

GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE No 3  
BUDGET ESTIMATES 2009-10  
HEARING QUESTIONS ON NOTICE  
Questions relating to Primary Industries

QUESTION 1

**The Hon. DUNCAN GAY:** My first series of questions relates to fisheries. Are you aware that in 2001, when recreational fishing licences came in, there were 110 fisheries compliance officers. Since then funding has been enhanced courtesy of fishing licences, for which there was meant to be an increase in the number of fisheries officers. Is it correct that the current number of fisheries officers is down to 94 and that until recently that number was 84?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I would have to check the exact figures, and I am happy to do that. Obviously, the Recreational Fishing Trust funds are used for a range of purposes to benefit the fishing community. They include some compliance aspects but also quite a lot of positive capital works for the fishing community and funding for the operation of the Gaden Trout Hatchery. Important things come out of it. I need to seek further advice on the actual numbers. Unless we have that I will take it on notice.

**The Hon. DUNCAN GAY:** Could I direct that question also to Mr Davey or Dr Sheldrake, because I am sure they would know the numbers.

**Dr SHELDRAKE:** I have not actually got the number. Probably, to give the most accurate answer, it would be best if we took that on notice.

**The Hon. DUNCAN GAY:** Do you know if it is more than 110?

**Dr SHELDRAKE:** I will take it on notice.

**Mr DAVEY:** I do not think it is more than 110.

**The Hon. DUNCAN GAY:** If, as Mr Davey indicates, it is not more than 110 and, given that extra funding was provided courtesy of the recreational fishing licences, is that an unacceptable level?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I need to look at the commitments made at the time the fishing licence came in, particularly relating to compliance officers. I certainly have not had any complaints from the community about the number of compliance officers. I have had positive feedback on the work they have been doing and the results they have been getting in their compliance work.

**The Hon. DUNCAN GAY:** I can save you some of that work because I have done that research already. In fact, when the fishing licence was brought in one key expectation or commitment was that the recreational licence would provide for extra officers on the water. Given that you have this extra money from the fishermen of this State, why are there now lower numbers? Evidence given to the Legislative Council committee of which the Hon. Robert Brown, the Hon. Rick Colless and the Hon. Ian Cohen are members indicates that

recreational fishers have serious concerns about illegal activities in New South Wales waters with people not being caught?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** The feedback I get is that a lot of work is being done in compliance, particularly with bag limits and other aspects of fishing compliance, as well as education, in which a number of officers take a role. I need to check the actual numbers before being able to respond.

**The Hon. DUNCAN GAY:** You will come back to us with those numbers?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Yes.

## **ANSWER**

I am advised that the Honourable Duncan Gay's reference to a commitment to increase fisheries officer numbers after the introduction of the recreational fishing licence actually related to the re-introduction of the freshwater licence which took effect in 1998. I am advised that this commitment was honoured, moreover, and that 6 additional fisheries officer positions were recruited and located across the inland.

I am advised that there was no commitment to increase the number of fisheries officers at the time the freshwater licence was broadened into an all-waters licence in 2001. Other initiatives have been introduced, however, including the establishment of the Fishcare Volunteer Program which was established to improve voluntary compliance and to improve communications with recreational fishers. There are now over 300 fishcare volunteers in NSW, and the program has proven tremendously successful.

I am advised that in 2001 there were 101 fisheries officer positions.

The current fisheries officer establishment in Industry & Investment NSW (I&I NSW) is 92 positions, 18 of which are funded from the Recreation Fishing Trust Funds. Two of these positions are currently vacant, but recruitment action is underway.

In addition to these fisheries officer positions, there are now 10 Marine Parks Officers employed by the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water who undertake patrol activities within Marine Parks, and adjacent waters. Marine park officers enforce both the Marine Parks Act and the Fisheries Management Act, thereby complementing the work of I&I NSW fisheries officers. The number of marine park officers has increased significantly since 2001, reflecting the declaration of new marine parks.

