Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 – 16 February 2012

Question: 1

Topic: Clean Energy Future

Asked By: Senator JOYCE

Type of Question: RRA&T 83

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 1

Senator JOYCE: I will ask one and then put the rest on notice, because there are many other areas that are vastly more important. I have one curiosity. At 30 November you told us you had five staff looking after climate change issues. Do you still have five staff looking after climate change issues?

Ms Beauchamp: Yes, we do.

Senator JOYCE: How are they going? Have they changed the climate yet?

Ms Beauchamp: The contribution of the department to the government's Clean Energy Future package is quite significant. We are involved in the secretary's group on climate change. We are involved in implementation and influencing the guidelines, particularly as the assistance package supports communities. We will continue to have an ongoing role to support implementation of the government's policy in this area.

Senator JOYCE: Why can't we just bang those five people in with all the other hundreds of people in the climate change department?

Ms Beauchamp: There are particular things that we have been asked to do to support the package on the Clean Energy Future. That is looking at the potential impacts on regions and communities as the Clean Energy Future package is being rolled out. It is quite relevant for us to have those functions remain in the department.

Senator JOYCE: What is the average wage of those five people?

Answer:

Staff from a number of areas across the Department work to support implementation of the government's policies on climate change and to look at any potential impacts on regions and communities as the Clean Energy Future package is being rolled out. The number of staff totals approximately five ASL (Average Staffing Level). The average wage for the five ASL is $104,597.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 – 16 February 2012

Question: 2

Topic: Margaret Olley Trust

Asked By: Senator JOYCE

Type of Question: RRA&T 86

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 1

Ms Fleming: The Margaret Olley Trust wanted to re-establish, on Margaret Olley's death, a museum in a house that she resided in Tweed River. Funding was provided to support that, through recollection, through some underspends in some other programs.

Senator JOYCE: That is interesting. That was allocated through some underspending in some other programs?

Ms Fleming: Yes.

Senator JOYCE: That is a different story, is it not? What was the underspending in the other programs? Can you tell me about that?

Ms Fleming: I would have to take that on notice.

Answer:

The Tweed Shire Council wrote to Minister Crean, on 1 November 2011, advising that they are unable to commence the Tweed Heads Regional Museum project funded through the Better Regions program. They requested that the funding of $1million be reallocated to the Margaret Olley Centre project. On 24 November 2011, the Prime Minister agreed to the reallocation of funding from Better Regions program to fund the Margaret Olley Centre, under the Community Infrastructure Grants program. This was subsequently approved

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 3

Topic: Better Regions Program

Asked By: Senator JOYCE

Type of Question: RRA & T 86

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 1

Senator JOYCE: Was any money transferred from the Better Regions program?

Senator Arbib: The officials are taking the question on notice in regard to where the funding came from, so we will get back to you.

Senator JOYCE: Is that the answer? That was a new question. Was any money transferred from the Better Regions program?

Mr O'Brien: Again, we will take that on notice.

Answer:

Refer to Question 2.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 -16 February 2012

Question: 4

Topic: RDAF - Round 1

Asked By: Senator JOYCE

Type of Question: RRA&T 87

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 1

Senator JOYCE: I am interested to know how many people responded to you in a description of that manner, that they were unhappy with the feedback that they were getting regarding your feedback.

Ms Fleming: I would have to take on notice that particular article. There was a range of feedback. Some people, of course, have a variety of views about the advice that the department provides them and we had discussions around that.

Answer:

The Department received four complaints from unsuccessful applicants for Round One of the Regional Development Australia Fund (RDAF). These complaints were investigated in accordance with the Complaints Management Process for the RDAF program, which is published on the Department's website.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 – 16 February 2012

Question: 5

Topic: Regional Footprint

Asked By: Senator MACDONALD

Type of Question: RRA&T 92

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 2

Senator IAN MACDONALD: Finally on corporate, you said you have 24 locations across the country. You are not thinking of cutting out those as part of an efficiency dividend? Could I add that, whilst some might say it may be efficient, I think it is very essential that as the regional department your department, more than any others, is located across Australia. Are you looking at closures of any offices?

Ms Beauchamp: Minister Crean is very keen for us to increase our regional footprint. We are looking at doing that over the next little while. What we do need to do is make sure we have the right people out there and we will be looking at co-location opportunities rather than cutting out offices altogether.

