

BUDGET QUESTIONS
QUESTIONS TAKEN ON NOTICE DURING THE HEARING

1. MR GAY ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC-

QUESTIONS

- (a) What was the total staff and operational cost of helicopter and boat patrols for abalone poaching on the weekend of 9 and 10 August 2003 on the south coast of New South Wales?
- (b) How many illegal fishermen were caught in that operation?
- (c) Have these fishermen been charged with any offences?
- (d) Has there been any legal action, or is there likely to be future legal action taken against New South Wales Fisheries as a result of this operation?

ANSWERS

- (a) Up to seventeen officers were engaged at various times during the operation. The cost of the helicopter and boat patrols was \$6,900.
- (b) Two.
- (c) Infringement notices have been issued to the offenders.
- (d) No legal action has been taken against NSW Fisheries as a result of this operation.

2. MR GAY ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC-

QUESTION

In relation to freedom of information (FOI) requests, does a report listing FOI information and the status of applications go to the Premier's Department before the information is provided to the person who made the request?

ANSWER

Applications under the FOI Act are dealt with in accordance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 1989.

3. MR COLLESS ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC-

QUESTIONS

- (a) In the past year, how many FOI requests has the Department advised the Ministerial staff of?
- (b) Could you provide a list of these FOIs and who requested them?

ANSWERS

(a-b) Statistics on FOI administration can be found within the Annual Reports of departments and agencies.

4. MR COLLESS ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC-

QUESTION

In relation to the fee per meeting paid to management advisory committees (MAC) members, how long has it been since it has been increased?

ANSWER

I am advised that management advisory committees for the majority of the state's commercial fisheries were established in 1997. Fee increases have been proposed but have not been generally supported by committee members when discussed at committee meetings.

5. MR GAY ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC-

QUESTIONS

- (a) What measures were taken by New South Wales Fisheries to inform recreational and commercial fishermen, scuba divers and the broader South West Rocks community that a review on the grey nurse shark was underway?
- (b) How many discussion papers in regard to the review were distributed throughout the South West Rocks community?
- (c) Where were the discussion papers distributed?

ANSWERS

- (a) The decision to review grey nurse shark protection measures was announced on 27 May 2003, and a discussion paper on grey nurse shark protection was released for public comment on 3 July 2003.

The discussion paper was advertised in the Sydney Morning Herald, the Daily Telegraph, The Australian and in 21 regional coastal newspapers, including the Port Macquarie News, Macleay Argus and the Coffs Harbour Advocate. The release of the discussion paper received a considerable amount of media interest including regional television, radio and print media coverage.

(b - c)

Over 15,000 copies of the grey nurse shark discussion paper were distributed throughout NSW. The discussion paper was sent to bait and tackle shops, scuba diving shops, recreational fishing clubs along the NSW coast, ocean and trap and line commercial fishers, commercial fishers in the South West Rocks region and to 1,500 people who had previously made a submission in relation

to the grey nurse shark. It was forwarded to local councils and libraries for display and was also accessible on the NSW Fisheries website. Specifically, the discussion paper was made available at the South West Rocks Waterways office, NSW Fisheries Offices in Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour, and at several local dive shops and bait and tackle shops.

**6. MR COHEN ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES
THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC-**

QUESTION

How much dedicated New South Wales Fisheries funding, excluding external grants, will be allocated to research, management, staff costs and compliance in 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06?

ANSWER

\$12,775,000 has been allocated by NSW Fisheries for research including staff in 2003-04. \$11,889,000 has been allocated by NSW Fisheries for compliance including staff in 2003-04. \$31,966,000 has been allocated by NSW Fisheries for other projects including commercial and recreational fishery management planning, marine parks planning, fisheries conservation staff, aquatic pests management, threatened species management and planning, aquaculture management and planning, and corporate services functions including information technology, in 2003-04.

Specific funding by function for future years has not been determined.

**7. MR COHEN ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES
THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC-**

QUESTIONS

- (a) To date, how many threatened species recovery plans have been finalised?
- (b) How many draft plans are waiting for approval?
- (c) How many plans are in preparation?
- (d) What is the total number required?

ANSWERS

- (a) The grey nurse shark and eastern cod threatened species recovery plans have been substantially finalised but not yet gazetted.
- (b) The grey nurse shark draft recovery plan will be gazetted once the current review has been finalised. The eastern freshwater cod draft recovery plan is in the final stages.

- (c) Eleven recovery plans are currently being prepared (oxleyan pygmy perch, trout cod, green sawfish, black cod, silver perch, river snail, great white shark, Macquarie perch, Adams emerald dragonfly, the aquatic ecological community of the lower Murray River catchment; and a multi-species plan for 4 small Murray-Darling species).
- (d) There are 19 listed threatened species, populations and ecological communities; 15 recovery plans are being prepared as one plan is a multi-species plan to include four species. One species is extinct and does not need a plan.

8. MR COHEN ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC-

QUESTIONS

- (a) How much was spent on recovery planning and threatened species conservation assessment for 2001-02 and 2002-03?
- (b) Could you detail the spending of the balance?
- (c) What resources were allocated to complete the finalisation of recovery plans in the 2002-03 and 2003-04 budgets?