I am advised that the apparent reduction in fisheries officer numbers since 2001 has been due (i) to an administrative restructure that saw marine parks officers relocated into the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water, and (ii) to declines in the availability of external funding for compliance, in particular in the abalone fishery and in Commonwealth-managed fisheries. Funding of compliance positions from consolidated revenue has not declined.

I should add that the last decade has also seen a raft of changes in the way compliance is undertaken - changes that have allowed compliance staff to more accurately identify the compliance risks in any one district or fishery, to

better plan how to operationally target that risk, and to more accurately measure the outcomes achieved.

Not only has core funding been maintained therefore, but improved planning and reporting, and a lot of hard work by dedicated compliance officers, have resulted in continual improvements in compliance performance.

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## QUESTION 2

**The Hon. DUNCAN GAY:** Are you aware of any fisherman who may have been fined as a result of these faulty maps?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** No, I am not aware of that. I would have to take it on notice and find out.

## ANSWER

I am advised that no person has been booked fishing in the area in question; however people have been fined for fishing in the adjacent sanctuary zone further north.

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## QUESTION 3

**The Hon. DUNCAN GAY:** Minister, are you aware of any other primary industry structural adjustment that has taken place without any, or with very little, government financial assistance?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** In primary industries, obviously I would need to seek advice on whether there has ever been anything, but structural adjustment does occur in industries—in many cases, with government assistance, that is true, particularly in the areas of forests and assistance for farmers who are exiting the industry as well. There are certain areas which do receive assistance. I would have to seek advice, though, on whether there are any other areas where structural adjustment has occurred and where it has not. Of course, the fishing industry has received assistance in past structural adjustments.

## ANSWER

With respect to the commercial fishing industry in NSW, the introduction of share management allows fishers to buy additional shares and access, or to sell their shares and leave the industry. This enables restructuring to occur in an ongoing way. A specific industry restructuring program is currently underway that provides an exit grant of up to \$15,000 for fishers wanting to leave the industry. The Government has allocated \$1.5m for this process from the commercial fishing trust fund. I am aware that there have been a number of other fisheries structural adjustment processes both within Australia and overseas in the past. These programs vary greatly in the amount of Government subsidy.

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#### QUESTION 4

**The Hon. DUNCAN GAY:** What is the current financial status of the commercial trust? Is it in surplus or deficit?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I will refer that to Mr Davey.

**Mr DAVEY:** I understand it is in surplus.

**The Hon. DUNCAN GAY:** What would be the figure that is currently in there?

**Mr DAVEY:** I would need to take that on notice, I think.

**The Hon. DUNCAN GAY:** The budget papers indicate \$1.5 million. Would that be close to your rationale?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** That is the information I am being given now—\$1.5 million.

**The Hon. DUNCAN GAY:** During the year, they received \$200,000 in interest. If there is \$1.5 million in the trust, how do you get \$200,000 in interest? Is there another sum of money somewhere that is not showing up to get to that? If you multiply 5 per cent by \$1.5 million—

**The Hon. RICK COLLESS:** Impressive investment!

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It seems to be doing quite well.

**The Hon. DUNCAN GAY:** It is a great investment. I would like one of them myself.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I will need to take that on notice and get you some information on the actual earnings and how it was invested.

#### ANSWER

The balance of the Commercial Fishing Trust Fund at 30 June 2009 and 2010 was approximately \$4.8M and \$5.5M respectively. The 2010 balance however, included commitments for approximately \$2M that have not yet been drawn down.

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#### QUESTION 5

**The Hon. ROBERT BROWN:** I will continue on the fisheries theme. In 2007 at a budget estimates committee your predecessor, in response to a question from me, provided some data and information on the number of fee payments or licences for recreational fisheries and the total number of licence holders for commercial fisheries. That information was provided for 2004-05, 2005-06 and 2006-07. You may have to take this on notice but can you provide me with the data for 2007-08 and 2008-09 on both the recreational and

commercial fishing licence holders or fee payments or however you would like to call it?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I am certainly happy to provide you with the details on notice. I can tell you that in 2009-10 we had 540,000 recreational fishing licences, raising more than \$13 million in fees. I can get the rest on notice for you.

