

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 01

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Weeds

**Hansard Page:** 114 (26/05/08)

**Senator Siewert asked:**

**Senator SIEWERT**—I want to ask about weeds. Can you remind me how many weed species you have on your lists?

**Mr Aldred**—Depending on the nature of the questions, we are probably better off dealing with those either in the natural resource management area or in the department of environment. I will flag that.

**Senator SIEWERT**—You will flag it, okay. I can ask under NRM.

**Mr Aldred**—If you ask us a couple of the questions, we will just make sure that that is the case.

**Senator SIEWERT**—I want to know how many species you have on the weed list. I know WWF has prepared a list of what they consider weed species which went into the thousands. I am wondering if you have done an analysis against the list that they have prepared and what is on your list.

**Mr Quinlivan**—Senator, could you clarify if you are talking about the so-called weeds of national significance, which are here, or weeds that we should be wary of, which are not here yet? What is the nature of the—

**Senator SIEWERT**—I think they are weeds that are here already.

**Answer:**

There are:

- 20 species on the Weeds of National Significance List;
- 28 species on the National Environmental Alert List;
- 17 species on the Priority Sleeper Weeds List;
- 6 species targeted for eradication; and
- 86 species targeted for biological control.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 02

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Research and Development / Climate Change

**Hansard Page:** 22 (27/05/08)

**Senator Scullion asked:**

**Senator SCULLION**—I wonder if you can answer some general questions with regard to the regional and rural research and development corporations. I know we have the Grains Research and Development Corporation coming up, but I want to ask specifically about the funding arrangements across all of the cotton, fisheries, grains, grape and wine, land and water, rural industries and sugar R&D. I understand from Budget Paper No. 4 that, if we make a comparison between the agency resourcing and the estimated actual, there is a net increase of about \$7 million. I understood that there is, in fact, an electoral commitment for \$15 million to the agricultural, regional and rural RDCs. I want to know if there is scope under which the seven which I have mentioned come and whether or not those calculations are, in fact, correct.

**Dr O’Connell**—I am not aware of any particular election commitment from the government to provide \$15 million to the R&D corporations.

**Mr Burns**—I think, Senator, that that might be related to climate change initiatives.

**Senator SCULLION**—It may be, but it was specifically directed to the agricultural research and development corporations—those particular development corporations—whether it was for climate change or whatever.

**Dr O’Connell**—I think that the program funding is probably best discussed under the NRM when we get to the climate change programs, because the \$15 million comes under that.

**Senator SCULLION**—I would have thought that these are principally involved—as you would be aware, Mr Secretary—with food production and agriculture, and I thought that under the heading ‘Food and Agriculture’ would be the area where we would be able to get that. Perhaps it is an opportunity for someone to find out.

**Dr O’Connell**—We will find out.

**Answer:**

**“Comparison between the agency resourcing and the estimated actual”**

Differences between estimated actual receipts for 2007-08 and agency resourcing in 2008-09 reflect Research and Development Corporations' (RDCs) expectations for cash receipts from levies and matching government payments. While there is an overall net increase for 2008-09, there are substantial variations in forecasts by individual RDCs reflecting particular differences in expected impacts on rural industries of weather and market conditions. As forecasts, these figures will be subject to change over a season.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**“Electoral commitment for \$15 million”**

Consistent with the Australian Government’s “Plan for Primary Industries” election document, \$15 million has been committed to the Climate Change and Productivity Research Program from 2008-09 to 2010-11 (\$6 million in 2008-09). This program is part of Australia’s Farming Future, a \$130 million climate change initiative for primary industries.

At the time of the Budget Estimates hearings there had been no decision on the specific details of the Climate Change and Productivity Research Program.

Additional funds have now been allocated for research, development and demonstration activities from the Climate Change Adaptation Partnerships Program (\$60 million over four years) under Australia’s Farming Future, reflecting the immediate priority and extent of the challenge confronting the sector in managing their emissions and adapting.

This brings total funding to \$46.2 million from 2008-09 to 2011-12 under the Climate Change Research Program, for research projects and on-farm demonstration pilots that target three key priorities:

- reducing greenhouse pollution
- better soil management
- adapting to a changing climate change.

Rural Research and Development Corporations and Companies will be well placed to bring forward competitive proposals and potentially receive funding in excess of the initial \$15 million commitment under the total combined investment in research, development and demonstration.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 03

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Consultation with the agriculture sector on emissions trading

**Hansard Page:** 55 (27/05/08)

**Senator Heffernan asked:**

**Mr Quinlivan**—There are a couple of processes. There was a meeting recently that Ministers Burke and Wong held with—I am not sure of the precise number—15 to 20 leaders which included the farm leaders.

