

The Senate

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Rural and Regional Affairs  
and Transport  
Legislation Committee

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Budget estimates 2014–15

June 2014

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# Membership of the committee

## Members

Senator the Hon Bill Heffernan, Chair

Senator Glenn Sterle, Deputy Chair

Senator Sean Edwards

Senator Sue Lines

Senator Barry O'Sullivan

Senator Rachel Siewert

New South Wales, LP

Western Australia, ALP

South Australia, LP

Western Australia, ALP

Queensland, NATS

Western Australia, AG

## **Secretariat**

Mr Tim Watling, Secretary  
Dr Jane Thomson, Principal Research Officer  
Ms Trish Carling, Senior Research Officer  
Mr Jarrod Jolly, Research Officer  
Ms Lauren Carnevale, Administrative Officer

PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Ph: 02 6277 3511  
Fax: 02 6277 5811  
E-mail: [rrat.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:rrat.sen@aph.gov.au)  
Internet: [www.aph.gov.au/senate\\_rrat](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate_rrat)

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

1.1 On 13 May 2014, the Senate referred the following documents to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee (the committee) for examination and report in relation to the Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio and the Agriculture portfolio:

- particulars of proposed expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2015 [Appropriation Bill (No.1) 2014-15]; and
- particulars of certain proposed expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2015 [Appropriation Bill (No.2) 2014-15].<sup>1</sup>

1.2 The committee was required to report to the Senate on its consideration of 2014-15 budget estimates on 24 June 2014.<sup>2</sup>

### Budget Estimates hearings

1.3 The committee considered the Portfolio Budget Statements 2014-15 for all portfolios at hearings between 26 and 29 May 2014. The hearings were conducted in accordance with the agreed agenda as follows:

- Monday 26 and Tuesday 27 May 2014 – Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio; and
- Wednesday 28 and Thursday 29 May 2014 – Agriculture portfolio.

1.4 The committee heard evidence from the following senators:

- Senator the Hon David Johnston, Minister for Defence (representing the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development); and
- Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Agriculture (representing the Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development).

1.5 Evidence was also provided by:

- Mr Mike Mrdak, Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development;
- Dr Paul Grimes, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture;
- officers representing the departments and agencies covered by the estimates before the committee.

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1 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 27, 13 May 2014, p. 778.

2 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 6, 4 December 2013, p. 224.

1.6 The committee thanks the ministers, departmental secretaries and officers for their assistance and cooperation during the hearings.

### **Changes to departmental structures**

1.7 Following the government's announcement of the site for the construction of the Second Sydney Airport at Badgerys Creek, along with the commitment to the construction of additional western Sydney road infrastructure, the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development was, at the time of the Budget Estimates hearing, in the process of establishing the Western Sydney Unit. The committee was advised that the Western Sydney Unit would be fully operational from 1 July 2014.

1.8 The Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation and Wine Australia Corporation will merge to form a new statutory marketing authority, the Australian Grape and Wine Authority (AGWA), to commence on 1 July 2014. The AGWA will fall within the Agriculture portfolio.

### **Questions on notice**

1.9 In accordance with Standing Order 26, the committee is required to set a date for the lodgement of written answers and additional information. The committee resolved that written answers and additional information be submitted by 25 July 2014.

### **Additional information**

1.10 Answers to questions taken on notice at the committee's Budget Estimates hearings will be tabled in the Senate in separate volumes entitled 'Additional information relating to the examination of Budget Estimates 2014-15 May 2014, Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee'. Documents not suitable for inclusion in the additional information volumes will be available on request from the committee secretariat.

1.11 Answers to questions on notice received from the departments will also be posted on the committee's website at a later date.<sup>3</sup>

### **Note on references**

1.12 References to the Hansard transcript are to the proof Hansard; page numbers may vary between the proof and the official Hansard transcript.

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3 Answers to questions on notice, once received, will be published at the following website address:  
[http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Senate\\_Estimates/rtratctte/estimates/bud1415/index](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Senate_Estimates/rtratctte/estimates/bud1415/index)

# Chapter 2

## Infrastructure and Regional Development

2.1 This chapter contains the key issues discussed during the 2014-15 Budget Estimates hearings for the Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio.

### Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development

2.2 The committee heard evidence from the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development (the department) and agencies on Monday 26 May and Tuesday 27 May 2014. The hearing was conducted in the following order:

- Corporate Services;
- Infrastructure Investment and Infrastructure Australia;
- Western Sydney Unit;
- Australian Transport Safety Bureau;
- Civil Aviation Safety Authority;
- Airservices Australia;
- Aviation and Airports;
- Local Government and Territories;
- National Capital Authority;
- Policy and Research;
- Surface Transport Policy;
- National Transport Commission; and
- Australian Maritime Safety Authority.