**The Hon. ROBERT BROWN:** Can you advise, in the 2010-11 budget papers, what is the department's estimate for income or the number of recreational licences for this budget period?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I will take that on notice. I understand that it varies year to year, obviously, but it is about \$13 million. I will take on notice exactly what we have put in our budget.

#### **ANSWER**

For 2007/08 and 2008/09 there were respectively 1238 and 1266 licensed commercial fishers in NSW. In 2007/08 there were 488,000 recreational fishing licences sold, generating approximately \$10.8 million in revenue. In 2008/09 there were 528,000 recreational fishing licences sold, generating approximately \$13.4 million in revenue.

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#### **QUESTION 6**

**The Hon. ROBERT BROWN:** What is your formal role as Minister in approving or otherwise whatever recommendations are made? Do you consult? Do you veto? What is the relationship, if I can ask that question?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I need to seek some advice on the formal process of coming back to Cabinet. I can take that on notice and let you know.

**The Hon. ROBERT BROWN:** I want to know formally how you interact with Mr Sartor.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Certainly. I will take that on notice.

#### **ANSWER**

I jointly administer the *Marine Parks Act 1997* with the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment. I take an active role, and strive to balance the needs of conservation and sustainable use.

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#### **QUESTION 7**

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I acknowledge that even though shark attacks make a lot of headlines when they happen they are not frequent events on Australian

coasts—and the sharks are in their natural environment of course. The shark nets in the netting program are not designed to completely enclose a beach but are designed to upset sharks' migration habits and stop them from setting up territories on those beaches. That is their aim and the cost of meshing for sharks in the 2010-11 budget is \$900,000.

**CHAIR:** How does that compare with the last budget?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I will take that question on notice.

**ANSWER**

I am advised that Treasury provided \$831,000 for the Shark Meshing (Bather Protection) Program in 2009/10 and \$852,000 this year.

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**QUESTION 8**

**CHAIR:** How many full-time equivalent fisheries officers are currently employed by the department?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Mr Davey, do you have that, or do you want to take it on notice?

**CHAIR:** It was already asked.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Yes, a similar question was asked. We will take it on notice.

**CHAIR:** Could you tell me how many shares in share management fisheries have been forfeited under section 75 of the Fisheries Management Act in the last three years?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We will take that on notice.

**ANSWER**

The current fisheries officer establishment in Industry & Investment NSW (I&I NSW) is 92 positions, 18 of which are funded from the Recreational Fishing Trust Fund and 1 funded from the Commercial Fishing Trust Fund. Two of these positions are currently vacant, but recruitment action is underway.

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**QUESTION 9**

**CHAIR:** You might be aware that section 75 allows for the forfeiture of shares in a share management fishery where a shareholder commits a certain offence. Last year Minister Kelly made a commitment during the passage of the Fisheries Management Amendment Bill 2009 that amendments would be made that would allow the Minister to assign forfeited shares to Aboriginal fishers engaged in cultural and subsistence fishing. Has that commitment by

the Minister at the time come about? Do you have any intention to amend section 75 of the Fisheries Management Act or similar provisions in relation to the surrender of shares in share management fisheries to remove the requirement that the Minister sell forfeited shares at public tender?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I will seek advice on that and the commitment made by Minister Kelly. We have not yet had any in that category. Does that mean none forfeited at this stage?

**Mr DAVEY:** Yes.

**CHAIR:** So there is no forfeiture at all at this point in time?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** At this stage, yes.

**CHAIR:** Has the department previously considered any amendments to section 75 of the Act, and what was the nature of the proposed amendments?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I will take that on notice as well.

