Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 On 8 February 2006, the Senate referred to the committee the following documents for examination and report in relation to the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Transport and Regional Services portfolios:

- Particulars of proposed additional expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2006 [Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2005–2006];
- Particulars of certain proposed additional expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2006 [Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2005–2006];
- Statement of savings expected in annual appropriations made by Act No. 72 of 2005 *(Appropriation Act (No. 1) 2005–2006)* and Act No. 73 of 2005 *(Appropriation Act (No. 2) 2005–2006)*;
- Final budget outcome 2004–05 and the Issues from the Advance to the Minister for Finance as a final charge for the year ended 30 June 2005.[1]

1.2 Legislation committees were required to report to the Senate on 28 March 2006.[2]

1.3 The committee considered the Portfolio Additional Estimates Statements 2005–2006 for each portfolio at hearings on 13, 14, and 17 February 2006. The hearings were conducted in accordance with the agreed agenda as follows:

- Monday, 13 February – Transport and Regional Services portfolio;
- Tuesday, 14 February – Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry portfolio;
- Friday, 17 February – Transport and Regional Services portfolio.

1.4 The committee heard evidence from Senator The Hon Ian Campbell, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, representing the Minister for Transport and Regional Services and Senator The Hon Eric Abetz, Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation, representing the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Evidence was also provided by Mr Mike Taylor, Secretary of the Department of Transport and Regional Services, Ms Joanna Hewitt, Secretary of the Department of

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1 *Journals of the Senate,* No. 70, 8 February 2006, p. 1835.

2 *Journals of the Senate,* No. 71, 9 February 2006, p. 1845.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and officers representing the departments and agencies covered by the estimates before the committee.

1.5 The committee thanks the ministers, departmental secretaries and officers for their assistance and cooperation during the hearings.

Questions on Notice

1.6 In accordance with Standing Order 26, the committee is required to set a date for the lodgement of written answers and additional information. The committee requested that written answers and additional information should be submitted by Thursday, 6 April 2006.

1.7 In his opening statements to DOTARS and DAFF, the chair expressed the committee's concern about the late submission of answers to questions on notice from the previous round of estimates. In particular, the committee was concerned that a pattern has developed where the departments do not provide answers at the estimates hearings; instead, questions are taken on notice but not answered for several months and often provided on the day before the next round of hearings. The committee finds this unacceptable and intends to monitor the situation closely.

Additional Information

1.8 Answers to questions taken on notice at the additional estimates hearings will be tabled in the Senate in separate volumes entitled 'Additional Information provided during the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee's examination of additional estimates 2005–2006'. Documents not suitable for inclusion in the additional information volumes will be available on request from the committee secretariat.

1.9 Answers to questions on notice received from the departments will also be posted onto the committee's website at a later date.