ANSWERS

- (a) The Government has allocated \$1 million a year to the aquatic threatened species program. Specifically in 2001-02 approximately \$165,000 was spent on threatened species recovery planning and threat abatement planning, and approximately \$450,000 was spent on threatened species conservation assessment. In 2002-03 these figures were approximately \$180,000 and \$370,000 respectively. The remaining funds were spent on related threatened species projects listed in (b).
- (b) In addition to recovery planning, NSW Fisheries carried out a wide range of threatened species recovery actions and related activities in both financial years. These included:
 - negotiations with the community and other agencies to integrate threatened species requirements into natural resource management plans, such as water sharing plans;
 - assessment of the environmental impacts of development proposals on threatened species;
 - communication and education initiatives, including development of a community reporting program for sightings of threatened species by the public, and preparation of educational materials;
 - expansion of a database of threatened species records across NSW, available to the public via the NSW Fisheries website;
 - conservation stocking of 47,000 trout cod and 5,400 eastern freshwater cod;
 - habitat rehabilitation projects throughout the State (eg fish passage); and
 - research on the distribution, biology and genetics of threatened species;

(b) See (a).

**9. MR COHEN ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES
THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC-**

QUESTION

Can you provide the Committee with the number of vacant compliance staff positions at New South Wales Fisheries?

ANSWER

I have been advised that as at 30 September 2003 there were 10 vacant compliance positions at NSW Fisheries. The recruitment process for compliance officers is underway.

**10. MR COHEN ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES
THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC-**

QUESTION

Does the average compliance officer work as an individual or as part of a team?

ANSWER

Compliance officers generally work as part of a team.

**11. MR COHEN ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES
THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC-**

QUESTIONS

- (a) Could you provide information on the bio-nutrient loads and fish escapes associated with aquaculture developments?
- (b) Have feral fish populations become a problem as a result of aquaculture activities in our waterways and coastal areas?

ANSWERS

- (a) The NSW Government applies strict planning controls, environmental controls, and operating conditions to aquaculture developments.

With the exception of salmonid (ie trout and salmon) farms, freshwater aquaculture farms are not permitted to discharge into natural water bodies.

All nutrients from non-salmonid farms are disposed of on site through irrigation of pastures or crops, thereby preventing any nutrient loads entering our waterways. Nutrient discharges from salmonid farms are licensed by the Environment Protection Authority.

A marine finfish farm that produces 25 tonne of product annually is estimated to produce 3.3 kg of nitrogenous waste per day. This is quickly dispersed into and utilised by the marine environment and to date no significant impact has been observed despite extensive independent monitoring.

Fish escapes from land based farms are rare and given the stringent requirements that apply today the establishment of feral fish populations directly from aquaculture is unlikely. Marine farms have some escapement of fish. However, these fish are from the same genetic source as wild stocks in the area.

- (b) NSW Fisheries does not permit farming of non-indigenous (introduced) species in marine farms, therefore no feral fish populations can become established from legal operations. A population of banded grunter that appears to have become established in the Clarence River is alleged to have been introduced through a shipment of silver perch from Queensland although no evidence has been produced to back up these claims.

**12. MS HALE ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES
THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC-**

QUESTION

How much dedicated New South Wales Fisheries funding, excluding external grants, will be allocated to resourcing compliance officers in 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06?

ANSWER

See question 6.

**13. MS HALE ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES
THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC-**

QUESTION

How many times has the minister exercised his powers under section 154 of the Local Government Act?

ANSWER

I have no powers under section 154 of the Local Government Act.

**14. MS HALE ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND MINISTER
FOR FISHERIES THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC-**

QUESTION

What are you doing to remove weirs obstructing the passage of fish in our streams and rivers?

ANSWER

The NSW Government has been very active in addressing problems associated with weirs and fish passage. In 2001, the NSW Government implemented Australia's first weir removal program with funding from the recreational fishing licence. This program follows an initial weir review undertaken by NSW Fisheries, which recommended the removal of approximately 80 weirs across NSW.

This program has so far seen the removal of 17 barriers to fish passage and as a result more than 270km of aquatic habitat has been re-opened to native fish migration in 12 different waterways. Thirty-five fishways have already been installed along NSW coastal and inland rivers and this has opened up areas of fish habitat previously inaccessible to our native fish

**15. MR GAY ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES
THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC-**

QUESTIONS

- (a) On what basis did SafeFood New South Wales close oyster farming regions on the south coast?
- (b) Were the local oyster industry representatives consulted prior to the closure?
- (c) What information has been made available to the local oyster industry since the closure was enforced?

ANSWERS

- (a) In March and April this year toxic algal blooms were identified in a number of waterways on the NSW far south coast. Harvesting restrictions were placed on oyster and mussel farmers in accordance with the shellfish quality assurance program administered by SafeFood NSW.
- (b) The closures were a mandatory response. Local oyster industry representatives were informed prior to the harvesting restrictions in accordance with the established protocol.
- (c) Local oyster farmers have been provided with information including new protocols by way of a newsletter, personal discussions with officers of SafeFood, and a meeting of interested parties at Merimbula hosted by the Regional Algal Coordinating Committee.

