

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates 26 May-6 June 2014

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Outcome/Program: 1.1 Prime Minister and Cabinet

Topic: Closing the Gap and COAG Reform Council

Senator: Senator the Hon Jan McLucas

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Question:

1. During previous Estimates hearing on 28 February 2014 the Minister for Indigenous Affairs stated “we are still committed to ensuring that through COAG the matters around justice, incarceration and the high levels of Aboriginal and Islander victims need to be dealt with.” Is indigenous incarceration and/ or a justice target being negotiated as part of the agenda for the next COAG meeting? If not, why not? Could the department detail the work that has been undertaken to progress the development of a justice target to date?
2. The COAG Reform Council is independent of government and is responsible for monitoring and providing advice to government on efforts to Close the Gap. Where will the Government now receive this advice from?
3. Media reports have indicated that federal departments will take over the responsibilities of the COAG Reform Council. Will the Department and Prime Minister and Cabinet assume the COAG Reform Council’s responsibilities insofar as they relate to Closing the Gap? Who within the department will assume these responsibilities? Provide APS level for each staff member.
4. Part of the role of the COAG Reform Council was to highlight areas of challenge, such as rising unemployment, early childhood education and health, which need an accelerated effort. How will the department identify these challenges? Given that the department must implement the priorities of the Government, how will the department deliver independent advice which may challenge the policy priorities of the Government?
5. How often will the department report on the new responsibilities of monitoring and providing advice on Closing the Gap and COAG reform? Will the department report be publicly available as the COAG Reform Council report was?

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Answer:

1. The Government is working with states and territories to drive improvements in community safety and reduce incarceration rates through practical, on-the-ground initiatives. Discussion of an Indigenous justice target is not expected at the next COAG meeting.

2. The Commonwealth will continue to work closely with the States and Territories to monitor and report against the targets.

Data on outcomes for Indigenous Australians will continue to be published, including in the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report (OID Report), the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework report, Australian Bureau of Statistics data sets and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare publications.

The next OID report is due to be released in late 2014 while the next Health Performance Framework report is due to be released in the first half of 2015.

The Government is considering options for public reporting of progress against the Closing the Gap targets, including the new school attendance target.

3. See answer to question two.

4. The Department will continue to collect and analyse independent data to track progress against the Closing the Gap targets. This includes the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework report, Australian Bureau of Statistics data sets and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Indigenous affairs publications.

The Commonwealth Government will continue to work collaboratively with the States and Territories to identify and address challenges in Indigenous Affairs with a focus on the Government's key priorities of ensuring children go to school, adults are in work and communities are safe.

5. The Prime Minister delivers an annual Closing the Gap Statement to Parliament which includes a report on progress against the Closing the Gap targets.