**Senator HEFFERNAN**—Could you provide us with the details of that meeting?

**Mr Quinlivan**—Yes, I am sure we can do that.

**Answer:**

On 28 April, Minister Wong and Minister Burke co-hosted an Agriculture Roundtable with industry leaders to discuss the possible inclusion of the agricultural sector in the Emissions Trading Scheme.

Organisations represented at the meeting included the National Farmers' Federation, NSW Farmers' Association, Queensland Farmers' Federation, South Australian Farmers' Federation, Victorian Farmers Federation, AgForce Queensland, the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association, Grains Council of Australia, Australian Dairy Farmers, Australian Cane Growers Council, Cattle Council of Australia, Meat & Livestock Australia and the Australian Farm Institute. A list of invited participants is at **attachment A**.

The key outcome of the meeting was the establishment of an expert Land Based Sector Consultative Group which includes both agriculture and forestry technical experts. The Consultative Group has met three times since the Agriculture Roundtable. The attendees at the first meeting is provided at **attachment B**.

**[NRM 03 attachments A&B]**

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 04

**Division/Agency:** DEWHA & DAFF/AGNRM

**Topic:** Community Coastcare hot spot locations

**Hansard Page:** 114 (27/05/08)

**Senator Abetz asked:**

**Senator ABETZ**— We will give it a go here and see how we go. Community Coast Care tells us what a coastal hot spot is. It then goes through a number of categories. I turn to the state of Tasmania. It seems that we only have hot spots in the south on the Derwent estuary and its catchment and on the Pittwater-Orielton Lagoon Ramsar site. Can I ask on what basis these 12 hot spots around Australia were determined and, in particular, why the Tamar River estuary, with all its problems, is not on this list?

**Dr O'Connell**—Senator, I think this would be better put to DEWHA. They manage this, although this goes to the joint management.

**Senator ABETZ**—What is the bet they will tell me to come back here, but we will see how we go.

**Dr O'Connell**—No. They will know it well.

**Senator ABETZ**—If I may, I will try and ask them there. I request the committee to take the question on notice and, between the two departments, come up with an answer for me. . I would be much obliged if that could happen because I am not sure that I will necessarily get to the environment portfolio with this.

**Dr O'Connell**—Okay. We will make sure they are prepared for you.

**Senator ABETZ**—Can I ask in relation to—

**Senator Sherry**—Do you want us to refer your question to them? It is not the normal process.

**Senator ABETZ**—Yes. If NRM take it because they manage it with Environment, I imagine that any question on NRM would be passed through both departments in any event. If I may, I will leave them here and the specific advice can be obtained. Thank you, Dr O'Connell.

**Answer:**

For the purpose of Caring for our Country, a coastal hotspot is defined as an area that:

1. encompasses one or more matters of national environmental significance as defined under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act);
2. is under pressure as a result of population growth and development, disturbance of acid sulfate soils, and water quality decline; and/or
3. is suffering ecosystem disturbance leading to habitat loss and biodiversity decline.

The 12 priority coastal hotspot sites for the 2008-09 transition year were identified on the basis of the above definition. In each of these 12 sites, coastal protection is already underway and stakeholders are well placed to build on existing work to deliver

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

successful project outcomes. Targeting of investments will allow substantial and measurable change at key sites to be achieved and reported.

In the transition year, an explicit decision was made to focus investment on sites whose significance had already been agreed with jurisdictions and where work was already underway.

While the Tamar Estuary is under pressure and there are challenges associated with its management, priority was given to a site that had work underway (the Derwent) and a site that was a Ramsar wetland (Pitt Water-Orielton Lagoon). A decision as to whether or not to add the Tamar to the list of hotspots will be made when the list is reviewed at the end of the transition year.

Applicants are not precluded from putting in bids for large grants outside the coastal hotspots and these will be assessed on their merits.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 05

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Tamar Estuary

**Hansard Page:** 115 (27/05/08)

**Senator Abetz asked:**

**Senator ABETZ**—Hardly likely, but that is for the future. The money that the NRM groups currently have is surely subjected to some process or some criteria. Under the existing criteria can I ask: would you be able to use the money for a study on how to remove silt from a river?

**Mr Smith**—I understand that we are already funding siltation studies, for instance, in the Tamar. The Australian government is jointly funding those with the Tasmanian government. So under the current—

**Senator ABETZ**—That is the estuarine management in the Tamar.

**Mr Smith**—I do not have the exact details of the program, but I do know that the Australian government is funding a study to address siltation and to provide mapping and awareness—

**Senator ABETZ**—To stop siltation. That is what they are being funded for at the moment—to find out the cause of it, to try to stop it and to remediate it. But as to the actual siltation problem in the river, I have never heard of an NRM grant or regional body in fact funding the actual removal of silt from a river or a study for the removal of silt from a river—how best to do it just from a logistics point of view.

