
4. No date has been set for the delivery of the discussion paper.
5. The Assistant Minister has been briefed on the work of the Forestry Industry Advisory Council and development of the discussion paper.

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Agriculture and Water Resources

Question: 240

Division/Agency: Sustainable Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Division

Topic: Forestry industry

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator STERLE asked:

1. Once again we see Government Ministers using figures that suit their narrative which is misleading to the forestry industry. Is the Department aware that the employment figures in the forestry industry fell by 6000 jobs? If not, why not?
2. Did the department seek to provide the Assistant Minister with the correct figure?
3. Are media releases by the Assistant Minister fact checked by the department?

Answer:

1. The department is aware that the forestry sector employment figures changed from 70 458 in 2013-14, to 64 512 in 2014-15. The forestry sector employment figures for 2014-15 were published on 11 November 2015, using Australian Bureau of Statistics labour force survey results, in the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) report - *Australian forest and wood products statistics: March and June quarters 2015*.
2. In the 15 December 2015 media release titled 'New Australian Government funding for forestry R&D', the department supplied the 2013-14 forestry industry employment figure, rather than the latest 2014-15 figure. The figure has now been updated to the latest figure, with a footnote added to explain that a change has been made.
3. Media releases are fact checked by the department but the availability of an updated figure was missed on this occasion.

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Agriculture and Water Resources

Question: 241

Division/Agency: Sustainable Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Division

Topic: Regional Forest Agreements

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator URQUART asked:

1. Has the Commonwealth Government examined the prospective impacts of RFA sanctioned native forest logging on forest carbon stores, and on water supply and quality?
2. Has the Commonwealth initiated any studies into the impact of RFA sanctioned native forest logging on other industries, particularly tourism and fisheries?
3. Does the Commonwealth Government intend to enforce the completion of the 5 yearly reviews of the RFA's which have not been completed, or partly or ineffectively completed?

Answer:

1. At the national level, Australia uses the international Montreal Process Criteria and Indicators as the framework for monitoring and measuring how forests are managed, including in relation to carbon storage and water. The five-yearly State of the Forests Reports presents this information. The series of reports can be found at www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/forestsaustralia/sofr
 - Criteria 5 reports on the maintenance of forest contribution to global carbon cycles (indicator 5.1a).
 - Criteria 4 reports on the conservation and maintenance of soil and water resources (indicator 4.1d – water quantity and indicator 4.1e – water quality). The potential impacts of forestry operations on water quantity are managed by practices such as seasonal restrictions on wood harvesting, and limiting the annual proportion of catchments subject to wood harvesting. Some forestry operations such as thinning to decrease stand density can increase water yield.
2. In developing the Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs), Australian and State Governments, jointly undertook scientific Comprehensive Regional Assessments of the environment, heritage, social and economic uses and values of native forests.

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The process used nationally-agreed criteria to identify the areas of the forest that needed protection, and which parts could be used for commercial purposes. The assessments also determined what the forests meant to the industries and people of each region. They drew on existing material as well as a wide range of specially commissioned studies and technical reports. Each RFA involved at least 50 assessment projects in disciplines ranging from biology and zoology to economics and sociology. Socio-economic reports for each RFA region considered the values and uses of forests in relation to other sectors such as tourism and fisheries, where applicable.

Further information on the comprehensive regional assessments can be found on the relevant RFA web pages on the department's website at www.agriculture.gov.au/forestry/policies/rfa.

3. Three RFA states have reviews that are now overdue – Western Australia, NSW and Victoria. Officials from the Australian Government continue to encourage RFA state counterparts to progress these reviews in a timely manner. The commitment to five yearly reviews was a statement of intent in the RFAs by Australian and state governments and is not a legally enforceable requirement.