### Corporate Services

2.3 The committee discussed the department's expenditure and procurement processes relating to a video production released on 13 May 2014, entitled *Infrastructure for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The committee was informed that the department used a 'panel arrangement' to commission production of the video, whereby members of the panel were selected by tender.<sup>1</sup> Production of the video involved two separate contracts at a total cost of \$70,460.72.<sup>2</sup>

2.4 Mr Mike Mrdak, Departmental Secretary, updated the committee on the department's progress towards achieving a \$60 million reduction in regulatory costs

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1 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 5-9.

2 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 6-9, 19.

across the Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio. The committee heard that by June 2014 the department was required to have undertaken an audit of all its regulatory activities and to have subjected them to a compliance cost calculation, using a framework set by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Further, the department was in the process of identifying legislation or regulation that could be removed to reduce unnecessary regulatory compliance costs, focusing particularly on the Civil Aviation Safety Authority and Australian Maritime Safety Authority. Specific areas within the department's own remit targeted for reductions in regulation were stated to include motor vehicle compliance, transport security, and aviation and airports.<sup>3</sup>

2.5 Finally, the department detailed how it would achieve savings in its budget through machinery of government changes and the application of a 2.5 per cent efficiency dividend on its portfolio.<sup>4</sup>

### **Infrastructure Investment and Infrastructure Australia**

2.6 The committee devoted significant attention to examining current and proposed infrastructure projects, including:

- (a) the East West Link, Victoria;<sup>5</sup>
- (b) the M80 Ring Road, Victoria;<sup>6</sup>
- (c) the Melbourne Rail Link, Victoria;<sup>7</sup>
- (d) the Perth Freight Link, Western Australia;<sup>8</sup>
- (e) the WestConnex, New South Wales;<sup>9</sup>
- (f) the Pacific Highway, New South Wales;<sup>10</sup>
- (g) the Toowoomba Second Range Crossing, Queensland;<sup>11</sup>
- (h) the Bruce Highway, Queensland;<sup>12</sup>
- (i) 16 ongoing projects and 45 new projects in Queensland;<sup>13</sup>

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3 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 10-18.

4 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, p. 15.

5 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 19-41, 110-111.

6 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 41-44.

7 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 44-45.

8 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 47-63.

9 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 66-69, 82-86, 96-99.

10 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 78-82.

11 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 70-71, 107-109.

12 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, p. 71.

13 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 99-107.

- (j) the Midland Highway, Tasmania;<sup>14</sup>
- (k) the Freight Equalisation Scheme and Bass Strait Passenger Vehicle Equalisation Scheme, Tasmania;<sup>15</sup>
- (l) the Hobart Airport runway extension, Tasmania;<sup>16</sup>
- (m) the Torrens Road to River Torrens, South Australia;<sup>17</sup>
- (n) the Darlington, South Australia;<sup>18</sup>
- (o) Outback Way, Northern Territory;<sup>19</sup>
- (p) Tiger Brennan Drive, Northern Territory;<sup>20</sup> and
- (q) the Majura Parkway, Australian Capital Territory;<sup>21</sup>

2.7 In relation to infrastructure projects allocated Commonwealth funding, a consistent theme throughout questions concerned whether a full business case had been assessed and benefit-cost ratio (BCR) calculated by Infrastructure Australia, an independent statutory body that advises the government on infrastructure issues.

2.8 The committee examined the decision by Moorebank Intermodal Company to negotiate with Qube and Aurizon about the development and operation of the Moorebank intermodal terminal.<sup>22</sup> Mr Mrdak informed the committee that, following the receipt of expressions of interest, Qube and Aurizon – together the Sydney Intermodal Terminal Alliance (SIMTA) – were selected to proceed with negotiations on the basis that 'their proposal was the most advanced and best placed to meet the government's objectives.'<sup>23</sup>

2.9 The committee sought an update from Infrastructure Australia on the status of proposals for public transport projects, as at December 2013, and was informed that none had attracted any Commonwealth funding.<sup>24</sup>

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14 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 72-73.

15 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, p. 73-76.

16 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, p. 74.

17 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 77-78.

18 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 77-78, 111-113.

19 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 113-114.

20 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 115, 118-119.

21 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, p. 116.

22 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 86-96.

23 Mr Mrdak, Secretary, Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, p. 87.

24 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 119-121.

## **Western Sydney Unit**

2.10 The committee discussed the Western Sydney Infrastructure Plan, focusing on the planning and development of road and rail infrastructure to service Sydney's second airport, to be located at Badgerys Creek.<sup>25</sup> Mr Mrdak indicated that the department had been funded to, *inter alia*, provide planning for rail access to the airport site, but that funding for rail infrastructure ultimately remained a state responsibility. He noted, however, that the federal government was making a 'substantial contribution' to road investment in the area.<sup>26</sup>

## **Australian Transport Safety Bureau**

2.11 The committee sought an update on the status of the Transportation Safety Board of Canada's peer review of the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB). Mr Martin Dolan, Chief Commissioner, ATSB, stated that it was 'unlikely' that a final report would be available before the end of June 2014 and that the ATSB would be given an opportunity to comment on the factual content of the draft report.<sup>27</sup>

2.12 Mr Dolan also updated the committee on the ATSB's role in the search for the missing aircraft MH370, reductions in staff, requests for supplementary funding, and its current review aimed at reducing industry regulation.<sup>28</sup>

