

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Budget Estimates May 2009
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question No. ONA 01

Division/Agency: Office of Northern Australia

Topic: Travel and accommodation expenses for the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce

Hansard Pages: 138 (28/05/09)

Senator MacDonald asked:

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Again, I suppose the same answer will apply to the funding for the Northern Australian Land and Water Taskforce? There is no separate line item? You can tell me what it was last year, but not for the current year until you have done your budgets?

Mr Tongue—That is right.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—On notice, can we get details of the expenses of travel and accommodation for the task force?

Mr Tongue—Certainly. We will provide that on notice.

Answer:

Travel related expenses for the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce are outlined in the table below.

| | <u>2008-09</u> (as at 30 June 2009) |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Airfares: | \$53,805.42 |
| Accommodation: | \$10,728.18 |
| Other Travel related expenses: | \$11,927.71 |
| Total: | \$76,461.31 |

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee
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Question No. ONA 02

Division/Agency: Office of Northern Australia

Topic: Australian Government Involvement in the Ord Expansion Project

Hansard Pages: 142 (28/05/09)

Senator HEFFERNAN asked:

Senator HEFFERNAN—Are you funding bringing Ord 1 into compliance with the National Water Initiative—because, at the present time, if you did in New South Wales what they do up there then we would put you in jail?

Ms Foster—The issues to do with the Ord 2 are the purview of the Western Australian Government.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Der! But we are funding it to half the extent, with \$195 million.

Ms Foster—No.

Senator HEFFERNAN—What are we doing with that? Is that fantasy money or something?

Mr Angley—This is for social and economic infrastructure that will be accessible to the whole community.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Yes, obviously. We had that argument ages ago.

Senator Conroy—You are asking a genuinely detailed question—

Senator HEFFERNAN—Yes, I am.

Senator Conroy—And we are happy to take it on notice and come back to you with an update on that information.

Answer:

The Australian Government's investment of \$195 million is for social and common-use infrastructure projects in the East Kimberley region. The Package includes key investments across the areas of health, education and training, housing, transport and community infrastructure. A list of projects funded by the \$195 million East Kimberley Development Package is at [Attachment A](#). The terms of reference for the Joint Assessment by the Australian and Western Australian Governments indicated that a condition of the Australian Government's investment was that the Ord expansion projects will be consistent with Western Australia's National Water Initiative commitments.

The Western Australian Government has confirmed that the Ord irrigation projects will be developed consistent with the National Water Initiative. The Package includes key investments across the areas of health, education and training, housing, transport and community infrastructure.

[ONA 02 – Attachment A]

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Question No. ONA 03

Division/Agency: Office of Northern Australia

Topic: Australian Government Involvement in the Ord Expansion Project

Hansard Pages: 143 (28/05/09)

Senator Heffernan asked:

Senator HEFFERNAN—Do we know whether they are going to include the lighter soils in Ord 2?

Senator Conroy—I am sure that the officers—

Senator HEFFERNAN—What is the point of coming to estimates if we cannot get answers?

Senator Conroy—If you are going to ask a detailed question like that, Senator Heffernan—

Senator HEFFERNAN—No, but this is—

Senator Conroy—If there is any information available, we are happy to give it to you.

Senator HEFFERNAN—They have to report at the end of the year. They are not going to report anything, because I am aware of what is going on in the system—'no can do any more'.

Senator Conroy—We will take that on notice.

Answer:

All matters dealing with delivery of water and drainage, land use and crops are the province of the Western Australian Government.

The Western Australian Minister with responsibility for the Ord expansion is Brendon Grylls MLA, Minister for Regional Development; Lands; Minister Assisting the Minister for State Development; Minister Assisting the Minister for Transport.

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Question No. ONA 04

Division/Agency: Office of Northern Australia

Topic: Australian Government Involvement in the Ord Expansion Project

Hansard Pages: 142 (28/05/09)

Senator Heffernan asked:

Senator HEFFERNAN—Do I just give up, do I? Have we made some contingency arrangements for the drainage down the Keep River? Do you know that?

Mr Angley—The Western Australian Government is still finalising the details of the expansion of the irrigation side of it. The Commonwealth has offered its funding to build the social infrastructure in the region.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Yes, I know all that.

Senator Conroy—We will take that on notice, Senator Heffernan.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Can we get some people who know the answers along at some stage? That would be better. It is patently obvious that if you are going to do Ord 2 of 14,000 hectares and you intend to maximise the whole scheme to 80,000 hectares—which includes the lighter soils which were excluded under the tender document for Ord stage 2, which was scrapped because it was a con job—and if you have not made the contingency for the lighter soils as you go, as you obviously have not because it is still at 14,000 hectares, and if you have not made the contingency for the channel sizes and the capacity of the system to also supply Ord 3 down the same supply line, and if you do not know what you are going to do about Ord 3 because you do not know what you are going to do about the lead mine, then this is all a farce. Do you know what I am talking about?

Senator Conroy—I think that is a rhetorical question.

Senator HEFFERNAN—It is not, mate. I know—

Senator Conroy—We have said we will get you the information you have asked on notice, Senator Heffernan.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Do you understand these issues?

Mr Angley—I certainly do.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Do you know what I am talking about?

Mr Angley—Yes.

Senator HEFFERNAN—So do you know what they are doing about it?

Senator Conroy—We said we would take it on notice.

