

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WRITTEN QUESTION

Mr Higgins to the Minister for Environment and Natural Resources

Appropriation Bill – Environment and Natural Resources

Please provide copies of:

- all questions, which you have received from the public in relation to the Estimates process and consideration of the Appropriation Bill for the 2017/18 financial year; and
- the answers to those questions that were presented to the Estimates Committee.

Please provide the information requested below for Agencies and Government authorities for which you have responsibility, as at 31 March 2017.

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES
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Please accept apologies if questions are not under the correct Output. Where this is the case, it would be appreciated if you could indicate the appropriate Output in your response. Thank You.

OUTPUT GROUP: NATURAL RESOURCES

OUTPUT: FLORA AND FAUNA

1. In the budget papers, it states that government is promoting economic opportunities through the sustainable use of wildlife, particularly saltwater crocodiles." Please explain what that means. Why particularly saltwater crocodiles?
2. The Chief Minister has been in the news recently talking about crocodile safaris. Has there been any change in the Federal Government's position on this issue? Is there any reason to believe a crocodile safari proposal might go ahead despite the Federal Government repeatedly ruling it out?
3. What is the timeline envisaged for the introduction for these crocodile hunting safaris?
4. Please provide a copy of the submission to, and response from the Federal Government regarding crocodile hunting safaris in the NT.

5. It also states government is “working with aboriginal elders and communities to preserve and utilise aboriginal biocultural knowledge for the conservation of the Territory’s flora and fauna.” Please explain what this means. When did the initiative begin? Please give examples.
6. The budget paper also states that there will be \$9.9 million over five years to accelerate land resource mapping activities, through a soil, water and biodiversity assessment. Please advise how much will be spent on biodiversity assessment over the next 5 years and breakdown the figure further.
7. According to the budget there is \$1.2 million in Commonwealth funding for pest and weed management. Please break that down and explain how the money is being spent.
8. How is the cabomba eradication program going in Darwin River? How is success measured and is it likely to be achieved?
9. There is \$300,000 in the budget to reduce the high fire risk associated with gamba grass infestation? How is that deployed? How is that assessed? Is there any other funding for gamba grass control in this portfolio? Why is so little spent on gamba grass control?
10. The budget paper states that government is reviewing the Weeds Management Act. Please outline what this process involves. What is the timeline for this process?
11. The budget paper also says that there are 2,400 biodiversity information requests met. Who tends to make these requests? Can these figures be broken down?
12. There are 8 management programs in place for sustainable wildlife use. Please list those programs and their purposes?

OUTPUT: RANGELANDS

1. An additional \$780,000 was allocated to this Output at Mid-Year Review. Please explain what this was for and what outcomes can be expected.

Indigenous Carbon Unit

1. \$500,000 was allocated to an Indigenous Carbon Unit? What does that funding actually go towards?
2. How will this model work?
3. Are there public servants allocated to this unit?

4. In the budget paper note under land clearing applications assessed, it states “the variation in financial year 2016-17 reflects strong growth and investment in the agricultural and horticultural industries.” Please comment on the growth and investment as to why activity increased? Why is it believed this activity won’t continue into the 2017/18 financial year?
5. The decrease from 400,000 square km to 250,000 square km of land receiving weed extension services is explained as “the decrease mainly reflects changed resourcing and training arrangements that will service multiple stations.” Has this increased the amount of land receiving weed extension services.
6. The budget paper states that 600 soil profile sites have been described and tested for land suitability assessment and mapping. Please break those down by region, or explain further how the sites are chosen.
7. The budget paper mentions government provides “developers and users of the Territory’s natural resources with consistent scientific advice that promotes economic development without compromising the overall health of the Territory’s resources.” Please elaborate on that and provide examples of the consistent scientific advice.
8. The budget paper mentions “identifying opportunities for agricultural expansion through the strategic assessment and identification of land with suitable soils and sufficient water”. How much land has been identified since 1 July 2016? Where will the new agricultural precincts be?
9. The budget paper mentions “supporting the economic viability of the pastoral industry through contemporary land management practices and ongoing diversification of the pastoral estate.” Please explain more about how the pastoral industry is assisted and elaborate on the ongoing diversification of the pastoral estate.
10. The agency profile states that government is “finalising an appropriate, sustainable and transparent process for rental of the Territory’s estate for pastoral purposes.” Please explain how much progress has been made since 1 July 2016. When will the process be finalised? Please outline how an “appropriate” process is measured. How can the process be improved?
11. What is the Vacant Crown Land Strategy? Why the 20% drop in funding for this from \$576,000 to \$439,000? What does this money provide for?