## **Civil Aviation Safety Authority**

2.13 The committee discussed near misses or collisions of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) with structures or other aircraft and heard that rules relating to UAVs weighing below two kilograms are 'relatively light', with no build or maintenance standards currently in place. However, Mr John McCormick, Director of Aviation Safety, Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA), informed the committee that CASA had designed an education program, incorporating safety pamphlets that are issued to major toy stores and electronics outlets.<sup>29</sup>

2.14 Following from discussions at the Additional Estimates 2013-14 hearings, the committee investigated the current status and costs of legal proceedings before the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT), involving CASA and a pilot with a colour-vision-deficiency who, due to this condition, had certain restrictions placed on his licence. The committee was informed that a mediation conducted in early 2014 had been unsuccessful.<sup>30</sup>

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25 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 125-132.

26 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 127-128.

27 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 134-137.

28 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 132-134, 139-142.

29 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 144-145.

30 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 145-146.

2.15 In relation to the issue of colour-vision-deficient pilots, the committee once again explored the validity and reliability of current and alternative methods utilised to assess the competence of such pilots to safely operate an aircraft.<sup>31</sup>

### **Airservices Australia**

2.16 The committee sought an update on various initiatives implemented at Perth Airport designed to increase efficiency, including the 'Airport Capacity Enhancement (ACE) program' and 'MAESTRO program'. It was indicated to the committee that, as a result of the ACE program, there had been an increase in departure rates and a reduction in airborne delays at Perth Airport.<sup>32</sup>

### **Aviation and Airports**

2.17 Noting the concerns of some aircraft operators who felt they had no recourse when airport owners or leaseholders made adverse decisions, the committee asked the department to clarify the Commonwealth's responsibilities and powers in relation to airports that it had gifted, sold or leased.<sup>33</sup> Mr John Doherty, Acting Deputy Secretary of the Department, responded with the following:

... In relation to the ALOP [Aerodrome Local Ownership Plan] deeds, which are the deeds that applied in relation to the transfer of many of the regional airports, not the leased federal airports, we have taken legal advice on issues from time to time which clearly shows some gaps in the capacity. The practice over a period with those leases has been that we are able to, and do as a matter of policy, ensure that the airports continue to operate as airports but that our powers to control what happens on the airport in any more detail would be very limited. In relation to the federal leased airports, we obviously have a range of more direct regulatory controls which go through the master planning and development plan processes and, in that circumstance, we are trying to achieve the right balance between the airport operators' rights in relation to the site, which they acquired through a tender process, and the development of the site and the interests of the users.<sup>34</sup>

2.18 The committee discussed the proposed airport at Badgerys Creek and heard that the department was in the process of determining the requirements for an environmental impact assessment, given that the last study of the Badgerys Creek site was completed in 1999-2000.<sup>35</sup>

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31 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 146-150.

32 *Estimates Hansard*, 26 May 2014, pp. 151-152.

33 *Estimates Hansard*, 27 May 2014, pp. 3-4.

34 Mr Doherty, Acting Deputy Secretary, Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, *Estimates Hansard*, 27 May 2014, p. 3.

35 *Estimates Hansard*, 27 May 2014, pp. 8-9.

2.19 The committee enquired as to whether there had been any comprehensive risk assessments completed at Sydney Airport since the introduction of a third runway in the early 1990s. The committee heard that a further environmental impact statement, including a comprehensive risk assessment, has not been necessary given that there have been no major changes to the operations or layout of the airport since the introduction of the third runway. However, it was noted that the relevant agencies and authorities continually update their safety management systems and conduct safety and security assessments.<sup>36</sup>

2.20 In relation to the search for the missing aircraft MH370, the committee heard that Australian experts from search and rescue, air traffic control and civil aviation safety attended a special meeting of experts convened by the International Civil Aviation Organisation in order to examine how similar aviation incidents can be more effectively avoided and responded to.<sup>37</sup>

### **Local Government and Territories**

2.21 The issue of supplementary road funding in South Australia was discussed extensively. The committee heard that the existing supplementary road funding arrangements in South Australia, introduced as part of a lapsing program, would cease on 30 June 2014, but that increased funding had been allocated to the Roads to Recovery and Black Spots programs.<sup>38</sup>

2.22 The committee sought to determine whether the department had undertaken any modelling in relation to how a wide variety of proposed budget measures would impact regional Australia. The committee was advised by the department that, having not been consulted on all budget measures, no such modelling had been conducted and that there were no imminent plans to undertake it.<sup>39</sup>

2.23 Noting a proposed reduction in funding to local governments through the Financial Assistance Grants scheme, the committee asked the department to explain how local governments would be affected. The department informed the committee that some modelling had been undertaken in relation to how the proposed indexation freeze would impact current allocations to local councils. The department explained that it did not have enough information to adequately ascertain how each individual council would respond in reallocating its priorities.<sup>40</sup>

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36 *Estimates Hansard*, 27 May 2014, pp. 10-11.

