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into Hansard
L. Hiscutt 8 Nov 2022

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Hansard.
Ahead.

QUESTION WITHOUT NOTICE

Legislative Council

ASKED BY: Sarah Lovell MLC, Member for Rumney

ANSWERED BY: Hon Leonie Hiscutt, Leader of the
Government in the Legislative Council

QUESTION:

In relation to voluntary conservation covenants:

1. For landholders who were on the register of Expressions of Interest for conservation covenants and who subsequently established a voluntary conservation covenant on title, what is the average number of days they were on the register?
2. For landholders who currently remain on the register of EOI for conservation covenants, what is the average number of days they have been on the register?
3. What steps is the Government taking to reduce the average number of days landholders spend on the register before being able to establish a covenant?
4. Noting that only two voluntary conservation covenants have been established on title through the Department's EOI process since 2018 and that 41 landholders remain on the register of EOI for conservation covenants, what are the reasons for this low rate of established covenants and what steps is the Government taking to improve the effectiveness and rate of attainment of the Department's EOI process for voluntary conservation covenants?
5. How many staff (by FTE and headcount) are currently allocated to managing the EOI process for establishment of voluntary conservation covenants? Are there any plans to increase this staffing allocation, and if so, by when and by how much?

ANSWER:

1. In 2013, the Australian Government ceased funding for covenanting programs. Since then, there have been no new Australian Government funding for covenants. Importantly however, voluntary conservation covenants continue to be progressed, with priority given to areas of land with significant natural values such as threatened species.

For landholders who were on the register of Expressions of Interest (EOI) for voluntary conservation covenants and who subsequently established a

conservation covenant on title, the average number of days they were on the register was 1180 days (N=2).

2. For landholders who currently remain on the register of EOI for conservation covenants, the average number of days they have been on the register is 1359 days (N=44)
3. In the short-term, the Program is amending the EOI process and associated communications to better manage stakeholder expectations. In the longer term, the Program is being reviewed with recommendations informing future delivery of the Program.
4. The Private Land Conservation Program, like all effective long-running Programs, is reviewed and revised on a regular basis to identify potential efficiencies and ensure the Program is delivering maximised outcomes for Tasmania.

The process for establishing conservation covenants on title requires considerable resourcing, as does their administration in perpetuity. The Program has continued to grow the number and extent of conservation covenants, currently comprising 929 conservation covenant agreements (as at 4 Oct 2022). However, the majority of the Program focusses on managing the existing private reserve estate and providing a range of essential services to covenant landowners.

The EOI register represents one of several avenues for identifying and progressing new conservation covenants. Whilst only two conservation covenants have been registered through the EOI process since 2018, an additional 24 voluntary conservation covenants have been registered by the Department since 2018 through other avenues (i.e. via the Tasmanian Land Conservancy and NRM programs).

In addition, this figure does not include conservation covenants that have been established as offsets to meet regulatory requirements and contribute to sustainable development.

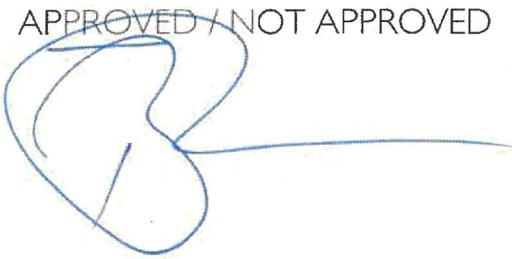
5. Managing the EOI register requires minimal resourcing as it primarily involves fielding enquiries from prospective covenant applicants, recommending alternative options for proposals that do not meet minimum thresholds, and maintaining a record of enquiries and associated properties that are proposed for covenanting.

An additional 0.5 FTE (approximately) is currently allocated to managing the new covenant process. This includes liaising with covenant applicants and covenant brokers, reviewing and assessing applications, preparation of maps and documents, and liaison with key stakeholders.

The remaining ~4.5 FTE (across 6 staff) of the Program are largely focussed on administering and maintaining the current reserve estate, as outlined above.

There are no current plans to increase resources within the Program to manage new covenanting processes.

APPROVED / NOT APPROVED

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal tail extending to the right.

Hon Roger Jaensch MP
Minister for Environment and Climate Change

Date: 7 November 2022