

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2014

Agriculture

Question: 39

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Policy Division

Topic: Briefing to the Minister regarding biosecurity functions

Proof Hansard page: 31 (28/05/2014)

Senator GALLACHER asked:

Senator GALLACHER: No, it is not. It is not that broad. Basically, did the Minister for Agriculture ask you, as the head of the department, to do a paper or a briefing note on taking biosecurity from there and putting it over there?

Dr Grimes: We have provided advice, Senator.

Senator GALLACHER: On the minister's instigation?

Dr Grimes: I cannot recall the precise sequence of events.

Senator GALLACHER: That is a very familiar comment from other jurisdictions—'I can't recall'.

Dr Grimes: No. You are asking me whether there was a specific request for us to provide advice or whether it was advice that we initiated in the department.

Senator SIEWERT: You cannot recall that?

Dr Grimes: I cannot recall the precise—

Senator SIEWERT: Could you check on that for us, please, and get back to us?

Dr Grimes: We can certainly check on that matter and take it on notice.

Answer:

The Department of Agriculture provided advice to the Minister for Agriculture on 22 April 2014 on the consolidation of biosecurity functions into the Australian Border Force. The department initiated the advice as part of its normal role in providing advice to the Minister.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2014

Agriculture

Question: 40

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Policy Division

Topic: Stronger Biosecurity and Quarantine

Proof Hansard page: 34 (28/05/2014)

Senator XENOPHON asked:

Senator XENOPHON: Whilst the exotic disease preparedness program comes under another stream, the budget does set out an additional \$20 million over four years for quite stronger biosecurity and quarantine arrangements. How does this fit in with cancelling the exotic disease preparedness program, because there is a link between the two?

Ms Mellor: Yes, I understand. As I just answered to Senator Gallacher, we are certainly using part of that funding towards increased surveillance. Without my animal health experts here I could not tell you directly how much of that relates to the wildlife side of surveillance.

Senator XENOPHON: Whether it is on notice or now, will any of this funding be used to support state-based initiatives? Will this funding remain allocated to biosecurity if it is rolled into the proposed border force agency?

Answer:

Yes, as part of the rapid response capability, the Stronger Biosecurity and Quarantine initiative is available to provide support to state based responses to biosecurity incursions. This support is not intended to replace existing activities that the states and territories are required to undertake following the initial detection of a significant exotic or emerging pest or disease incursion. Rather, it is intended to add value to the response, for example, by facilitating access to experts for tasks over and above that normally required and critical equipment not easily obtained by jurisdictions.

The Stronger Biosecurity and Quarantine initiative will also add to the national capacity to respond to significant pest and disease incursions, including:

- financial support for the foot-and-mouth vaccine bank currently managed by Animal Health Australia.
- surveillance capacity building, particularly in Northern Australia and with indigenous communities, and to increase scanning for emerging threats (for example this could include emerging diseases originating in wildlife such as Hendra or bat lyssavirus) to assist in both response and preparedness.

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- improvements to emergency response systems, including a centralised repository for information on surveillance and response activity data.

Funding provided through this measure will be administered by the department consistent with its policy intent.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2014

Agriculture

Question: 41

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Policy Division

Topic: Advice to the minister

Proof Hansard page: 40 (28/5/2014)

Senator SIEWERT asked:

Senator SIEWERT: I want to follow up here with a few more questions because Senator O'Sullivan has traversed quite a lot of the issues. Dr Grimes, maybe this question is better for you. I want to clarify: have you had a chance to check whether you were asked for the advice or you provided the advice to the minister?

Dr Grimes: I have been here at the table, so I have not had that opportunity yet.

Answer:

See response to Question on Notice 39 from Budget Estimates.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2014

Agriculture

Question: 42

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Policy Division

Topic: New Exotic Species

Proof Hansard page: 42 (28/05/2014)

Senator WATERS asked:

Senator WATERS: Will new exotic species recorded be dealt with from three till 4 pm?

Ms Mellor: New exotic species recorded just generally?

Senator WATERS: Accidental new entries since the year 2000.

Ms Mellor: Since the year 2000—I do not think I have got that now. Just in the plant space or animal as well?

Senator WATERS: No. Plants, animals, fungi, pathogens—the full gamut.

Ms Mellor: We could give you very quickly those figures for the last year, but to go back to the year 2000 would be a piece of work that would have to go back to the office for some time.

Senator WATERS: I might put that one on notice then.

Answer:

Question on notice 42 has been answered as part of Question on Notice 47.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2014

Agriculture

Question: 43

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Policy Division

Topic: Measurement reports regarding cooperation across management

Proof Hansard page: 44 (28/05/2014)

Senator O'SULLIVAN asked:

Senator O'SULLIVAN: I need a ruling. Can I ask a hypothetical question about a hypothetical event which may or may not happen in the future, to take on notice?

ACTING CHAIR: You certainly can ask a hypothetical. Whether or not you get an answer, Senator O'Sullivan, have a crack.

Senator O'SULLIVAN: In the event that you start to measure—I understand you are coming together to enhance the cooperations across management. Are you able to take on notice applying this committee with any of the measurement reports that may occur as a result? Can you take on notice supplying us with a report that is yet to be published?