Mr Angley—I said to you that the Western Australian Government is finalising its details on the expansion of the irrigation infrastructure and the way they are going to expand the extra 14,000 hectares.

Senator Conroy—We said we would take it on notice.

CHAIR—He did. He has said that on a number of occasions.

Answer:

The Western Australian Government is responsible for the Ord River irrigated land and associated infrastructure.

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Question No. ONA 05

Division/Agency: Office of Northern Australia

Topic: Australian Government Involvement in the Ord Expansion Project

Hansard Pages: 144 (28/05/09)

Senator Heffernan asked:

Senator HEFFERNAN—They have to report by the end of the year, for God's sake. They have closed down Land and Water, who were assembling the silos of knowledge. Have you a mission statement?

Senator Conroy—They have indicated that they have not finalised—

Senator HEFFERNAN—Can we see your mission statement? Do you have a mission statement?

Mr Anglely—What for?

Senator HEFFERNAN—The purpose of the task force these days, because it has altered its purpose.

Mr Anglely—We certainly have the terms of reference, and there is a work plan—

Senator Conroy—We will make them available to you.

Answer:

The purpose of the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce is to provide a better understanding of opportunities for new sustainable economic development in the north that are based on water resource availability, and the potential impact of such development on the underlying water balance and water quality, and on the natural environment, existing water users and the broader community.

For each of the key surface and groundwater systems and basins within the Timor Sea and Gulf of Carpentaria drainage divisions, and that part of the North East Coast drainage division north of Cairns, the Taskforce will:

- Identify, consistent with the provisions of the National Water Initiative, the sustainable capacity of the river systems and/or drainage basins to support increased consumptive water use;
- Identify, consistent with sustainable resource use principles and practices, economic development and diversification opportunities (including non-consumptive uses) which rely on access to locally or regionally significant water resources;
- Identify the potential impact of such development opportunities on the natural environment and other users and the broader community;
- Identify incentive, market, regulatory or planning instruments that could be used to facilitate, control or influence development, such that it proceeds in a manner consistent with the principles of the National Water Initiative; and
- Recommend governance arrangements for the effective management of surface and groundwater resources that cross jurisdictional boundaries.

The terms of reference for the Taskforce are available at <http://www.nalwt.gov.au/tor.aspx>

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Question No. ONA 06

Division/Agency: Office of Northern Australia

Topic: Forward Work Program for the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce

Hansard Pages: 144 (28/05/09)

Senator Heffernan asked:

Senator HEFFERNAN—I am not too sure what the purpose of the task force is, given that they have gutted your budget et cetera and they have filled it with bureaucrats and the already existing infrastructure of the northern development officers who are up there and retitled them. That is fair enough; that is the prerogative of government. But is it the intention of your mob to look at the potential for infrastructure development in the north which value-adds to the development downstream of the minerals, the gas opportunities, the tourism opportunities and the agricultural opportunities? Is that in your terms of reference?

Mr Angley—Yes, it is.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Can you tell us where you are up to with that?

Mr Angley—The task force has met a couple of times and agreed on a work plan for the things it wants to—

Senator HEFFERNAN—Can you give us a work plan?

Mr Angley—I can certainly tell you what they have asked the CSIRO to do and the task force to invest in.

Mr Tongue—We are happy to take that detail on notice and provide it to you.

Senator HEFFERNAN—I think I had better—

Answer:

The Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce (the Taskforce) is due to provide a final report to Government in December 2009.

Meetings to date of the current Taskforce include the following:

- 12-13 November 2008, Canberra
- 2 February 2009, Brisbane
- 21-22 April 2009, Weipa
- 1-3 July 2009, Broome

The following meetings have been scheduled for the Taskforce:

- 19-21 August 2009, Darwin
- 6-8 October 2009, Darwin
- 16 December 2009, Canberra

To establish a sound scientific basis for the recommendations of the Taskforce, the CSIRO has been commissioned to manage and deliver a comprehensive program of research work for the Taskforce addressing each of the five (5) terms of reference. The CSIRO (and partners) will explore a range of alternative development options and land use change

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activities, and assess their impacts on critical sustainability criteria. The CSIRO work will be based on a synthesis of existing information. The CSIRO will provide a final report to the Taskforce in October 2009. An outline of the CSIRO project is available at <http://www.nalwt.gov.au/key.aspx>

The Taskforce has also commissioned the Northern Australia Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA) to facilitate additional consultations with Indigenous stakeholders, which will be held on 5-6 August 2009 at the Mary River Crossing near Darwin. The Taskforce is also inviting individuals or organisations from the Industry & Agriculture and Conservation sectors to participate in facilitated forums with the Taskforce to discuss the terms of reference. The facilitated forums will be held during September in both Darwin and Cairns.

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Question No. ONA 07

Division/Agency: Office of Northern Australia

Topic: Australian Government Involvement in the Ord Expansion Project

Hansard Pages: 145 (28/05/09)

Senator Heffernan asked:

Senator HEFFERNAN—Do you know if there have been active discussions by your mob, because that is what we were doing, with the Northern Territory Government on the sovereign issues surrounding the Ord scheme to take it into the third of the potential of the scheme which is in the Northern Territory? Have you had those sovereign discussions?

Senator Conroy—We have said we will take that on notice.

Answer:

The Australian Government and the Northern Territory Government discussed numerous issues raised by the Ord Expansion Plan.