

**BUDGET ESTIMATES 2009-2010  
GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No. 5**

**Friday 18 September 2009**

**Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio areas**

**WATER, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE  
UNCORRECTED PROOF**

**RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS TAKEN ON NOTICE**

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**TRANSCRIPT:**

***The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY:** What contracted price have you got from Capital Wind Farm at Bungendore?*

***Ms SCHOTT:** We have two prices. We have a price for the electricity that goes into the grid and we have a price for the renewable energy certificates [REC].*

***The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY:** Can you take that on notice and give us the cost of those prices?*

***Ms SCHOTT:** I can take it on notice. Black power is the black power price, and the REC price is set in line with rises in the consumer price index, which is an unusual feature of the contract and makes it favourable for us.*

***The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY:** So what you are saying is that you are getting a good price from Capital Wind Farm?*

***Ms SCHOTT:** Exactly.*

***The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY:** You estimated at 60¢ and now it is 65¢.*

***Ms SCHOTT:** Or thereabouts. I will take that on notice*

**RESPONSE:**

The contracted price with the supplier of renewable energy to power the desalination plant involves a price for electricity and a price for Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs). The contracted prices broadly reflect forward market prices at the time contracts were signed. The prices are linked to changes in the consumer price index each year.

During the first two years of operation of the plant, the costs of electricity and renewable energy will be around \$20 million a year each. Over time, the total cost will depend on the amount of water produced by the plant each year, as well as movements in the consumer price index.

Based on Sydney Water's pricing submission to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) in September 2007, if the desalination plant was operating at full capacity, the operating cost of desalinated water was estimated as 60 cents per kilolitre.

**TRANSCRIPT:**

**The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY:** *Given that the Metropolitan Water Plan calls for a water recycling target of 70 billion litres of water by 2015, and some 100 billion litres of water by 2020, why in the recent budget did you approve a cut of \$23 million to Sydney Water's recycling budget and a further cut of \$20.5 million to recycling projects in western Sydney?*

**Mr PHILLIP COSTA:** *I do not know where those numbers came from. I know that we are certainly on target to reach our target of the 70 billion litres of recycled water. In fact, the Premier and I announced one at Smithfield. We have been doing a lot of work. Work is happening in a range of locations. I can confidently say that we are certainly working very well to get to our 70 billion litres of recycled water by 2015. I think we are up to about 24 billion litres already since we began this program. The cut in the budget, I will have to take that on notice because my understanding is that we are still progressing quite well towards that. The budget paper allocated \$71.5 million for the 2009 program for the replacement of flows —*

**RESPONSE:**

The recent budget does not show a budget cut but rather a timing difference between years. Some funding for recycled water projects may have been incurred in a previous financial year if the project was running faster than expected. Similarly, if a project involves more complicated works, funding may be pushed out to future financial years.

**TRANSCRIPT:**

**CHAIR:** *Have there been any prosecutions? Will you take that question on notice?*

**Mr HARRISS:** *A successful prosecution has been undertaken in that time in terms of a water user deliberately interfering with a meter. We have a number of compliance activities currently under investigation that may ultimately lead to prosecution.*

**RESPONSE:**

I refer the Member to the answer to question on notice 22 from Mr Ian Cohen MLC on this matter.

**TRANSCRIPT:**

**CHAIR:** *Will the department include in this year's annual report a report on its performance towards achieving the State Plan Priority E4 target? Will the Minister provide information on key performance indicator results?*

**Mr PHILLIP COSTA:** *Could you read E4?*

**CHAIR:** No, I do not have E4 here.

**Mr PHILLIP COSTA:** Good. I have not memorised the entire State Plan, but I will work on it.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** You could make it up.

**Mr PHILLIP COSTA:** I could make it up—he would not know the difference, would he? It is bound to be an outstanding target. Could I take it on notice? We are more than happy to give you that information.

