

**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2014

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 175

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable resource Management Division

**Topic:** Caring for our Country grant

**Proof Hansard page:** 24 (28/05/2014)

**CHAIR asked:**

**CHAIR:** Dr Grimes, I have a question for you regarding your previous role as secretary to the environment department. I have not had an answer; that is why I am raising it here. I might not have time to get to the environment hearing. Do you know about the appropriate timings for this? I am referring to where a person who worked for the government in New South Wales, under the previous government—I do not care which government—in the department that looked after property et cetera went out to Bathurst, to a property between Mudgee and Bathurst, and asked the owner, who I have spoken to, whether she could get his property assessed for a Caring for our Country grant, which she did.

I have spoken to the catchment management person who assessed it. She was notified through due process that the place qualified for a grant in a woody gum grass patch of 300 hectares or whatever it was, out of a place of over a thousand hectares. She then approached the owner and said, 'Would you like to sell your property to me?' He said, 'Yes'. She bought it for \$230,000 or whatever it was. Ten weeks after she signed the contract, she got a grant from her catchment management authority Caring for our Country, which is state and federal. It could be Agriculture; there is an agricultural arm to it. A person from your department sits on the tick-off committee. She got a grant for \$890,000 for a property for which she paid \$230,000, to lock up a bit of the property. I thought that was bizarre. I will not go into what I really think.

She then went to the bank to get a loan against the property. The bank valued the property at zero because it was going to cost more than the property was worth to spray the over-infection on the property of noxious weeds, including blackberries. I have referred this to everyone from the department to the fraud squad. I have not had a bloody answer. They said, 'We're investigating.' It would take five minutes to figure out that it was a dodgy deal. Could you take that on notice and let me know where it is up to?

**Dr Grimes:** Senator, we can take it on notice. We may have to refer it to Environment

**Question:** 175 (continued)

**Answer:**

The Department of the Environment administers the Environmental Stewardship Programme through which the grant was funded. We have been advised that the Department of the Environment is actively investigating the matter and that it will be finalised shortly. The Department of the Environment will advise Senator Heffernan of the investigations' outcome shortly thereafter.

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Budget Estimates May 2014

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 176

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable Resource Management Division

**Topic:** Navua sedge

**Proof Hansard page:** 57 (28/05/2014)

**Senator BACK asked:**

**Senator BACK:** As I understand it, it is not a poisonous or a noxious weed, it is just that it is very aggressive, competing with other plant species. But more to the point, from what I understand, it has been on the coast for many years and it has now moved westward into and up onto the Atherton Tableland. I will ask a couple of questions of APVMA a little bit later on in terms of trying to control it. Firstly, is the department aware of it? You obviously are—

**Mr ALDRED:** Not in this division. We can ask in other divisions, but if it is an established weed then essentially it is a matter for state and territory jurisdictions.

**Senator BACK:** Would the department be giving the state or territory any assistance or advice?

**Mr ALDRED:** I am not sure. I could check whether it is—

**Answer:**

The Department of Agriculture is aware of Navua sedge. The department has not been requested to provide and is not providing advice or assistance on Navua sedge control to the Queensland Government.

**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

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Budget Estimates May 2014

**Agriculture**

**Question: 177**

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable Resource Management Division

**Topic:** Up-to-date list of Australia Landcare Council members

**Proof Hansard page:** 72 (28/05/2014)

**Senator LINES asked:**

**Senator LINES:** Is that the one you told Senator Siewert you were waiting on?

**Mr Thompson:** Yes. My suggestion is that some of these things happened in late May and the website is slightly out of date.

**Senator LINES:** Did you indicate to Senator Siewert that you would provide an up-to-date list?

**Mr Thompson:** We can provide an up-to-date list.

**Answer:**

The only current member of the Australian Landcare Council is Lynne Strong.

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Budget Estimates May 2014

**Agriculture**

**Question: 178**

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable Resource Management Division

**Topic:** Landcare appointments

**Proof Hansard page:** 72-73 (28/05/2014)

**Senator LINES asked:**

**Senator LINES:** Would it help if I gave you my document from your website?

**Mr Thompson:** I am not sure what the context of that was. The only thing I can think is that it is not applicable because it is not one of the bodies that fell within that request for appointments.

**Senator LINES:** Rather than think about it can you get us a definite answer on why it was tabled that way, please?

**Answer:**

There were two vacancies listed on page seven of the Department of Agriculture's response to Senate Standing Order on Government Appointments and Vacancies May 2014. They were the Australian Landcare Council chair and member positions, and the National Landcare Facilitator (NLF). The 'N/A' included in this table under the column titled "Commonwealth Body" referred to the vacant NLF position. The NLF is not a Commonwealth body.

