

Chapter 5

Cross Portfolio Matters

5.1 This chapter contains key issues discussed during the 2012-2013 budget estimates hearings for cross portfolio Indigenous matters pursuant to Resolution of the Senate of 26 August 2008.¹ The following portfolio departments were in attendance:

- Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
- Health and Ageing
- Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

5.2 The committee heard evidence from portfolio departments on Friday 1 June 2012. Areas of the portfolios were called in the following order:

- General Financial Matters
- Closing the Gap
- Northern Territory Emergency Response
- Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services
- Health Issues
- Employment and Economic Development
- Aboriginals Benefit Account
- Remote Jobs and Communities Program
- Indigenous Housing
- Indigenous Business Australia
- Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations

Closing the Gap

5.3 Proceedings commenced with questions to the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs related to funding of a range of Indigenous policies and programs, such as Healing Foundation, the Stronger Futures package, and programs targeted at Closing the Gap.²

5.4 Officials were reluctant to answer a number of questions about allocation of funds to programs affected by partnership agreements with other governments, as negotiations were still underway. Mr Pratt commented that, 'not to put too fine a point

1 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 22, 26 August 2008, p. 683.

2 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 1 June 2012, pp. 3–8.

on it, I am sure that our negotiating partners are observing this and it would be unwise of us to go into too much detail about what might happen'.³

5.5 Senator Scullion asked a series of questions about arrangements for additional police officers in remote Northern Territory communities. Answers clarified that all Australian Federal Police Officers had now been replaced with Northern Territory police (apart from a very small number in coordination roles), but that the Commonwealth was continuing to fund the officers. This funding was under the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) and the National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap, and would continue under the Stronger Futures package.⁴

5.6 Questions were asked about the liquor licences. It emerged that, under the Alice Springs Transformation Plan, Commonwealth funds had been allocated to purchase two takeaway outlet liquor licences, with negotiations underway for a third. These licences were then surrendered and cancelled. However, at a similar time, the Lhere Artepe Aboriginal Corporation received funds through the Aboriginal benefits Account to contribute to the cost of purchasing three supermarkets, which they now operate. All three had liquor licences attached to them.

5.7 Mr Coffey, the Regional Director South from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Northern Territory State Office, explained that the government was working to strengthen alcohol management plans for the supermarkets. During the questioning, Mr Coffey stated that the amount for which the liquor licences had been purchased was 'in confidence'. Senator Scullion flagged that he might pursue this matter further, subject to advice.⁵

Office of the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services

5.8 Questions for Mr Gleeson, the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services, began by referring to the recently-release report of the Coordinator General, which contained some figures about child sexual abuse that were widely reported in the media.

5.9 Mr Gleeson provided a statement to the committee about the report, in which he emphasised what he saw as the bigger issue, which was the need for governments to implement all recommendations from the Mullighan inquiry of 2008.⁶ He identified six recommendations that he was planning to pursue with the South Australian government.⁷

3 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 1 June 2012, p. 8.

4 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 1 June 2012, pp. 10–11.

5 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 1 June 2012, p. 15.

6 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 1 June 2012, p. 19.

7 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 1 June 2012, p. 19. These were numbers 8, 9, 13, 16, 30 and 36.

Health

5.10 Questions were asked about a range of program funding and administration decisions. Officials indicated that the Australian Nurse-Family Partnership program, Health @ Home Plus, was not going to be extended beyond three trial sites, owing to a range of difficulties with the model. They indicated that the Commonwealth is 'not walking out of the nurse home visiting space, [but is] just not going to continue with this particular model'.⁸

5.11 Committee members continued to pursue the ongoing issue of support for, and supply of, Aboriginal community health workers,⁹ sought updates on a range of programs such as those for eye and ear health,¹⁰ and obtained details in relation to recent policy announcements regarding mental health and suicide prevention.¹¹

5.12 Senators asked questions about the roll-out of low aromatic ('Opal') fuel in central Australia, focussing on why a small number of outlets are not making this fuel available.¹² The committee is currently conducting an inquiry into a Bill, the Low Aromatic Fuel Bill 2012, which aims to address some of the issues raised both before and during the estimates hearing.

Employment and Economic Development

5.13 Committee members sought explanations of various aspects of the Remote Jobs and Communities Program. There was particular attention to tendering processes, procurement guidelines and the formulation of performance criteria for the program.¹³

Indigenous Housing

5.14 Committee members have had long-standing concerns about progress in providing new housing and refurbishment of existing housing in Indigenous communities.¹⁴ Senators had expressed concern about the cost and quality of some work, and how these related to the scope of works for the projects. The process of getting information was slowed by the fact that while the program is Commonwealth funded, the scope of works for each project is managed by the Northern Territory government. Following a series of questions in previous hearings, the Commonwealth

8 Ms Powell, *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 1 June 2012, p. 26.

9 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 1 June 2012, pp. 28–30.

10 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 1 June 2012, pp. 30–33.

11 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 1 June 2012, pp. 35–37.

12 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 1 June 2012, pp. 37–40.

13 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 1 June 2012, pp. 42–48.

14 See, eg, *Supplementary Estimates Hansard*, 21 October 2011, pp. 82–83; *Additional Estimates Hansard*, 17 February 2012, pp. 65–72.

wrote to the Northern Territory seeking access to the scope of works documentation.¹⁵ Officials advised the committee that the scope of works were now going to be made available, but remain concerned to find a way that they can be examined without creating excessive work for both Northern Territory and Commonwealth officials.¹⁶ As in previous hearings, committee members continued to query the value and effectiveness of aspects of the project.¹⁷

5.15 Questions were asked around progress in the area of homeownership, during which officials noted that it was a challenging area, and that they had learned 'we should not underestimate the challenges there are in putting the land tenure system in place'.¹⁸

Indigenous Business Australia

5.16 Evidence given by Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) at the committee's hearing in February 2012 is the subject of a separate inquiry by this committee. That evidence related to an IBA conference on the Gold Coast, and IBA's investments in Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park. The committee received anonymous allegations claiming that the evidence given by IBA on these matters had been misleading.

5.17 During the estimates, these allegations were not discussed. Questions were asked however about the Tjapukai investment itself, funding spent to date, planned future investments, and the processes that were used by IBA to support those investments.¹⁹

Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations

5.18 There was a short period of questioning of the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations, particularly in relation to an organisation called Gumala. ORIC advised the committee that a case relating to the organisation was currently before the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, prompting Senator Scullion to indicate that, in those circumstances, he would not pursue access to the document that arose from a review of Gumala.²⁰

Senator Claire Moore Chair

15 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 1 June 2012, p. 52.

16 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 1 June 2012, pp. 52–53.

17 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 1 June 2012, pp. 53–57.

18 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 1 June 2012, pp. 60–63.

19 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 1 June 2012, pp. 63–67.

20 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 1 June 2012, p. 70.