## **ANSWER**

The commitment given by the Hon. Tony Kelly at the time was to review and possibly amend section 75 of the *Fisheries Management Act* 1994 relating to the forfeiture of shares. Minister Kelly pointed out that in addition to the cancellation of forfeited shares option that was being introduced in the Bill being debated at the time, the Act may be further amended to give greater flexibility to dispose of shares. This could include an option to reserve and reallocate shares for Indigenous commercial fishers.

It was highlighted at the time that there was much more work to be done with stakeholders before any such arrangements could be included in legislation.

The new Aboriginal Fisheries Advisory Council (AFAC) will be established shortly and one of the key roles of this group will be to provide advice on the development of opportunities for Aboriginal communities to benefit economically from the fisheries resources of NSW, including participating in commercial share management fisheries. It is important that consultation on how a scheme of reallocation of forfeited shares could operate in line with other potential measures to provide commercial fishing opportunities for Aboriginal communities is undertaken with the AFAC along with other key stakeholders before any other legislation amendments are considered.

With respect to the specific question about share forfeiture, no forfeited shares have to date been allocated to Aboriginal fishers. There have been shares forfeited and sold by tender in the past and currently there are 14 shares in the Lobster Fishery that were forfeited in 2008 and are now held in repository. The future of these shares is yet to be decided but importantly it needs to be recognised that a minimum of 55 shares is required for any new entrant before commercial fishing in the fishery can be undertaken.

## QUESTION 10

**The Hon. DUNCAN GAY:** You will recall that your Government proposed to send agricultural research stations to the chopping block in your 2008 mini-budget before then reacting to fierce community and Opposition concerns and deciding to keep some open. Your Government also announced on 7 July 2009 that the Gaden trout hatchery would be saved and you would use the fishermen's money to buy it back from the Government. You also said that Gosford Institute at Narara would be relocated to Ourimbah within the University of Newcastle. Regarding Narara, can you confirm this and provide an update, and can you also confirm that the facilities at Berry, Condobolin, Glen Innes and Temora have remained, and will remain, in place and operate as they have in the past?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I can confirm, firstly, that the new facility at Ourimbah is well underway. I visited it a couple of weeks ago and spoke to the site supervisor there. There had obviously been a little bit of disruption due to welcome rain. That means that the completion date for that facility now looks like being February. That is going to be a very valuable facility. Gaden hatchery, as you correctly mentioned, is open and is functioning as a result of some good work by the community and some people in this room. So there is some very good work happening there. I might hand over the other more specific queries to Dr Sheldrake for comment.

**The Hon. DUNCAN GAY:** I am happy for them to be taken on notice, if you like.

**Dr SHELDRAKE:** I have the answers, but I can take it on notice if that is easier.

## ANSWER

The recreational fishing industry has agreed to take responsibility for the operating costs of the Gaden Hatchery and it will no longer be sold.

The site on which the Gosford Horticultural Institute is located is to be sold as a result of the staff and operations relocating to purpose built facilities at Ourimbah Campus of Newcastle University.

The Department will retain the Berry Office and sub divide and sell a portion of surplus land which is not required for the Department's operations.

The Government has agreed to retain Condobolin Research Station following an agreement with industry to work with the Department to attract additional research projects and support funding to the facility.

As a result of negotiations with the community and industry bodies it has been agreed that Glen Innes Research Station will be retained and a research director appointed to improve research funding opportunities and outcomes.

In response to community and council representation the Department is working with the Land and Property Management Authority (LPMA) and Temora Shire Council to facilitate the transfer of management of this facility to



a council sponsored trust which is planning to manage it as a community research facility.

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## QUESTION 11

**The Hon. DUNCAN GAY:** I am told it is category 1, which is the same category as equine influenza.

Has the department put the same sort of effort into myrtle rust as it did into EI?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I will ask Dr Sheldrake to make that comparison.

**Dr SHELDRAKE:** I think the reference to category 1 relates to the funding arrangement but I will take that on notice. The issue in aligning it with equine influenza or another disease is that the control strategy you put in place and the management practices around that strategy are important. In this case the department, the Commonwealth Government and the other jurisdictions have effectively signed off on a national way to deal with this outbreak, as we did with equine influenza.