Senator IAN MACDONALD: I am interested in your comment about Mr Crean wanting to expand those. On notice, could you just tell me where you are at with that, how far you have gone, where you are looking and anything you can tell me that is not confidential at this stage.

Answer:

The Department manages a broad network of regional offices in 19 different locations across Australia. This total does not take into account the departmental staff located throughout the Australian Territories, being Christmas Island, Cocos-Keeling Island, Norfolk Island and Jervis Bay.

The recent Machinery of Government change that formed the Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport, resulted in the amalgamation of the regional footprints of the former Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, the Office for the Arts and the Office for Sport. This amalgamated network comprises the 19 locations noted above.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 – 16 February 2012

The Department is undertaking preliminary work on the most effective use of its resources in the regions, in particular, co-location opportunities between offices in the same locations, and the most effective deployment of departmental staff in those regions to address the current and emerging issues. At this time, the Department is focused upon better utilising its regional footprint and working to continually improve its effectiveness and long-term value to the regions in which it operates.

It should be noted that the Department has recently made some increases to its non-Canberra based locations, with the opening of a Melbourne and Adelaide office in February 2012, and the appointment of additional staff in its Townsville and Perth offices.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 6

Topic: Development Opportunities in Upper Spencer Gulf and Eyre Peninsula

Asked By: Senator EDWARDS

Type of Question: RRA&T 93

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 3

Mr O'Brien: I cannot give you a complete description of all the projects, but I can say that they are predominantly in the energy sector and mining sector. There are enormous development opportunities in the Upper Spencer Gulf and the Eyre Peninsula and, as I say, they are mainly energy projects, as I understand it.

Senator EDWARDS: So it is mining?

Mr O'Brien: Energy and mining.

Senator EDWARDS: If you could provide me with the basis of that press release, that would be great. If they are private investments—

Answer:

The basis of the media article published in the *Whyalla News* on 7 February 2012 titled '$2bn worth of projects in 2012' were Whyalla based projects listed in the South Australian Major Projects Directory 2011-12. This publication was released by the South Australian Department for Manufacturing, Innovation, Trade, Resources and Energy in November 2011.

A list of projects is at **Attachment A**.

ATTACHMENT A

Projects that formed the basis of the media article published in the Whyalla News publication on 7 February 2012 titled '$2bn worth of projects in 2012'

Investment proposed ($ Million)	Company/ proponent	Project name	Project description
390	Onesteel	Haematite Extension Project	OneSteel is undertaking an expansion program to be able to sustain export sales of six million tonnes of hematite iron ore per year for at least the next 10 years from its mining operations. Work is underway with continued expansion targeting further resources across its tenements.
200	Onesteel	Project Opal	The expansion of OneSteel's export port facilities at Whyalla, South Australia from its current capacity of approximately 6.5 – 7.0 million tonnes per annum, to approximately 12 million tonnes per annum by around the fourth quarter of calendar year 2012.
1000	Arafura Resources	Whyalla Rare Earths Complex	The Whyalla Rare Earths Complex is underpinned by the Nolans Bore rare earths deposit. Mineral concentrate from the Nolans Bore Mine will be transported by rail in purpose-built containers for chemical processing at the Rare Earths Complex on the outskirts of Whyalla.
71	Electranet	Cultana 275/132 kV Augmentation	The 275/132 kV augmentation of the existing high-voltage substation at Cultana will upgrade the Eyre Peninsula regional electricity system. This development will assist in maintaining the quality, reliability and security of supply of prescribed transmission services.
55	Electranet	Whyalla terminal substation replacement	This project will replace the Whyalla Terminal substation, to allow continued compliance with the connection point reliability standards of the South Australian Electricity Transmission Code.
17	Wizard Power	Advanced energy storage Technology	The project is a demonstration plant and R&D facility in Whyalla which uses an array of Wizard Power's Big Dish solar concentrators, with a surface area of 500 square meters each.

Investment proposed ($ Million)	Company/ proponent	Project name	Project description
29.9	Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure	Port Bonython Jetty Refurbishment	Refurbishment of walkways and mooring point access structures on the jetty.
69.3	SA Health	Whyalla Hospital Redevelopment and Regional Cancer Centre	Refurbishment of acute services facilities including mental health, rehabilitation and palliative care services and integration of day surgery into operating theatres. Provision of new and enhanced cancer facilities and equipment.
40	Martin Wood Developments	Ocean Eyre Estate	Ocean Eyre is the largest residential estate in Whyalla. At completion this estate will boast approximately 1,500 allotments and feature Whyalla's first Builder Display Village.
1872.2	**Total**		

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 7

Topic: Viability of Airports

Asked By: Senator FAWCETT

Type of Question: RRA&T 93

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 1

Senator FAWCETT: Is the department aware of the National Airports Safeguarding Advisory Group, which is being run by the department of transport but deals with local government as well as state governments around the viability of airports, and are you having any input to that process?

