

Economics Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education Portfolio
Budget Estimates Hearing 2012-13
28 and 29 May 2012

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY, INNOVATION, SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

TOPIC: Animal Welfare Governance

REFERENCE: *Question on Notice (Hansard, Monday 28 May 2012, page 69)*

QUESTION No.: BI-29

Senator COLBECK: At the February estimates I asked some questions about Mataranka Station. I am wondering whether you have followed up and whether the Animal Welfare Governance Subcommittee has reconvened and, if so, when?

Mr de Carvalho: You will have to remind me of the questions that you have put on notice. If I recall the conversation that we had at the time, which I unfortunately do not do very well, I am trying to find my briefs for the last period and your question on notice.

Senator COLBECK: I am not sure that we gave you anything on notice.

Senator Chris Evans: Is this the one about the Northern Territory property?

Mr de Carvalho: The cattle, yes.

Senator COLBECK: One of the recommendations of the report was that the Animal Welfare Governance subcommittee would reconvene in April.

Mr de Carvalho: That is not an Australian government subcommittee.

Senator COLBECK: I know it is not an Australian government subcommittee. It is a CDU subcommittee.

Mr de Carvalho: Yes.

Senator COLBECK: Given your oversight of CDU and the breadth of that broader issue of animal welfare, I am just wondering if you have followed that up or not?

Mr de Carvalho: I have not, but I can do so. We can easily ascertain, in the course of the afternoon, with a phone call to the CDU as to whether that meeting took place

ANSWER

The department contacted Charles Darwin University (CDU) and obtained the following responses to Senator Colbeck's questions.

Has the Animal Welfare Governance Sub-Committee reconvened? If so when?

The Council of Territory Co-operation (<http://www.nt.gov.au/lant/parliamentary-business/committees/ctc/council-territory-co-operation.shtml>) formed the Animal Welfare Governance Sub-committee in May 2011 to inquire into animal welfare governance in the Territory. The Sub-committee delivered its Final Report to Parliament in October 2011. The Report made 21 recommendations to improve the Northern Territory's (NT) animal welfare legislative framework and its implementation and enforcement by government. One of the

recommendations was that the Sub-committee reconvene in six months to scrutinise progress in addressing the recommendations in the Report. The Sub-committee reconvened on 3 April 2012 and considered a briefing from the NT Department of Housing, Local Government and Regional Services on actions in relation to the recommendations. A Bill was introduced to the May sittings of NT Parliament to amend the *Animal Welfare Act NT* according to the recommendations of the Sub-committee Report.

Did their investigations cover activities at CDU and Mataranka, where there appear to have been systemic management issues related to the incident in 2008, 2009 and 2010?

The Sub-committee's Terms of Reference included inquiry into - *the processes and systems adopted by the Department of Resources and its predecessors, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Regional Services and its predecessors and the Charles Darwin University in relation to the recent investigations into animal welfare issues at the Charles Darwin University owned cattle station.*

The Sub-committee Terms of Reference and Final Report can be found at <http://www.nt.gov.au/lant/parliamentary-business/committees/ctc/animal-welfare/about-us.shtml>.

The animal welfare incidents at Mataranka Station in 2008 – 2010 have also been the subject of internal and external investigations. External investigations include:

- An Ombudsman's investigation in 2010;
- A Commissioner for Public Interest Disclosures investigation in 2010;
- A NT Department of Housing, Local Government and Regional Services investigation in 2011.

Has appropriate action been taken by CDU and at Mataranka?

CDU has accepted and taken action on most of the recommendations made in the Ombudsman's final report on the investigation into animal welfare matters at Mataranka Station in 2010. These actions are summarised as follows:

- In June 2010 the Vice-Chancellor established the Mataranka Station Advisory Committee (MSAC), chaired by Ms Elaine Gardiner, an independent external consultant, and with three of the five positions on the Committee held by members external to CDU. MSAC's role is to oversee and advise on management of the station. MSAC meets quarterly and the Station Manager, and others involved with Mataranka Station, are required to both report to, and take advice from, MSAC.
- A new Station Manger was appointed in late 2010 after a national selection process. Animal care and welfare were specific items raised in both the job description and the selection process.
- In 2010 CDU commissioned an external consultant, Science Matters, to review operations at Mataranka Station and prepare a Business Plan to guide management into the future.
- In 2012 CDU commissioned a benchmarking study to compare facilities and operations at Mataranka Station with the Australian Agricultural Colleges Corporation in Queensland and will address the recommendations of the report in further improving Station management.
- The CDU Animal Ethics Committee (AEC) has been subject to an external review to ensure that its operation and procedures meet the legislative requirements and obligations under the

NHMRC Code and that its procedures and responsibilities are fully understood by all those involved.