**CHAIR:** It was not a trick question; I thought you would have it.

**Mr PHILLIP COSTA:** I have not memorised the State Plan. However, I will get back to you on that.

## **RESPONSE:**

I am responsible for reporting against two of the targets in State Plan Priority E4. These are the riverine health and groundwater targets.

An update on the actions that have been carried out to allow reporting against these targets will be included in the 2008/09 Annual Report of the Department of Water and Energy.

Some of the information collected will also be made available in the next NSW State of the Environment Report.

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## **TRANSCRIPT:**

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** My question did not relate to the Dam Safety Committee. It related to work requested by the peer review group in respect of additional geological studies. My question was: Have those studies been conducted, or have they not? It is a kind of yes/no response that I am looking for here.

**Mr PHILLIP COSTA:** I will need to take that question on notice.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Perhaps Mr O'Hearne could tell us. Has additional geological work been done since February 2009 at the Tillegra dam site?

**Mr O'HEARN:** I too will have to take the question on notice. My understanding is that we had completed the geotechnical reports and had that peer reviewed by international experts, and that the advised site is an ideal dam site.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** But did they or did they not ask for additional investigation work of those two features, the shear at the dam site and the shear on the left abutment?

**Mr O'HEARN:** I will have to take the question on notice.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Why does the environmental assessment report not contain any geological information after February 2009, even though we have continual reports from local residents of ongoing geological investigations on that site?

**Mr O'HEARN:** The environmental assessment report is very comprehensive and provides quite detailed information on the geotechnical work that has been undertaken.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** But only up to February 2009, and nothing subsequent to February 2009.

**Mr O'HEARN:** I have just been handed a note that the work to which you referred has been completed.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** So there has been additional work since February 2009?

**Mr O'HEARN:** *The work in respect of the two shears that you talked about has been done.*

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** *So that testing has been done. So why was the report on that work not in the environmental assessment report, whereas the earlier reports were?*

**Mr O'HEARN:** *I will take the question on notice.*

## **RESPONSE:**

Geotechnical investigations for major structures are typically undertaken in a number of stages involving feasibility studies, concept investigations and design investigations.

The results of the concept stage investigations were released in March 2009 in the form of a report on Rim Stability and the Concept Design Report. Both of these reports have been reviewed and endorsed by the Independent Peer Review Panel and NSW Dams Safety committee.

The concept stage investigations are included in the Environmental Assessment Report and are more comprehensive than would typically be provided to inform the assessment process. NSW Department of Planning has determined that the investigations meet the Director General's requirements and has declared the Environmental Assessment Report as adequate for Public Exhibition.

The purpose of the Design Stage Geotechnical Investigations is to provide information for the designer to tailor the fine detail of the design to suit the site. It relates to the construction phase and was not a requirement of the Environmental Assessment Report process.

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## **TRANSCRIPT:**

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** *How much of the water included in the purchase of Toorale Station has been allocated? And to where? In particular, how much water remains attached to Toorale Station?*

**Mr PHILLIP COSTA:** *Is that in relation to current flows or generally?*

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** *To the entitlements.*

**Mr PHILLIP COSTA:** *We will have to get that specific detail to you.*

## **RESPONSE:**

Licence details for Toorale Station, and the water provided for downstream environmental benefits as a result of the February/March 2009 flow event, are contained in two reports available on the website of the former Department of Water and Energy, titled *Proposal to enable environmental water entitlements acquired in the Darling River at Toorale Station, to be diverted downstream of the Menindee Lakes.*

**TRANSCRIPT:**

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** *What proportion of Toorale entitlements was pumped out of the Darling?*

**Mr HARRISS:** *During that flow event?*

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** *No. They must have had an entitlement to take water out of the Darling River. What was that compared with their entitlements that flowed down the Warrego River?*

**Mr HARRISS:** *If I understand you correctly, it is very difficult to estimate what proportion of water can be diverted from Toorale compared to the Darling River because it will depend on the different event. For example, they have a number of licences, which have different commence-to-flow heights. If you get a small flow in the Darling, they will not be able to divert water. If you get a substantial flow in the Darling River, they will be able to divert more water. They have what are called A-class licences, which are very restrictive. I cannot recall off the top of my head the proportion.*