Mr O'Brien: I will take that on notice. Not to my knowledge. Obviously, in the Regional Development Australia Fund round 1 there were some regional airport upgrades.

Answer:

The Department is aware of the National Airports Safeguarding Advisory Group (NASG).

Eligible applications for Round One of the Regional Development Australia Fund were provided to Commonwealth agencies and State and Territory Governments for advice on the applicant and project. This feedback was taken into account in the assessment process. Applications relating to airports were referred to the Department of Infrastructure and Transport.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 8

Topic: RDAF Round 1 - Applications relating to airports

Asked By: Senator FAWCETT

Type of Question: RRA&T 93

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 1

Senator FAWCETT: Under round 1 of the Regional Development Australia Fund—obviously Port Lincoln was one, with $4.5 million; that is great—how many of the applications related to airports around Australia in that round?

Mr O'Brien: There were certainly more than a handful. I would have to look at the applications that came through. There were 563 applications all up. There were a number that involved regional airports.

Answer:

Eleven applications in Round One of the Regional Development Australia Fund requested funding for projects relating to airports. Of these, three were funded:

RDAF REFERENCE	PROJECT NAME	PRIMARY APPLICANT	Grant Provided
RDAF100291	Upgrade to Griffith Airport (Terminal and Main Apron)	Griffith City Council	$1.9 million
RDAF100595	Port Lincoln Airport Upgrade	District Council of Lower Eyre Peninsula	$4.5 million
RDAF100963	Ballina Byron Gateway Airport Apron Extension Project	Ballina Shire Council	$3.5 million

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 9

Topic: Gilbert and Flinders River System

Asked By: Senator MACDONALD

Type of Question: RRA&T 95

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 3

Senator IAN MACDONALD: We have very limited time. Can I ask you to give me a short note on notice just on what that assessment is supposed to bring about?

Mr Dickson: Absolutely.

Senator IAN MACDONALD: I do not suppose the Commonwealth has any involvement in Ms Bligh's announcement of accessing another 80,000 megalitres out of the Flinders? That is not anything the Commonwealth would be involved in, is it?

Ms Fleming: That was part of the joint project that Queensland has guaranteed a certain quantum of water during this trial period.

Senator IAN MACDONALD: Can you give me some more details on that?

Ms Fleming: We will include it.

Answer:

The *North Queensland Irrigated Agriculture Strategy* (the Strategy) will deliver a comprehensive assessment of sustainable water resource development and the potential for new irrigated agriculture in north Queensland. This project builds on the Northern Australia Sustainable Futures program and the work of the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum and is focused on the Gilbert and Flinders Rivers.

Further information the *North Queensland Irrigated Agriculture Strategy* is available at www.regional.gov.au/regional/ona/nqis.aspx.

The Strategy addresses all the key 'next steps' identified by the Mount Isa to Townsville Economic Zone (MITEZ) and Gulf Savannah Development (GSD) regional planning groups, to grow irrigated agriculture and to intensify beef production in north Queensland, and will provide substantial impetus to local efforts.

The Commonwealth Government is contributing $6.1 million to the project over three years, including:

- $6 million for CSIRO to undertake a comprehensive and integrated assessment of water resource development and the potential for new irrigated agriculture in north Queensland; and
- a $100,000 contribution to a joint Government study into the commercial viability of meat processing in north Queensland.

CSIRO will contribute an additional $800,000 (in-kind) to the project, to complete regional scale geochemical and geophysical surveys of the Gilbert and Flinders River catchments to map surface and groundwater connectivity and salinity risks.

The Queensland Government has committed to contribute $3 million to a program of on ground farm trials, and $124,000 to the meat processing viability study.

The Strategy includes a sharp focus on practical research and on-ground demonstration activities (including field trials) that are essential to assessing the viability and sustainability of irrigated agriculture in northern Australia and will:

- identify and evaluate water capture and storage options;
- identify and test the commercial viability of irrigated agriculture opportunities; and
- thoroughly assess potential environmental, economic and cultural impacts and risks, to ensure development paths are genuinely sustainable.