37 *Estimates Hansard*, 27 May 2014, p. 12.

38 *Estimates Hansard*, 27 May 2014, pp. 13-14, 16-17, 22.

39 *Estimates Hansard*, 27 May 2014, pp. 14-16.

40 *Estimates Hansard*, 27 May 2014, pp. 15-23.

2.24 The committee discussed the assessment processes in relation to the selection of projects granted funding by the Regional Development Australia Fund (RDAF) and National Stronger Regions Fund.<sup>41</sup>

2.25 The committee sought an update on the financial position and future direction of Norfolk Island. Noting that the Australian National Audit Office had reviewed the financial statements of the Norfolk Island government and projected ongoing deficits, it was explained that the department was working closely with the Norfolk Island administration on a number of reforms aimed at improving its financial position and future economic viability.<sup>42</sup>

### **National Capital Authority**

2.26 After clarifying the role and future of the National Capital Authority, the committee sought updates on a range of potential or existing programs and projects, including:<sup>43</sup>

- (a) the monitoring of blue-green algae in Lake Burley Griffin;
- (b) diplomatic leasing arrangements;
- (c) the proposed Immigration Place Monument;
- (d) the implementation of paid parking within the Parliamentary Triangle;
- (e) the development of Bowen Place Crossing; and
- (f) proposals for light rail on Northbourne Avenue;

### **Policy and Research**

2.27 Officers of the department updated the committee on the department's current policy and research agenda and indicated that they were not expecting any changes to it as a result of budget reductions. Research issues discussed included: trends and indicators across regional Australia and urban areas; the evolution of Australian towns; regional rail passenger services; data on freight movements by commodity; road safety; public transport; and road user charging.<sup>44</sup>

2.28 The committee sought updates on the work of the Office of Northern Australia, particularly in relation to the Northern Australian Strategic Partnership and the development of the Northern Australia Whitepaper.<sup>45</sup>

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41 *Estimates Hansard*, 27 May 2014, pp. 24-28.

42 *Estimates Hansard*, 27 May 2014, pp. 32-34.

43 *Estimates Hansard*, 27 May 2014, pp. 35-42.

44 *Estimates Hansard*, 27 May 2014, pp. 44-45, 52-58.

45 *Estimates Hansard*, 27 May 2014, pp. 46-52.

## Surface Transport Policy

2.29 The committee explored current issues surrounding the regulation of coastal shipping in Australia.<sup>46</sup> The committee was informed that industry and stakeholder groups were being consulted in relation to three potential options for reform:

The first two options canvas regulatory settings around an open coast where the government does not regulate access by foreign flagged vessels to moving freight. The third option canvases whether there is a need to maintain a regulatory framework for access and what that might look like.<sup>47</sup>

2.30 The committee sought an update on the current status of the intergovernmental agreement on national heavy vehicle legislation and was informed it commenced on 10 February 2014 in relation to Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT, with administration carried out by the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator. Western Australia did not sign the intergovernmental agreement and though Northern Territory signed the agreement, it had not yet enacted the relevant legislation at the time of the hearing. The committee further discussed challenges faced by the national scheme and barriers to Western Australia joining it.<sup>48</sup>

## National Transport Commission

2.31 Mr Mrdak updated the committee on National Transport Commission's recently approved work plan for the following year:

It is focused on three areas, firstly, ongoing reforms to underpin the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator, in particular, but also national rail regulation. Secondly, maintenance of existing regulations; for instance, the NTC is now doing work on heavy vehicle maintenance and compliance at the request of New South Wales following the discussion we had at the last estimates about dangerous goods. So, dangerous goods and national heavy vehicle maintenance, those types of projects are continuing. The third area is around national pricing. The NTC has recently finished a new determination for pricing and is continuing work for jurisdictions on that.<sup>49</sup>

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46 *Estimates Hansard*, 27 May 2014, pp. 60-64.

47 Ms Kennedy, Acting General Manager, Maritime and Shipping, Surface Transport Policy, Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, *Estimates Hansard*, 27 May 2014, p. 60.

48 *Estimates Hansard*, 27 May 2014, pp. 66-70.

49 Mr Mrdak, Secretary, Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, *Estimates Hansard*, 27 May 2014, p. 72.

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## Australian Maritime Safety Authority

2.32 The Australian Maritime Safety Authority informed the committee that it was in the process of auditing and costing all of the regulation it was responsible for, with a view to achieving the government's deregulation agenda.<sup>50</sup>

2.33 The committee enquired about a reduction in the Protection of the Sea Levy, a levy designed to fund the National Plan to Combat Pollution of the Sea by Oil and other Noxious and Hazardous Substances. Mr Mick Kinley, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA), assured the committee that the reduced levy and \$50 million in available funds were adequate to mount a pollution response.<sup>51</sup>

2.34 The committee sought information from officers regarding AMSA's safety standards for lifesaving appliances and whether AMSA had conducted inspections on Customs vessels, specifically the *ACV Ocean Protector* and *ACV Triton*, to ascertain whether they met the relevant standards.<sup>52</sup>

2.35 ASMA explained its role in the search for missing aircraft MH370 and the committee sought information on how such an incident could be avoided in the future.<sup>53</sup>

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50 *Estimates Hansard*, 27 May 2014, pp. 74-75.