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** *What I am trying to get at is this: How much of Toorale entitlements were they able to pump out of the Darling River? How much did they collect from flows coming down the Warrego River? They must have had a different allocation from the Warrego to the Darling.*

**Mr HARRISS:** *They have a number of different licences, which entitles them to store water from the Warrego and to pump water at different flow levels from the Darling River. Whatever water is taken at Toorale Station depends on the circumstances, where the water is flowing through, and what level is in the Darling River. So it will vary.*

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** *Perhaps you could get that information for us with a list and all the detail of the licences, in particular where the water came from and whether it was the Warrego River water or the Darling River water.*

**Mr HARRISS:** *We can certainly take that on notice. We did produce a report, which is on the Department of Water and Energy's website.*

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** *I am sure you will provide that.*

**Mr HARRISS:** *We will provide that on notice.*

**RESPONSE:**

Licence details for Toorale Station, and the water provided for downstream environmental benefits as a result of the February/March 2009 flow event, are contained in two reports available on the website of the former Department of Water and Energy, titled *Proposal to enable environmental water entitlements acquired in the Darling River at Toorale Station, to be diverted downstream of the Menindee Lakes*.

**TRANSCRIPT:**

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** *Can you tell us how much water after being reallocated and after it has been separated from the land, as you explained before, will remain attached to Toorale for their needs there, once it is a park?*

**Mr PHILLIP COSTA:** *That is a matter for DECCW because they have a licence as to how they will allocate that water into the environment. They are obviously going to go through and look at that. As some of you may be aware, there are some ecosystems that have been created on Toorale, and they are looking at the impact of removing water from that.*

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** *From what is on there.*

**Mr PHILLIP COSTA:** *Therefore, if those studies show that, no, we cannot, that will change the impact on what they will make available. But that is a question that my colleague in DECCW will need to get to. We will attempt to get that data for you.*

#### **RESPONSE:**

The Toorale licences associated with the use of water for stock and domestic purposes will remain attached to Toorale. These licences are generally associated with structures or dams, which also provided irrigation water. The operation, and possible modification of, these structures from which stock and domestic water is extracted, is currently being considered by the Australian and NSW governments. Any proposed modification of structures will be subject to environmental review and consultation with neighbours and the public.

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#### **TRANSCRIPT:**

**The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY:** *In relation to your comments of 4 February 2009 that the Peel valley water sharing plan is a priority, what date did work on drafting this document begin? When do you expect it to conclude?*

**MR HARRISS:** *I am not sure of the date it commenced but we have established a regional committee—*

**The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY:** *You will take that on notice?*

**MR HARRISS:** *Yes, but I can assure you that we are aiming to have a draft plan by the end of this calendar year.*

#### **RESPONSE:**

Preliminary work on the Peel commenced at the time of developing the Namoi water sharing plan, and continued over the ensuing years. This included issues identification, data compilation and some early consultation. Work started in earnest on the Peel water sharing plan around February this year, when I identified it as a priority.

Since then, I have established a Peel Advisory Group and assigned the Office of Water's planners to the job. As a result, we've been able to deliver a draft water sharing plan, which is currently on public exhibition until 16 November 2009. I encourage all stakeholders to provide input on the plan.

**TRANSCRIPT:**

**The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY:** *How many consultants has the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water [DECCW] and its predecessors engaged since 8 September 2008? You might need to take that on notice.*

**Mr PHILLIP COSTA:** *I am advised that consultants are only engaged when the required professional expertise is not available internally or cannot be provided in a more cost-effective manner. Details of consultants expenditure over \$30,000 are reported in agency annual reports. Does that help with your question?*

**The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY:** *My question is seeking numbers and names. How many consultants have been engaged since 8 September 2009? What are the names of each of these consultants and/or the companies? How much was each consultant paid? What specialist projects were each of these consultants employed on? Which consultants did the Minister directly appoint and which were appointed by way of the public tender process? If directly appointed, what were the specific professional qualifications upon which the appointments were made?*