A commitment was that local experts and community representatives would be engaged in the governance and management of the project in a meaningful way.

The Program Governance Committee includes three independent experts to cover the subject areas of:

- Agriculture and Pastoralism;
- Local Government and Planning; and
- Water resource development.

The Program Steering Committee includes the CEOs of the McKinlay, Flinders, Richmond and Etheridge Shire Councils, as well as the CEOs of the Mount Isa to Townsville Economic Zone (MITEZ) and Gulf Savannah Development (GSD) regional planning groups.

The Queensland Premier in December 2011 also announced that an additional 80,000ML of water will be available for the Flinders River from the general reserve allocation provided under the Gulf Water Resource Plan administered by the Queensland Government.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 10

Topic: Cairns Plan

Asked By: Senator MACDONALD

Type of Question: RRA&T 96

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 2

Senator IAN MACDONALD: Is there any time line? Can I expect some action by the end of March or June? Is there anything that you can give me?

Ms Beauchamp: Not at this stage, because we will be working with the Queensland government and the relevant department up there to provide advice to both ministers.

Senator IAN MACDONALD: So, there will be nothing happening for a couple of months because, as you know, Queensland is just about to go into a caretaker mode. I am quite sure that the Commonwealth would not be involved in a Queensland election by making announcements during that period. Perhaps, on notice, you can tell me whether there is a timetable for that.

Answer:

The Cairns region has been the focus of a number of regional planning activities. Advance Cairns launched the *Tropical North Queensland Regional Economic Plan* on Monday 12 December 2011. This plan outlines a twenty year economic vision based upon widespread consultation and research.

The Queensland Government released the *Cairns Region Economic Future 2012-15 plan* in January 2012 to create jobs and identify opportunities for Cairns.

On 15 December 2011, Minister Crean concluded a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for regional place-based strategies with the Queensland Government.

The aim of the agreement is to improve infrastructure, liveability and economic resilience in high growth regional economies through providing skilled and flexible workforces, more affordable housing and better services.

Northern Queensland has been agreed as the first region to be the focus of the agreement. Under an umbrella *Northern Queensland Strategy*, Ministers have agreed to progress two collaborative initiatives, being:

– *The Northern Queensland Regional Development Initiative*, which will identify investment opportunities in north Queensland that increase employment, deepen inter-regional connections, address productivity bottlenecks and improve economic resilience and diversity.

– *The Mackay/Fitzroy Workforce Development Initiative*, which will focus on workforce demand and supply chain analysis and develop a comprehensive Workforce Development Strategy.

The *Northern Queensland Strategy* will focus on the following four key issues:

– responding to the resource boom - skills and regional liveability;

– infrastructure to support development, including NBN;

– climate change and energy; and

– tropical expertise.

Economic development in the Cairns region will be considered in the context of the broader north Queensland region in this program of work.

Australian Government officials are working with the Far North Queensland and Torres Strait, Mackay Whitsunday, Townsville and Northwest, and Fitzroy and Central West Regional Development Australia committees, the Queensland Government Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI) and other key stakeholders, including James Cook University, to progress this work

It is anticipated that this work will be completed before the end of 2012.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 11

Topic: AAco

Asked By: Senator MACDONALD

Type of Question: RRA&T 96

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 2

Senator IAN MACDONALD: Senator Heffernan asked another area of the department earlier about a proposal for an abattoir in Darwin by the AACo doing that themselves, but they need support for infrastructure. Is the department looking at that at all?

Ms Fleming: There are five abattoir proposals across the north at the moment. AAco's are some of those. There are other proponents that are part of it. As part of the Northern Australian Ministerial Forum there is a project, together with the jurisdictions of Queensland, NT and WA, to look across those proposals to see what is viable. As you would be aware, northern abattoirs have a mixed history of success, and that project is looking at the logistics. We have just about finished the scope of that work. There is a very large beef project under the Northern Sustainable Futures first phase.

Senator IAN MACDONALD: That is very useful, but time has escaped me. Could you finish your answer as a question on notice, so I can pass to others.

Ms Fleming: Certainly.

Answer:

The Australian Agricultural Company's request for support with infrastructure investments associated with their Darwin abattoir proposal, is being considered by the Department of Infrastructure and Transport.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Through the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum, the Commonwealth, Western Australia, Queensland and Northern Territory governments are collaborating with industry to assess the contemporary risks and opportunities facing the northern beef industry and the potential roles for governments to facilitate the development of new meat processing capacity across northern Australia more broadly.

