

**Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Additional Estimates February 2009

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit 01

**Division/Agency:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit

**Topic:** FMD Virus and Independent Review of Australia's Quarantine and Biosecurity Arrangements

**Hansard Page:** 83-84 (23/02/2009)

**Senator Heffernan asked:**

**Senator Heffernan**—But there is a recommendation.

**Senator Sherry**—As far as the government is concerned, there are no plans to import live FMD viruses in Australia. On the matter of who suggested it in a particular submission, if indeed any submission suggested it—

**Senator HEFFERNAN**—Well, no-one did, apparently.

**Senator Sherry**—we are taking it on notice and we will analyse the submissions to see if anyone specifically suggested it. Your approach to the witness is bordering on unreasonable badgering.

**Senator HEFFERNAN**—No, I am not going to the thinking of the panel at all. I am going to who made the submission that said we should bring in live foot and mouth, which has alarmed all farmers in Australia.

**Dr O'Connell**—You said what was the seed of the panel's thinking.

**Senator HEFFERNAN**—No. Who sowed the seed with the submission to the panel? I was talking about the submitters to the panel, nothing to do with the panel.

**Dr O'Connell**—I think we could probably—

**Senator HEFFERNAN**—Because if the panel did not have a seed sown and they took it upon themselves, they were completely out of order.

**Dr O'Connell**—We could take that on notice.

**Answer:**

The Quarantine and Biosecurity Review Panel released a written statement on 26 February 2009 in relation to Recommendation 59 of its report to permit the import of virus material for research, diagnostic and response purposes. The statement is attached for reference (see **QB 01 – attachment A**)

The statement confirmed that there was no specific recommendation in the formal submissions in relation to the desirability or otherwise of the importation FMD material. The panel noted that the issue was however discussed with interlocutors from major research and analytical bodies.

**Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Additional Estimates February 2009

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit 02

**Division/Agency:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit

**Topic:** Government timetable of responding formally to the Beale review

**Hansard Page:** 89 (23/02/2009)

**Senator Williams asked:**

**Senator WILLIAMS**—Perhaps I should direct this to the minister: what is the government's timetable of responding formally to the Beale review? Minister, would you know?

**Senator Sherry**—I do not know the precise date. Do you have any idea?

**Dr O'Connell**—No. That is in the government's decision-making process.

**Senator Sherry**—I will have to take that on notice.

**Answer:**

The government has released the report and its preliminary response on 18 December 2008.

**Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Additional Estimates February 2009

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit 03

**Division/Agency:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit

**Topic:** Live virus samples of foot and mouth disease

**Hansard Page:** 86/90 (23/02/2009)

**Senator McGauran asked:**

**Extract from page 86**

**Senator WILLIAMS**—Still on the *Land* newspaper, it says that the government has accepted, in principle, all recommendations from the Beale report. Minister Burke is quoted as saying:

The principle here is that we make science-based decisions.

It would be irresponsible to rule out ever allowing in live virus samples of foot and mouth disease.

If there is an outbreak, live virus samples allow scientists to make the fastest and most accurate diagnosis of the virus strain, to determine the best vaccine to use.

The government has clearly said they will accept in principle all recommendations from the Beale report, and here is the minister's statement saying they would not rule out not importing it. My big concern is that, just like when the calicivirus was brought to Australia—as Senator Heffernan has said, they like playing with fire—if it gets out it will be the ruination of rural Australia. What I would like to hear from Minister Sherry representing Minister Burke is: can you give this committee a guarantee that the government will not import foot-and-mouth disease?

**Page 90**

**Senator McGAURAN**—All right. It is simply not clear to those of us on this side of the table what the intentions of the government are—particularly as my colleague, Senator Williams, quoted the minister in the *Land* newspaper not ruling out the principle. It is just not clear. Can you rule it out? Make it clear now. Have you any instructions from the minister? To use the words 'There is no proposal' is simply not clear enough; it has to be ruled out.

**Answer:**

There is no proposal by Australia's animal health authorities or CSIRO (including AAHL) to import live FMD virus.

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Hon. Tony Burke M.P, has indicated that the only circumstance in which the need to import live FMD virus would be considered would be if an outbreak had already occurred.

**Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Additional Estimates February 2009

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit 04

**Division/Agency:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit

**Topic:** Independent Review of Australia's Quarantine and Biosecurity Arrangements

**Hansard Page:** Written

**Senator Colbeck asked:**

1. Have there been any adjustments to the costs of the Beale Review as supplied following the October 2008 Estimates and if so what are the costs now?
2. What was the individual breakdown of payments for each panellist and the chair of this Review?
3. At what rate were these panellists paid?
4. What are the breakdowns for the travel costs for this review?

**Answer:**

1. Yes – the final costs for the review have now been calculated. The review cost \$1,743,213, comprising panellists' sitting fees (\$664,449), travel costs and allowances (\$302,145), employee expenses for department staff directly supporting the review (\$684,275), legal advice (approximately \$78,858) and other supplier expenses (\$13,486).
2. The final sitting fees (\$664,449) consists of:
  - Allen Consulting Group Pty Ltd received \$345,455;
  - Fairo Holdings Pty Ltd received \$191,818;
  - Andrew Inglis received \$14,974;
  - AL Inglis and GL Inglis received \$49,886
  - Larool Secretariat Services Pty Ltd received \$62,315
3. The Chair of the review was charged out at \$4,000 (*GST inclusive*) per day by the Allen Consulting Group Pty Ltd. An acting Chair was appointed for a short period of time, and was charged out at a rate of \$3,000 (*GST inclusive*) per day. The three (non-Chair) panel members charged out at a rate of \$2,500 (*GST inclusive*) per day, \$1,000 (*GST inclusive*) per day and \$1,000 (*GST inclusive*) per day respectively.
4. The travel costs and allowances totalling \$302,145 consists of \$105,110 Departmental travel cost and allowances and \$197,035 panellists travel costs and allowances. Panel members' travel allowances were paid in accordance with the Tier 1 determination set by the Remuneration Tribunal.

**Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Additional Estimates February 2009

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit 05

**Division/Agency:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit

**Topic:** Independent Review of Australia's Quarantine and Biosecurity Arrangements

**Hansard Page:** Written

**Senator Williams asked:**

1. How much did the Beale Review cost?
2. Please provide a breakdown of all individual costs.

**Answer:**

The final costs for the review have now been calculated. The review cost \$1,743,213, comprising panellists' sitting fees (\$664,449), travel costs and allowances (\$302,145), employee expenses for department staff directly supporting the review (\$684,275), legal advice (approximately \$78,858) and other supplier expenses (\$13,486).

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Additional Estimates February 2009

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit 06

**Division/Agency:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit

**Topic:** Independent Review of Australia's Quarantine and Biosecurity Arrangements

**Hansard Page:** Written

**Senator Williams asked:**

1. What is the Government's timetable for responding formally to the Beale Review?
2. When will the legislation be introduced?

**Answer:**

1. The government released the report and its preliminary response on 18 December 2008.
2. The timing of introduction of legislation is a matter for the government to finalise in its legislation program.

**Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Additional Estimates February 2009

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit 07

**Division/Agency:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit

**Topic:** Independent Review of Australia's Quarantine and Biosecurity Arrangements

**Hansard Page:** Written

**Senator Williams asked:**

Who has the government consulted within industry on the Beale Review's recommendations?

**Answer:**

The independent panel consulted widely with interested organisations in Australia and overseas. In total, the panel consulted directly with 170 individuals and representatives of organisations and received approximately 220 written submissions.

The government has commenced discussions with a number of industry bodies and state and territory agencies. The government is planning a range of activities to ensure that key industry stakeholders continue to provide input into the implementation of the proposed reforms.

**Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Additional Estimates February 2009

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit 08

**Division/Agency:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit

**Topic:** Independent Review of Australia's Quarantine and Biosecurity Arrangements

**Hansard Page:** Written

**Senator Williams asked:**

1. Has industry welcomed all aspects of the Beale Review's recommendations?
2. Are there any alternative views within industry on any of the recommendations, particularly in relation to market access arrangements and establishing new markets, particularly import protocols in relation to quarantine matters including cost?

**Answer:**

Industry response to the report has been mostly positive. Three recommendations have generated concerns for industry:

1. Recommendation 59 regarding the importation of live foot and mouth disease (FMD) virus.
2. Recommendation 79 which states that the government's 40 per cent subsidy of AQIS export certification functions be allowed to lapse, as scheduled, at the end of June 2009.
3. Recommendation 73 regarding an adjustment to the Passenger Movement Charge to help fund some of the reforms.



**Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Additional Estimates February 2009

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit 09

**Division/Agency:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit

**Topic:** Independent Review of Australia's Quarantine and Biosecurity Arrangements

**Hansard Page:** Written

**Senator Williams asked:**

Why did the Government give in principled support to every single recommendation in the Beale Review without first consulting with industry?

**Answer:**

There was extensive consultation undertaken by the panel during the review process, having consulted directly with 170 individuals and representatives of organisations and received approximately 220 written submissions. Prior to release, discussions on the report's content occurred with key stakeholders including state and territory ministers and industry bodies.

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has indicated that while the government has accepted the panel's recommendations in-principle, there would be ongoing consultation on how to implement the findings and fund the reforms.

**Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Additional Estimates February 2009

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit 10

**Division/Agency:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit

**Topic: Independent Review of Australia's Quarantine and Biosecurity Arrangements**

**Hansard Page:** Written

**Senator Williams asked:**

Is the government reviewing its 'in-principle support' for any of the Beale Review recommendations?

**Answer:**

The government has accepted the 84 recommended reforms in-principle and is now in the process of working towards implementation. The government's preliminary response states that the report is a comprehensive reform blueprint for strengthening Australia's biosecurity system and that there would be ongoing consultation on how to implement the findings and fund the reforms.

The government has commenced initial discussions on implementing the findings with a number of industry bodies and other relevant stakeholders. The government is planning a range of activities to ensure that key industry stakeholders continue to provide input into the implementation of the proposed reforms.

**Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Additional Estimates February 2009

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit 11

**Division/Agency:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit

**Topic: Independent Review of Australia's Quarantine and Biosecurity Arrangements**

**Hansard Page:** Written

**Senator Williams asked:**

What is the estimated cost of implementing the Beale Review recommendations? (Please provide a breakdown, including any additional costs and/or savings).

**Answer:**

The report recommends the Commonwealth should increase its pre-border, border and post-border biosecurity investment by an amount in the order of \$260 million per annum. Of this increase in resources, approximately 25 per cent should be allocated to pre-border activities, 20 per cent at-the-border, 5 per cent for staff training and development, and the remaining 50 per cent post-border.

The panel recommends that a significant part of the recommended increase in resources should be funded through cost recovery and an adjustment to the passenger movement charge. The panel notes that based on existing cost recovery ratios, approximately half the additional pre-border and border investment would be cost recoverable.

The panel also recommends an additional \$225 million investment over a number of years in information technology and business systems for biosecurity.

The government's preliminary response indicates that it will consider the specific resourcing requirements in the budget process. The preliminary response also notes that the government intends to refine cost recovery arrangements in consultation with industry.

**Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Additional Estimates February 2009

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit 12

**Division/Agency:** Quarantine and Biosecurity Policy Unit

**Topic:** Independent Review of Australia's Quarantine and Biosecurity Arrangements

**Hansard Page:** Written

**Senator Williams asked:**

Does the Government still give 'in-principled' support to recommendation 59 of the Beale Review which in part states; *'The panel's view is that access to positive control samples such as the FMD virus is vital and should be permitted...to approved laboratories and to AAHL (Australian Animal Health Laboratory).'*

**Answer:**

The government's in-principle agreement to recommendation 59 should not be interpreted as agreement to the importation of any particular exotic disease agent, including Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) virus. The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has stated that the government would only consider importing the live virus if an outbreak had already occurred. If an outbreak did occur, the Minister has indicated that a decision would be taken, on the basis of the best available scientific advice, on how to best eradicate the disease – including whether imported live virus needed to be used. A media statement by the Minister on this issue is attached (**QB 12 - Attachment A**).

There is no current application to import live FMD virus. The only laboratory in Australia with the requisite biological security level to handle a virus like the FMD virus is the CSIRO Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL) at Geelong.

Dr Alan Bell, Chief of CSIRO Livestock Industries, has stated that AAHL presently has no plans to seek permission to import live FMD viruses for research purposes.

The Quarantine and Biosecurity Review Panel clarified its position in relation to Recommendation 59 in a statement on 26 February 2009. The panel emphasised in this statement that it was not proposing the import of any specific live virus material, which could present a threat to Australia's agriculture and environment without further assessment of risk. The statement is attached for reference (**QB 12 - Attachment B**).