**16. MR COHEN ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND MINISTER
FOR FISHERIES THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC-**

QUESTIONS

- (a) What are you doing to encourage landholders to retain snags in rivers adjacent to their properties to promote the breeding of native fish?
- (b) Do you have a budget for these programs?

- (c) Do you have specific expenditure on information to disseminate on this issue?

ANSWERS

- (a) NSW Fisheries Habitat Protection Plan No.1 outlines policies for the management of important fish habitats, including snags. Under this plan, public authorities must notify NSW Fisheries of any proposals to remove or relocate snags. The Government has also produced advisory materials, which promote snag retention and management such as the NSW Fisheries Policy and Guidelines for Aquatic Habitat Management and Fish Conservation. An advisory brochure (a fishnote) has been prepared for snags and is also available on the NSW website.

NSW Fisheries regularly gives advice to local government, state agencies, developers and the community about the rules relating to snags. In 2001, NSW Fisheries, in collaboration with the Inland Rivers Network, successfully sought \$29,100 from the Natural Heritage Trust to conduct 20 inland workshops within the 9 western catchments of NSW. The workshops promoted freshwater habitat and fish conservation issues, including snag protection, and provided local communities with a greater awareness of how to conserve fish and their habitats.

- (b)-(c)

The protection and management of aquatic habitats, including snags, is a core function of NSW Fisheries and is funded from within the Department's current budget allocation.

17. MR COHEN ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC-

QUESTION

What funding was set down in the 2001-02 and 2002-03 budget for threatened species conservation?

ANSWER

See question 8.

18. MR GAY ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES, THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC—

QUESTIONS

- (a) When was Mr Glen Taylor appointed?
(b) To which position was he appointed?

- (c) Please detail the qualifications Mr Taylor brought to this role? (Hansard, p15)

ANSWER

Glenn Taylor is employed by the Director General of the Premier's Department in accordance with the provisions of the Public Sector Employment and Management Act 2002.

19. MR COLLESS ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES, THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC—

Questions:

- (a) Please provide plans to hand over the responsibility for management of travelling stock routes from RLPBs to the National Parks and Wildlife Service, if they are managing them?
- (b) What assurance can you give to farmers who use travelling stock routes that access to these important resources will not be jeopardised by any involvement of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, if they are managing them? (Hansard, p15)

Answer:

- (a)-(b) There are no plans for RLPBs to hand over responsibility for management of travelling stock reserves (TSRs) to the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

20. Mr Gay asked the Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Fisheries, the Hon Ian Macdonald MLC

Questions:

- (a.) How much of the total expenditure on drought activities has gone directly to farmers' pockets?
- (b.) Can this figure be broken down by program item, for example emergency relief fund etc? (Hansard, p16)

Answers:

- (a) Of the \$93.6m committed on drought to 11 September 2003, \$81.7m has been allocated to farmers' via subsidies, loans or rebates on government expenses. The remaining \$11.9 has been largely committed to other farm and rural support measures such as supplementing town water supplies, rural financial counselling, payroll tax relief and the employment of Drought Support Workers.

(b) Yes. Please refer to Table 1.

Table 1: NSW Government Commitments on Drought Assistance
1 July 2002 to 11 September 2003

	Total	Directly to Farmers
Feral Pig and Fox Project Western Division	\$703,035	\$703,035
Wild Dog Destruction Board Fees Western Division	\$456,500	\$456,500
Waiving of Fees for Western Land Leases Western Division	\$1,400,000	\$1,400,000
Waiving of Permit Fees for Bees in National Parks	\$960,000	\$960,000
Cost of Establishing NSW Agriculture Stockplan Program	\$180,000	
Cost of Establishing NSW Agriculture Web Page	\$780,000	
Cost of Running Drought Workshops for Farmers	\$170,000	
Cost of Drought Publications eg Drought Guide	\$75,268	
Financial Counsellors	\$1,314,000	
Emergency Relief Fund	\$5,381,444	\$5,381,444
DOCS and Department of Health Counselling	\$810,000	
EC Costs	\$712,000	
Drought Coordinator, Drought Welfare, Administration	\$976,432	
Drought Support Workers	\$457,190	
Farm Family Gatherings	\$92,337	
Cost of Transport Subsidies	\$33,535,492	\$33,535,492
100% Freight on Donated Fodder	\$1,348,860	\$1,348,860
RLPB Fees for Processing Transport Subsidies	\$973,850	
Payroll Tax Concessions to Rural Business	\$2,467,669	\$2,467,669
Small Business Assistance	\$194,111	\$194,111
TAFE Training for Farm Hand Program	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
Animal Welfare	\$500,000	\$500,000
EC Interest Subsidies (State's 10% component)	\$2,811,539	\$2,811,539
OJD Levy Waivers	\$432,000	\$432,000
TOTAL ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS AND RURAL BUSINESS	\$57,731,726	
LOANS TO FARMERS		
Special Conservation Loans (desilting dams, water infrastructure etc)	\$24,580,000	
Value of Loan Applications pending	\$1,730,000	
Special treasury Loans to Cover farmer payment of this years OJD Levy	\$4,200,000	
TOTAL LOANS (approved and pending)	\$30,510,000	\$30,510,000
TOWN WATER		
Expenditure on Alleviating Town Water Supply Problems	\$5,400,000	
TOTAL FOR WATER	\$5,400,000	
TOTAL GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS ON DROUGHT 2002/2003	\$93,641,726	
TOTAL ALLOCATIONS TO FARMERS		\$81,700,649