Work is also progressing through the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum on a comprehensive logistical analysis of the livestock industry value chain (production; transport and handling; live cattle trade; processing; retail and exports) and how productivity could be optimised across the northern beef sector in both the short and medium term. This work is being undertaken on behalf of the Ministerial Forum by CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems.

Furthermore under the Minister's MOU with Queensland, $100,000 has been provided to support Phase 2 of the Queensland Government's study into the commercial viability of meat processing in northern Queensland.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 12

Topic: Kununurra Hospital

Asked By: Senator EGGLESTON

Type of Question: RRA&T 100

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 1

Ms Fleming: I am sorry, I stand corrected. We also provided an expansion to the Kununurra Hospital of $20 million, so there was a hospital and a transfer.

Senator EGGLESTON: What was that for?

Ms Fleming: To expand the hospital.

Senator EGGLESTON: In an unspecified way. It was not for a renal dialysis unit or something like that?

Ms Fleming: I could provide you with more details on that project.

Answer:

The $20 million project within the Kununurra Hospital precinct will provide for an integrated primary health care centre. The centre will house services such as:

- Boab Health Services (formerly Kimberley Division of General Practice).
- Kimberley Aged and Community Services.
- Kimberley population health unit (including child and school health and immunisations).
- Allied health services (including physiotherapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy and dietetics).
- A purpose built space for a private General Practice. A tender to provide this service will be put out to market this year.

Other health projects in Kununurra supported by the Australian Government include:

- A renal dialysis unit funded by the Health and Hospitals Fund.
- A short stay patient accommodation and housing funded by the East Kimberley Development Package.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 13

Topic: EKDP Projects

Asked By: Senator STERLE

Type of Question: RRA&T 100

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 2

CHAIR: I have been fortunate enough to see a lot of the work under Minister Gray's stewardship through that Office of Northern Australia. Could you table those projects for the committee. I know Senator Eggleston's commitment to Indigenous issues in the north is unquestionable, but there are also some fantastic returns for Indigenous training and employment there, too. Could you do that?

Answer:

The East Kimberley Development Package has 29 projects valued at $195 million. The projects are:

Wyndham Health Facilities upgrade and staff housing
Residential Rehabilitation Facility upgrade and expansion (Ngnowar Aerwah facility near Wyndham)
Sobering Up Centre refurbishments in Kununurra and Wyndham
Environmental Health measures in Warmun, Kalumburu and remote stations
Health Service Providers Housing in Kununurra
Short Stay Patient Accommodation in Kununurra
Kununurra Hospital expansion (Primary Health Care facility)
Remote Aged Care in Kalumburu and Warmun
Remote Clinics projects in Kalumburu and Warmun
Community Meeting Rooms in Kununurra, Dawul and Kalumburu
Kimberley TAFE projects in Kununurra and Wyndham
Wyndham Early Learning Activities Centre
Jungdranung Early Learning Centre
Kununurra Education Precinct - 4 projects (High School, Primary School,

Community Library and Teacher training facility)
Wyndham Port Upgrade
MG-Gelganyem Shared Administration Facility in Kununurra
Social Housing in Kununurra and Wyndham
Transitional Housing in Kununurra
Kununurra Airport expansion and upgrade
Kununurra Airport Patient Transfer Facility
Wyndham Picture Gardens
Wyndham Swimming Pool
Kununurra Community Oval
Wyndham Jetty
Waringarri Arts centre expansion and upgrade
Warmun Early Learning Centre

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 14

Topic: Case Studies - National Disaster Recovery Taskforce

Asked By: Senator HUMPHRIES

Type of Question: RRA&T 101

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 2

Senator HUMPHRIES: It is still not clear to me how this task force actually effects changes in or outcomes from decisions made by state agencies which are spending the Commonwealth money to repair roads and do other things. Perhaps you could take on notice to give me some case studies of how the task force's work has actually changed outcomes on the ground.

Mr Leeper: Certainly, we will do that.

Answer:

- The Taskforce coordinated the Australian Government response to the 2010-11 flooding and Tropical Cyclone Yasi, including through the implementation of exceptional assistance measures under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA) and by leveraging existing Commonwealth programs. Exceptional assistance measures that the Taskforce contributed to the development of included:
  - Wage assistance of up to 26 weeks available to employers to support business and community viability. As of 20 January 2012, 615 employers have claimed wage assistance, for around 4,700 employees. Approximately $23.3 million has been paid to date.
  - The Rural Resilience Fund to provide assistance in the form of counseling, farm clean-up and other social support measures in certain disaster affected areas. Funeral and Memorial Assistance Grants were also made available. This fund is a cost share arrangement, and the Commonwealth contribution is $10 million.