**Mr Smith**—I am happy to take it on notice.

**Senator ABETZ**—If you could, that would be helpful.

**Answer:**

Proposals to conduct a study for the removal of silt from a river may be submitted under Caring for our Country Open Grants 2008-09 if the project meets the funding criteria and can demonstrate that it contributes to outcomes under one of the Caring for our Country national priority areas. Applications for projects must be lodged by 5.00 pm (AEST) Friday 1 August 2008. Applications that deal with the source of environmental problems, such as siltation, and provide a longer term solution would generally be looked upon more favorably than remedial actions.

For future years, each September, the Australian Government will release a Caring for our Country Business Plan inviting proposals from relevant organisations and partnerships to undertake activities that will achieve outcomes against the national priority areas. The first Business Plan will identify the five year outcomes sought for the period to June 2013 against each of the national priority areas for investment; outline the short-term targets to achieve these outcomes; and invite proposals for activities to deliver investments against these priorities and targets.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 06

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** 60 per cent (base-level) funding to regions under Caring for our Country

**Hansard Page:** 120 (27/05/08)

**Senator Siewert asked:**

**Senator SIEWERT**—Can we go back to the 60 per cent historical funding. I want to be very clear about what that is based on. Is that the whole of the funding that the NRM group got, or is it based on an admin section they got? Is it based on the whole of the money that was delivered for their investment plan at the end of the three years? Is that what you mean by historical funding?

**Mr Smith**—The historical funding relates to the funding under the life of the NAP, the national action plan for salinity and water quality, and the Natural Heritage Trust.

**Senator SIEWERT**—Was it the first year funding, the second year or the third year?

**Mr Smith**—I will take it on notice. I have a feeling it is certainly more than those. It is about six or seven years of funding.

**Senator SIEWERT**—So you are averaging it?

**Mr Smith**—It is averaged over the life of those two programs.

**Senator SIEWERT**—NHT2 or 1?

**Mr Smith**—NHT2 only and the NAP. As you know, the NAP was a seven-year program that was extended for another year and the NHT2 was about a six-year program.

**Senator SIEWERT**—So you are going to get back to me and confirm whether it is an average for that period of time. Is that what you are going to do?

**Mr Smith**—That is right.

**Senator SIEWERT**—That would be appreciated.

**Answer:**

The base-level funding (60 per cent) allocation to each NRM regional body in the transition year (2008-09) is based on the average annual allocation that the region received from the Commonwealth under the Natural Heritage Trust 2 (NHT2) and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAP) for regional investment plan activities. This means that it is averaged over six years of the NHT2 (2002-03 to 2007-08) and averaged over seven years of the NAP (2001-02 to 2007-08).



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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 07

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Caring for our Country - \$31.8 million (15 per cent) transitional allocation funding to regions

**Hansard Page:** 121 (27/05/08)

**Senator Siewert asked:**

**Senator SIEWERT**—And the 15 per cent is 15 per cent across the board?

**Mr Quinlivan**—On average, yes.

**Senator SIEWERT**—Right. Thank you.

**Mr Quinlivan**—I hope that was right.

**Senator SIEWERT**—Can you clarify that to make sure it is.

.....

**Senator Sherry**—We will even provide on notice for you some practical illustrations about how it is applied.

**Answer:**

The 15 per cent transitional allocation to Natural Resource Management (NRM) regional bodies in 2008-09 which equates to \$31.8 million is based on 15 per cent of the total average annual allocations to regions from the Commonwealth under the Natural Heritage Trust 2 and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality for regional investment plan activities.

The distribution of this \$31.8 million to each NRM regional body was decided using a set of allocation principles, including broad equity between jurisdictions, local transitional pressures, expectation of regions receiving funds from other sources, regional capacity, operational overheads and estimated carryovers in regions. State and territory governments and regional NRM bodies were consulted on the formulation of these allocation principles.

As a practical illustration, the Swan region in Western Australia was allocated baseline funding of \$2.160 million for 2008-09, equalling 60 percent of its historical allocation received from the Commonwealth under the Natural Heritage Trust and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality.

After consultation with the states and regions on the \$31.8 million transitional fund, the Swan region received an additional transitional allocation of \$1.070 million. This takes the total guaranteed funding for the Swan to \$3.230 million or 90 percent of their historical average annual allocation.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 08

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Caring for our Country - \$31.8 million (15 per cent) transitional allocation applied to which regions?

