

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: PIAPH 01

Division/Agency: Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health Division

Topic: Bee Colony Collapse

Hansard Page: 34-35 (18/02/2008)

Senator NASH asked:

Dr Carroll—Thank you. We did have a study team go across to the United States following the last Senate estimates, particularly Denis Anderson from CSIRO, Dr Iain East from our own area, and Paula Dewar, a queen bee breeder. They met with various US scientists, attended a symposium, produced a report and in particular answered a claim which had been made associating Australian bee exports with colony collapse disorder in the United States.

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Senator NASH—Could we have a copy of that report for the committee?

Dr Carroll—Yes.

Senator NASH—That would be quite helpful.

Answer:

A copy of the requested report is attached.

[PIAPH 01 attachment]

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: PIAPH 02

Division/Agency: Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health Division

Topic: Bee Colony Collapse

Hansard Page: 35 (18/02/2008)

Senator SIEWERT asked:

Senator SIEWERT—Is the bee decline in America continuing? You were talking about the 2006 year when they had the massive decline of 45 per cent. Were there similar declines in 2007 or did it improve?

Dr Carroll—My understanding was it was not as bad in 2007, but I would have to get more information on that. The big mortality event, so as to speak, was 2006.

Answer:

Informal inquiries to a number of members of the US apiculture industry and bee health researchers have indicated that the overall situation is not known and won't be clarified until a US wide survey is completed in April 2008. Anecdotal evidence provided by the various contacts included:

- considerable losses were observed in southern California.
- the losses in commercial bees going to California are >35 per cent (higher than last year 2006 at 30+ per cent).
- the largest beekeeper in the USA lost more than 6000 of his 40 000 hives.
- the losses are sporadic with some beekeepers losing large numbers of hives whilst other beekeepers in the same region have not experienced losses above that normally expected with the annual winter decline of their colonies.
- the situation was not as bad as last year but was nearly so.

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Question: PIAPH 03

Division/Agency: Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health Division

Topic: Bee Colony Collapse

Hansard Page: 35 (18/02/2008)

Senator SIEWERT asked:

Senator SIEWERT—The point we were at, if I recall it—and it was very late last time we were discussing it—was that there was some concern expressed I think by committee members about the large numbers exported from Australia considering we were obviously interested in the health of our industry and maintaining its vigour.

Mr Aldred—I am not sure that we have got recent figures to hand on exports, but we will certainly chase them up and provide them to the committee.

Senator SIEWERT—That would be appreciated, thank you.

Answer:

Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service exports data for 2007 recorded that 31 834 packages of bees were exported from Australia, estimated to contain approximately 500 million bees.

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Question: PIAPH 04

Division/Agency: Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health Division

Topic: NLIS Non-Compliance

Hansard Page: 36 (18/02/2008)

Senator NASH asked:

Senator NASH—Does the department have a list of those people who have been prosecuted for non-compliance?

Mr Aldred—I doubt that we have.

Mr Magee—I do not believe that we maintain such a list but, certainly, the states and territories may have that.

Senator NASH—It would be interesting to see how many instances there have been.

Mr Aldred—We could take that on notice

Senator NASH—If you could take that on notice.

Mr Aldred—We could try to get a report on the numbers of prosecutions.

Senator NASH—It would be quite interesting, thanks.

Answer:

Northern Territory, South Australia, Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and Tasmania have report no prosecutions to date.

Western Australia has reported no prosecutions to date but is preparing evidence for its first prosecution.

Queensland has report approximately 17 prosecutions by Queensland police.

New South Wales has reported one prosecution.

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Question: PIAPH 05

Division/Agency: Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health Division

Topic: Overseas Tissue Transfer

Hansard Page: 37 (18/02/2008)

Senator MILNE asked:

Senator MILNE—Have you been asked to facilitate the transport or transfer of tissue samples to overseas universities, laboratories et cetera?

Dr Carroll—Not that I am aware of, no.

Senator MILNE—You have not been involved in any way?

Dr Carroll—I am not aware. I have only been in the position since last December.

Senator MILNE—Could I ask you to take that on notice, then. If you could indicate to me whether the Commonwealth has been asked to facilitate tissue sample, research, exchange and that type of thing with international research agencies, laboratories et cetera and, if so, when and what and that sort of thing.

Dr Carroll—Certainly we will do that. I should stress as well that Tasmanians on their own behalf can certainly make contact with those organisations too, so they would not necessarily need to use us. If they did want to use us we would be there to help facilitate and do anything we could to assist, but they also have their own networks that they could use themselves. They would not have to come through us for that.

Senator MILNE—Thank you.

Answer:

Neither the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry nor the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and Arts were approached to facilitate the transport or transfer of tissue samples to overseas universities or laboratories, except by the provision of the necessary permits.

The following information was provided from Tasmania:

The Department of Primary Industries and Water has a Permit to Export Tasmanian devil (*Sarcophilus harrisii*) DNA and/or tissue under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, (Permit # WT2007-1049; valid to 27th Feb 2010). Our records show that there have been 2 exports under this permit, of Devil genomic DNA. These samples were despatched to Cold Springs Harbour Laboratories, Cold Spring Harbour, NY, USA (Specimen Export Record #'s 31269 and 31267). The purpose for despatch was to facilitate collaborative research into Tas. Devil genetics. We are finalising the despatch of other Devil genomic DNA samples to a new collaborator in the USA by the end of this month.