21. MR GAY ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES, THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC—

Questions:

- (a) Please provide the Committee with a breakdown of the assistance provided to farmers affected by the drought, by region? (Hansard, p17)
- (b) Please provide the Committee with a breakdown of the assistance that has been provided based on departmental expenses/costs, versus the payments made directly to farmers or small businesses affected by this drought? (Hansard, p17)

Answers:

- (a) It is impossible to break down all drought assistance commitments on a regional basis however this can be done for the major assistance measure of transport subsidies. Please refer to Table 2.
- (b) The information provided at Table 1 in response to Question 20(b) provides a breakdown of Departmental expenses and payments to farmers.

Table 2: Transport Subsidy Payments by Rural Lands Protection District

Rural Lands Protection District	Payments to 11/9/03
Armidale	\$706,328
Balranald	\$291,185
Bombala	\$58,092
Bourke	\$727,796
Braidwood	\$249,238
Brewarrina	\$1,091,806
Broken Hill	\$884,437
Casino	\$531,120
Central Tablelands	\$564,179
Cobar	\$562,604
Condobolin	\$1,083,969
Cooma	\$198,759
Coonabarabran	\$1,643,834
Coonamble	\$2,123,801
Dubbo	\$461,053
Forbes	\$487,219
Gloucester	\$284,496
Goulburn	\$380,393
Grafton	\$180,266
Gundagai	\$653,234
Hay	\$545,642
Hillston	\$566,249
Hume	\$1,320,558
Hunter	\$828,458
Kempsey	\$1,091,320
Maitland	\$141,367
Milparinka	\$524,783
Molong	\$252,568
Moree	\$738,709
Moss Vale	\$756,787
Mudgee	\$1,203,811
Murray	\$464,576
Narrabri	\$695,386
Narrandera	\$376,532
New England	\$652,791
Northern Slopes	\$328,507
Nyngan	\$797,814
Riverina	\$619,846
South Coast	\$994,927
Tamworth	\$1,950,620
Tweed-Lismore	\$122,557
Wagga	\$987,400
Walgett	\$2,469,405
Wanaaring	\$189,757
Wentworth	\$302,380
Wilcannia	\$723,710
Yass	\$394,409
Young	\$330,813

22. MR GAY ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES, THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC—

Question:

Can you provide a list of those consultancies or agencies that have been commissioned to undertake work on behalf of the department assessing the drought or the Government's drought policies? (Hansard, p17)

Answer:

Expenditure on consultancies is reported in Departmental Annual Reports. All expenditure is in accordance with the appropriate guidelines.

23. MR COHEN ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES, THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC—

Questions:

- (a) Please identify the nature of each GM project that the department has been involved with?
- (b) Please identify the parties involved, the duration, location and funding arrangements for those projects (Hansard, p19)

Answers:

(a) – (b)

NSW Agriculture has been involved in the following GM projects

- Bioassays of insecticidal genes

Collaborative research between NSW Agriculture and CSIRO undertaken in the Leeton Local Government Area (LGA). Research was undertaken in 2000/2001 and 2002/2003. Funded by the Rice Co-operative Research Centre.

- Field trials of genetically modified canola.

NSW Agriculture carried out field evaluations of genetically modified canola between 1997 and 2000. The trials were conducted on a fee for service basis predominately on subcontract to Agriculture Victoria.

All the trials were conducted in accordance with GMAC licence conditions.

- Field trials of peas resistant to pea weevil.

Field trials were undertaken in collaboration with CSIRO between 1998 and 2002 under licences PR59X, PR61 and PR105 in the Wagga Wagga City Council LGA.

The NSW Agriculture component of the projects was funded by CSIRO on a fee for service basis.

- Evaluation of grain from modified barley lines

Evaluation of barley grain in collaboration with CSIRO. Evaluation was laboratory based in the Wagga Wagga City Council LGA and carried out in 1999 under project PR92 and in 2001 under project PR139.

- Evaluation of modified cotton lines.

A range of modified cottons are being evaluated in the Narrabri LGA in collaboration with CSIRO under licences issued by the OGTR.

- Evaluation of diagnostic test with modified Salmonella

Research classified as a Notifiable Low Risk Dealing by the OGTR in the Ballina LGA and funded by the Meat and Livestock Australia. The research has been ongoing since August 2002.

- Characterisation of Mycoplasma antigens

Research classified as a Notifiable Low Risk Dealing by the OGTR in the Camden LGA and funded by a grant from the University of Connecticut, the McGarvie-Smith Foundation and the University of Wollongong. The research has been ongoing since 2002.

- Characterisation of antibiotic resistance in bacteria.

Research classified as a Notifiable Low Risk Dealing by the OGTR in the Camden LGA and funded internally. The research has been ongoing since 2003.

