

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment portfolio

Question No: 73
Hearing: Additional Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 7
Programme: Adaptation and Science Division
Topic: Adaptation Strategy - built environment
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Question Type: Spoken

Senator Ludlam asked:

Senator LUDLAM: I want to put a particular adaptation strategy to you. I am not expecting you to have this at the table. On 20 February, the West Australian newspaper tested relative impacts of urban heat island effects. It tested the theory that the variation can be up to four degrees depending on the surrounding, and particularly the amount of tree cover. In suburbs that are more susceptible, the death toll will be higher. The relative rate of illness and impact will be higher. For example, in this piece on 20 February, they found that Mt Lawley was five degrees Celsius hotter than Mt Hawthorn, where tree cover was much better. That same State of Australian cities report that I am quoting from proposed increasing the amount of vegetation in the built environment and implementing green infrastructure. Can you point me to anything, apart from what the states and territories might be up to, or any lead that the Commonwealth has taken in response to that recommendation specifically?

Dr Kennedy: It is probably hidden away. We will need to consult with other departments as well. We are happy to take that on notice to see with our colleagues both in infrastructure and industry and in health.

Senator LUDLAM: All right. It is quite cross-portfolio. I am happy if you are able to take that on notice. Can I assume from that, though, that you are not immediately aware of anything within your remit that has been done in response to those proposals?

Dr Kennedy: I am not, Senator. I will just confer with my colleagues. No, Senator. But we will confirm on notice that that is the case.

Dr de Brouwer: I might observe, Senator, that the government does have a 20 million trees program. That also includes urban and peri urban trees as well.

Senator LUDLAM: Who is responsible for that specifically?

Dr de Brouwer: That is in the environment department, and they will be appearing, Senator, this evening.

Senator LUDLAM: I may be elsewhere, but maybe I could pitch an on notice question to those officers if they are watching the internal broadcast. Is there under consideration a systematic process of cooling the heat island effect using native vegetation in particular? I will leave it there. Thanks for your time.

Answer:

The 2013 State of Australian Cities report discusses the benefits of “urban greening” in Chapter 4, Sustainability, and provides case studies of a number of Australian cities with urban forest initiatives (pages 211-230). The 2013 State of Australian Cities report is not a policy document and does not propose or recommend actions.

The Commonwealth recognises the contribution tree planting makes to the liveability of our cities and towns and the benefits trees provide in moderating climate. Planting of trees in urban spaces will be a component of the Australian Government's 20 Million Trees by 2020 Programme, commencing in July 2014.