- Concessional loans of up to $650,000 to support small businesses and primary producers recover. As of 1 March 2012, 172 loans totaling approximately $73.3 million have been made.
- The Queensland Local Council Package to provide $330 million in joint Commonwealth/Queensland Government funding to assist local councils with repairing damage to infrastructure including:
  - Water and sewerage utilities
  - Riparian and coastal cleanup
  - Rockhampton Airport
  - Establishment of new head infrastructure in Grantham to allow the relocation of housing from flood-prone areas;
  - Day labour costs of local councils
  - Reconstructing Brisbane City Council's ferry terminals and River Walk
  - A $15 million package to clean up waterways and repair marine infrastructure in the Cassowary Coast region

- The Taskforce and the Australian Government Reconstruction Inspectorate worked with the Queensland Reconstruction Authority to finalise and agree a framework to provide assurance that value for money is being achieved in the reconstruction. Value for money is assessed across four key elements of time; cost; quality; and local engagement. This has led to more carefully developed and costed applications for funding under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements.
- In supporting the Australian Government Reconstruction Inspectorate, the Taskforce is monitoring the delivery of reconstruction projects and will undertake some 130 separate project reviews to provide a statistical level of assurance that value for money is being achieved in reconstruction. In addition, through this oversight, the Taskforce has identified a number of emerging issues in the reconstruction, for example, competition for resources and the reimbursement treatment of internal council labour forces and is working closely with the Queensland Reconstruction Authority to address these.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 15

Topic: Myregion website

Asked By: Senator JOYCE

Type of Question: RRA&T 104

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 1

Senator JOYCE: What is the average time they are on the site for?

Ms Foster: I do not know. I would have to take that on notice.

Answer:

For the period August 2011 – February 2012, users accessing the site from Australia spent, on average, 3:30 minutes on the site per visit.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 16

Topic: Myregion website costs

Asked By: Senator JOYCE

Type of Question: RRA&T 104

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 1

Senator JOYCE: I will have another crack at it. How much is that costing us a year?

Ms Foster: We will have to take the exact cost on notice.

Answer:

The ongoing cost of the myregion website is expected to be around $290,000 per year.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 17

Topic: Myregion Website Summary

Asked By: Senator JOYCE

Type of Question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 1

Can the Department please provide a summary of the *myregion* website including how many views the website has received, how many comments are contained in both the forums and the blogs, and what percentage of staff comments there are to other comments within the forums and the blogs?

Answer:

- The first phase of the myregion website was released to the public on Friday 26 August 2011 as a test or beta site.
- The second phase of myregion is scheduled for release at the end of March 2012.
- Between 26 August 2011 and 29 February 2011, myregion received 25,695 visits and 92,284 page views.
- At 29 February 2012, excluding opening comments posted to start forum threads:
  - users have posted 74 comments (95 per cent), and staff have posted 4 comments (5 per cent) in myregion's forums and blogs, and
  - there was a total of 65 posts in myregion's forums and 13 comments in myregion's blogs.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 18

Topic: Area Consultative Committees

Asked By: Senator JOYCE

Type of Question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 2

1. Can the Department please explain the process by which the ACC's (Area Consultative Committees) were wrapped up and finalised?
2. On what date were they finalised?
3. In particular, were all their bank accounts closed?
4. If so, where did the money go?
5. If the bank accounts were not closed, why?

Answer:

1. The then responsible Minister, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, announced on 20 March 2008 that from 1 January 2009 the network of 54 ACCs would transition to become Regional Development Australia (RDA) committees. The ACC Chairs Reference Group was appointed as the RDA Interim Board, which reported to the Commonwealth on the transition on 15 September 2008. To assist with the transition, a number of extensions were made to Commonwealth funding of ACCs and to the terms of ACC Chairs, with the funding extensions covering the period from 30 June 2009 to 28 February 2010. As autonomous legal entities, ACCs in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia undertook their own formal dissolution by applying for de-registration to the relevant registration authority in their state. ACCs in Western Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory were each reformed as RDAs, utilising their existing legal entity status as unincorporated associations.
2. The Department does not have a consolidated list of precise dates for this formal de-registration of ACCs in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia.

