

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 On 13 May 2014 the Senate referred the following documents to the committee for examination and report in relation to its portfolios:

- Particulars of proposed expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2015 [Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2014–2015].
- Particulars of certain proposed expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2015 [Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2014–2015]; and
- Particulars of proposed expenditure in relation to the parliamentary departments in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2015¹.

1.2 The committee is responsible for the examination of the following portfolios:

- Health;
- Social Services; and
- Human Services.

1.3 The committee was required to report to the Senate on its consideration of 2014–2015 budget estimates on Tuesday 24 June 2014.² An extension of time to report until the 26 June 2014 was granted.³

Details of hearings

1.4 The committee considered the Portfolio Budget Statements (PBS) 2014–2015 for the Social Services portfolio, the Human Services portfolio, and the Health portfolio, at hearings from 2 June 2014 to 5 June 2014 (inclusive). The hearings were conducted in accordance with the agreed agenda outlined as follows:

- Monday 2 and Tuesday 3 June 2014 — Health portfolio
- Wednesday 4 June 2014 — Social Services portfolio
- Thursday 5 June 2013 — Social Services portfolio and Human Services

1.5 The committee heard evidence from the following Senators:

- Senator the Hon Fiona Nash, Assistant Minister for Health (and representing the Minister for Health).
- Senator the Hon Mitch Fifield, Assistant Minister for Social Services (representing the Minister for Social Services)

1 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 27, 13 May 2014, p. 778.

2 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 6, 4 December 2013, p. 224.

3 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 31, 17 June 2014, p. 890.

- Senator the Hon Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Social Services (representing the Minister for Social Services)
- Senator the Hon Marise Payne, Minister for Human Services.

1.6 Evidence was also provided by the following:

- Ms Jane Halton, Secretary of the Department of Health;
- Mr Finn Pratt, Secretary of the Department of Social Services;
- Ms Kathryn Campbell, Secretary of the Department of Human Services; and
- officers representing the departments and agencies covered by the estimates before the committee.

1.7 The committee also considered budget expenditure at a hearing on Friday 6 June 2014 pursuant to Senate resolution 127 of 13 February 2014. This resolution provides that an additional hearing of a committee considering estimates is taken to be required where any three members of the committee notify the chair of the requirement, in writing.⁴ Senators Brown, Peris and Siewert provided this letter to the chair requesting an additional hearing to examine the Department of Human Services. Explanations relating to the estimates were received from Senator the Hon Marise Payne. Officers from the Department of Human Services were in attendance.

1.8 The committee held a hearing on Thursday 19 June 2014 pursuant to a motion for leave to meet during sitting.⁵ Explanations relating to the estimates were received from Senator the Hon Concetta Fierravanti-Wells. Officers from the Department of Social Services were in attendance.

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

Questions on Notice

1.10 In accordance with Standing Order 26, the date for submission to the committee of written answers to questions or additional information relating to the expenditure is 25 July 2014.

1.11 Answers to questions taken on notice and tabled documents relating to the committee's hearings will be tabled in the Senate. Answers to questions on notice and additional information may be accessed via the committee's website.

Hansard transcripts

1.12 The committee discussed many of the expenditure proposals and information contained in the PBS. These discussions are detailed in the committee's *Hansard*

4 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 14, 13 February 2014, p. 478.

5 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 31, 17 June 2014, p. 890.

transcripts of 2 June 2014 to 6 June 2014 (inclusive) and 19 June 2014, copies of which will be tabled in the Senate. *Hansard* transcripts of the estimates proceedings are also accessible on the committee's website at http://www.aph.gov.au/senate_ca.

1.13 References to the Hansard transcript are to the proof Hansard; page numbers may vary between the proof and the official Hansard transcript.

Changes in the PBS

1.14 There are no changes to the Ministry since Additional Estimates 2013–14.

Procedural issues

1.15 The following procedural issues during the committee's hearings were noted.

Grounds for not answering questions

1.16 The committee notes that no formal claims for public interest immunity were made. However, there were instances during the committee's hearings, particularly during the committee's questioning of ASADA,⁶ where officers declined to provide requested information without reference to a properly formed public interest immunity claim. The committee reminds officers that there is no discretion to withhold information during the consideration of estimates without some specific indication of the harm to the public interest that could result from the disclosure of the information and draws officers' attention to the order of the Senate of 13 May 2009.⁷

1.17 During questioning on discretionary grants programmes, officers of the Department of Social Services expressed concern at providing some requested details due to probity issues related to a current tender process. Officers advised that the material would be made public as part of this process on 19 June 2014. The Secretary took on notice to refer to the Minister the question of whether there were public interest grounds for not providing the information. The committee determined to hold an additional estimates hearing on 19 June 2014 to facilitate examination of the discretionary grants programmes in greater detail.⁸

6 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2014, pp 103–115.

7 *Journals of the Senate*, 13 May 2009, p. 1941.

8 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 5 June 2014, pp 68–70.