**Hansard Page:** 121 (27/05/08)

**Senator Siewert asked:**

**Senator SIEWERT**—I appreciate that. But if it was the status quo they were not able to competitively compete for the other funding that you are talking about—in fact, some regional groups are not lucky enough to have icons—have you done an analysis of what each regional group wins or loses?

**Mr Quinlivan**—Well, we have made a careful analysis of the individual circumstances of the regional bodies in deciding the allocation of that additional 15 per cent. So I think the answer to your question is yes, because we made a careful assessment of their need.

**Senator SIEWERT**—Can you provide that information to the committee so we have an idea of which regional groups?

**Mr Quinlivan**—I think we would have to take that on notice because that information was generated with another department. In some cases, it could be quite sensitive to the future of the regional body.

**Senator SIEWERT**—That is exactly the point.

**Senator Sherry**—We will take it on notice.

**Answer:**

The process to determine the \$31.8 million transitional allocation to regions in 2008-09 was applied to all the 56 natural resource management regional bodies across Australia. Each of the 56 regional bodies received some component of this \$31.8 million.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 09

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Caring for our Country regional allocations – List of NGOs consulted?

**Hansard Page:** 122 (27/05/08)

**Senator Siewert asked:**

**Mr Smith**—On the consultation process, the program has been developed in consultation with the states and territories. I understand there have also been some discussions with other non-government organisations. But I do not have full details of all those groups that were consulted and which groups were not and which groups were.

**Senator SIEWERT**—Can you provide a list of who has been consulted, please, from the NGO perspective?

**Mr Smith**—I can try to do that, yes.

**Answer:**

During the determination of the 2008-09 base-level and transitional allocation funding to NRM regional bodies, the Government consulted with state and territory officials and regional chairs and chief executive officers. Non-government organisations were consulted as part of the process of drafting the five-year outcome statements for Caring for our Country but were not consulted on the allocation of funds to regions.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 10

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Employment in NRM Regions

**Hansard Page:** 125 (27/05/08)

**Senator I. Macdonald asked:**

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—Thank you, Senator Sherry. You are not going to enter into it. Because of the time, can I just ask three very simple questions? Senator Siewert asked what jobs have been lost. We got the bureaucratic answer—that is not a derogatory term. It is what you would say if you are protecting your present minister, which is what you are required to do. Could we get a detail in writing of the actual job losses throughout country Australia that this 60 per cent has caused? We can all at this table give you a start if you cannot count them elsewhere because the job losses in regional Australia are quite enormous. Could we, on notice, get you to provide for us the job losses that you were able to ascertain from the 56 NRM bodies? Is that okay?

**Dr O'Connell**—Over what period would you be wanting this?

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—From the change of government to the time you get the answers to us, which is within two or three weeks of today. There will continue to be job losses and I am already aware that there have been substantial job losses to date.

**Dr O'Connell**—We need to be very clear about precisely what you are asking. What sort of job losses are you talking about: direct employees funded by government funding or are you—

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—Each NRM body has a budget out of which they pay their CEO, their board members and their staff.

**Dr O'Connell**—Their budgets are not all funded by the Commonwealth. In many cases their budgets are only marginal.

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—There have been substantial job losses. All I am asking you to do is a quick survey of the 56 bodies, come back to us and tell me how many jobs that were there on 23 November 2007 are not there now?

**Mr Quinlivan**—There has not been any change in their funding so far. They may be anticipating changes and they may be correct or they may be quite wrong in anticipating those changes.

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—You would know, Mr Quinlivan. They are all directors of the board and they have to plan for their future in accordance with the corporate responsibility of board directors. So they are sacking people they know they will not be able to fund through to the area. You may be right. Maybe there have not been any job losses, but, if that is the case, it will not take you long to ring around the 56 and say, 'Okay there have been no job losses.' I am sure you will find differently, so what I am asking is that you give us those, on notice, by the end of the question period.

**Dr O'Connell**—I am not sure that I can follow through on your request without it being a little bit more specific. We cannot reasonably look to capture an account of all job changes between then and now when they are unrelated to our funding.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—Let me be very specific Dr O'Connell. Ring the Northern Gulf catchment's NRM, ask them how many they had employed on the 20 November 2007, and how many they have employed now. Maybe the answers will be an embarrassment to me, but I am prepared to take the risk.

**Dr O'Connell**—I think the issue is what relationship would that have to our program changes?

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—It is a different question. Just get an answer for me, please.

**Senator Sherry**—Let us cut through this. You want the number of positions as of the day after the election and the number of positions as of today and maybe we can get a projection. I will take that on notice; I know what you want.