Indigenous Ranger Grants Program

1. The Northern Territory Government is implementing a new policy initiative - Protecting Country, Creating Jobs which seeks to support Indigenous Rangers to protect the environment and create jobs. This will be achieved

through a capital grants program for Indigenous Ranger groups. Please detail what consultation has been done with respect to this new policy initiative and where the money will come from.

OUTPUT: WATER RESOURCES

1. Please provide a breakdown of all water and other natural asset allocation granted by the Northern Territory Government since 1 September 2016.
2. How many Water Advisory Committees are there?
3. How many were set up by the current government and how many were there already in existence?
4. What is the allocation for each?
5. How often do they meet?
6. When are the reports expected?
7. When they do the allocation, what economic modelling will be done?
8. The budget papers mention “implementing a strategic indigenous reserves policy and methodology.” Please explain how this policy works and the timelines around implementing it.
9. The budget papers mention “improving the transparency of water licence allocations and decisions, by making licence information publically available online.” What is the timeline for implementing this? Will all information be made public?
10. There was \$1 million in Commonwealth funding of a Territory feasibility study to investigate managed aquifer recharge. How is the study going? Are any preliminary results available and when will all results be made available?
11. There was \$200,000 in Commonwealth funding for compliance and enforcement systems for water management. What are these compliance systems?
12. How much of the \$9.9 million over 5 years for land resource mapping is allocated to water mapping? Where will this mapping be done?
13. Funding from the Commonwealth’s “National Water Infrastructure Development Fund” has increased by \$675 million for financial year 2017/18. Why is there such a large increase?

14. Please provide a breakdown of how and where this money is being spent.
15. Please provide an update on the water licensing arrangements in the rural area.
16. How many water licence applications have been received?
17. How was the half a hectare cut off point determined?
18. How many license applications have been submitted since 1 September 2016?
19. Is it believed that some water users who should apply for a licence have not yet done so? What would the estimated number of these water users be?
20. Is it still Government policy to oppose new dams?
21. How much will the review of water extraction licences cost? How much is allocated for it?
22. How much are the review panel members, Ms Dyson and Dr Davison, being paid?
23. What is the hourly rate for their pay?
24. If the estimated cost of the review is \$366 000, then how much is the estimated amount paid to the panel members?
25. What were the estimated number of hours worked for each panel member, when estimating the cost of the review at \$366 000?
26. How many licences were issued during that timeframe?
27. Is the Minister aware of any other reviews which have been held retrospectively into an entire term of government?
28. The original terms of reference of the review state that it will conclude in mid-2017. Will this be made public?

Water Development Infrastructure Fund

1. What action is the Government taking to work with the Federal Coalition Government to deliver money from the Water Development Infrastructure Fund? Please provide copies of submissions and responses.

OUTPUT: BUSHFIRES

1. I note government is “improving compliance with fire prevention and mitigation legislation by landholders, including through gamba grass reduction strategies.” How is this going?
2. Please provide figures showing increased compliance.
3. How is this monitored?
4. What are the gamba grass reduction strategies?
5. Do these programs apply to the government as a landholder? Who is responsible for handling and dealing with gamba grass on crown land?
6. There is \$300,000 to reduce the high fire risk associated with gamba grass infestation? How is that deployed? How is that assessed? Is there any other funding for gamba grass control in this portfolio? Why is so little spent on gamba grass control?
7. In the budget papers, it is stated that the number of wildfire incidents attended by staff or volunteers will increase from 300 in financial year 2016/17 to 400 in financial year 2017/18 due to weather conditions? How does that compare with the number of wildfires attended in previous earlier years?
8. Why did the PEFO reduce the estimate of the number of extension visits to properties?
9. The budget papers say that there will be 400 stakeholders trained, a number stable with earlier years. In general, who are these stakeholders? Are they landholders?
10. The budget papers also state there are 550 trained volunteers, similar with last year. Is that enough volunteers to deal with the threat levels of bushfires, especially in what is estimated to be a busy season?
11. There were 5000 enforcement actions relating to the Bushfires Act and similar. Please breakdown what was the outcome of these enforcement actions. Is it expected that the number of enforcement actions will grow or reduce in coming years?
12. There was \$200,000 for the National Aerial Firefighting Centre Agreement in this budget. What are those funds spent on?
13. What are the plans for a new Bushfires NT headquarters? When will funding be allocated?

