



Australian Government

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Ms Jeanette Radcliffe
Committee Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Radcliffe

In the course of reviewing the record of responses by officers of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (the department) and portfolio agencies during the Budget Estimates hearings conducted by the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee (the committee) on 26 and 27 May 2008, it has been determined that several of the answers provided were incomplete or inaccurate.

The errors occurred through officers of the department and portfolio agencies attempting to answer the committee's questions, in good faith and from memory, without the specific details at hand for reference. We have since had the opportunity to review the answers provided at the hearings and the following pages provide our corrections and in some cases further information for the consideration of the committee.

I apologise for incorrect or incomplete information supplied at the hearings and for any misunderstanding that may have arisen. It would be appreciated if these corrections could be brought to the attention of the members of the Committee.

If you have any queries on this matter, please contact me on 6272 3035.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Elizabeth Bie'.

Ms Elizabeth Bie
General Manager
Ministerial, Parliamentary & Media Branch

July 2008

RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Senate Budget Estimates Hearings 26 and 27 May 2008

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FORESTRY

Factual Corrections

In answering Senator Scullion's questions (Hansard page 15; 26 May 2008):

Senator SCULLION – How many requests have you received?

Senator SCULLION – How many of those have been granted or denied or are currently under consideration?

Mr Craig Penney wishes to advise the committee of a number of minor factual errors in the statistics provided at the hearing. Mr Penney informed the committee that the department had received 39 requests for the 2007/08 financial year up to 23 May 2008, the date of the hearing. The correct figure is 36 as 3 requests were received in the previous financial year. Of the 36 requests received, 18 have been completed [not 13 as indicated]; 11 have been withdrawn [as opposed to 9]; 4 have been subject to internal review as indicated; and 3 have been transferred to another agency [not 2 as indicated].

In answering Senator Heffernan's question (Hansard page 94; 26 May 2008):

Senator MILNE—I thought Mr Bowen was going to add something.

Mr Bowen—I think Mr Burns covered the fact that there is a whole-of-government approach here for our defence of the case. The only thing extra I would add to the information is that we have also hired the Chief General Counsel from the Australian Government Solicitor's Office to provide advice to the team that has been put together for the defence.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Is this a court that uses court rules?

Mr Bowen—It is a mixture of the courts. It is a trade organisation which has a panel which has been appointed and has people required to make submissions and-

Senator HEFFERNAN—What is the driver? Is it the law?

Mr Bowen—The driver is a WTO agreement called the Sanitary Agreement, and New Zealand has alleged that Australia has broken some of the rules under the WTO SPS agreement in regard to the conditions, or measures, set out for imports for apples and they are challenging those conditions.

Mr Bowen wishes to advise the committee that the 'Sanitary Agreement' should be amended to the 'Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement', as this is the correct abbreviated title of the agreement he was referring to.

In answering Senator McGauran's question (Hansard page 118; 26 May 2008):

Senator McGAURAN—All around the country. And 12 laboratories—what do you mean by the laboratories?

Mr Woods—A laboratory is an organisation that tests the wheat samples. When wheat is packed in the containers, samples are taken—one for AQIS and another for us. That sample is sent off for testing. The lab has to check the tests against what is written on the contract specifications. Then they supply that back to us and we check it against the contract specifications. So we are talking about protein screenings and moisture.

Mr Woods wishes to advise the committee that his fourth and fifth sentences need correction to ensure the process is described accurately.

The lab has to test the sample for various quality measurements as requested by the exporter, for example protein and screenings. Then they supply the results to the EWC and we check it against the contract specifications.

In answering Senator McGauran's question (Hansard page 119; 26 May 2008):

Senator McGAURAN—Yes. So you say you get 4,000 notifications?

Mr Woods—Yes. So, before they ship, they have to notify us. We have forms available on the internet. An exporter will fill out a form notifying us that they are going to ship. They provide when they are going to be packing, how much they are packing, the country it is going to and various other things, including a section out of the contract specifications. From that, they also notify the testing laboratory what to test for. Then, once it is shipped, the test results come to us and we compare them to see if they are similar or the same as on the contract.

Mr Woods wishes to advise the committee that his last sentence needs correction to ensure the process is described accurately.

Then, once it is tested, the test results are sent to the EWC and we compare them to see if they are similar or the same as on the contract.