Dr Grimes: It would not be normal to answer those questions, but we can take that on notice and see what can be provided.

Answer:

The Department of Agriculture is unable to commit to providing copies of measurement reports that may or may not be developed.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2014

Agriculture

Question: 44

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Policy Division

Topic: Consolidating the Border Compliance into the new Border Force Agency

Proof Hansard page: 55 (28/05/2014)

Senator SIEWERT asked:

Dr Grimes: Indeed, there was a question earlier today which I took on notice from Senator Siewert. The question effectively was in two parts, date of providing advice and was it initiated by the department. I have been able to check during the break, and our advice was provided on 22 April.

Senator SIEWERT: The second part of the question was: did you initiate it?

Dr Grimes: It was initiated from the department.

Senator SIEWERT: You initiated it? You were not asked by the minister?

Dr Grimes: It was initiated from the department, yes.

Senator SIEWERT: Can I ask a follow-up question?

Senator FARRELL: I am happy while it is on this topic.

Senator SIEWERT: What initiated your initiation?

Dr Grimes: Budget considerations and budget preparations.

Senator SIEWERT: So, you were anticipating that there may be a discussion around—

Dr Grimes: Maybe in the time honoured tradition when we go into budget deliberations. It is not a matter I can go into in further detail. I can take matters on notice, but I would not be able to respond here.

Answer:

The advice provided by the Department of Agriculture in relation to consolidation of biosecurity functions into the Australian Border Force formed part of advice provided to the Minister as part of preparations for the 2014-15 Budget.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2014

Agriculture

Question: 45

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Policy Division

Topic: Advice provided to Minister regarding division consolidation

Proof Hansard page: 56 (28/05/2014)

Senator SIEWERT asked:

Senator SIEWERT: Can you take on notice why you undertook to prepare and provide that advice? Why did you initiate that process?

Dr Grimes: We can take further questions on notice. I am happy to take that question on notice and happy to indicate that it was in the context of budget considerations.

Answer:

The advice provided by the Department of Agriculture in relation to consolidation of biosecurity functions into the Australian Border Force formed part of advice provided to the Minister as part of preparations for the 2014-15 Budget.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2014

Agriculture

Question: 46

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Policy Division

Topic: Advice regarding the benefits for biosecurity to be part of a broader department

Proof Hansard page: 56 (28/05/2014)

Senator SIEWERT asked:

Senator SIEWERT: The other issue is the nature of the advice provided. I understand and have been told repeatedly that I cannot ask for the nature of that advice. However, under some of the procedures of estimate committees I understand I am allowed to ask for some of the nature of the advice. We can then have a discussion about what you can tell me. Have you provided advice that it would be beneficial for biosecurity to be part of a broader department, a compliance department?

Dr Grimes: I think that is very much going into matters that I cannot comment on.

Senator SIEWERT: The nature of the advice went to biosecurity being incorporated into a broader border.

Dr Grimes: I have indicated that we have provided some advice, but beyond that I do not think it is appropriate for me to be commenting here.

Senator SIEWERT: If you could take those other matters on notice, that would be appreciated.

Dr Grimes: I can take that question on notice.

Answer:

The Department of Agriculture provided advice to the Minister for Agriculture on 22 April 2014 on the consolidation of biosecurity functions into the Australian Border Force as part of preparations for the 2014-15 Budget. The disclosure of the nature of that advice is a matter for the Government.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2014

Agriculture

Question: 47

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Policy Division

Topic: Exotic Species

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator WATERS asked:

1. What exotic species (plants, animals, fungi, pathogens) have been newly recorded in Australia since 2000 as a result of accidental introduction? Please include species, date and location.
2. Which of the above species identified in have been referred to the National Management Group for consideration of an eradication response?
3. What exotic species (plants, animals, fungi, pathogens) have been newly recorded (established in the wild) in Australia since 2000 as a result of accidental introduction? Please include species, date and location?
4. What is the process for determining which organism listed in the above question would be considered as possible candidates for eradication, including the details of each step in the process from the time the new species is detected?
5. Can the Department supply copies of any assessments conducted for any species under the process in question 3 to determine if that species is a candidate for eradication.
6. Which of those species newly recorded (established in the wild) in Australia since 2000 have been considered as candidates for eradication?
7. For each species identified in response to newly recorded (established in the wild) in Australia since 2000 that were considered and rejected as a candidate for eradication, please provide the reasons for that rejection.

Answer:

The consolidation of information on pest and disease detections, incursions and eradication responses over a 14 year period would entail a substantial diversion of resources.

The Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (2002) and the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (2005) identify those pests and disease that have been categorised as candidates for an eradication response for the animal or plant sectors. Each agreement also sets out the process for categorisation of new or unknown pests and diseases and the requirements to be met for a national cost-shared eradication response to occur.

The National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement (2012) sets out the requirements that must be met for a national cost-shared eradication response for an incursion where the impacts are predominately environmental or to social amenity. These include an assessment of

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the national significance of the pest or disease threat, the technical feasibility of eradication and the benefit:cost.

Details on national eradication responses are available at –

<http://www.outbreak.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>

Question on notice 42 has been answered as part of Question on Notice 47.