## ANSWER

Equine Influenza is listed as a Category 4 disease under the Emergency Animal Disease Response Agreement (EADRA). The category reflects the proportion of funding paid by governments and industry. With Category 4 diseases, 20% of funding is paid by Governments and 80% by industry. Category 4 diseases are mainly production diseases and whilst there may be some international trade losses and local market disruptions these do not significantly affect the national economy.

It should be noted that the EADRA currently doesn't apply to EI and PIMC has given the horse industry until 1 December to agree to a funding arrangement to allow the EADRA to be signed.

Different categories should not affect the response plan. The most effective response arrangement as agreed nationally will be put in place regardless of category. Different categories affect the proportion of funds paid by government and industry.

In accordance with the nationally agreed response plan determined by the National Management Group, Industry & Investment NSW responded to the Myrtle rust incursion soon after the first detection on 23 April, 2010. The established practice upon detection of each infected premises is to:

- contain and destroy infected plants and the line of plants which included the infected plants;
- treat the property with a systemic fungicide effective against Myrtle rust;
- impose legal obligations on the property regarding treatments, plant and equipment movements and reporting.

On the basis of its efforts and results, Industry & Investment NSW advanced the view that aggressive containment with the goal of eradication was worth pursuing. The National Management Group recognised the effectiveness of the suppression and eradication works carried out by Industry & NSW and upon review of the effectiveness of the response and the conditions generally agreed to a nationally cost shared response plan prepared by Industry & Investment NSW.

Movement controls were placed on all infected premises. To minimise the risk of rust spread, a Quarantine Area was declared in the local government areas of Wyong and Gosford. Under the current movement requirements, Myrtaceae plants may not be moved off any premises within the Quarantine Area without approval of a Regulatory Inspector.

Nationally agreed scientifically based protocols to contain and eradicate Myrtle Rust have been developed and are being implemented on all infected properties.

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## QUESTION 12

**The Hon. DUNCAN GAY:** I have further questions relating to this matter but I will put them on notice. How seriously do you take the Hendra virus? Are you aware that two veterinarians have already died from that virus? What is the Government doing currently and what steps have been put in place to combat that virus? How much money has been spent on research into the virus? What research has been done in relation to bats as viral vectors?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I will take on notice that element of the member's question that relates to the amount of money that has been spent. Obviously I am aware of the deaths of two veterinarians, which is tragic. I am aware also that our department and our biosecurity people take this disease seriously. We have been looking at strategies, in particular, in northern New South Wales. Primarily, it is a disease in tropical areas and a lot of work is taking place in Queensland. We do exclusions in New South Wales and we have in place personal protection clothing and protocols. We might have some more detail in relation to that issue.

**The Hon. DUNCAN GAY:** Are you looking also at horse vaccinations?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** For Hendra?

**The Hon. DUNCAN GAY:** Yes.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I will ask Dr Sheldrake to answer that question. We might have to take that question on notice.

**Dr SHELDRAKE:** I will take that question on notice.

## **ANSWER**

Industry & Investment NSW is very concerned about Hendra virus infection. Currently 4 people (all from Queensland) have died from this disease, two of which have been veterinarians.

I&I NSW has invested funds in establishing the latest testing capability at Elizabeth Macarthur Institute (EMAI). The Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) is now available at EMAI and this has allowed for suspect cases to be rapidly tested. I&I NSW has also had a major program in alerting veterinarians and all personnel involved in the horse industry into the risks associated with Hendra and ways of reducing the risks of horses acquiring Hendra. This has included the correct use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

I&I NSW and Livestock Health and Pest Authorities have also undertaken over 100 investigations into suspect cases of Hendra virus infection in NSW. Fortunately all have been negative to date.

Research is occurring into the development of a vaccine against Hendra to be used in horses. I&I NSW is not involved in this work.

