

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: FF 01

Division/Agency: Fisheries and Forestry

Topic: Review of Tasmanian forest contractors

Hansard Page: 130 (27/05/08)

Senator Abetz asked:

Senator ABETZ—Thank you. There was a review of Tasmanian forest contractors implemented. That was to report in November. Has that review been received?

Mr Bartlett—Not to my knowledge.

Senator ABETZ—When are you anticipating that review?

Mr Bartlett—I will have to take that on notice.

Answer:

As part of their role as Independent Assessors for the Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement Industry Development Program, forest-industry consultants Poyry Forest Industry Pty Ltd undertook a review of a submission for a structural adjustment package by the Tasmanian Forest Contractors Association.

Poyry Forest Industry Pty Ltd provided its final review of the TFCA submission entitled *Review of 'Structural Assistance Programme for Tasmanian Forest Contractors' as proposed by Tasmanian Forest Contractors Association* to the Department on 4 April 2008. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry provided a copy to the Tasmanian Forest Contractors Association on the same date.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: FF 02

Division/Agency: Fisheries and Forestry

Topic: Forestry Research

Hansard Page: 130 (27/05/08)

Senator Abetz asked:

Senator ABETZ— That is a great answer, thank you. There is a nuisance in Tasmania who likes placing advertisements. Part of the advertisement says, ‘Plantation managed investment schemes promoted and protected by Senator Abetz, the former minister for forests, will now be under close scrutiny by the Australian Taxation Office.’ You have confirmed that they are now legislated schemes, and that will not be occurring. Do Forestry or you, Mr Bartlett, have any views in relation to the cuts to the CSIRO which mean that we will now have only one area for dedicated forestry research, the CRC for Forestry?

Mr Bartlett—No, I do not have any views.

Senator ABETZ—No views? Minister, do you think that this is going to be helpful for Forestry?

Senator Sherry—I will take it on notice and discuss it with the minister.

Senator ABETZ—Thank you.

Answer:

CSIRO has taken the decision to reduce administrative costs by amalgamating a number of Divisions. From 1 July 2008, CSIRO Forest Biosciences will no longer be a Division and its staff will be split among three other CSIRO Divisions (Sustainable Ecosystems; Plant Industry; and Materials, Science and Engineering). CSIRO’s view is that there will be no or little impact on capability or research delivery and CSIRO will continue to deliver the same outputs and outcomes for the forest sector through its research themes. CSIRO intends to maintain strong links with the forestry sector via long-standing mechanisms including advisory panels, research and business partnerships, industry and community committees, and one-on-one contacts.

The main forest theme is likely to be Sustaining Australia’s Forest Ecosystem Resources and the main wood products theme will be Transformed Forest Industries. These themes will continue to contribute to research for forest-based industries via existing and future partnerships such as the Forestry CRC and the Bushfire CRC.

The Australian Government will also continue its long-term commitment to forestry research through other avenues, including Forest and Wood Products Australia and the Bureau of Rural Sciences.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: FF 03

Division/Agency: Fisheries and Forestry

Topic: Illegal foreign fishing

Hansard Page: 131 (27/05/08)

Senator Abetz asked:

Senator ABETZ— Can you tell us, either now or on notice, what is happening with the *FV Taruman*, which has been rusting away at Hobart's port?

Answer:

The second tender process commenced in March 2008 and closed in April 2008. The Australian Fisheries Management Authority is currently considering the tenders.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: FF 04

Division/Agency: Fisheries and Forestry

Topic: Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement Industry Development

Program – ANAO Report

Hansard Page: 131 (27/5/08)

Senator Milne asked:

Senator MILNE—No, because the Auditor-General has now confirmed that Senator Abetz was not told of his responsibilities and therefore has not breached his responsibilities. I would like to ask this of the department: who has taken responsibility for failing to inform the minister? This is important. The Auditor's report said that there were no operating procedures developed for administering the programs; the assessment process was not transparent and not consistent with the commonly applied standards of grants administrations; the advice provided to ministers did not accurately reflect where assessments were not completed by the department, the Tasmanian Department of Economic Development or the independent assessor and where the scope of the assessment was restricted by the committee. That is pretty damning. Who is taking responsibility? In the regional grants process, people were forced to take responsibility. Who is taking responsibility for the complete maladministration of this fund?

