Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

Report on Budget Estimates 2002-2003

June 2002

© Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia 2002

ISSN 1323-3750

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee Secretariat

Mr Elton Humphery
Secretary

The Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Phone: 02 6277 3515
Fax: 02 6277 5829
E-mail: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au
Internet: http://www.aph.gov.au/senate_ca

MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

Senator Sue Knowles, Chairman	LP, Western Australia
Senator Lyn Allison, Deputy Chair	AD, Victoria
Senator Mark Bishop	ALP, Western Australia
Senator Kay Denman	ALP, Tasmania
Senator the Hon John Herron	LP, Queensland
Senator Tsebin Tchen	LP, Victoria

REPORT ON BUDGET ESTIMATES 2002-2003

Introduction

1.1 On 14 May 2002 the Senate referred the following documents to the Committee for examination and report in relation to the portfolios of Family and Community Services and Health and Ageing:

- particulars of proposed expenditure for the service of the year ending on 30 June 2003
- particulars of certain proposed expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2003.

1.2 The Committee has considered the expenditure of the portfolios set out in their respective Portfolio Budget Statements 2002-2003 and related budgetary documents. Explanations relating to the estimates were received from Senator the Hon Amanda Vanstone, Minister for Family and Community Services and Senator the Hon Kay Patterson, Minister for Health and Ageing and officers from the portfolio Departments at hearings held 3 to 6 June 2002. The Committee expresses its appreciation for the assistance of the Ministers, Mr Mark Sullivan, Secretary, DFaCS, and Ms Jane Halton, Secretary, DoHA and the officers who appeared before it.

1.3 In accordance with Standing Order 26, the Committee has agreed that the date for submission to the Committee of written answers or additional information relating to the expenditure is 5 July 2002.

1.4 The Committee discussed many of the budget measures and information contained in the Portfolio Budget Statements (PBS). These discussions are detailed in the Committee's *Hansard* transcripts of 3, 4, 5 and 6 June 2002, copies of which will be tabled in the Senate. *Hansard* transcripts of the estimates proceedings are also available on the Internet at http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/commttee/comsen.htm Volumes of Additional Information received by the Committee containing answers to questions taken on notice and tabled documents relating to the Committee's hearings, will also be tabled separately in the Senate and be accessible on the Internet at http://www.aph.gov.au/senate_ca

Answers to questions taken on notice

1.5 The Committee wishes to acknowledge the excellent effort made by both portfolios in providing, within a very tight timeframe, answers to questions taken on notice at the Additional Estimates hearings in February 2002. The prompt return of the answers enabled Senators to consider them prior to the tabling of the additional estimates report.

1.6 The Committee is pleased to report a great improvement in DoHA's provision of answers to questions on notice. Even though a very large number of questions were placed on notice, DoHA provided the Committee with a response to the majority of the questions by the due date or soon after.

1.7 The Committee thanks FaCS & Centrelink for their continued efforts as they also had a large number of questions to answer and these were provided to the Committee on time.

Portfolio Budget Statements

1.8 Some Senators experienced difficulties in locating a number of rural and regional health matters in DoHA's PBS and in identifying the appropriate Outcome under which questions should be asked. This is a particular problem with some rural health issues crossing Outcomes 4 (Quality Health Care), 5 (Rural Health Care) and 9 (Health Investment). Senator McLucas suggested that:

> In terms of assisting us for next estimates, would it be appropriate to give the committee a list of all of the programs that fit under outcome 5 and the disaggregated budgets for those programs so we get the program name, subprogram headings and the budget allocation? That would actually assist us so that we know where to ask questions.[1]

1.9 DoHA undertook to provide this information. Senator McLucas also stated that:

> There is a whole range of programs…that rural people access and that have a tag 'rural' somewhere in their name, but that do not fit in outcome 5. In that list that you provide to us, if there are other programs that a person coming across the PBS for the first time, and covering health issues for the first time, would assume sit in outcome 5, would you list them as well, with their allocation and where they fit in the outcome.[2]

1.10 DoHA acknowledged the difficulties which Senators were experiencing in identifying rural health matters and the appropriate Outcome under which to ask questions. The Departmental Secretary, Ms Halton, undertook to look at ways of improving the situation – such as indexing the 'name of the program and what it is under'.[3] The Committee suggests that it may be timely for DoHA to reassess the current structure and order of Outcomes within the portfolio.

1.11 Comment was also made on the lack of program-specific detail which used to be in the PBS but which is no longer provided under the accrual budgeting system.[4]

Issues

1.12 The Committee discussed a range of issues with both portfolio departments. There was considerable discussion with DFaCS officers on the Disability Support Pension[5] and the Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA).[6] The Committee was advised that the focus of the next CSTDA will be on improving accountability and providing more reporting information to government and customers.[7] Child abuse prevention funding was also discussed in detail with DFaCS.[8]

---

1 *Committee Hansard*, 05.06.02, CA197-198.

2 *Committee Hansard*, 05.06.02, CA205.

3 *Committee Hansard*, 05.06.02, CA205.

4 *Committee Hansard*, 03.06.02, CA105.

5 *Committee Hansard*, 03.06.02, CA52-88.

6 *Committee Hansard*, 03.06.02, CA39-52.

7 *Committee Hansard*, 03.06.02, CA50.

8 *Committee Hansard*, 03.06.02, CA105-109.

1.13 The Australian Institute of Family Studies provided the Committee with an overview of their current research projects - in particular the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children[9] and early childhood development project.[10] The National Child Protection Clearinghouse was also discussed with AIFS[11], as well as prevention of child abuse and children's contact services.[12]

1.14 A number of programs within the population health and safety area, including dealing with illicit drugs were discussed at length with DoHA[13], as were rural and regional health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health issues[14]. The Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and other pharmaceutical matters[15], as well as medical indemnity insurance were also discussed in detail.[16]

1.15 These issues, together with a number of other matters including administrative and process issues, were raised during the estimates discussions and are detailed in the *Hansard* transcripts of evidence.

Senator Sue Knowles
Chairman

June 2002

---

9 *Committee Hansard*, 04.06.02, CA132-133; 146-148.

10 *Committee Hansard*, 04.06.02, CA136-138.

11 *Committee Hansard*, 04.06.02, CA140-141.

12 *Committee Hansard*, 04.06.02, CA143-144.

13 *Committee Hansard*, 05.06.02, CA153-191.

14 *Committee Hansard*, 05.06.02, CA192-236.

15 *Committee Hansard*, 06.06.02, CA280-321.

16 *Committee Hansard*, 06.06.02, CA330-337.