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## **QUESTION 13**

**The Hon. ROBERT BROWN:** While we are talking about fish, when the recreational fishing havens were put in place some biodiversity baseline studies were carried out in 2002 on Tuross Lake and Lake Macquarie. In 2005—that is, three years later—the department conducted some research and those research papers are available. Does the department have any plans to repeat that data collection and research in those two areas, as those are the two areas on which you concentrated before?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I will refer your question to Dr Sheldrake. I am not aware of any.

**The Hon. ROBERT BROWN:** You could take that question on notice.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We will take that question on notice.

## **ANSWER**

Yes, the Department will be repeating the surveys of recreational fishers catches between March and May 2011 in each of Lake Macquarie and Tuross Lake. A survey will also be done in St Georges Basin, also a Recreational Fishing Haven, at the same time for comparison purposes. Funding is likely to come from a combination of recreational fishing trust funds and other Government funding.

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#### QUESTION 14

**The Hon. ROBERT BROWN:** Apart from the money from recreational fishing trusts that is used for research projects—some of which are run by or within the department, and some of which are managed by the department or by using departmental scientists—what is the department's research budget for all research?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I have a breakdown somewhere.

**The Hon. ROBERT BROWN:** Again, if you want to take that question on notice, that is fine.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We will take that question on notice. Obviously we have a number of fishery research facilities. Port Stephens and Cronulla are doing research and I know that some impressive and world leading research has been done on southern bluefin tuna at the Port Stephens facility. We will take that question on notice.

#### ANSWER

The NSW Government, through Industry and Investment NSW, projects \$146.5 million expenditure (recurrent and capital) in science and research for the 2010/11 financial year.

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#### QUESTION 15

**The Hon. ROBERT BROWN:** During the current public inquiry into recreational fishing some of the witnesses presented a table that purported to show a comparison between the commercial fishing take and the recreational fishing take. It turns out that the table that was presented was a cobbled together table taken from parts of a major fishery's research effort into the recreational fishing take. However, the one thing that is evident is that the range of estimates on the recreational fishing side were huge, which indicates that the research was based on a small sampling with maybe huge extrapolations. Does the department have an allocation in its current budget, or does it have any plans to do any overall State saltwater estimates or data gathering on the recreational fishing take? Would that be done within the general fisheries research budget, or would you be expecting the trusts to fund that sort of research?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I can understand the need for more information on take and also on the economic benefits of recreational fishing. As the member representing the Snowy Mountains, I talk a lot about that issue.

We are expecting a study on certain aspects of that to commence either this year or in 2011. I will take your question on notice and supply you with more details on that and also on the source of the funding. I believe it to be jointly funded by us and the trusts.

## **ANSWER**

Yes, I&I NSW is currently in the process of designing another State wide survey of recreational fishing catches to update our estimates of recreational fishing take. Researchers are currently working with consultants and experts from other states to develop the most appropriate and cost-effective survey methods. A workshop will be held in November 2010 with experts from around the country to finalise the methodologies for the survey. It is envisaged that the actual surveys will begin late in 2011 and will involve a mix of fisher diaries and on-site validations.

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## **QUESTION 16**

**The Hon. ROBERT BROWN:** Another issue that raised its head in the recreational fishing public hearings was the structure of the bodies that look after recreational fishing. I seem to recall that in the previous budget year, and it might even have been the budget year before that, the Minister for Fisheries allocated about \$130,000 to recreational fishing trusts—my memory might be wrong so I will take the Minister's advice on this matter—to appoint consultants to put together a business plan, or to look at how the recreational fishing trusts and the advisory body were functioning. Is that the case? Was that money put aside and, if so, has that progressed at all?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I will take that question on notice.

## **ANSWER**

Work has been done to develop a business plan for the Gaden Trout Hatchery. Once completed, this business plan concept will be broadened to recreational fishing issues generally. This will include the potential for appropriate governance arrangements. As with all projects funded through the Recreational Fishing Trust, a report will be provided to the expenditure committees and the Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing once the project is finalised.