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Question: PIAPH 06

Division/Agency: Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health Division

Topic: Mulesing

Hansard Page: 37-38 (18/02/2008)

Senator HEFFERNAN asked:

Senator HEFFERNAN—Can you give this committee any advice on where we are up to with the injectable mulesing? Has it failed? I am told it has failed its animal efficiency test, with the result showing it is more painful than mulesing. Is that true or false?

Ms Standen—The issue of phasing out the practice of mulesing by 2010 is an industry commitment, and Australian Wool Innovation as the R&D body for the industry has been undertaking a great deal of research in recent years to come up with a viable alternative to mulesing. One of the possibilities was the injection method to ease the pain. I am unable to give you any details on how that research may have unfolded, but I can certainly take that on notice and get some more information to you.

Answer:

Attached is a copy of a progress report and associated documents from Australian Wool Innovation Limited (AWI) Progress report on Mulesing Alternatives. It provides a summary of progress to date in each of the areas of R&D into industry wide options for mulesing alternatives covered by AWI. It includes independent assessment of progress made in these areas by the Australian Veterinary Association.

[PIAPH 06 attachment]

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: PIAPH 07

Division/Agency: Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health Division

Topic: Mulesing

Hansard Page: 39 (18/02/2008)

Senator HEFFERNAN asked:

Senator HEFFERNAN—How long ago did they get the money for these trials?

Ms Standen—I will have to take that on notice.

Senator HEFFERNAN—A year or two years? Ten years? Fifty years? How long ago, roughly?

Dr O'Connell—We can take it on notice.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Yes, you can. But you must have some idea. Was it a year ago? Surely to God there is someone in the back room there who knows the answer.

When did we give them the money for these trials?

Ms Standen—We do not give them money.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Well how long have the trials been going on?

Ms Standen—As I said to an answer previously, I am not precisely sure how long these trials have been going on.

Senator HEFFERNAN—But, if you don't know, who does know?

Ms Standen—Within the last three or four years.

Senator HEFFERNAN—But who does know? If you don't know—Dr O'Connell, who does know?

Dr O'Connell—We will find that before the day is done, if that is okay.

Answer:

As detailed in the Australian Wool Innovation Limited (AWI) Progress report on Mulesing Alternatives, provided in response to PIAPH 6, the wool industry agreed in November 2004 to phase out mulesing and instructed AWI as its R&D arm to fast-track the development of industry-wide alternatives to mulesing. Funding for the trials has been allocated as part of the AWI planning and budgeting processes since 2004-05. Australian Government funding to AWI is provided under the statutory funding agreement (SFA) between AWI and the Commonwealth. The SFA does not specify the R&D projects to be undertaken and no separate funding has been provided to AWI for this research.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: PIAPH 08

Division/Agency: Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health Division

Topic: Mulesing

Hansard Page: 39 (18/02/2008)

Senator Milne asked:

Senator MILNE—Could we have the original agreement with this company about the trial and the date by which the evaluation was to be finalised. Clearly any kind of trial must have had an end date when they had to report back. Could we have the original arrangements for the trial, including the date by which it was to be concluded and an evaluation and report back was to be finalised. Could I have that in addition to what has been said.

Senate Committee's clarification of question: The Senate committee has advised that Senator Milne would like information relating to the 'clips trials' and 'chemical mulesing'.

Answer:

Attached is a copy of the Australian Veterinary Association Report on Progress of AWI and R&D on Mulesing Alternatives against Wool Industry Commitments to International Retailers. It and the previous report (supplied in response to PIAPH 06 and PIAPH 07) covers the request for further information on the timelines for and evaluation of trials concerning the clips and chemical mulesing options, that was made by Senator Milne.

DAFF provides funding that is used by AWI for wool industry R&D purposes under a Statutory Funding Agreement. No specific project funding has been provided by DAFF for research on alternatives that would assist the phasing out of mulesing therefore DAFF is not a party to any contractual agreements between AWI and research providers for those trials.

Reporting on outcomes of the work being undertaken however is provided four times a year. The summary of interim and completed milestones in the attached report provides information on when particular trials and projects were to be completed. In addition we note that the private company Cobbett Technologies Pty Ltd is reported to be continuing its own work on the development of the bloodless wrinkle removal technique, called Skintraction TM.

[PIAPH 08 attachment]

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

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Question: PIAPH 09

Division/Agency: Product Integrity, Animal and Plant Health Division

Topic: Bayer program for pain relief

Hansard Page: 39, 43, 124(18/02/2008)

Senator Heffernan asked:

Dr O'Connell—If it would be helpful to the committee we could approach AWI and see if they will provide us with an assessment of progress that could be shared with the committee.

Senator HEFFERNAN—While you are at it, could you also ask AWI their view on Better Choices, which is a Bayer program for pain relief, as opposed to these other things? One of the things that is going wrong with the pegs is that they fall off because they are not put on properly.

Mr Murnane—Perhaps the best way of dealing with that could be to make sure that AWI includes issues of how they are going on pain relief measures in the previous package of information that was spoken about earlier today. We could make sure that they include it.

Answer:

The requested information has been included in the Australian Wool Innovation Limited Progress report on Mulesing Alternatives that was provided with the PIAPH 06 response.