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**Agriculture**

**Question:** 179

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable Resource Management

**Topic:** Tenure on Landcare

**Proof Hansard page:** 73–74 (28/05/2014)

**Senator GALLAGHER asked:**

I am happy with whatever the minister does. It is an elected government. He is the minister. He can do whatever he likes. I am just interested in you being there for 12 weeks. There was a cohort of people who—for whatever reason, the caretaker convention—were not enacted and then there was a different minister. The direct question to you was: did the minister instruct the department to ring people up and ask them to consider their tenure on Landcare?

**Senator STERLE:** Or any of his staff to ring the department?

**Mr Thompson:** Not as far as I am aware in that period.

**Senator SIEWERT:** But it was after December?

**Mr Thompson:** I would have to check those facts but I am not aware if it was made during that period. I assumed that if the calls were made after, and my understanding was they were made early this year, any consideration issued by the minister was after my period in the minister's office.

**Answer:**

The appointment terms for the majority of Australian Landcare Council members lapsed in 2013, leaving the Council without a quorum. As a result, the department sought the Minister's consideration of potential appointees. The department indicated that it would contact each candidate to gauge their interest in becoming or continuing as a member of the Australian Landcare Council.

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**Agriculture**

**Question:** 180

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable Resource Management Division

**Topic:** Landcare Council board members

**Proof Hansard page:** 83 (29/05/2014)

**Senator STERLE asked:**

**Senator STERLE:** What remuneration did the four board members receive in the tenure of their time on the board, bearing in mind that one is still there? That might be easier for me to work out.

**Mr Thompson:** We would have to take that on notice. We have not got that exact number. I could give you an example of the amount of money. For 2012-13, their annual report reports \$115,000 as the remuneration for the council for that period of 12 months.

**Answer:**

1. Ron Archer – \$1254 plus super \$193.12
2. Kate Jones – \$3344 plus super \$514.98
3. Jackie Jarvis – \$2090 plus super \$321.96
4. Lynne Strong – \$3344 plus \$514.98

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 181

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable Resource Management Division

**Topic:** List of programs

**Proof Hansard page:** 86 (29/05/2014)

**Senator SIEWERT asked:**

**Dr Thomson:** The environment department are setting the priorities that relate particularly to environmental outcomes. Our traditional practice has been that Environment do that essentially on their own and let us know. In the sorts of activities where there is an overlap or they are working with agricultural stakeholder groups, they often work more closely with us or ask for somebody from us to give them a hand in reviewing a few guidelines. They often ask us, and we ask them too, to participate on project selection committees or evaluation committees or tender boards or those sorts of things because we each bring in a slightly different perspective. We would not be driving their prioritisation process, but we would expect to be reasonably informed and, where it makes sense, have an opportunity to input. That seems to have worked quite well over the last couple of years.

**Senator SIEWERT:** Thank you. With regard to the list of the programs that are now included, out of the funding, do you have a copy you could table now so that we can see that in front of us or do you need to take that on notice?

**Mr Thompson:** Mr Pak Poy might have something. I do not have a copy of the programs that are funded out of now, but I am not sure it is all that complicated.

**Answer:**

As a result of the current budget, the funds available for Agriculture under the National Landcare Programme for 2014-15 to 2017-18 total \$275.6 million, with investments including:

- Regional delivery - \$136.2 million (\$91.6 million is contracted, an additional \$44.6 million for the 15 regional NRM organisations with no approval beyond 30 June 2014).
- Reef Rescue - \$33.4 million
- Eradication of new incursions - \$47 million
- Innovation Grants - \$13.5 million



**Question: 181 (continued)**

- Landcare infrastructure including (Landcare Australia Ltd, National Landcare Conference, Australian Rural Leadership) - \$3.7 million
- Sustainable fisheries election commitment -\$6.8 million
- Australian Wildlife Health Network - \$3.6 million
- Programme implementation - \$31.4 million

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**Agriculture**

**Question:** 182

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable Resource Management Division

**Topic:** Regional Delivery

**Proof Hansard page:** 87 (29/05/2014)

**Senator SIEWERT asked:**

**Senator SIEWERT:** How much was for regional delivery?

**Mr Thompson:** On the agriculture side, \$91.6 million.

**Senator SIEWERT:** I have written all that down, but at some stage could you table that.

**Mr Thompson:** Yes, we can do that.

**Answer:**

For the period of 2014-15 to 2017-18 there is \$454.8 million available for regional delivery. Of this, \$136.2 million is from the Department of Agriculture.

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**Agriculture**

**Question:** 183

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable Resource Management Division

**Topic:** Terms of Reference

**Proof Hansard page:** 90 (29/05/2014)

**Senator LINES asked:**

**Senator LINES:** Is sustainability not a key priority anymore?

**Mr Thompson:** Sustainability is one of the key priorities. There are a range of priorities. We could table its terms of reference and its legislated functions and the priorities that it had under the—

**Senator LINES:** I think we know those, but I am happy for you to table it.

**Answer:**

The role and Terms of Reference for the Australian Landcare Council are outlined below.

The Australian Landcare Council (the council) is the Australian Government's independent advisory body on Landcare and natural resource management. The council was established in July 1997 by amendment to section 13(1) of the Natural Resource Management (Financial Assistance) Act 1992 (the Act).