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## **QUESTION 17**

**CHAIR:** What is the 2010-2011 budget allocation for the National Centre for Rural Greenhouse Gas Research?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I will take that question on notice.

## **ANSWER**

I&I NSW is contributing \$125,000 in salaries and \$243,000 in equipment to the National Centre for Rural Greenhouse Gas Research (NCRGGR) this financial year.

In addition, the Department is contributing to NCRGGR projects worth \$7.2 million over three years to December 2011.

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### QUESTION 18

**CHAIR:** Mr Newcombe, could you also let the Committee know the current historical funding level for the PROfarm training program?

**Mr NEWCOMBE:** I will take that specific question on notice, if you do not mind. We certainly have noticed a decline in the level of activity in the PROfarm courses in the past financial year. We have attributed that mainly to the economic climate and the prolonged drought. We have been looking at other ways to increase the uptake of that activity, particularly, as the Minister said, in looking at ways to deliver some of that training via e-learning.

### ANSWER

PROfarm does not have a specific funding allocation. The cost of attending training activities can be met in a number of ways:

- 1) Participants meet the full cost of training;
- 2) Many of the courses are subsidised to reflect the public benefits provided by the adoption of more sustainable farming practices with participants meeting the subsidised cost;
- 3) Funding is obtained from external sources to meet either the full or subsidised cost of training; or
- 4) Some training activities are of a less formal nature and as such I&I NSW do not charge participants to attend these events.

I&I NSW offers a variety of educational courses, facilities and activities for people working in the State's primary industries, and PROfarm forms an important part of our commitment to their lifelong training and education.

Courses are delivered locally by highly skilled and respected I&I NSW staff. In the 2009/10 financial year I&I NSW conducted 341 PROfarm courses and events involving 4,309 participants.

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### QUESTION 19

**CHAIR:** What percentage of New South Wales agricultural land is managed using minimum or reduced tillage techniques? What percentage of farmers use minimum tillage techniques?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I am not sure that we will be able to give you a specific figure, but certainly our field officers will have an idea. We will take that on notice and get you as much information as we can. It varies depending on the region and types of information.

## **ANSWER**

I&I NSW estimates that 80% of the crop in 2009/2010 was sown using reduced (minimum) tillage.

There are a number of well established long term trials and demonstration sites promoting the benefits of minimum till as a component of conservation farming. Minimum till farming practices and best management practices principles, water use efficiency and soil sustainability are continuously promoted to producers. I&I NSW provides a range of infrastructure and staff resources to assist in developing minimum tillage techniques.

I&I NSW will also continue to provide field based applied research and extension of key findings from demonstration sites at various locations across the State.

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## **QUESTION 20**

**CHAIR:** How many of them are agronomy and livestock officers?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I will take that on notice and get a breakdown for you. That figure includes both.

## **ANSWER**

I&I NSW has a broad network of 58 agronomists and 45 livestock officers who are located in over 35 regional locations in NSW.

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## **QUESTION 21**

**CHAIR:** For the past three financial years how many direct budget allocations or how much in-kind support was given for research or development of organic agricultural systems?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** A significant amount of work is being done in organics. I will ask Dr Sheldrake to answer so that he does not have to just write it out for me to read.

**Dr SHELDRAKE:** I will take on notice the issue of the dollars we commit on an annual basis. Our Bathurst research station primarily focuses on organic agriculture. That is looking at organic viticulture and organic crop production.

## **ANSWER**

I&I NSW invests at least \$500,000 a year in organics research and development. In addition, much of the research conducted by the Department

is relevant to both organic and conventional agriculture – for example, research into integrated pest management which promotes beneficial insects to reduce reliance on chemicals.

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## **QUESTION 22**

**CHAIR:** Given that Alstonville is a tropical fruit research station, does that look at the organic side of things?

**Dr SHELDRAKE:** I will take on notice the details of the specific projects that might be going on at Alstonville. If there are projects around organic forms of farming at Alstonville we will provide that in our response.