24. MR COHEN ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES, THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC—

Question:

How much direct or indirect funding does New South Wales Agriculture receive from Monsanto and/or Bayer? (Hansard, p20)

Answer:

NSW Agriculture has evaluated genetically modified canola as part of its conventional canola improvement program. This research was primarily funded by the Department of Primary Industries, Victoria and included evaluation of canola lines produced by Monsanto and Agrevo (now Bayer) in the late 1990's, the details of which are the subject of commercial confidentiality agreements.

25. MR COHEN ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES, THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC—

- (a) How many field trials involving GE crops are being undertaken currently in New South Wales?
- (b) (i) Is NSW Agriculture involved in the monitoring or oversight of those trials?
(ii) If so, please describe what environmental data is collected for the trials?
- (c) Have there been any breaches of licence conditions for any of these trials?
- (d) Please provide the details and results of any remedies or follow-up testing that might have been undertaken?
- (e) Does NSW Agriculture have all the agronomic data of trials conducted in New South Wales?
- (f) Has NSW Agriculture conducted any audits of the trials?
- (g) Have there been steps or tests undertaken by NSW Agriculture or its employees or agents, or others, to determine whether there has been any off-site contamination as a result of these trials?
- (h) Are you aware of any out-crossing resulting from these trials?
- (i) Please detail any steps that NSW Agriculture has taken to remedy those problems?
- (j) (i) Have trial licensees or NSW Agriculture kept seed produced during the trials in New South Wales?
(ii) If so, please provide details of which trial seed and why it was saved?
(Hansard, p20)

Answers:

- (a) The OGTR website, as updated on 5 May 2003, indicates there were 98 sites where field trials of GM crops are either being grown or are under post harvest monitoring. These are predominately non-food crops such as cotton.
- (b) (i) NSW Agriculture is monitoring three sites where GM Invigor canola is currently being trialled under an exemption order issued by the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries, on the advice of the NSW Agricultural Advisory council for Gene Technology..
(ii) As the GM canola trial exemption order is in place to address marketing issues, data pertaining to the environment is not required. Environmental and health issues are a matter for the OGTR.
- (d) Breaches of licence conditions for applications overseen by the OGTR, are presented in their quarterly reports and are available to the public on the OGTR website. The March report from the OGTR indicates that four incidents relating to licence conditions were reported to the OGTR.

For those three trials where NSW Agriculture has monitoring responsibility, two incidents were identified and acted on to prevent a breach of exemption order conditions.

- (d) Details of the four incidents mentioned above (25c) and any subsequent action relating to trials monitored by OGTR are presented in the quarterly report that is available to the public on the OGTR website.

The incidents reported in trials monitored by NSW Agriculture involved the identification of Brassica plants in the monitoring zone surrounding two trial sites. Upon notification, the company took immediate action to remove the Brassica plants either by hand weeding or spraying with herbicide. NSW Agriculture inspectors have re-visited the sites and have noted that the herbicide is taking effect.

(e) No.

- (f) Yes
- (g) No, apart from monitoring buffer zones as a requirement of the licence for field trials.
- (h) The only immediately apparent incidence of outcrossing is that recorded in the latest quarterly report of the OGTR as outlined previously.
- (i) Remedial action in relation to the outcrossing incident in question is within the jurisdiction of the OGTR not NSW Agriculture.
- (j) (i) OGTR licence conditions and exemption order conditions specify the requirements for retaining seed from trials.
(ii) NSW Agriculture is not in possession of such details.

26 MR COHEN ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES, THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC—

QUESTIONS

- (a) What action is the Minister taking to promote and support the expansion of organic agriculture?
- (b) Please indicate to the Committee how much money was allocated in 2002/03 for research and development into organic agriculture?
- (c) How much money is allocated in 2003-04 for research and development into organic agriculture? (Hansard, p21)

ANSWERS

- (a) The Department of Agriculture has, over the past ten years, strongly supported the expansion of organic agriculture through its policy, research, advisory &

education activities. Information on the Department's activities in this regard is available on its website.

- (b) During 2002-2003, NSW Agriculture allocated \$0.76 million for research and development into organic agriculture.
- (c) In 2003-2004, NSW Agriculture has allocated \$0.67 million for research and development into organic agriculture.

27 MR COHEN ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES, THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC—

QUESTIONS

- (a) Has there been any research into more environmentally suitable crops as an alternative to those that are water intensive, such as rice?
- (b) Could you describe the research being conducted by NSW Agriculture in the area of water efficiency savings?
- (c) Do you have a specific budget for research into water efficiency projects?
- (d) Please elaborate on the efforts of NSW Agriculture in the areas of covering of waterways, irrigation channels etc (Hansard, pp21-22)