In answering Senator Milne's question (Hansard page 61; 27 May 2008):

Senator MILNE—.....Don't you accept some responsibility for that, especially when there were plenty of people telling you as long as three years ago that this was coming?

Mr Glyde—I do not accept responsibility for laying out the assumptions behind our forecast, doing the best possible job we could, in ascertaining the information and data behind those and putting it forward and publishing it. I think that is our role.

Mr Glyde wishes to advise the committee that he 'does accept responsibility for laying out the assumptions....'.

In answering Senator Nash's question (Hansard page 80; 27 May 2008):

Mr Glyde—On the questions of segregation, we have tried to shed some light on that early on in our report. I think it was last year. We did a sample of farmers I think in WA to get a sense of what some of the costs were if you were going forward with the segregated regime so as to try and shed some light on that. It was not the complete picture. There was some criticism about what we did and did not do in that. But it was our attempt to deal with the segregation question.

Senator NASH—Did you talk to the bulk handlers or just the farmers?

Mr Glyde—I am not quite sure who we talked to in relation to that report.

Senator NASH—It is a big issue, if you did not talk to the bulk handlers. Can you take that on notice?

Dr Penm—In April, ABARE held a workshop inviting industry people to discuss the GM issue and also we sent two officers—

Senator NASH—Could you provide the list to the committee, on notice, of who you actually had at that workshop?

Dr Penm wishes to advise the committee that that workshop was held in February 2008.

In answering Senator Siewert's question (Hansard page 80; 27 May 2008):

Senator SIEWERT—I know the approach that you have been taking in your reports, but I am wondering if you are doing any economic analysis of the impact of liability.

Dr Penm—That is not currently our work program for this financial year.

Dr Penm wishes to advise the committee that although ABARE has not undertaken any economic research specifically on the impact of liability, there is a project titled 'Insurance and the Cartagena Biosafety Protocol' that ABARE is currently in the process of completion. In the report, there will be some discussion on the issue of liability resulting from the transboundary movements of living modified organisms and the implications for the Cartagena Biosafety Protocol that is currently being negotiated. Liability rules in Australia will not be looked at in this project.

In answering Senator Siewert's question (Hansard page 106; 27 May 2008):

Senator SIEWERT—The reason I am asking is because in an entirely different situation I am aware of some tenders that have been given for delivering of other counselling service where the people were inexperienced to deal with the regional issues and it has now resulted in significant problems. So I am asking specifically how much experience did they have in dealing with regional issues and was that specifically weighted for in your decision-making process?

Ms Kidman—The grant applications were assessed by the assessment panel in each of the states and they were assessed against 10 criteria. I believe, and they were considered in detail by the assessment panel against each of those criterion. Each of those criterion were assessed by the assessment panel on its own merits with equal weighting.

Ms Kidman wishes to advise the committee that the grant applications were assessed against 11 criteria, not 10 as she advised the committee.

In clarifying Senator Sherry's response (Hansard page 111; 27 May 2008):

Senator SHERRY—You can get it from the minister representing the minister that yes, it will be funded. I understand the \$80,000, or whatever the figure was in previous years, was not separately listed. It was part of a general program but it is departmental and it will be there.

Mr Ian Thompson wishes to advise the committee of the quantum of funding provided to ABC Heywire in previous years.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has been a sponsor of the Heywire initiative since 2003 and, in 2005, executed a co-sponsorship agreement that extended until June 2008. Under this agreement the department provided \$20,000 (GST exclusive) annual funding to the Heywire initiative and co-sponsors (the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government; the Department of Housing, Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; and the Department of Health and Ageing) each provided \$10,000 (GST exclusive) per annum. This totals \$50,000 (GST exclusive) sponsorship per year by the Australian government. The Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation also provided \$40,000 (GST exclusive) annually.

Additionally, funding of \$30,000 (GST exclusive) supported members of the Heywire alumni to attend the 2008 Heywire Youth Issues Forum. These additional funds will be available in the 2008–09 financial year.

In answering Senator Siewert's question (Hansard page 133; 27 May 2008):

Senator SIEWERT—I will be following that up tomorrow. I did not quite hear the original question Senator Abetz asked so I apologise if this question has been asked: has there been a decrease in funding for IUU surveillance?

Mr Hurry—No.

Mr Hurry wishes to advise the committee that while the answer remains no, there should be clarification that agencies have returned unused funding to finance that is associated with lower levels of vessels being apprehended and therefore processed.
