

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Budget Estimates Feb 2006

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question no: BRS 01

Division/Agency: Bureau of Rural Sciences

Topic: National Social Data Study

Hansard page: 93

Senator O'Brien asked:

I would like to begin by asking for an update on the national social data study.

Ms Hewitt—That is not ringing bells. Perhaps it is work known by a different title.

Senator O'BRIEN—It may be. That is the title I know it by. If we have found terminology that does not ring any bells—

Dr Samson—We will take it on notice on the assumption that perhaps we do know it by a different name. If what you are looking for is an update, we would be happy to provide a progress report if it is indeed something that falls within our purview.

Senator O'BRIEN—If you can find it, I want to find out what has been done to ensure that the results of this study are translated to practical outcomes on farms. Perhaps this is not your area.

Dr Samson—I am afraid it is collectively not ringing any bells, but we will certainly look into it and try to track it down for you.

Answer:

The 'National Social Data Study' is a short-hand title for a large Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) project which is known as 'Social data for NHT - delivering better outcomes for landholders through catchment planning'. It is designed to develop a better understanding of how farmers make decisions about their natural resource management (NRM) practices.

The first stage of the project has been completed with the finalisation of comprehensive surveys and reports for each of three regions - Victoria (Glenelg Hopkins region), New South Wales (Lachlan Catchment), and Queensland (Murray Darling region). The project involves working closely with the regional NRM group in each of these areas to collect and interpret socio-economic data to underpin key catchment planning and management decisions. An important part of this process is the establishment of partnerships with local farmers and other stakeholders through regional steering committees.

The results of the first stage have reinforced the importance of landholders working closely with regional communities to find local solutions to local issues.

The second stage of this project commenced recently with the further establishment of case studies in regions in Tasmania (NRM South region), South Australia (Northern and Yorke region), and Western Australia (South West Catchment Council).

Membership of the steering committees in each region includes local farmers, members of the regional NRM group, and other NRM stakeholders.

The surveys for the Tasmanian and South Australian regions will be mailed to landholders in March. The survey for the Western Australian region will be mailed in April as this timing better suits the farmers of that region.

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With the establishment of these case studies, the project will soon be able to draw together findings to provide a clearer picture nationally of the factors encouraging or hindering farmers in their NRM practices. It is anticipated that the final report will be available in July 2006.

This project has been designed from the beginning to ensure that findings translate into practical outcomes. There has been a long process of consultation and engagement with regional stakeholders including local landholders and regional NRM bodies. To ensure that the study is relevant and meaningful for rural landholders, regional steering committees have been established. The surveys (of at least 1000 landholders in each region) are piloted with local landholders to ensure it is relevant to them. This process has achieved extremely high response rates for mail surveys (in excess of 60 percent in each case study completed).

The project also provides baseline social and economic data about what landholders are doing, what they plan to do in the future, and the key barriers that might prevent them from implementing natural resource management practices. This fills a critical information gap that exists for most natural resource management stakeholders and will help ensure that NRM policies and programs effectively account for the needs of local landholders.

Question no: BRS 02

Division/Agency: BRS

Topic: National Agricultural Monitoring System – Dryland Broadacre System

Hansard page: 95

Senator O'Brien asked:

Is it possible that the ministerial council could make whatever decisions are necessary to allow an automatic commencement on the work on the more difficult areas once the dryland broadacre system goes live?

Answer:

Yes it is possible that the Ministerial Council could make whatever decisions are necessary to allow an automatic commencement on this work. The Primary Industries Standing Committee (PISC) considered the issue at their meeting in Adelaide on 9 March 2006.

It was agreed at that meeting that a working group be established under the PISC to do a short scoping study and to define a workplan to undertake this work. The Ministerial Council has already agreed to the cost sharing arrangements between the Australian and state governments for the work to be undertaken.

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Question no: BRS 03

Division/Agency: Bureau of Rural Sciences

Topic: Water 2010 Project

Hansard page: 95

Senator O'Brien asked:

What is the funding?

Dr Grant responded:

As I recall, it is about \$600,000 this year, but I will take that on notice if you need to be precise.

Answer:

The 'Water 2010' Project received \$400,000 in departmental funds in 2004-05 and \$600,000 in 2005-06. In addition, the National Water Commission has contributed \$50,000 to the Project in 2005-06. There are no funds as yet definitively allocated for next financial year.