**Mr PHILLIP COSTA:** *My understanding is that that question was relating to the DECCW?*

**The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY:** *No, in relation to your portfolios.*

**Mr PHILLIP COSTA:** *Of water—*

**The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY:** *And regional development—you do not have regional development.*

**Mr PHILLIP COSTA:** *I do have regional development.*

**The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY:** *In your capacity as Minister responsible for the agencies under your control.*

**Mr PHILLIP COSTA:** *I will take that on notice.*

**RESPONSE:**

I am advised that consultants are only engaged when the required professional expertise is not available internally or cannot be provided in a more cost effective manner.

Details of consultancy expenditure over \$30,000 are reported in agency annual reports.

**TRANSCRIPT:**

**The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY:** *How much funding did the New South Wales Government provide to Orange City Council to bring the stormwater harvesting and recycling project online?*

**Mr PHILLIP COSTA:** *I am impressed with what the people have been able to achieve in Orange. I take my hat off to the council and the community, because it is a combined effort. The total cost was \$4.5 million. The number is in my head but I do not want to throw that number out unless I am sure, so I might get back to you with a specific figure for that. I will take the contribution that we have made in terms of our country town water scheme, but I will check the number.*

## RESPONSE:

The Government provided \$4.45 million to Orange City Council for a range of emergency drought works to secure the town water supply of Orange. Of this, \$2.46 million was allocated to the stormwater harvesting project.

As a result of the on-going drought Orange City Council is accessing some of the remaining funds to investigate other potential drought projects, to further enhance the drought security of Orange's town water supply.

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## TRANSCRIPT:

**CHAIR:** *Would you take this question on notice. You said that the figures for desalinated water produced, water recycled, storm water harvested and water saved through education, if that is possible, in the Sydney Basin would be interesting figures to have. Could you provide those figures.*

**Mr PHILLIP COSTA:** *I will provide those figures, yes. I have given you some fairly global numbers, it works out at 20 billion litres of recycled water. When the desalination plant comes on line it will be 250. Do you want percentages?*

**CHAIR:** *It would be good to have them but I do not expect them now.*

## RESPONSE:

The desalination plant will provide drinking water from the summer of 2009-10. It will run continuously for a two-year proofing period and will provide up to 90 billion litres per year, which is about 15 percent of Sydney's water needs. The plant has been designed so it can be quickly upgraded to provide up to 500 million litres per day if needed.

Consistent with the State Plan, the Metropolitan Water Plan includes a target of recycling 70 billion litres of water per year in greater Sydney by 2015. This is about 12 percent of Sydney's water needs. The current recycling volume is about 26 billion litres per year.

The volumes for recycled water include treatment and use of stormwater runoff. The Government has contributed financially and in other ways to over 90 stormwater projects in greater Sydney and the Central Coast, saving about 2 billion litres of water per year.

The Government has a comprehensive demand management program which, in total, is expected to reduce Sydney's water needs by about 145 billion litres per year by 2015, or 24% of Sydney's water needs. Current savings are around 86 billion litres a year. Education is a major component of this program but it is not possible to measure specific water savings from the education components. Their purpose is largely to encourage participation in the water efficiency programs.



Among the programs under the Water For Life banner, the Government also partners with councils and non-government organisations to deliver practical education projects and provides training and support for council education staff.

Sydney Water also operates a number of water efficiency initiatives as part of the Government's demand management program. These include WaterFix, Every Drop Counts Business Program, Do-It-Yourself Water Saving Kits, rainwater tank and washing machine rebates, and Every Drop Counts in Schools, the latter being undertaken in collaboration with the Department of Education.

Thanks to our education programs, around eight out of every ten residents are regularly taking action to save water – that's around 3.2 million people who are actively saving water in greater Sydney.