The activities of the council are guided by the objectives of the Act. The primary objective of the Act is to facilitate the development and implementation of integrated approaches to natural resource management in Australia to achieve efficient, sustainable and equitable management of natural resources that is consistent with the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

The Act also aims to:

- Promote community, industry and government partnerships in the management of natural resources
- Assist in establishing institutional arrangements to develop and implement policies, programs and practices that will encourage sustainable use of natural resources
- Assist in enhancing the long term productivity of natural resources
- Assist in developing approaches to help resolve conflicts over access to natural resources.

The functions of the council, as identified in the Act, are to make recommendations to the Minister for Agriculture and the Minister for the Environment on:

- matters concerning natural resources management; and

**Question:** SRM14 (continued)

- priorities and strategies for natural resources management; and
- to investigate and report to the Commonwealth Government on matters concerning natural resources management referred to it by either of the Ministers.

*Terms of Reference*

1. Strengthen the Landcare model for community natural resource management
2. Drive the development and implementation of the Australian Framework for Landcare (the framework) including options to address key issues identified under the framework
3. Foster improved sustainable farm and land management practices, ecosystem services and landscape scale conservation
4. Foster the capacity of the rural and Landcare community sectors to ensure that Australia is prepared for challenges to productivity and sustainable development into the future, including the challenges associated with climate change
5. Empower Traditional Owners to become involved in natural resource management decision making
6. Examine ways to attract the next generation and rejuvenate the Landcare movement
7. Provide advice on any other matters relating to natural resource management referred to it by the ministers for agriculture or environment

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**Agriculture**

**Question:** 184

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable Resource Management Division

**Topic:** Water Licensing in the Northern Territory

**Proof Hansard page:** Written

**Senator PERIS asked:**

Are you aware of the recent controversy in the Northern Territory over the allocation of water licences in the Katherine Daly region? Indigenous groups, including the Northern Australia Indigenous Land and Sea Management (NAILSMA), are concerned that the Strategic Indigenous Reserve (SIR) water policy has been scrapped by the Northern Territory Government.

**Answer:**

No. Under the Constitution, water management is the responsibility of the state and territory governments.

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**Agriculture**

**Question:** 185

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable Resource Management Division

**Topic:** Water Licensing in the Northern Territory

**Proof Hansard page:** Written

**Senator PERIS asked:**

Are you aware that environment groups have also outlined their concerns that the science is being ignored in the allocation of water extraction licences?

**Answer:**

No.

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**Agriculture**

**Question:** 186

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable Resource Management Division

**Topic:** Water Licensing in the Northern Territory

**Proof Hansard page:** Written

**Senator PERIS asked:**

Are you aware of allegations of corruption in relation to CLP members being granted licences?

**Answer:**

No.

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**Agriculture**

**Question: 187**

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable Resource Management Division

**Topic:** Water Licensing in the Northern Territory

**Proof Hansard page:** Written

**Senator PERIS asked:**

Does the Department have views on the water licencing allocation practices and procedures in the Northern Territory?

**Answer:**

The Commonwealth has a limited role in water issues. The Department of the Environment has Commonwealth portfolio responsibility for water policy and resources including the implementation of the Australian Government's water reform agenda and administration of the EPBC Act where matters of national environmental significance might be affected.



**Agriculture**

**Question: 188**

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable Resource Management Division. The response was prepared in consultation with AFMA and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service.

**Topic:** Australia-France Cooperative Enforcement Agreement in the Southern Ocean

**Proof Hansard page:** written

**Senator WHISH-WILSON asked:**

1. How often are there formal meetings in regards to these arrangements?
2. What Australian vessels are involved in the cooperative arrangements?
3. Are there French personnel on Australian vessels and vice versa?
4. If yes, how many Australian and French personnel are on the other nations vessels?
5. How does AFMA measure the effectiveness of this arrangement?
6. Is there a formal review process built into the arrangement?
7. If yes, when is the next review?

**Answer:**

1. Meetings are on an ad hoc and as needed basis. Commander Border Protection Command met with French authorities in La Reunion in 2013 to discuss the existing arrangements.
2. ACV Ocean Protector is the only capable asset currently available to the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service (ACBPS) to undertake Southern Ocean patrols.
3. Arrangements allow for the mutual exchange of Australian and French officials on respective patrol vessels to patrol the Australian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) within the Heard and McDonald (HIMI) EEZ and the adjacent French EEZ around Kerguelen Island.
4. While numbers may be dependent on operational circumstances, it is usual for one ACBPS officer, in conjunction with two AFMA officers, to be embarked on a French patrol vessel. It is usual for two French officers to be embarked on an Australian vessel.
5. No illegal foreign fishing vessels have been detected inside the Australian Fishing Zone (AFZ) surrounding HIMI and Macquarie Island since the treaty was entered into force.
6. No. The treaty can be renegotiated at the request of either party.
7. Not applicable.