51 *Estimates Hansard*, 27 May 2014, pp. 75-76.

52 *Estimates Hansard*, 27 May 2014, pp. 76-86.

53 *Estimates Hansard*, 27 May 2014, pp. 87-88.



# Chapter 3

## Agriculture

2.1 This chapter contains the key issues discussed during the 2014-15 Budget Estimates hearings for the Agriculture portfolio.

### Department of Agriculture

2.2 The committee heard evidence from the Department of Agriculture (the department) and agencies on Wednesday 28 May and Thursday 29 May 2014. The hearing was conducted in the following order:

- Finance and Business Support, People and Service Delivery, Information Services, Governance, and Office of the General Counsel;
- Biosecurity Policy and Compliance;
- Post Entry Quarantine Program;
- Biosecurity Plant;
- Australian Chief Plant Protection Office;
- Australian Landcare Council;
- Landcare Australia Limited;
- Plant Health Australia;
- Biosecurity Animal and Australian Chief Veterinary Office;
- Live Animal Exports;
- Animal Health Australia;
- Meat and Livestock Australia Limited;
- Australian Meat Processor Corporation Limited;
- Australian Livestock Export Corporation Limited (LiveCorp Australia);
- Trade and Market Access;
- Food;
- Agricultural Adaption and Forestry;
- Drought Concessional Loan Taskforce;
- Agricultural Productivity;
- Grains Research and Development Corporation;
- Horticulture Australia;
- Cotton Research and Development Corporation;
- Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation;
- Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation and Wine Australia Corporation;

- Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority;
- Interim Inspector-General of Biosecurity;
- Sustainable Resource Management;
- Forest and Wood Products Australia Limited;
- Australian Fisheries Management Authority; and
- Fisheries Research and Development Corporation.

## **Finance and Business Support, People and Service Delivery, Information Services, Governance, and Office of the General Counsel**

2.3 The committee discussed the department's response to the application of an efficiency dividend and heard that the department would achieve its targets by reducing expenditure on advertising, travel, consultancies and deregulation. Savings would also be achieved by reducing funding to a number of programs and corporations within the portfolio.<sup>1</sup>

2.4 The committee sought to clarify the accuracy of two articles published on 9 April and 10 May 2014 in the *Armidale Express* claiming that the Minister for Agriculture was planning on moving his ministerial office in Sydney to Armidale, New South Wales. The department confirmed that planning was underway to establish an office in Armidale and that this was within his electorate.<sup>2</sup>

## **Biosecurity Policy and Compliance**

2.5 The committee investigated whether the government is considering consolidating the department's biosecurity functions with Border Force, the recently announced single frontline operational border agency. The department indicated that it had provided a briefing to the Minister for Agriculture on the biosecurity functions of the department and how they related to the functions of the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service. The committee also discussed different models of border management.<sup>3</sup>

2.6 The committee sought further information on the establishment and operation of a rapid response capability within the department. The department clarified that the additional funding received would not be used to establish a specific response team, but rather complement and boost existing response processes.<sup>4</sup>

2.7 The committee discussed the department's biosecurity risk estimation matrix, used as part of the import risk assessment process, in light of concerns from some

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1 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, pp. 6-11, 24, 26-28.

2 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, pp. 11-20.

3 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, pp. 30-32, 34, 36-40, 49-50.

4 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, pp. 32-35.

stakeholders that it was not adequate. The department reiterated that it had a high degree of confidence in the existing matrix.<sup>5</sup>

2.8 The committee received an update on the department's implementation of more targeted risk and compliance based intervention methodologies to effectively and efficiently manage the biosecurity risks of international mail, air and sea cargo, and arriving international passengers and vessels.<sup>6</sup>

### **Post Entry Quarantine Program**

2.9 The committee discussed the construction of a new post entry quarantine facility in Mickleham, Victoria. The department explained that the decision to construct a single facility was taken as all other facilities operated by the department were leased privately from a number of owners and not subject to extension beyond 2018.<sup>7</sup>

### **Biosecurity Plant**

2.10 The committee asked officers of the department to explain the federal government's role in managing the effect of fruit flies on Australia's domestic and international horticultural markets. Dr Vanessa Findlay, Australian Chief Plant Protection Officer, updated the committee on progress made towards achieving a national approach to managing fruit fly and management responses in place to deal with changes relating to dimethoate and fenthion. The committee heard that a barrier to a truly national approach was the lack of constitutional and legislative authority for the Commonwealth to act. However, an advisory committee had been established that brought together each of the states and territories, the Commonwealth government, industry, and research and development providers in order to better coordinate a response to the issue.<sup>8</sup>

### **Australian Chief Plant Protection Office**

2.11 Dr Findlay explained her role and highlighted her contributions to advancing the national fruit fly strategy, emergency response arrangements, and international work on trade arrangements for plant products.<sup>9</sup>

### **Australian Landcare Council**

2.12 The committee enquired after the resignation of the members of the Australian Landcare Council. The committee heard that the role of the Landcare Council was being reviewed in light of the establishment of the National Landcare

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5 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, pp. 42-44.