More details on these initiatives can be found in the 2008 Progress Report on the Metropolitan Water Plan and in the Sydney Water Corporation's Water Conservation and Recycling Implementation. These reports are available from [www.waterforlife.nsw.gov.au](http://www.waterforlife.nsw.gov.au) and [www.sydneywater.com.au](http://www.sydneywater.com.au)

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**TRANSCRIPT:**

**CHAIR:** *Is the department looking at riverine groundwater dependent ecosystems et cetera? Has the department also been able to find an agreed protocol at the national level for identifying and assessing groundwater dependent ecosystems?*

**Mr HARRISS:** *I will take that on notice. A lot of research work is being undertaken at the present time. A lot of that will roll up into the Murray-Darling Basin for the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, which is due for release in 2011.*

**RESPONSE:**

The NSW Office of Water addresses the protection of groundwater dependent ecosystems in all water sharing plans as they are prepared. They are protected by ensuring that groundwater diversions are within sustainable limits and the allocation of a portion of the total annual average recharge goes to the environment. For example, in the six major inland alluvial aquifers already subject to a plan, diversions are being reduced over the life of the plan to ensure they are sustainable.

Water sharing plans also have provisions to ensure that groundwater diversions within close proximity to identified high priority groundwater dependent ecosystems are managed. Additionally, in highly connected surface water and groundwater systems, a single Water Sharing Plan (WSP) will apply to the unregulated and alluvial groundwater sources. These connected coastal unregulated and alluvial plans ensure that groundwater diversions in proximity to unregulated water sources have the same operational conditions. The groundwater diversions may either have to cease diversions at the same time as surface water diversions or may have a set delay prior to commencement of ceasing diversions. These conditions ensure protection of riparian ecosystems and stream base flow.

The NSW Office of Water is also working with other agencies and catchment management authorities on a range of other GDE projects.

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**TRANSCRIPT:**

**CHAIR:** *I understand the Office of the Hawkesbury-Nepean has received \$77 million from the Federal Government for programs. What contribution has the New South Wales Government made to the office?*

**Mr PHILLIP COSTA:** *We opened the office at Penrith. The new agency is a one-stop shop about improving the operations or the cutting of red tape we are heading towards for this particular river system. It is \$77.4 million from the Federal Government for seven projects in New South Wales which will be overseen by the Office of the Hawkesbury-Nepean. The office has a number of priorities, including contributions to a comprehensive river health strategy, a nutrient management strategy, stormwater management and water sensitive urban design initiatives, sustainable agricultural strategies, including water efficiency and nutrient management, infrastructure projects and weir modifications, fish passage program and water sharing plan to provide a secure environment. A number of our agencies, for example, the Sydney Catchment Authority, are already putting significant funds into the fish passage program on the Nepean River. I will need to get the specific project funds from each of the agencies that are making contributions to the projects that are listed there.*

**RESPONSE:**

On 20 May 2009 the Federal Government announced details of a \$77.4 million funding package to help restore the health of the Hawkesbury-Nepean river system by making more water available for environmental flows and reducing nutrient inputs to the river system. Under the terms of the Funding Deed for the Hawkesbury-Nepean River Recovery Program (HNRRP), the NSW Government will also provide \$5.1 million in funding and in-kind contributions, and will implement the projects. Further funding and in-kind contributions will be provided by local landholders and the Hawkesbury City Council. The HNRRP is being oversighted and project managed by the Office of the Hawkesbury-Nepean in partnership with NSW agencies.

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**TRANSCRIPT:**

**CHAIR:** *And where the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Authority funded program overlaps with programs undertaken by the office, and the nature of the overlap?*

**Mr PHILLIP COSTA:** *I will do that, yes. The ten staff at the office are being resourced by New South Wales. The staffing and operations of the office is coming through New South Wales. A number of projects will be run parallel with the seven projects. I mention, for example, the Sydney Catchment Authority, which is already in the process of putting fish passages on the upper Nepean. I will ask Michael to elaborate on that because it is a good project and a lot of money is going into it.*

**Mr BULLEN:** Do you want specifically in relation to Hawkesbury-Nepean?

**Mr PHILLIP COSTA:** Yes.

#### **RESPONSE:**

The Office of the Hawkesbury-Nepean has been established to specifically focus on maintaining and improving the health of the Hawkesbury-Nepean river system and improving the management of development in the Hawkesbury-Nepean waters. The Office complements the work of the Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment Management Authority (CMA), so that while the Office will be focusing on river management and in-stream development, the CMA will focus on the full range of natural resource management issues in the catchment.