**Answer:**

All 56 regional Natural Resource Management (NRM) bodies have been asked to provide details of the number of full time equivalent positions employed in their organisation. Responses have been received from 51 regions as at 10am 17 July 2008, showing that at:

20 Nov 2007 a total of 1630 full time equivalent positions were employed; and  
7 May 2008 a total of 1698 full time equivalent positions were employed.

Both permanent employees and non-ongoing contractors are included in these totals. A complete response will be provided once information has been received from the remaining regional bodies, which are from various states.

The Australian Government is not responsible for monitoring employment data for regional bodies as many are state statutory bodies and others are independent incorporated bodies. This information has been provided to us by state and regional organisations and cannot be verified.

The Australian Government is not the only source of funds used to employ regional staff. Regional NRM bodies also receive significant resources from state and territory governments as well as from private corporations and philanthropic bodies. Variations in the size of contributions from these other sources will vary over time and will also impact on regional staffing levels. It is not possible for the Australian Government to accurately project future employment by regional bodies

The Natural Heritage Trust and National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality programs were scheduled to end on 30 June 2008. It is expected that contracts for staff attached to these projects would cease at the same time. This is normal practice in program management.

Many regions had much higher than average levels of funding in the last two years of the Natural Heritage Trust and National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality which is likely to have contributed to an increase in staffing towards the end of the programs, and a drop-off in staffing levels from 1 July 2008 was anticipated under

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

former program arrangements. All regional NRM bodies have been given the option of using 2008-09 funding to employ staff in areas that support the delivery of Caring for our Country outcomes. The proportion of funds spent on employment to on-ground activities was largely determined by the regional NRM bodies themselves.

**Revised answer (provided 18/09/2008):**

On 18 July 2008, an interim response was provided to this question as not all regional Natural Resource Management (NRM) bodies had provided details of the number of full time equivalent positions employed in their organisation. Responses have now been received for all 56 regional bodies and our response has therefore been updated as follows:

20 Nov 2007 a total of 1891.32 full time equivalent positions were employed; and  
7 May 2008 a total of 1882.58 full time equivalent positions were employed.

Both permanent employees and non-ongoing contractors are included in these totals.

The Australian Government is not responsible for monitoring employment data for regional bodies as many are state statutory bodies and others are independent incorporated bodies. This information has been provided to us by state and regional organisations and cannot be verified.

The Australian Government is not the only source of funds used to employ regional staff. Regional NRM bodies also receive significant resources from state and territory governments as well as from private corporations and philanthropic bodies. Variations in the size of contributions from these other sources will vary over time and will also impact on regional staffing levels. It is not possible for the Australian Government to accurately project future employment by regional bodies.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 11

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** State Contributions to Natural Resource Management Regional Bodies

**Hansard Page:** 125 (27/05/08)

**Senator I.Macdonald asked:**

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—Would you take another two questions on notice because time is running out. Regarding states contribution to NRM bodies, could we get on notice a detail of that. I asked this last time and got the equivocal answer which we used to get in the past, but I really want to know what the states have contributed to the NRM bodies. Take that however you will, but please come up with some answers.

**Senator Sherry**—I had anticipated you there. I had actually just mentioned that. Or do you mean—

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—Senator Sherry it is your problem now.

**Senator Sherry**—That is the price of responsibility. I have agreed to take this on notice; it has been taken on notice on behalf of the minister and the research will be done.

**Answer:**

States were required to match the Australian Government's National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAP) investment dollar for dollar at a state-wide level. They were also required to match Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) investment through cash and in-kind contributions at a state-wide level.

The Australian Government does not have access to details regarding any further contributions from state governments to NRM bodies and only collects data associated with matching its investment through the NAP and NHT. The NAP investments were matched \$ for \$ against the Australian Government investment in all jurisdictions across the life of the program. The **attachment** provides best available detail on State Government contributions under the NHT.

Natural Resource Management regional bodies in New South Wales, Tasmania, Victoria, the Australian Capital and Northern Territories and South Australia are statutory bodies of State or Territory Government and receive significant resources and in-kind support above the Australian Government's contribution.

In Queensland and Western Australia the NRM bodies are independent community organisations or corporations and also receive further resources from state government and other sectors.

**[NRM 11 attachment]**

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 12

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Appointment arrangements for natural resource management bodies in Queensland and Western Australia

**Hansard Page:** 126 (27/05/08)

**Senator I.Macdonald asked:**

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**—My third question is this: please assure me that the arrangement that applies in Queensland and Western Australia and perhaps in other states in relation to natural resource management bodies, as opposed to state organised subsidiaries of their departments' catchment management groups, will continue unchanged.

