

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

Question No. 104

Senator Humphries wrote the following question at the hearing on 26 May 2011

I refer to the Disaster Income Recovery Subsidy – I note a very low level of awareness of this source of funding from the communities I've visited.

- a) How many people have received the DIRS to date?
- b) Can you give us an overview of this program and the kind of projects it funds?
- c) What kinds of benchmarks are used to measure the efficacy of this program and the projects it funds?

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

- a) In the 2010-2011 financial year 61,888 people have received the Disaster Income Recovery Subsidy through Centrelink, worth over \$73 million (as at 10 June 2011).
- b) The Disaster Income Recovery Subsidy (DIRS) provided assistance to employees, small business persons and farmers who lost income as a result of the flooding that commenced on 29 November 2010 and continued through December 2010, January 2011 and, February 2011. This flooding affected Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania. The Subsidy provided fortnightly payments equivalent to the maximum rate of Newstart allowance depending on the person's circumstances for a period up to 13 weeks. The claim period for this assistance in Queensland, Tasmania, South Australia, New South Wales and Western Australia closed on 31 March 2011. The claim period for this assistance in Victoria closed on 31 May 2011.

The DIRS was available to Australian residents or eligible foreign nationals who are older than 16. 'Eligible foreign nationals' include people who are on permanent visas (but who have not yet met the residency waiting period) and people who are on temporary skilled visas or temporary family visas.

The DIRS was not available to those already receiving another income support payment or pension such as Age Pension, Newstart Allowance, Service Pension or Exceptional Circumstances Relief Payment.

The DIRS does not fund projects. The DIRS is a payment to individuals.

- c) DIRS is a not a standing program. It is currently activated on an ad hoc basis. Consequently there are no specific benchmarks in place. However, at the February 2011 meeting of the then

MCPEM-EM, Ministers tasked the NEMC to examine and report on the effectiveness of Commonwealth and State/Territory relief and recovery payments.