ANSWERS

- (a) Yes. NSW Agriculture has undertaken significant research into environmentally suitable crops and cropping systems. Some research aims to increase water use in rain fed/dryland systems for dryland salinity control. Other projects aim to reduce crop water use. The first water use efficient rice variety, Quest, was released by NSW Agriculture in 2003.
- (b) NSW Agriculture is involved in a number of major research projects on water efficiency savings. The Department is evaluating "whole of system" water efficiencies from the whole valley to the paddock scale. This project is part funded by Land and Water Australia. The Department is working with the Rice Cooperative Research Centre on sealing irrigation channels and ways of identifying more impermeable soils for rice growing. Three major water use efficiency projects have been recently concluded. Research with the RIRDC has identified efficient irrigation techniques for coffee production, work with the Murray Darling Basin Commission and the Viticulture Cooperative Research Centre has identified the impacts on salinity of low irrigation techniques and research on partial root zone drying for citrus has identified practical ways to lower water use in crop production. A cost benefit analysis of conversion from lower technology to higher technology (drip irrigation) for the Murray Darling Basin Commission has also been completed.
- (c) While there is no specific budget for research into water efficiency projects, NSW Agriculture allocates funds into this area of research from Treasury allocation and also attracts funds from external sources.

- (d) NSW Agriculture is investigating methods to reduce seepage from irrigation channels, a major area of loss from channels and storages. NSW Agriculture was a key member of a national workshop carried out in 2001 by the National Program for Irrigation Research and Development to identify best practice in evaporation control.

28 MR COHEN ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES, THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC—

QUESTION:

- (a) On Crown lands, how much Government funding has been received for managing travelling stock routes for conservation in New South Wales for 2002-03?
- (b) On Crown lands, how much Government funding has been received for managing travelling stock routes for conservation in New South Wales for 2003-04? (Hansard, p23)

ANSWER:

The expenditure which Rural Lands Protection Boards incurred in the management of travelling stock reserves in 2001 was \$6.5 million. The income which Boards received, largely through issuing grazing permits, was \$3.4 million. This resulted in a loss of \$3.1 million, a shortfall which was made up by general Board rate income.

Under Section 45(2) of the Rural Lands Protection Act (1998) Boards must prepare a function management plan for the travelling stock reserves under their care, control and management. This management plan must have regard to, amongst other things, the adoption of appropriate stocking practices, the conservation of wildlife, and the protection of the reserves against soil erosion and diminution of water quality. Once the Board has had their plan approved by the State Council of Rural Lands Protection Boards, the Board must comply with its contents.

Further at the 2003 State Conference of Rural Lands Protection Boards it was resolved to adopt a set of minimum recommended standards for grazing on travelling stock reserves. These standards included:

1. Prohibiting set stocking in areas of high and medium conservation value vegetation and in areas where threatened species have been identified.
2. Promoting natural regeneration through allowing appropriate breaks from grazing and controlling competing weeds.
3. Avoid stock access to areas subject to active erosion.
4. Provide stock watering points at a reasonable distance along TSRs, subject to available funding, to prevent soil erosion and degradation of remnant vegetation.
5. Protect and enhance native vegetation through promoting and supplementing (where necessary) natural regeneration.

Rural Lands Protection Boards manage their travelling stock reserves with careful regard to the natural environment and it for this reason that many travelling stock reserves are amongst the best examples of remnant vegetation in the state. In addition to this a number of Boards applied for and received grant funding for conservation work on travelling stock reserves for the 2002 – 2003 financial year which amounted to \$46 647. In the 2003 – 2004 financial year it is envisaged that a further \$46 541 will be received.

29. MR COHEN ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES, THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC—

QUESTIONS

- (a) How much money was spent on weed control and eradication last year?
- (b) What is the budget allocation for weed control and eradication for 2003-04? (Hansard, p23)

ANSWERS

- (a)-(b) The Noxious Weed Grant allocated each year for Local Weed Control Authorities is identified in the NSW Government Budget Papers and the NSW Agriculture Annual Report.

30 MS HALE ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES, THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC—

QUESTIONS

- (a)
 - (i) Has NSW Agriculture or its employees received any donations in kind, contributions or gifts from Monsanto and/or Bayer for any purpose, including projects, research positions, technical assistance or equipment and so forth?
 - (ii) If so, how much was each donation, contribution or gift?
- (b) What was the purpose of that donation, contribution or gift? (Hansard, p23)

ANSWERS

- (a)
 - (i) I am advised by NSW Agriculture that the answer to this question is “No”.
 - (ii) Not applicable.
- (c) Not applicable.

31 MS HALE ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES, THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC—

QUESTIONS

- (a) (i) Are any employees of Bayer and/or Monsanto currently working in any NSW Agriculture office?
- (ii) If so, how many and in which offices?
- (b) What type of work is being done?
- (c) What are the funding arrangements for that work?
- (d) How many employees of NSW Agriculture have previously worked for Monsanto and/or Bayer? (Hansard, p23)

ANSWERS

- (a) (i) No
- (ii) N/A
- (b) N/A
- (c) N/A
- (d) Only one known

32 MS HALE ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES, THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC—

QUESTIONS

- (a) At what rate is the organic farming industry growing in Australia?
- (b) How much is the Australian organic farming industry worth at the moment?
- (c) How many of the nation's organic farms are located in New South Wales?
- (d) At what rate is the consumer demand for organic food increasing each year? (Hansard, p23)

ANSWERS

- (a) The Australian industry (Biological Farmers of Australia Cooperative Ltd – Organic Food and Farming Report Sept 2003) suggests that growth is continuing at between 10-30 per cent per annum, depending on the sector.