Dr O'Connell—I have only had a short look, but it does look as though the context of your question would have made it clear that it did not refer to Minister Burke but to the previous minister. On that basis, I apologise for the department misinterpreting the question when they came to draft the answers. I am happy to undertake to provide a corrected answer to you

Answer:

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (the department) did not formally advise the former Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation, senator the Hon. Senator Abetz, of his obligations under the financial management regulations in relation to the disbursement of grant funds.

The Department provided the former Minister with briefs about the Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement (TCFA) programs and their administration at the time he became Minister and on several occasions at Parliamentary Briefing Meetings.

In March 2006, when the Department first requested the former Minister to approve grants under the TCFA Industry Development Programs, the written brief included detailed information about the program guidelines, the recommended grants, the assessment process and the reasons for not recommending any particular components of grant applications.

[FF 04 attachment]

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: FF 05

Division/Agency: Fisheries and Forestry

Topic: Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement Industry Development

Program grant payments

Hansard Page: Written question

Senator Abetz asked:

Since the 24th of November 2007, how much money has been expended from the Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement Industry Development Grant Programs, specifying the individual beneficiaries?

Answer:

Since 24 November 2007, payments under the combined Tasmanian Community Forest Agreement Industry Development Programs amount to \$5.671 million, consisting of \$ 3.805 million under the Tasmanian Forest Industry Development Program, \$1.442 million under the Tasmanian Softwood Industry Development Program and \$0.424 million under the Tasmanian Country Sawmills Assistance Program.

Payments have been made to the following beneficiaries:

Tasmanian Forest Industry Development Program

Project Number	Grantee	Amount paid
TFI 10	Britton Timbers	\$ 59 159
TFI 23	University of Tasmania	\$ 141 140
TFI 100	Australian Paper	\$ 137 590
TFI 2	Forest Enterprise Australia	\$ 2 060 000
TFI 102	Southcape Harvesting	\$ 90 947
TFI 73	Les Walkden Enterprises	\$ 65 000
TFI 30	Koppers Wood Products	\$ 105 282
TFI 75	Riella Pty Ltd	\$ 160 899
TFI 106	Allen Brittain	\$ 104 750
TFI 96	Gunns Ltd	\$ 81 124
TFI 98		\$ 5 082
TFI 90	Andrew Lette Pty Ltd	\$ 619 925
TFI 111		\$ 173 756
Total payments 24 November 2007 – 16 June 2008		\$ 3 804 654

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Tasmanian Softwood Industry Development Program

Project Number	Grantee	Amount paid
TSI 3	Koppers Wood Products	\$ 99 882
TSI 25	Wrights Harvesting	\$ 74 401
TSI 23(a)	Statewide Forest Services	\$ 68 312
TSI 18	KJ & B Mahnken	\$ 593 106
TSI 11	Norske Skog	\$ 96 000
TSI 6	Chris Hall Investments Pty Ltd	\$ 337 016
TSI 16	Forest Enterprises Australia	\$ 173 358
Total payments 24 November 2007 – 16 June 2008		\$ 1 442 075

Tasmanian Country Sawmills Assistance Program

Project Number	Grantee	Amount paid
TCS 3	GL & VN Barber	\$ 55 277
TCS 30	Mathews Timber	\$ 129 626
TCS 2	Kelly Gang Timbers	\$ 8 563
TCS 12	Mirragong Pty Ltd	\$ 2 018
TCS 24	McKay Investments	\$ 153 894
TCS 15	Kelly's Timbers	\$ 74 667
Total payments 24 November 2007 – 16 June 2008		\$ 424 045