3. Bank accounts for ACCs in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia were closed. Those for ACCs in other states and territories were maintained for their transition into RDAs.
4. Remaining surplus funds were returned to the Commonwealth's consolidated revenue once all ACC debts had been met.
5. The only bank accounts not closed were those of ACCs that transitioned into RDAs.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 19

Topic: RDA Funding

Asked By: Senator JOYCE

Type of Question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 1

1. The Peel RDA was allocated an extra $50,000 in the 2011/12 budget. It is now mid February 2012 and the Peel RDA has still not seen this money? This money was promised to be allocated before Christmas. What is the delay?
2. The RDA fund has turned RDA's into quasi Semi Govt approval authorities. Do you intend to actually give them some real approval rights and to have their own budgets?
3. What plans do you have for programs for 2nd (10-25,000) and 3rd tier communities (under 10,000) as these centres are driving much of the growth in the Australian economy?

Answers:

1. The 2011-12 budget provides for $20.3 million over four years for additional resourcing of RDA committees. Allocations will be advised shortly.
2. RDAs are a partnership between state and territory governments and the Australian Government, and provide advice on the development of Australia's regions. They have assisted with the prioritisation of Regional Development Australia Fund Round Two. The Australian Government retains responsibility for decisions about Australian Government programs. As legally autonomous entities, RDAs are able to raise funds beyond the operational funding that they receive from the Australian Government, and to reflect these in their budgets.
3. The Regional Development Australia Fund (RDAF) and many other Australian Government programs are available to regional communities subject to meeting respective program guidelines.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 20

Topic: RDAF - Round 1 - Projects submitted by RDA Perth

Asked By: Senator JOYCE

Type of Question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 1

1. What projects were submitted by RDA Perth under Round One?
2. Were any of these prioritised?

Answer:

RDA Perth did not submit any projects under Round One. Only local governments and not-for-profit organisations were able to submit applications for Round One.

Six applications were submitted from organisations located within the Regional Development Australia Perth boundaries in Round One. All applications were assessed by the Department; however the Panel did not recommend any for funding.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 21

Topic: RDA Committee Vacancies

Asked By: Senator JOYCE

Type of Question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 1

1. At Supplementary Estimates in October 2011, there were a total of 57 casual vacancies amongst various RDA committees. Have these positions now been filled?
2. If not, why not?
3. Please provide an updated list of RDA committee vacancies.

Answer:

1. All casual vacancies were filled during the 2011 Expression of Interest (EOI) round.
2. N/A.
3.

Casual Vacancies as at 1 March 2012		
State	**RDA**	**Number of casual vacancies**
NSW	Mid North Coast	1
NSW	Murray	1
VIC	Barwon South West	1
VIC	Melbourne East	2
VIC	Grampians	1
WA	Goldfields and Esperance	1 Committee size increased to 12. Vacancy will remain unfilled for the time being.
WA	Pilbara	1
SA	Limestone Coast	2 One position to be filled by Local Government Association South Australia endorsed nominee.
SA	Murraylands and Riverland	1
SA	Yorke and Mid North	1 Local Government Association SA to propose a nominee

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 22

Topic: Promoting Regional Living

Asked By: Senator JOYCE

Type of Question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 1

1. Can you provide an update on when the guidelines will be released for the $11.5 million for Promoting Regional Living?
2. If not released, what is the delay? Has this program been chopped in the tightening of the budget?
3. What organisations will be eligible?
4. How will they apply for this funding?
5. When will they be able to apply?
6. Is it true this program is really only for Evocities or extensions of evocities groups in other states such as QLD and WA?

Answer:

1. The arrangements for the initiative are currently being considered by the Government.
2. Refer to question 1.
3. Refer to question 1.
4. Refer to question 1.
5. Refer to question 1.
6. Refer to question 1.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 23

Topic: Regional Development Policy Centre

Asked By: Senator JOYCE

Type of Question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 2

1. Can you please provide an update as to the progress of the Regional Development Policy Centre? When will it be operational?
2. Can you please list the members of the Board which has been established?
3. Are the members of the Board receiving remuneration and which component of the Departments budget is the Board members remuneration coming from?
4. Do you know where the policy centre will be located yet?
5. If not, when are we likely to know?
6. Is there a shortlist? If so, are any universities on the list?
7. Who has the Board consulted about the location of the Centre?
8. Has the decision been made as to the location of the Policy Centre and if so where is the location?