- From 2010 to 2012 CDU has invested around \$750,000 in upgrading infrastructure at Mataranka Station with a particular focus on improving stock well-being and management, including increased access to water. An assessment by NT Department of Resources in January 2011 indicated that 94 per cent of the station is now within 5km of water, improving access to and utilisation of pasture by stock through the dry season.
- Mataranka Station stocking rates are maintained below the assessed carrying capacity to ensure that there is sufficient pasture available to maintain the herd in good condition through the dry seasons. Controlled breeding is being employed to minimise the number of cows carrying and feeding calves over the dry season, and the consequent stress this places on breeding stock.
- MSAC has finalised herd, weed and feral animal management strategies and procedures for Mataranka Station and is working through Standard Operating Procedures for use of animals in training.
- CDU has reviewed its staff and student grievance and complaints procedures and put in place new procedures that improve process and transparency and provide specific direction on making complaints relating to animal welfare.

Are any of the same management team still in place (and I mean more than just the farm manager who we know has been replaced), and if so, how can we be confident that the situation will not recur?

Since the events at Mataranka Station in 2009 there have been significant changes in the CDU management team, summarised as follows:

- MSAC was established in June 2010 to oversee management of Mataranka Station.
- A new Station Manager was appointed in late 2010 after a national selection process. This position manages livestock and production at both Mataranka Station and CDU's Katherine Rural Campus. In addition to the Manager, new Overseers and Station Hands have been appointed to both Mataranka Station and Katherine Rural Campus since 2010.
- A new position Director Katherine Region was created and filled in 2011. This position has direct line management responsibility for the Station Manager as well as training staff and reports to the Pro Vice-Chancellor Vocational Education and Training (VET).
- A new Pro Vice-Chancellor VET was appointed in early 2011.
- A new position of Animal Welfare Officer was created and filled in 2011. This position monitors, advises on and investigates animal welfare matters and reports to the CDU Animal Ethics Committee and the Mataranka Station Advisory Committee as required.
- A new Chair of the AEC was appointed in October 2010.
- A new Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) was appointed in 2011 following resignation of the previous DVC Research (March 2011), who was also the former Chair of the AEC up until May 2010.

The University is confident that new management and governance arrangements, including oversight by MSAC and our processes for responding to concerns, will contribute to the maintenance of high standards of animal welfare at the Mataranka Station and Katherine Rural Campus.

Has there been a refocussing of the operation to raise the profile of animal welfare?

The profile of animal welfare at the University has been raised through the following actions:

- Appropriate and humane treatment of animals was included as a specific selection criteria in the new Station Manager's job description and animal welfare was a matter specifically addressed in the selection process.
- A new position of Animal Welfare Officer was created and filled in 2011 by a veterinarian qualified to monitor and advise on animal welfare matters.
- New staff and student grievance procedures provide specific direction on making animal welfare complaints.
- The AEC has been subject to an external review to ensure that its operation and procedures meet the legislative requirements and obligations and ensure good practice and governance in relation to animal welfare.
- MSAC has a standing agenda item at all of its AEC meetings and animal welfare reports and investigations in order to remain informed about any issues as they arise.
- Staff at Mataranka Station and Katherine Rural Campus have undergone training in low stress animal handling and in the National Health and Medical Research Council Code of Practice and the NT Animal Welfare Act in 2011 and 2012 and this staff development will be an ongoing process.
- The Director Katherine region convenes weekly meetings of training and production staff to discuss any matters related to the operation and management of Mataranka Station and Katherine Rural Campus, including animal welfare matters where relevant.