6 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, pp. 44-46.

7 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, pp. 50-55.

8 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, pp. 58-66.

9 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, p. 67.

Program and that the remaining members had been asked to consider resigning in view of the new arrangements.<sup>10</sup>

### **Landcare Australia Limited**

2.13 The committee enquired as to the relationship between Landcare Australia and the recently established Green Army. It was informed that Landcare Australia had provided general feedback on the Green Army proposal and that it hoped to assist Landcare groups to apply to host Green Army teams to work on their projects.<sup>11</sup>

### **Plant Health Australia**

2.14 The committee sought an update on projects listed in the 2008 implementation plan from the National Fruit Fly Strategy and how Plant Health Australia, as the lead agency, would manage the Strategy over the next 18 months. Plant Health Australia identified that it was well placed to lead the strategy given that it was a public company incorporating the plant industries, the Australian Government, and the state and territory governments as its three major shareholders.<sup>12</sup>

### **Biosecurity Animal and Australian Chief Veterinary Office**

2.15 Dr Robyn Martin, Acting Australian Chief Veterinary Officer, updated the committee on the past history of the Exotic Diseases Preparedness Program and how the cessation of funding at the end of the 2013-14 financial year would impact research projects that were previously funded.<sup>13</sup>

2.16 The committee sought information on the readiness of the department and the Chief Veterinary Officer in relation to exotic disease emergencies and heard that resources were being targeted in a way that minimised risk in the most effective manner.<sup>14</sup>

### **Live Animal Exports**

2.17 In light of a recent announcement that the Australian Government had concluded negotiations with Iran in relation to the health protocol for the export of animals from Australia to that country, the committee was informed that further arrangements had to be established before trade could commence.<sup>15</sup>

2.18 The committee discussed the Export Supply Chain Assurance System (ESCAS) and the government's commitment to reducing regulation, particularly in

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10 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, pp. 69-75.

11 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, pp. 76-83.

12 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, pp. 84-88.

13 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, pp. 89-90.

14 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, pp. 94-96.

15 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, p. 96.

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relation to live animal exports. The department was of the view that further reductions in regulation could be achieved.<sup>16</sup>

2.19 In response to allegations of exporters mistreating animals, the department outlined a range of tools and options, including criminal offences, available under the relevant legislation to ensure exporters complied with the regulatory framework. The department also explained the process it undertakes to deal with incidents of non-compliance, particularly those involving alleged criminal conduct.<sup>17</sup>

2.20 The committee was informed that the department was reviewing cost recovery arrangements to ensure the framework was cost effective.<sup>18</sup>

### **Animal Health Australia**

2.21 The committee discussed Animal Health Australia's levy arrangements for its members and whether these were adequate for the organisation to operate effectively.<sup>19</sup>

### **Meat and Livestock Australia Limited**

2.22 The committee explored concerns about the service agreement between Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) and the Cattle Council of Australia. The committee was informed that under MLA's statutory funding agreement it is empowered to pay funds to peak industry councils for consultation and that it had renewed its agreement with the Cattle Council of Australia until the end of December 2014.<sup>20</sup>

2.23 The committee discussed issues surrounding the merits of mandatory price reporting. Dr Peter Barnard, General Manager, Trade and Economic Services, MLA, advised the committee that he believed there was no clear answer on the matter, but that MLA's own market information activities were strongly supported by its stakeholders.<sup>21</sup>

2.24 In relation to questioning about low cattle prices in Australia, Dr Barnard suggested the greatest issue was that, despite strong worldwide demand, supply levels in Australia were low, particularly due to the effects of drought in Queensland. He was of the view that the 2011 suspension of livestock trade resulted in a four to five per cent decline in grass-fed cattle prices, but that Northern Territory producers faced price declines of between 20 and 30 per cent.<sup>22</sup>

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16 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, pp. 96-98, 100-101.

17 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, pp. 101-105, 107-109.

18 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, pp. 105-107.

19 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, pp. 110-113.

20 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, pp. 113-115.

21 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, pp. 115-117.

22 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, pp. 117-118.