- (b) The Australian industry (Biological Farmers of Australia Cooperative Ltd – Organic Food and Farming Report Sept 2003) estimates farm gate value for Australian organic produce in 2002 at \$90 million, exports at \$40 million, and domestic market value at the retail level at \$250 million.
- (c) There are estimated to be 2,100 certified organic farming operations within Australia. It is estimated that approximately 700 of these are located within NSW.
- (d) There are no recent statistics on the growth in consumer demand for organic foods in Australia.

33 MR GAY ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES, THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC—

QUESTIONS

- (a) Please provide further details on how recommendations numbered 1, 2, 7 to 12, 14 and 16 of the Report on Dairy De-Regulation Impact and Assessment Committee to the NSW Parliament are being implemented?
- (b) When have they been implemented?
- (c) Please provide the Committee with some examples of tangible benefits derived from the implementation of these recommendations? (Hansard, p25)

ANSWERS

- (a)-(b) Recommendations 1, 2, 7 to 12, 14 and 16 of the Report of the Dairy De-Regulation Impact and Assessment Committee to the NSW Parliament, October 2001 have been implemented as indicated below.

RECOMMENDATION 1: The responsibility for maintaining standards and for ensuring the safety of milk and dairy products be maintained by SAFE Food Production, NSW.

SAFE Food Production NSW assumed the role of food safety and standards in the NSW dairy industry from the NSW Dairy Corporation in 1999.

RECOMMENDATION 2: That NSW Agriculture and NSW State and Regional Development maximise and continue while ever necessary, the existing network of assistance available to rural communities affected by deregulation.

NSW Agriculture has provided assistance to the dairy industry through the Dairy Do It Program, with its three components of; Dairy ASSIST, Dairy FAMILY and Dairy CHECK, which were implemented in October 1999. In

addition, seven Rural Financial Counsellors funded through NSW Agriculture provide support to dairy communities. Details of these programs are available on the NSW Agriculture website.

The Department of State and Regional Development supported the dairy industry through the NSW Dairy Industry Transition Initiative. The initiative provided assistance for the establishment of new industries for job opportunities, business training for people leaving the dairy industry and the researching of further value added initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION 7: To develop a mechanism, through the NSW Rural Assistance Authority, to make available to NSW dairy farmers the facility for obtaining reduced interest rate loans for prescribed farm development purposes which clearly improve farm productivity and profitability.

The Special Conservation Scheme Loans for Primary Producers administered by the NSW Rural Assistance Authority are available to all dairy farmers. Details of this Scheme are available from the Authority's website.

RECOMMENDATION 8: To re-assess the conditions applying to farmers seeking financial assistance through the Irrigated Agriculture Water Use Efficiency Incentive Scheme, and in particular, with a view to increasing the net capital asset cap for farmers seeking assistance.

Enhancements to the Irrigated Agriculture Water Use Efficiency Incentive Scheme were implemented in December 2001 and February 2003. Access to this Scheme is not subject to an assets test.

RECOMMENDATION 9: Through the Department of Education and Training, to increase opportunities for training with programs for dairy farmers, ex-dairy farmers and others whose employment has been affected by dairy deregulation.

Negotiations with the NSW Department of Education and Training under the auspices of the Dairy FAMILY resulted in the development of the NEXT STEP Dairy training strategy, launched in early 2002. The program was made available to people employed in the dairy industry, or employed in activities directly dependent on it, at the time of deregulation. The program provided a range of free services including career advice, formal recognition of current skills, vocational training and job search help to assist workers either to remain in the industry or enter another industry.

RECOMMENDATION 10: The NSW Environment Protection Authority works closely with the NSW dairy industry and identifies measures by which NSW dairy farmers can obtain assistance.

The NSW Environment Protection Authority collaborated with NSW Agriculture and the Dairy Industry Development Company in a \$130,000 project to address odour, land and water pollution issues on dairy farms. The so-called Cleaner Production on Dairy Farms pilot commenced in September 2002.

RECOMMENDATION 11: The NSW Department of Urban Affairs and Planning to examine ways of minimising the impact of deregulation on dairy farm planning related matters.

NSW Agriculture is finalising the “Feeding and Housing Guidelines for Dairy Cattle”. The Guidelines are to accompany the Dairy Waste Management Guidelines with both as aids to local government in dealing with dairy farm planning issues. The Guidelines will also support the Department of Infrastructure Planning and Natural Resources State Environmental Planning Policy 30 for Intensive Agriculture.

RECOMMENDATION 12: NSW Agriculture develop a program of research to ensure the NSW dairy industry is capable of meeting its environmental commitments.

NSW Agriculture has undertaken a scoping study with a view to developing a major program of research into the environmental aspects of dairying, based at the Wollongbar Agricultural Institute and drawing on its expertise as a Centre of Excellence for the Environment and at Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute and Sydney University. The research planning process started in 2000 and projects have rolled out progressively since.

RECOMMENDATION 14: To support the initiative of the Australian Dairy Farmers Federation in seeking from the ACCC an authorisation to allow individual farmers to be permitted to group together for the purpose of negotiating the price for their milk and supply terms.