**Mr Smith**—As you have rightly said, Queensland and WA have community based arrangements compared with the other states, which have statutory. I do not think the Australian government is in a position to make any assurances around that. Those arrangements are purely for those states and territories.

**Senator IAN MACDONALD**— No, no, come on Mr Smith. We went through all this eight years or however long ago. They all should have been the community model in my view, but back years ago the department erroneously accepted that state governments could appoint the catchment management authorities and they became instrumentalities of state governments. In Queensland and Western Australia they were genuine community based organisations that were very well run, in spite of my initial reservations, that you guys all convinced me was the right way to go. The Commonwealth does have a role in that. I should not be putting you in a difficult position. All I am seeking, perhaps from the minister, is an assurance that the arrangements for appointment of NRM bodies in at least Queensland and Western Australia will not change.

**Answer:**

The operational arrangements for natural resource management bodies, including appointment arrangements, are determined either by the respective State and Territory governments in the case of statutory authorities, or by the particular constitutional arrangements under which the relevant bodies are governed for non-statutory organisations. The Australian Government does not have a role in the operational arrangement of natural resource management bodies and under Caring for our Country there is no proposal to seek changes to these arrangements.



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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 13

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Future of the Landcare Program

**Hansard Page:** 128-129 (27/06/08)

**Senator Siewert asked:**

**Senator SIEWERT**—Could you clarify one more thing about the Landcare program? Is that now rolled into this? Could they take it on notice?

.....

**Senator SIEWERT**—I do take the point. This is, however, an extremely important program and I have been sitting here very patiently for two days. Could you please take it on notice and provide me with information about the future of the Landcare program? Is it rolled into this or, if it is not, what is its ongoing funding?

**Senator Sherry**—We will take it on notice.

**Answer:**

One of the six Caring for our Country priorities is Sustainable Farming Practices which includes Landcare.

The budget of \$2.25 billion for Caring for our Country includes \$149 million that has been separately appropriated to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry for Landcare activities over the four years from 2008-09 to 2011-12. Decisions about the expenditure of these Landcare funds will be made by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry but within the overall framework for delivery of Caring for our Country jointly agreed between the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 14

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** National Weeds and Productivity Research program

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

Can you give me brief description or overview of the new National Weeds and Productivity Research program?

**Answer:**

The Government has announced that this program will be implemented by the establishment of an Australian Weeds Research Centre. The centre will establish a comprehensive national applied research program to investigate and find solutions to the most serious invasive plant problems in Australia. More detailed information on the Centre is expected to be announced in the near future.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 15

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Defeating the Weeds Menace

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

How much is the reduction in annual spending in the program from what has been spent annually in the past through the Defeating the Weeds Menace program?

**Answer:**

Funding under the Defeating the Weed Menace program totalled approximately \$44.4 million over a four year period. Weeds will continue to be a focus for the Government under Caring for our Country.

The Government will invest \$15.3 million over four years through the Australian Weeds Research Centre to reduce the impact of invasive plants on farms, forestry, as well as biodiversity.

The amount spent on weeds annually will depend on the investments of the regional Natural Resource Management bodies and the successful project bids under Caring for our Country.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 16

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Defeating the Weeds Menace

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

What will happen to the Weeds of National Significance (WoNS) list which was determined and agreed to by all states and the Federal Government after vast amounts of research and discussion.

**Answer:**

The Weeds of National Significance species will continue to be recognised as a priority by the Government.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 17

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Defeating the Weeds Menace

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

Through the new program, will the Australian Government continue to act as the coordinator with states on this issue and provide guidance on the issue of weeds, determining which weeds are a national threat and what to do about them?

**Answer:**

Yes.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 18

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Defeating the Weeds Menace

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

How much, if any, funding (of the \$5 Million PA) is allocated to national coordination.

**Answer:**

Funding for the national coordination of the Weeds of National Significance will continue in 2008–09. Details of funding arrangements are under consideration.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 19

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Defeating the Weeds Menace

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

Will the [www.weeds.gov.au](http://www.weeds.gov.au) website continue to operate under this program?

**Answer:**

Yes.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 20

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Defeating the Weeds Menace

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

Did the Government consult with peak bodies, industry or National Weeds Advisory Group when it determined that funds for DWM should be cut?

**Answer:**

Since its commencement in July 2004, peak bodies, industry and the National Weeds Advisory Group have been aware that the Defeating the Weed Menace program was a four year program terminating on 30 June 2008. Funding for future weeds activities has been incorporated into Caring for our Country.



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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 21

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Defeating the Weeds Menace

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

Will the Government continue to seek advice from the National Weeds Advisory Group or will NWAG be disbanded?