### **Australian Meat Processor Corporation Limited**

2.25 The committee sought information from the Australian Meat Processor Corporation (AMPC) as to its research and development funds available to enable the industry to maximise opportunities arising out of recently concluded free trade agreements.<sup>23</sup> The committee was informed that:

The funding model in AMPC involves three programs. The core program, which is where we focus all our investment and research activities, is in the processing sector; there is the joint program, which is a program with MLA and which involves a significant contribution to marketing—market access in particular, but also domestic marketing; and there is the PIP program, which helps translate technologies into plants in Australia.<sup>24</sup>

### **Australian Livestock Export Corporation Limited (LiveCorp)**

2.26 The committee heard that the live export trade was vital to Indigenous employment in northern Australia and that recent initiatives had led to an increase in Indigenous employment.<sup>25</sup>

2.27 The committee sought information about the role of LiveCorp in relation to ensuring animal welfare standards were maintained in the live export trade. The committee was informed that LiveCorp was responsible for a range of research and development projects that had delivered significant improvements in reducing live export mortality rates.<sup>26</sup>

### **Trade and Market Access**

2.28 The committee was informed that the department had 12 counsellors working in embassies overseas:

In south and east Asia we have a counsellor in Bangkok servicing a number of Southeast Asian markets, we have a counsellor and a minister counsellor in Djakarta, and we have a counsellor in New Delhi. In north Asia we have two counsellors in Beijing, one in Seoul, and we have a minister counsellor in Tokyo. We have a minister counsellor in Brussels, a counsellor in Dubai in the Middle East, and we have a minister counsellor in Washington and also one in Rome.<sup>27</sup>

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23 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, p. 121.

24 Mr Hind, Chief Executive Officer / Business Manager, Australian Meat Processor Corporation Limited, *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, p. 121.

25 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, p. 123.

26 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, pp. 126-127.

27 Mr Murnane, Acting First Assistant Secretary, Trade and Market Access, Department of Agriculture, *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, p. 127.

2.29 Although some of these counsellors had made preliminary inquiries into opportunities to take a voluntary redundancy, none had so far formally applied.<sup>28</sup>

## **Food**

2.30 The committee discussed the Small Exporter Rebate Program announced in the 2014-15 Budget. The committee was informed that there were three components to the program:

The first component that applies in the 2014-15 financial year is a rebate component on registration costs associated with small exports. That rebate is up to \$5,000 or 50 per cent of the registration cost. The second component of this initiative is a review of fees and charges by each of the commodity sectors by 30 June 2015. Then, in the three forward years from that point forward, there is an expectation on each of the industry consultative committees to develop a range of projects that target greater improvements, whether it is market access or efficiencies, effectively with a focus towards a small exporter and that those projects would then be funded out of the residual funds left over from the rebates in those forward years.<sup>29</sup>

2.31 The committee heard that consultations with industry stakeholders in relation to the program were underway.<sup>30</sup>

## **Agricultural Adaption and Forestry**

2.32 The committee sought further information from the department about how it was planning to implement the government's election commitment to decentralise certain functions of the department, in particular whether the department was considering relocating its forestry functions to Tasmania. The department indicated it was examining whether it could consolidate divisions within its national Canberra office, but that it was not actively considering relocating divisions.<sup>31</sup>

## **Drought Concessional Loan Taskforce**

2.33 The committee was updated on the various elements of the drought assistance package announced by the Minister for Agriculture on 26 February 2014. The committee heard that applications for loans under the Farm Finance Program were closed but that the department still had 194 applications to assess, with \$100 million in loans approved across all jurisdictions as at 30 April 2014. The program was due to reopen for applications at the start of the 2014-15 financial year.<sup>32</sup>

2.34 The committee heard that the department was still liaising with its state counterparts to establish the Drought Concessional Loans Scheme. Queensland, the

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28 *Estimates Hansard*, 28 May 2014, p. 128.

29 Mr Read, First Assistant Secretary, Department of Agriculture, *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, p. 5.

30 *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, pp. 5-8.

31 *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, pp. 10-17.

32 *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, pp. 18-22, 31-32.

Northern Territory, New South Wales and Western Australia had expressed an active interest in the scheme. Reaching agreement on what qualified as a 'drought' was identified as the principal barrier to concluding the agreement between all interested jurisdictions.<sup>33</sup>

### **Agricultural Productivity**

2.35 The committee discussed a range of issues in relation to the government's proposal to reform the regulation of agvet chemicals.<sup>34</sup>

2.36 The committee also explored industry levy systems and the management of voting rights attached to levy payers.<sup>35</sup>

### **Grains Research and Development Corporation**

2.37 The committee questioned the Grains Research and Development Corporation about genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and any research it was currently undertaking on the matter.<sup>36</sup>

2.38 The committee also sought clarification from the Corporation about its expenditure on executive leadership training.<sup>37</sup>

### **Horticulture Australia**

2.39 Referring to the recently released ACIL Allen review into Horticulture Australia, the committee questioned Horticulture Australia about its response to the report and the recommendations made. Horticulture Australia reported that its board and members unanimously agreed that they would move towards becoming a grower-owned Research and Development Corporation (RDC).<sup>38</sup>

### **Cotton Research and Development Corporation**

2.40 The committee discussed how an additional \$100 million in funding to Research and Development Corporations across the Agriculture portfolio would be managed and whether the Cotton Research and Development Corporation had been consulted formally or informally.<sup>39</sup>

### **Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation**

2.41 The committee sought information from the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) as to how it would respond to recent budget cuts of approximately \$11 million over four years. The Corporation indicated it would aim to reduce administration costs to avoid reductions to funds allocated to research and

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33 *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, pp. 22-30.