The initiative was supported and was successfully ruled upon by the ACCC in favour of dairy farmers. Details of the determination handed down by the ACCC are available from the Commission.

RECOMMENDATION 16: To support the Australian Dairy Farmers’ Federation initiative seeking a wider ranging Federal Government led study into; the imbalance of market power between farmers and the processing and retail sectors generally, and the implications to both farmers and regional Australia; and the current market distortions between the lower prices for milk used for domestic consumption in Australia and the higher world parity prices for milk destined for use in export products.

The previous Minister for Agriculture, the Honourable Richard Amery MP, wrote to the Chairman of the ACCC enclosing a copy of the Report of the Dairy Deregulation Impact and Assessment Committee. The then Minister highlighted reference to recommendation 16 requesting ongoing action. I have also written to the Commonwealth Government encouraging it to initiate an inquiry into milk prices in supermarkets.

- (c) The NSW Government responses to the recommendations of the Dairy Industry Deregulation Impact and Assessment Committee report have resulted in many tangible benefits to the industry. These benefits have included facilitating dairy farmers in NSW gaining access the Dairy

Structural Adjustment Payments, alleviation of family crisis situations through ready access to Dairy Family Coordinators, options for retraining, access to low interest finance, and improvements in on-farm management and water use efficiency.

34 MR GAY ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES, THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC—

QUESTION

Why have I not received a formal written response to my letter dated 8 April 2003 requesting briefings from NSW Agriculture and NSW Fisheries? (Hansard, p25)

ANSWER

A written response was provided to the letter of the 8th April 2003 and earlier this year I offered to brief Mr Gay on drought. I have also offered Mr Gay a general briefing on agricultural and fisheries issues.

35 MR GAY ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES, THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC—

QUESTION

What has been the total cost for Ministerial air travel for the portfolio of Agriculture for the 12 months ending 30 June 2003 minus the \$17,556 you have spent on air travel? (Hansard, p 26)

ANSWER

Costs incurred during official travel were in accordance with the appropriate guidelines.

Travel undertaken is always on government business and essential for the performance of official business on behalf of the Government of New South Wales.

36 MR GAY ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES, THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC—

QUESTIONS

- (a) In relation to the briefings you attended in Orange, following the release of the latest drought figures at Warragamba Dam, when were you first advised of these briefings?
- (b) Why was your request for aircraft charter on 9 April not submitted until 8 April, the day before the planned date of travel?
- (c) Is it possible you may have been able to secure the use of aircraft owned by the National Parks and Wildlife Service or State Forest for charters, had your request been submitted at an earlier date? (Hansard, p26)

ANSWERS

- (a)-(c) Travel undertaken is always on government business and essential for the performance of official business on behalf of the Government of New South Wales. Official guidelines are designed to ensure economy and uniformity in the use of charter aircraft. Premier's Memoranda on these guidelines can be found at the Premier's Department website at www.premiers.nsw.gov.au.

37 MR COHEN ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES, THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC—

QUESTION

Why has the Department of Agriculture withdrawn their funding support for aquatic weeds management on the river, putting the program at risk of being discontinued? (Hansard, p26)

ANSWER

Funding has not been withdrawn for aquatic weed management in the Hawkesbury River. Funding to Local Weed Control Authorities is provided on the advice of the Noxious Weeds Advisory Committee and I have not yet received from the Committee its final recommendations for funding allocations for the 2003-03 year. I have, however, approved interim funding to the Hawkesbury River County Council of \$33,000 for their weed control coordination program, which includes aquatic weeds.

38 MR COHEN ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES, THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC—

QUESTION

Please provide an explanation of the Department of Agriculture's position that landowners should be responsible for funding this weed management program, given that the Hawkesbury-Nepean is used by the whole of Sydney for recreation and various amenities? (Hansard, p26)

ANSWER

The Department of Agriculture does not determine who is responsible for the control of noxious weeds. This is specified in the Noxious Weeds Act 1993, which clearly indicates that responsibility for control of noxious aquatic weeds in rivers lies with the landholders adjacent to the River. The Act also specifies that the Local Weed Control Authority, in this case the Hawkesbury River County Council, is responsible for enforcing the Act.

39 MR COHEN ASKED THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES, THE HON IAN MACDONALD MLC—

QUESTION

Is there specific activity to encourage farmers to change from traditional farming practices, like stripping back the land, to more natural and sustainable practices, like minimum soil disturbance and cropping alongside native grasses? (Hansard, p26)

ANSWER

NSW Agriculture works closely with farmers to increase the adoption of more sustainable farming practices. Initiatives in this regard include:

- The extension of information to growers through the farmer group networks across the State with whom NSW Agriculture extension staff work;
- The commencement of Precision Agriculture research being undertaken at Trangie Agricultural Research Centre; and
- Long term research projects at Tamworth and Wagga Wagga investigating the improvements in soil organic matter levels and soil structural characteristics under direct drill and stubble retention systems.

In 1995 only 38 per cent of all the State's crop was planted using minimum or reduced tillages techniques. This had increased to 60 per cent in 2002 and is expected to further increase in the future.