Answer:

1. The Regional Australia Institute (formerly the Regional Development Policy Centre) was launched on 28 February 2012 by the Chairman and the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, the Hon Simon Crean MP at Parliament House. The media release for the launch of the Regional Australia Institute is available in full at: http://www.minister.regional.gov.au/sc/releases/2012/february/sc021_2012.aspx.
2. The Board members are:
   - Mr Mal Peters – Chair
   - Mr Grant Latta AM – Interim Secretary
   - Rt Hon Ian Sinclair – Director

- Dr Ngiare Brown – Director
- Professor Sandra Harding – Director
- Mr Christian Zahra – Director

3. The Government has committed $8 million to fund the establishment of the Regional Australia Institute.

   As a public company limited by guarantee, the Institute may pay remuneration to the Directors as determined by the Board and in accordance with the company constitution.

4. The Regional Australia Institute has established premises in Canberra, ACT.
5. Please refer to answer 4.
6. Please refer to answer 4.
7. The Regional Australia Institute is a public company limited by guarantee. Consideration in regards to the location of the Institute is a matter for its Board.
8. Please refer to answer 4.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 24

Topic: Regional Structural Assistance Package

Asked By: Senator JOYCE

Type of Question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 1

1. Is the Department responsible for the coordination of the delivery of the $200 million Regional Structural Assistance Package under the government's clean energy plan?
2. Can the Department explain to me what the Regional Structural Assistance Package is?

Answer:

1& 2.

The Department is responsible for the coordination of the delivery of the Clean Energy Future Regional Structural Adjustment Assistance Program. Under this Program, the Government has set aside $200 million, if needed, for structural adjustment assistance support to workers, regions and communities that remain strongly affected by carbon pricing after other forms of assistance have been provided. Funding under this program will be determined on a case by case basis.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 25

Topic: Clean Energy and Impact of Carbon Prices

Asked By: Senator JOYCE

Type of Question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 2

1. How will the Department monitor the impacts of the carbon price on regions to determine areas where structural adjustment assistance may be required?
2. How many staff have been allocated to this program?
3. Will you be employing staff especially for this program?
4. How will the Department deliver this assistance?
5. Has any assistance been provided as yet? If so, who to?

On the Clean Energy Website, the Regional Australia Factsheet states that examples of programs that may be supported under this fund include *support for displaced workers and their families, support for affected small businesses, community development programs and economic diversification programs.*

6. Is the Department expecting there to be displaced workers as a result of a carbon price?
7. Will this funding be ongoing?

Answer:

1. The Government is currently developing the design of the Regional Structural Adjustment Assistance program. A monitoring framework will be in place by 1 July 2012.
2. The Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport has allocated four full time equivalent positions and a Graduate position to develop the program. Agreement on staffing for the ongoing implementation and delivery of the program (post 1 July 2012) has not yet been finalised.

3. Decisions on staffing for the program post 1 July 2012 have not yet been made.
4. In the event that Government determines that a region is significantly affected after other forms of assistance under the CEF have been delivered, the Government will work with the community through a coordinated, whole-of-Government approach to develop and deliver assistance measures.

   The design of any packages will be determined on a case by case basis tailored to the circumstances of the region.
5. No. Funding has been set aside under the RSAA program over seven years commencing 2012-13.
6. It is expected that the pattern of industry and employment will shift as Australia transitions to a low carbon economy. The Government has set aside $200 million, if needed, to help support workers, regions and communities that remain strongly affected by carbon pricing after other forms of assistance have been provided. This assistance may include access to training and skills development in order to facilitate the movement of labour into sustainable business opportunities.
7. Funding has been set aside under the RSAA program over seven years commencing 2012-13.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 26a

Topic: Climate Change Staff

Asked By: Senator HUMPHRIES

Type of Question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 1

Are there climate change sections or areas that work on climate change in your department/agency? If yes, list details.

Answer:

The Department contributes to the regional and local government aspects of the Government's policies on climate change and is involved in whole of government processes e.g. Secretaries group and contributing to the development of Regional Structural Adjustment.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 13 - 16 February 2012

Question: 27

Topic: Regional and Rural Research Development Grants

Asked By: Senator JOYCE

Type of Question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 1

1. When will the 2011-12 Regional and Rural Research and Development Grants Guidelines be available?
2. When will the 2011-12 funding round be made available?

Answer:

No decision has been made on the allocation of funding under the Regional and Rural Research Development Grants for 2011-12.