34 *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, pp. 34-36.

35 *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, pp. 36-39.

36 *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, pp. 41-43, 49.

37 *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, pp. 54-58.

38 *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, pp. 49-54.

39 *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, pp. 59-61.

development programs. However, programs funded by levy-paying industries would not be affected.<sup>40</sup>

### **Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation and Wine Australia Corporation**

2.42 The committee focused significantly on the details of the imminent merger between Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation and the Wine Australia Corporation. Issues discussed included: the future of existing research and development projects; logistics of the merger; savings and efficiencies garnered through the merger; morale of existing staff; and future direction of the merged organisation.<sup>41</sup>

2.43 The committee also discussed the recently concluded free trade agreements with Japan and the Republic of Korea. It heard that the agreements would be of great benefit to Australian wine exporters.<sup>42</sup>

### **Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority**

2.44 The committee discussed legislation proposed by the government that would reduce regulation relating to the registration of agvet chemicals. The committee heard that the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA) was taking a number of measures to ensure that chemicals within its mandate were safe, including through the use of its strengthened compliance powers.<sup>43</sup>

2.45 The committee was updated on steps the APVMA had taken to reduce regulatory burdens on industry.<sup>44</sup>

2.46 Finally, the APVMA discussed with the committee its response to a recently released report pertaining to neonicotinoids and honey bee health in Australia.<sup>45</sup>

### **Interim Inspector-General of Biosecurity**

2.47 The Interim Inspector-General of Biosecurity updated the committee on his current work, including projects on the biosecurity risks associated with animal breeding material and the biosecurity risks associated with the imports of cut flowers. He also indicated that enabling legislation which would confirm his position as the Inspector-General of Biosecurity had not yet passed, but was under active consideration by the government.<sup>46</sup>

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40 *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, pp. 62-64.

41 *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, pp. 65-68.

42 *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, pp. 69-70.

43 *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, pp. 73-75, 76-77.

44 *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, p. 75.

45 *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, pp. 79-80.

46 *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, pp. 80-81.

## **Sustainable Resource Management**

2.48 The committee pursued questions in relation to funding for Landcare Australia Limited and the National Landcare Program. The committee heard that in terms of funding for agriculture under the Program, all funds were either allocated or committed and contracted. It was confirmed that there was no new funding allocated for Landcare groups to apply for. However, the committee heard there was new funding available for regional bodies.<sup>47</sup>

## **Forest and Wood Products Australia Limited**

2.49 Forest and Wood Products Australia Limited explained its current research and development investment program and its funding arrangements. The committee heard that it had discussions with the department as to whether it could access voluntary matching for funding and the rules relating to this.<sup>48</sup>

## **Australian Fisheries Management Authority**

2.50 The Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) outlined its proposed expenditure as it related to improving the competitiveness and sustainability of the fishing industry. It submitted that it was developing a program to ensure high levels of production by restoring fish stocks. This program relied on using the best available science to predict risk based approaches to harvest strategies.<sup>49</sup>

2.51 The AFMA reported it had seen an increase in the global total allowable catch for southern Bluefin tuna in recent years, which it indicated was backed by Australian action to ensure catches were kept within official limits and improvements in scientific studies on the issue.<sup>50</sup>

## **Fisheries Research and Development Corporation**

2.52 The committee heard that the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) received a cut of \$4.6 million over four years to its budget, but that the reduction was mostly offset by the department paying for FRDC's membership fees to relevant industry organisations. However, as a result of the funding reduction, it would also face cuts to its research budget of approximately five per cent every year.<sup>51</sup>

## **Senator Bill Heffernan Chair**

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47 *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, pp. 83-94.

48 *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, pp. 95-96.

49 *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, p. 97.

50 *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, pp. 97-98.

51 *Estimates Hansard*, 29 May 2014, pp. 103-105.

**Appendix 1**  
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## Monday 26 May 2014

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# Appendix 2

## Tabled documents

### **Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio**

#### *Documents tabled at hearing on Monday, 26 May 2014*

1. Percentages of on time arrivals and departures from airports in Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth, and Sydney, November 2013 - March 2014. Tabled by Mr Greg Hood, Executive General Manager, Air Traffic Control, Airservices Australia.

#### *Documents tabled at hearing on Tuesday, 27 May 2014*

1. Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics, Freightline - I: Australian freight transport overview, 2014. Tabled by Dr Gary Dolman, Head of Bureau, Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics, Policy and Research, Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development.

### **Agriculture portfolio**

#### *Documents tabled at hearing on Wednesday, 28 May 2014*

1. Cost of mortalities for sheep, cattle and goats exported from Australia, 1996-2013. Figures drawn from the Department of Agriculture and Australian Bureau of Statistics. Tabled by Senator Chris Back.

#### *Documents tabled at hearing on Thursday, 29 May 2014*

1. Breakdown of spending on meetings 1 November 2013 to 28 February 2014, Grains Research and Development Corporation. Tabled by Mr John Harvey, Managing Director, Grains Research and Development Corporation.