14. A letter has been sent regarding Lot 2900, Hundred of Strangeways, a few kilometres past the Cox Peninsula Road turn off on the Stuart Highway as a good potential site for a new headquarters. Has this site been investigated?

OUTPUT GROUP: ENVIRONMENT

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1. Under the agency profile there is mention of “Improving the Territory’s environmental management, including delivering a leading practice regulatory framework for environmental impact assessments and environmental approvals” What are the timelines for that process?
2. When will legislation be available to deliver on this outcome?
3. What are the largest areas of expenditure in this output area? Please provide a breakdown of the largest items within this output area.
4. Is the Coastal and Marine Strategy within this output?
5. What is the timeline for this strategy?
6. What does a strategy mean? Will it mean changes in legislation or regulation or something else?
7. What is the consultation process for the Coastal and Marine Strategy?
8. The budget papers state that the Government is “delivering a leading practice regulatory framework for environmental impact assessments and environmental approvals.” What are the timelines for this process? When will the Government introduce legislation to deliver on this outcome?
9. There is a new measure titled “Decision on whether Environmental Impact Assessment required”, with a forecast of 30. Please elaborate on this measure and the reason for its introduction.
10. Another new measure is “waste and pollution approvals and licences” with an expected 200 for financial year 2017/18. Please provide a breakdown of the numbers of approvals and licences for financial year 2016/17 up until March.
11. Why are the numbers an increase from last year?
12. According to the budget papers, the Government expects to have conducted 85 compliance audits this year and 110 compliance audits next year. Please summarise the findings of this year’s audits to March.

13. Have there been any fines or penalties levied for any breach of compliance in financial year 2016/17? Please provide additional details on these actions.
14. The Government has as a key performance indicator “Environmental grants to promote ecologically sustainable practices” with \$1 million allocation. Is spending a normal key performance indicator in this instance?
15. Wouldn't a better key performance indicator be a measure of the use of ecologically sustainable practices?
16. Please provide a breakdown of those \$1 million in environmental grants to promote ecologically sustainable practices.
17. According to the budget papers, there is a provision of \$250,000 to the Arid Lands Environmental Centre, Environmental Defenders Office and Environment Centre of the Northern Territory. Is that figure correct?
18. Did these three organisations apply for the grant? Was it from a funding program?
19. Please provide a further break down of that figure between the three organisations.
20. Why did Government decide to split the figure that way?
21. Are other organisations allowed to contest the grant?
22. Do the grants need to be acquitted?
23. What are the terms and conditions attached to each grant?
24. Was the grant for one year, or is it ongoing and if so for how long?

Environmental Groups

1. Funds were awarded to the Environmental Defenders Office and a number of other Green groups in the 2017 budget. Please advise as to whether this is new expenditure or if this money has come from another budget, for example from the operational budget of the independent EPA.

OUTPUT GROUP: STATUTORY AUTHORITY

OUTPUT: NORTHERN TERRITORY ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AUTHORITY

1. How many Full Time Equivalents are currently employed within the NT Environmental Protection Authority? Please break those numbers down by section.
2. How many Full Time Equivalents have resigned or retired from the NT Environmental Protection Authority? Please break those numbers down by section.
2. What has happened to these positions? Has the work been reallocated to existing staff?
3. Are there any plans to fill these positions in the near future?
4. What is the progress update on the EPA's investigation into silt mitigation for Durack Lakes?
5. What resourcing has been allocated to maintain important historical areas such as the WWII 16 Mile Camp in Johnston, specifically broken down into the maintenance schedule, and are there plans to expand this historical precinct?

OUTPUT GROUP: CORPORATE AND GOVERNANCE

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Staffing

1. How many Full Time Equivalents are currently employed within this Agency, broken down by Output and Business Unit?
 2. How many Full Time Equivalents have resigned, retired, taken a redundancy package or have been made redundant, or terminated? Please break down these numbers by Output and Business Unit.
 3. What has happened to these positions? Has the work been reallocated to existing staff?
 4. Are there any plans to fill these positions in the near future?
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