



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

BILLS

Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2012-2013

Consideration in Detail

SPEECH

Wednesday, 30 May 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Burke, Tony, MP

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Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities) (12:31): I am pleased to present the 2012-13 agriculture, fisheries and forestry appropriation to the chamber. Our \$36 billion agricultural export industry is dependent upon our reputation as a reliable supplier of high-quality foods and fibres to the global market. The Gillard government is committed to upholding that reputation and safeguarding our agricultural sector. To that end, the budget includes \$524.2 million to boost Australia's biosecurity system. That investment will deliver a state-of-the art quarantine facility, maintain the core risk response capability and repair our information and communications systems. The government will also introduce a new biosecurity act to replace the century-old legislation that we currently have.

In last year's budget we set aside funds to purchase land for a new post-entry quarantine facility. This new budget delivers \$379.9 million to build it. This state-of-the art post-entry quarantine facility, to be built in Melbourne, will mean that we have the newest and most advanced technology available to manage the import of high-risk plant and animal material. Our frontline defences play a pivotal role in protecting Australia from pests and disease. That is why \$124.5 million has been provided over four years for core biosecurity capacity, including screening of passengers and international mail. The Gillard government is also prioritising the reform of century-old legislation to modernise the Biosecurity Act and ensure a seamless transition of goods and services across Australia's borders.

Supporting all of these activities is a \$19.8 million investment over three years in biosecurity ICT infrastructure and systems. A separate \$95.9 million over seven years provided from the Caring for our Country program will fund eradication programs for nationally significant pests and diseases.

All up, the funding announced in the 2012-13 budget will see more than \$1.6 billion invested in biosecurity by the government since the Beale review. Our defence against pests and diseases is vital in protecting our agricultural sector and our environment. Protecting our natural resources also requires a broader effort. Australian farmers have been undertaking activities to manage and protect our natural resources for many years. It is vital that these efforts continue. As part of the budget, the Gillard government has committed \$2.2 billion to continue to fund its flagship Caring for our Country program post 2013. This funding provides over half a billion dollars over five years plus over \$200 million for Landcare for sustainable agriculture innovation, eradication and management of weeds and pests, as well as better practices that will protect our natural resources for food production. In addition to ensuring that Caring for our Country funding continues, this government has also recognised the complementary yet separate roles of farmers and those environmentalists who are not farmers—because many farmers are environmentalists, it is important to note—

Mr McCormack: Most!

Mr BURKE: I am not disagreeing with that for a minute. I have always disagreed very publicly with the argument that farmers are somehow environmental vandals. It is wrong and it deserves to be an argument that is knocked down at every opportunity.

From July 2013 these roles will be better reflected with Caring for our Country to be delivered through two specific streams: one dedicated to sustainable environment and the other to sustainable agriculture. This change provides a stream dedicated to agriculture, which allows for a more specific focus on the role our farmers play in keeping our land productive and the projects that are needed to support their efforts. It is a win for farmers and for farming communities. Look, here are a few extra pages which I have been given, all of which provide important issues, but given the time I think I might allow us to go directly to questions because I am sure some of the issues about drought support and research and development will come up during that opportunity.