

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2010

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: BRS 01

Division/Agency: Bureau of Rural Sciences (BRS)

Topic: Draft Murray-Darling Basin Plan

Hansard Page: 107-108 (24/05/2010)

Senator Nash asked:

‘I did just want to put it on notice that, in 2007, BRS did a study, an overview of tools for assessing groundwater, surface water connectivity, so I am just interested to know what input you have been asked to give or what role BRS is going to play in terms of the draft basin plan coming out in the middle of the year. I am happy for you to take that on notice, but if could you come back with the detailed input—if there is any—that BRS will have to drafting the plan.’

Answer:

Under the *Water Act 2007*, the drafting of the Murray Darling Basin Plan is to be undertaken by the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA).

At the MDBA’s request, BRS has contributed to two socio-economic reports describing the current conditions within the Murray Darling Basin and investigating the sensitivity of Basin communities to possible changes in water availability. The MDBA may use these reports to contribute to one component of the socio-economic assessment required by the Water Act, as part of the development of the MDB Plan. The first report was a collaborative analysis with ABARE and the ABS titled ‘Socio-Economic Context for the Murray–Darling Basin’ which is publically available from the MDBA website. The second report was a collaborative analysis with researchers from the Institute for Rural Futures at the University of New England titled ‘Indicators of community vulnerability and adaptive capacity across the Murray-Darling Basin—a focus on irrigation in agriculture’, which has not yet been publicly released by the MDBA.

BRS currently sits on a number of MDBA consultancy panels. Panel members may be called upon to provide analysis to support the further development of the Basin Plan. Under these panel arrangements BRS is currently contributing to a project led by the University of Melbourne investigating the impacts of native forest management regimes on catchment processes and water quality and quantity across the MDB.

Additionally, BRS will provide input to DAFFs comments on the draft plan.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: BRS 02

Division/Agency: Bureau of Rural Sciences (BRS)

Topic: BRS discussion paper on fisheries co-management trials

Hansard Page: Written

Senator Colbeck asked:

BRS released a publication in April titled 'Evaluating fisheries co-management trials: a discussion paper'.

1. Can you advise on the outcomes of this paper?
2. How would you expect this paper to impact Federal and State fishing agencies?

Answer:

1. A copy of the BRS publication *Evaluating fisheries co-management trials: a discussion paper* is available at:
http://adl.brs.gov.au/anrdl/metadata_files/pe_brs90000004195.xml.

Key outcomes of the paper were that the evaluation of current and future fisheries co-management arrangements in Australia would be facilitated by embedding evaluation as a central component of policy and program cycles; appropriately resourcing evaluation(s); and building government and industry capacity to participate in program evaluations.

The project also identified that stakeholders' desired outcomes for fisheries co-management were consistent with the Australian Fisheries Management Authority's aims for their co-management program. These include reduced costs and increased efficiencies within industry and government; improved government-industry relationships; and increased environmental stewardship and management capacities in the fishing industry.

2. Adopting recommendations from the paper has the potential to improve the implementation, transparency and acceptance of co-management arrangements in Commonwealth fisheries. Specifically, the paper highlights the need to incorporate appropriate systems to assess the performance of co-management arrangements ('program evaluation'). The success of fisheries co-management initiatives will depend on having sufficient, appropriate and timely information and methods to assess how well those programs are working and how changes or improvements can be made. The paper is also likely to be of interest to State fishery management agencies that are considering and/or implementing fisheries co-management.