

Estimates A – July 2, 2008

Species loss – Fire management - Broomrape

Mr GRIFFITHS: I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 3, page 11.9: No Species Loss. Can the minister advise whether any species were lost in 2007-08 and whether any joined the endangered, vulnerable and rare species list in that period?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: The South Australian government is committed to a target of 'lose no species' or 'lose no native species' as a result of human impact. The measure of the target is no decline and, where possible, an improvement in the regional status of known native species or relevant ecological communities. South Australia's plants and animals, and the ecosystems they form, have been in decline. At least 26 plants, 27 mammals, eight birds and one reptile species are presumed to have become extinct in South Australia since European settlement. However, no species is known to have become extinct in South Australia in the past decade or more.

The revised threatened species schedule, pursuant to the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972, listed endangered, vulnerable and rare plant and animal species in South Australia were gazetted on 21 February. The revised schedule recognises 96 more threatened species, with a total number of 1,137 listed, compared with 1,041 in 2002. I am advised that this increase tends more to reflect the improvements in information and data collection, rather than a change in the status of these species.

Mr GRIFFITHS: As an extension to my question, I note that in the performance commentary a strategy is in place for 2007 to 2017. I also note that no species have been lost in the past 10 years. I have not reviewed the strategy, but is any species identified as being particularly at risk over the period to 2017?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: The short answer to the question is no. We use the schedules and the revision of the schedules to help us identify and prioritise those species that might require projects and management plans. Outcomes in 2007-08 include the release of the 'No species loss: a nature conservation strategy for South Australia, 2007-17' and the integration of the strategy into the Department for Environment and Heritage nature conservation program; commencement of regional status assessments for flora and fauna, as identified by targets 6 and 7; development of the draft South Australian arid lands biodiversity strategy, 2008-18, released for public comment; and the ongoing implementation of threatened species recovery plans, which include the Glossy Black-Cockatoo, the Mallee fowl and a range of Lofty orchids.

Out of the 485 endangered and vulnerable listed threatened species in South Australia currently, I am advised that recovery and action plans are being implemented for 202 (43 per cent) of those identified.

Mr PEDERICK: As a supplementary question, are any species under threat with the planned expansion of reservoirs in the Mount Lofty Ranges?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: No planning proposals have been currently received for the expansion of any reservoirs. I take it that the member refers to the Mount Lofty Ranges. The member would know that, as part of that planning process, thorough environmental analysis is completed, which includes identifying any vulnerable species that could be affected by any proposed planning changes. As I said, there is no plan, so those assessment processes obviously have not commenced. The proper environmental assessment will occur according to due process.

Mr PEDERICK: I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 3, page 11.13: Public Land Fire Management. On page 11.13 the performance commentary states that once the 10 fire management plans have been adopted they will cover one-third of DEH's protected area system. Given that in this financial year expenses increased by over 20 per cent—for example, the 2007-08 budget had \$7.711 million compared to actual of \$9.387 million—does that not indicate that this program is underfunded and that a great deal more funding is required to complete the other two-thirds?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: The one-third which was targeted and to which the member referred has been identified as a priority by the department for the protection of both life and property. I have been advised that there is adequate funding for the planning process. In relation to the variations, I have been advised that they relate to a number of one-off events, such as the KI fire and also \$826,000 for additional summer firefighting crew, to mention just a few.

Mr PEDERICK: My question refers to Budget Paper 4, Volume 3, page 11.13. Which are the five fire management plans nearing completion?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: I have been advised that we do not have that level of detail with us today, so I am happy to take that on notice and bring back a response.

Mr PEDERICK: I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 3, page 11.9: Performance commentary. This relates to species lost and the targets. Given that in the 2007-08 budget the Mount Bold expansion was a centrepiece of the government's policy—although that seems to have shifted to options in the Mount Lofty Ranges—am I right to believe that no environmental work has commenced; or has it been identified that either the expansion of Mount Bold or the Mount Lofty Ranges option threatens endangered species, and therefore takes away one of the main centrepieces of the government's so-called water performance strategy?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: I have substantially answered this question in one of my previous responses, but I can add to the answer by saying that I have been advised that some preliminary work has been commenced by DEH, but given that there are no firm proposals for a development, no detailed environmental work has commenced.

Mr PEDERICK: I refer to the same budget line. Considering the situation that this state is in—that is, it is desperate for water supply options—what are the time lines for any proposed environmental studies? Considering the crisis this state is in, I would have thought that this would have been a centrepiece of the planning for reservoirs in the Mount Lofty Ranges.

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: This really goes to matters outside my portfolio responsibilities, and I am happy to refer the question to the appropriate minister, the Minister for Water Security and the River Murray.

Mr PEDERICK: I refer to Budget Paper 3, page 2.31: Saving initiatives. Are cuts to the branched broomrape eradication program included in the forward savings target figures indicated?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: Yes.

Mr PEDERICK: If so, what amount will be spent on the branched broomrape program in the 2008-09 budget year?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: The program's budget for 2008-09 will comprise \$2.34 million national funding, inclusive of SA's component of \$0.199 million, plus the SA government's additional contribution of \$1.94 million.

Mr PEDERICK: Is there any threat to our agricultural and horticultural industries due to cuts in the branched broomrape eradication program funding?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: The short answer is no, however, I will add a few comments. An independent national review of the program commissioned by the Australian Weeds Committee was completed in February 2008. The review recommends that eradication be maintained as the objective and that funding be provided to extend the program beyond July 2009 for the next triennium to June 2012. A new mathematical model that predicts the progress of branched broomrape infested paddocks towards eradication provides a more precise tool for identifying strategic priorities. That includes an increased focus on ensuring branched broomrape is treated in every infested paddock every year.

Modifications were approved to the code for the control of branched broomrape to recognise the status of infested paddocks that had been free of branched broomrape for seven years as provisional paddocks. The code simplifies some operational requirements for

farmers who have this provisional status. The first five paddocks will be released from quarantine in the year 2012, so some 14 per cent—that is, 1,032 hectares of 7,370 hectares—of infested paddocks have already attained provisional status and been free of the weed for seven years or more. Survey teams completed the market assurance and discovery surveys of over 320,000 hectares. An additional 322 hectares of infestation were identified, bringing the cumulative total infestation to 7,370 hectares. Only one infestation was found outside the 2007 quarantine area.

The 70 square metre area of additional infestation was on the edge of the 2007 quarantine area and this led to the extension of the quarantine area by 194 hectares—that is, the area of the paddock where the additional infestation was located. Although it was planned to fumigate 380 hectares in the period up to the early winter of 2008, only 152 hectares were fumigated because of the very late seasonal rainfall.

The fumigation process requires moisture in the soil and it must be completed before seeding. Agronomists have promoted the benefit of pasture management systems that control branched broomrape and this will be supported by an increased compliance effort in 2008-09 and help to manage the risk area for branched broomrape multiplication.

A new service developed by researchers is also being provided to farmers, enabling them to predict the best time for spraying to kill the host plants for branched broomrape. This program links the SA Strategic Plan targets concerning economic growth by maintaining market access and reducing loss of productivity through spread of the weed. It also addresses the state NRM Plan target 4.1, relating to the integrated management of animal and plant threats to minimise risk to natural systems, communities and industry.

The savings target of \$750,000 for 2007-08 was met by reducing the area of methyl bromide fumigation. Alternative fumigants are available at significantly reduced costs, while retaining their effectiveness in controlling branched broomrape.