

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

**Program 1.7**

**Question No. 147**

**Senator Humphries asked the following question at the hearing on 16 October 2012:**

Disaster resilience and mitigation

- a) Referring to articles dated 3 and 4 April 2012 referencing the Hon Robert McClelland MP, does the Department concur with Mr McClelland's statements that the handling of emergency preparedness funding is being sacrificed to help meet the budget surplus target and that the government should be looking at preventative measures?
- b) What communications have been made by the Attorney-General, Nicola Roxon, regarding the handling of the AGDRP disaster payments since her appointment, please specify?
- c) What communications have been made by Ms Roxon to the Department regarding disaster mitigation since her appointment, please specify?
- d) Has Ms Roxon expressed to the Department any proposed changes to the way in which the AGDRP is dispensed to those individuals affected by disaster, including eligibility requirements etc?
- e) Have there been any instances since Ms Roxon's appointment whereby claims or requests from states and territories for the activation of assistance under the AGDRP or NDRRA Category C assistance have been postponed, denied or cancelled? If so, please detail?
- f) Have there been any instances where claims or requests have initially been postponed or rejected and subsequently been approved? If so, please detail?
- g) Would the Department concur with Mr Paul Bell's statement (President of the Local Government Association of QLD) that better spending and investment by the government on infrastructure that offers better protection from the floods, fires and cyclones might lead to fewer victims/casualties?
- h) If so, has Ms Roxon acted by focusing on preventative measures, or has she directed the Department to focus their resources on preventative measures? If not, would the Department adopt the opinion that preventative measures would be a more appropriate focus of resources?

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

- a) It is not appropriate for the Department to express a view on matters of Government policy.
- b) The Attorney-General and Minister for Emergency Management communicates with the Department on the AGDRP and related matters as part of her regular engagement with the Department on matters of emergency management policy.

- c) The Attorney-General and Minister for Emergency Management communicates with the Department on disaster mitigation and related matters as part of her regular engagement with the Department on matters of emergency management policy.

The Department notes that the Attorney-General's views on disaster mitigation and resilience are publicly available. For example, in a speech on 28 March of this year, the Attorney-General noted the Commonwealth Government's investment in the *National Partnership Agreement on Natural Disaster Resilience* (NPA), which provides joint funding for states and territories to enhance Australia's resilience to natural disasters through a range of mitigation and volunteer projects. The Attorney-General has also recently delivered a series of media announcements with state and territory counterparts on NPA matters emphasising the importance of mitigation and enhancing community resilience.

- d) Please refer to the answer to b) above.
- e) The AGDRP is an Australian Government assistance payment. The states and territories are not able to request the activation of the AGDRP.

No requests for NDRRA Category C assistance have been postponed or cancelled

- f) In March 2012 the Victorian Government requested Category C assistance for all areas affected by flooding in late February to early March 2012. Category C assistance was agreed for a limited number of areas affected. Following additional impact information supplied to the Commonwealth, assistance was subsequently extended to further areas. Category C assistance has not been agreed for the entire area affected as the request did not demonstrate that Category C impact thresholds had been met.

In November 2012, following analysis of additional information provided by the Victorian Government and relevant Commonwealth agencies, the Prime Minister agreed to provide Category C assistance to limited areas within those areas affected by the flooding events in December 2011 and February-March 2012. The Victorian Government has not yet responded to the Prime Minister's offer of Category C assistance.

- g) It is not appropriate for the Department to comment on Mr Paul Bell's statement. Questions of this nature should be directed to the Attorney-General and Minister for Emergency Management.
- h) Please refer to the answer to g) above.