**Answer:**

As determined by the previous government, the term of the National Weeds Advisory Group ends when the Defeating the Weed Menace program finishes on 30 June 2008.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 22

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Budgets for natural resource management organisations

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

What is the specific reason for cuts to the budgets of regional Natural Resource Management (NRM) bodies?

**Answer:**

The determination of 2008-09 Australian Government funding to be provided to regional natural resource management (NRM) organisations took into account the historic levels of funding provided to regional organisations; the need to maintain their effectiveness; and the need to establish an effective transition to the emphasis on national environmental and natural resource priorities that apply to Caring for our Country.

In 2008-09, the regional bodies are guaranteed to receive a total of \$159 million under Caring for our Country. This equates to 75 per cent of the historic average annual funding provided to regional bodies, or 88 per cent of the funds they received in 2007-08. The average annual funding provided to regional NRM organisations under the Natural Heritage Trust and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality was \$212 million. In 2007-08, the 56 regional NRM bodies received a total of \$180 million for activities identified in their regional investment strategies under these two programs.

In addition to the guaranteed funding, regional NRM organisations may access a larger pool of funds than was available to them under previous programs. This pool includes:

- Open Grants – up to \$25 million in 2008-09;
- Community Coastcare – up to \$20 million in 2008-09;
- National Reserve System – up to \$25.6 million in 2008-09; and
- Working on Country – up to \$6 million in 2008-09.

The Australian Government will be providing further funding in 2008-09 to implement its 2007 election commitments, including \$30 million for implementation of Reef Rescue, much of which will be invested through regional bodies.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 23

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Forward funding for natural resource management organisations

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

Are NRM bodies going to have any indication given to them about forward years of funding, despite the annualised delivery of actual money? Will there be an indication of forward funding given for the purposes of NRM body planning?

**Answer:**

In years two to five of Caring for our Country, \$138.0 million per annum will be provided as guaranteed funding for NRM regional bodies. The specific amount allocated to each regional body will be determined in consultation with the States, Territories and regions, and regional bodies will be advised by October 2008 of the base funding they will receive. In addition, the Australian Government will release the 2009-10 Business Plan outlining the target areas for investment for the 2009-10 financial year and providing information on how regions will be able to access additional funds to undertake actions to achieve these targets.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 24

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Caring for our Country

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

Have any NRM bodies made contact with the department or the Minister's office to indicate that under the new budget they will be operating under their viability threshold?

**Answer:**

As far as the Department is aware, no NRM regional body has made contact with the Department or Minister Burke's and Garrett's offices to indicate that under their new budget they will be operating under their viability threshold.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 25

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Caring for our Country

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

Does the department have any sort of estimated figure of the value of leveraged funds (from private enterprise and community groups) lost as a result of the funding cuts to NRM regional bodies?

**Answer:**

No. It is not possible to estimate the value of leveraged funds that NRM regional bodies may potentially be able to obtain in the future.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 26

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Caring for our Country

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

However, under the new Caring for our Country program will regional bodies have to put in bids for funding for projects against projects from other bodies from across the country?

**Answer:**

Over the life of Caring for our Country, the Government will provide NRM regional bodies with a combination of secure base-level funding, specific assistance to help regions adjust to the new program priorities and an opportunity to bid for additional funding, on a competitive basis.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 27

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Caring for our Country

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

Are there going to be any categories for NRM bodies to apply for funding in or will it be one general pool – all projects measured against one another?

**Answer:**

As outlined in Question NRM 26, the Government will provide NRM regional bodies with a combination of secure base-level funding and specific assistance to help regions adjust. In addition, NRM regional bodies will have the opportunity to bid for additional funding, on a competitive basis, from within the overall allocation for Caring for our Country.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 28

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Caring for our Country

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

Who will make the final decisions on which body gets the funding from the national pool of money? The Minister, the Department or an independent body?

**Answer:**

Decisions on all Caring for our Country funding will be made by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts and the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. All proposals received in response to calls for funding will be assessed by assessment panels before being provided to ministers for decision.



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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 29

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Caring for our Country

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

I am aware of a number of projects that have been funded in previous rounds of NHT that deal with Threatened Species.

Will there be a special fund for projects that deal with Threatened Species?

**Answer:**

Funding for projects that deal with threatened species will be provided under Caring for our Country's national priority area of biodiversity and natural icons.

In the transition year, 2008-09, funding for Threatened Species projects will be available through Community Coastcare grants, National Reserve System, Caring for our Country Open Grants and investments undertaken by regional bodies. In addition, \$1.5 million will be provided to continue the work of the Threatened Species Network, including supporting a further round of Threatened Species Small Grants.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 30

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Caring for our Country

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

Could you also inform me how many projects that were funded through NHT 1 & NHT 2 dealt with threatened species?