## **ANSWER**

Research at Alstonville covers a wide range of work on sub-tropical species including research which is relevant to organic farming as such:

- the role of parasitic wasps to control nut borers as part of the Integrated Pest Management of macadamias. Some wasps are being trialled with local farmers.
- the role of parasitic wasps to control fruit spotting bug, another pest of macadamias.

In addition one block (about 0.5 ha) has been planted down to macadamias on the Alstonville site specifically for the purpose of organics research. The block is still young and has not started fruiting yet.

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## **QUESTION 23**

**CHAIR:** What is total budget allocation of Industry and Investment NSW for biosecurity expressed as a per hectare spend in New South Wales?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Expressed as a per hectare spend I would need to take on notice.

**CHAIR:** Can you give any indication of the budget allocation in general terms? How does it compare with Victoria and Queensland, either per hectare or whatever measure you want to use to do that assessment?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I will ask Dr Sheldrake to answer what he can of it and we will take the rest of it on notice. Do you want a figure on biosecurity overall?

## **ANSWER**

Total expenditure for the Biosecurity Branch within the Primary Industries Division of the Industry & Investment NSW was approximately \$46.5 million in



2009-10. However, this does not include expenditure on research, industry development and compliance activities which indirectly deliver benefits to biosecurity. For example, the NSW Government has invested \$56.678 million in laboratory infrastructure at the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute that will provide leading edge biosecurity facilities for NSW as well as upgraded research capability.

The Livestock Health and Pest Authorities (LHPA) are an efficient and effective structure for delivering a range of livestock health related services to landholders, including biosecurity preparedness and response. The LHPA structure is unique to NSW and has its own funding structure.

Comparisons with other states are difficult because of significant differences in how biosecurity related strategies are delivered and the variable degree to which biosecurity expenditure is differentiated from other areas of expenditure on agricultural productivity and protection of natural resources.

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## QUESTION 24

**CHAIR:** I was thinking more of conservation grants. I will take your information, but I was thinking more of where it supports the natural environment in conservation grants.

**Dr SHELDRAKE:** There is a series of eligible activities that farmers can apply in terms of conservation. I cannot give you a breakdown now, but we will certainly take that on notice.

**CHAIR:** Perhaps you could take that on notice and include the total number of applicants, what is eligible or not, and how many there were for the Special Conservation Scheme.

## ANSWER

1. The Special Conservation Scheme provides loans to primary producers for works which improve the sustainability of the farming property.

Key information:

- a) Loans to eligible applicants of up to 90 per cent of the cost of capital works;
  - b) Maximum loan is \$150,000; and
  - c) The interest rate on loan approvals under the scheme has recently been revised to 4.5 per cent.
2. Statistical data for 2009-10 financial year:-

<b>Eligible Activity</b>	<b>Number Applications Received</b>	<b>Dollars Approved</b>
Soil Conservation	7	29 700
Control Noxious Weeds	2	91 500

Stock & Domestic Water	101	3 719 056
Upgrading/improving existing Irrigation systems	54	4 671 800
Hail Netting	4	203 500
Livestock Effluent Control	2	150 000
De-Silting and refurbishment of ground tanks	6	278 400
Planting of perennial pasture species	5	113 700
Permanent hay, grain and silage storage facilities	33	983 700
<b>Total</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>\$10 241 356</b>

3. Examples of other eligible activities under this Scheme include:-
- a) Capping and piping of Artesian bores
  - b) Woody Weed control
  - c) Serrated Tussock control
  - d) Exclusion netting to prevent flying fox damage to existing orchards with a demonstrated flying fox problem.
4. Examples of what is not covered by this Scheme:-
- a) Farm machinery and all vehicles
  - b) Portable Silos, Field Bins or Grain Augers
  - c) Stock yards , fences
  - d) Buildings e.g. woolsheds, machinery sheds etc
  - e) Use of own machinery or own labour
  - f) Any work which is considered to be purely productivity based.



**Steve Whan MP**  
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Minister for Emergency Services  
Minister for Rural Affairs