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#### **TRANSCRIPT:**

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Ms Schott, when you responded to Mr Colless's question about the cost of water coming from the desalination plant, you were referring to incremental costs, not an average cost?

**Ms SCHOTT:** Yes.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** What is the equivalent incremental cost for purchasing water from Sydney Catchment Authority once it has been treated—incremental, not average?

**Ms SCHOTT:** I would have to ask Michael Bullen what I am paying him.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** No, you cannot ask him because I understand you pay him—

**Ms SCHOTT:** I pay him a wholesale price.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** You pay a wholesale price, but you also pay a treatment price.

**Ms SCHOTT:** Yes, I do.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** So there can be an apples with apples figure for Mr Colless's question, which you declined to give—the 65 cents incremental from Sydney Water and an equivalent incremental cost—

**Ms SCHOTT:** Yes, the numbers that I was talking about with Mr Colless were just the operating costs. They did not include a capital component.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Yes, and the equivalent for the Sydney Catchment Authority would just be the incremental cost, the variable charge.

**Ms SCHOTT:** Yes. I will need to take it on notice, and I would need, as you rightly point out, to add the cost of treatment.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** So you will take that on notice and get back to us?

**Ms SCHOTT:** Yes.

#### **RESPONSE:**

The cost of desalinated water and dam water is discussed in response to a question on notice from Ms Pavey at page 4 of the hearing transcript.

#### **TRANSCRIPT:**

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** Mr Bullen, how much does Ms Schott pay you per kilolitre of water?

**Mr BULLEN:** I will have to take that on notice as well and get back to you.

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** So you are unaware of the incremental price—

**Mr BULLEN:** *I do not have that information with me, so I will have to take it on notice and get back to you.*

**Dr JOHN KAYE:** *You will get back to us with that?*

**Mr BULLEN:** *Yes, sure.*

#### **RESPONSE:**

The SCA's charge for water is determined by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal and is made up of a fixed component and a volumetric charge based on the actual volume of water purchased. Further details can be found in IPART's Determination on its "Review of prices for the Sydney Catchment Authority - From 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2012."

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#### **TRANSCRIPT:**

**CHAIR:** *Minister, there was a company in Ballina called Permadrive, which was a revolutionary automotive gearing trucking universal stored energy concept. My understanding is that that company went to the wall because of lack of support at a critical time. Are you aware of that company and that situation?*

**Mr PHILLIP COSTA:** *We are.*

**Mr CULLEN:** *Permadrive is a company that actually was in our Australian Technology Showcase. It was looking for significant capital—that is, over tens of millions of dollars. As I understand, it is still operating but had to wind back. Part of its issue was being able to pin big contracts in the United States. They were basically defence contracts and also with the postal services in the United States. What their status is right at this second, I could not tell you, but my understanding is that they are still operating but have had to basically come back a little in understanding what capital they can raise particularly over the next incremental step. Certainly from our program point of view, the company has been helped along the way, but it really reached the point where it needs to grow globally, and that is where it has had difficulty at the moment.*

**CHAIR:** *My understanding is that the plant near Ballina airport had to close down. I could be wrong. I will check it out. Perhaps you could investigate that and get back to me on that one?*

**Mr CULLEN:** *Sure. The thing is that they did not have a commercial scale plan. It was basically a small operation.*

#### **RESPONSE:**

Permo-Drive was originally located in Ballina and recently relocated its head office and engineering centre to the Lismore industrial airport area. The company continues to operate.