**Answer:**

More than 900 projects were funded through NHT1 and NHT2 dealing with threatened species.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 31

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Rock Lobster Project

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

Given the new format for the allocation of funding is the national/competitive pool, there is no guarantee for ongoing funding – only for 12 months, how are groups supposed to be able to engage in long-term and sustained projects with industry if there is no continuity or certainty of funding?

**Answer:**

The Caring for our Country Business Plan is being developed and will incorporate a range of delivery approaches including multi-year investments.

Groups who demonstrate a good business case for multi-year funding to achieve Caring for our Country outcomes will be considered.

A total of \$138.0 million per annum will be provided as secure funding to regions for the first five years of Caring for our Country. Regional organisations will be advised of their specific allocations for 2009-10 and subsequent financial years in October 2008.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 32

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Rock Lobster Project

**Hansard page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

Are there any other programmes in place under this Caring for our Country program that will deal with the long-spined Sea Urchin?

**Answer:**

No, the long-spined Sea Urchin has not been targeted by any of the programs to be undertaken in the transition year of Caring for our Country. Proposals for dealing with the long-spined Sea Urchin may be submitted under Caring for our Country Open Grants 2008-09 if the project meets the funding criteria and can demonstrate that it contributes to outcomes under one of the Caring for our Country national priority areas. Applications for projects must be lodged by 5.00 pm (AEST) Friday 1 August 2008.

The threat posed by the long-spined Sea Urchin to marine biodiversity and the rock lobster and abalone industries in Tasmania is being addressed through a collaborative project *Re-building Ecosystem Resilience* involving the Tasmanian Government, the University of Tasmania, the Rock Lobster Association, the Tasmanian Aquaculture and Fisheries Institute and the Australian Government. The project has funding of \$400,000 between 2008-09 and 2012-13 from the Australian Government Fisheries Research and Development Corporation.

In addition, the Tasmanian NRM North regional NRM organisation contributed \$50,000 to the project in 2007-08, and an additional \$51,000 has been contributed from the 2007-08 Tasmanian regional strategic reserve under the NHT.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 33

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Landcare

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

Have there been any funding cuts to the Landcare program at all through the budget?  
If so, in what areas?

**Answer:**

No. The National Landcare Program was allocated \$149 million for the four years from 2004-05 to 2007-08. The Landcare component of Caring of our Country has been allocated \$149 million over the four years from 2008-09 to 2011-12. There has been some minor reallocation of funds between the years from 2008-09 to 2011-12 to reflect Government priorities.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 34

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Landcare

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

Is funding delivery going to be any different from previous years?

**Answer:**

Administration arrangements for Landcare will be streamlined as part of the Caring for our Country.

Caring for our Country investments will be made through an integrated approach outlined in an annual business plan that will contain national outcomes and one to three year targets. Funding will be directed towards achieving those outcomes in the most efficient and effective way and through those organisations that are best placed to deliver the outcomes.

There will be a single point of entry for Caring for our Country which will be accessible throughout Australia via a secure internet portal and a toll-free telephone number. Information funding, contracting and reporting arrangements will be standardised. Landcare funding deeds will be signed directly between the Commonwealth Government and grant recipients rather than with state governments or regional bodies as had been the case in the past.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 35

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Landcare

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

Is there any plan to let community groups know about the plans for the delivery of the funding from this financial year onward?

**Answer:**

Yes. Arrangements will be made clear to all groups when grants are advertised and when groups are offered funding.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 36

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Landcare

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Abetz asked:**

Who will make the final decision on the awarding of grants, the Minister, the Department or an independent body?

**Answer:**

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.



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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 37

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Wandering Trad

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Birmingham asked:**

In October 2007, prior to the election, the Australian Government allocated \$450,000 to the CSIRO for a three-year biological control into Wandering Trad in the Dandenong Ranges. To what extent will the expected outcomes of the program for which the \$450,000 was allocated to the CSIRO be achieved through the \$15 million National Weeds and Productivity Research Program administered by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry?

**Answer:**

The expected research outcomes from the National Weeds and Productivity Research Program have yet to be finalised, however, biological control is expected to be an important component of the new Program.

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

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates May 2008

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** NRM 38

**Division/Agency:** Natural Resource Management

**Topic:** Wandering Trad

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Birmingham asked:**

Is funding still being provided to the CSIRO and, if so, what involvement will the CSIRO have in the National Weeds and Productivity Research Program?

**Answer:**

No. However, it is anticipated that the CSIRO will be involved in the National Weeds and Productivity Research Program.