

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 On 8 February 2018, the Senate referred the following documents to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee (the committee) for examination and report:

- Particulars of proposed additional expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2018 [Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2017–18];
- Particulars of certain proposed additional expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2018 [Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2017–18]; and
- Final Budget Outcome 2016–17.¹

1.2 The committee is required to examine the 2017–18 additional estimates contained in these documents in relation to the Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities portfolio and the Agriculture and Water Resources portfolio. Following examination, the committee is required to table its report on 27 March 2018.²

Additional estimates hearings

1.3 The committee examined witnesses from the Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities portfolio on 26 February 2018, and witnesses from the Agriculture and Water Resources portfolio on 27 February 2018. In addition, the committee conducted a cross-portfolio Murray-Darling Basin Plan matters estimates hearing on 2 March 2018 in accordance with a Senate agreement of 15 November 2017.³

1.4 The committee heard evidence from the following senators:

- Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, representing the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport; and
- Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, representing the Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources.

1.5 Evidence was also provided by:

- Dr Steven Kennedy, Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities;
- Mr Daryl Quinlivan, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources;
- Mr Phillip Glyde, Chief Executive of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority;
- Ms Jody Swirepik, Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder; and

1 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 83, 8 February 2018, p. 2647.

2 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 70, 15 November 2017, p. 2228.

3 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 70, 15 November 2017, p. 2227.

- officers representing the departments and agencies covered by the estimates before the committee.

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

Questions on notice and Hansard transcript

1.7 In accordance with standing order 26(9)(a), the committee set 13 April 2018, as the date for the return of written answers or additional information, in response to questions placed on notice during the hearings.

1.8 Written answers and information provided to the committee in response to questions on notice arising from the hearings are tabled in the Senate and posted on the committee's webpage. Links to the Hansard transcripts of these public hearings, and to answers and additional information are also available on the committee webpage at: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Senate_Estimates/rrat.

Record of proceedings

1.9 This report does not attempt to analyse the evidence presented during the hearings. However, it does provide a summary of some of the key issues that were covered by the committee for each portfolio.

Answers to questions on notice – Supplementary Budget Estimates 2017–18

1.10 The committee undertook supplementary budget estimates hearings on 23 and 24 October 2017 for the Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio and the Agriculture and Water Resources portfolio. On 27 October 2017, the committee examined cross-portfolio Murray-Darling Basin Plan matters. The committee set 15 December 2017 as the deadline for return of answers to questions on notice.

1.11 The Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio took 130 questions on notice. The Agriculture and Water Resources portfolio took 170 questions on notice. There were no questions on notice for the Environment and Energy portfolio arising from the cross-portfolio hearings.

Timeliness of answers to questions on notice

1.12 The Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio submitted 51 responses to questions by the deadline. The remaining answers were received gradually throughout December 2017 and until 23 February 2018. At the time of the additional estimates hearings, two responses remained outstanding.

1.13 The Agriculture and Water Resources portfolio submitted one response by the deadline. All remaining responses were provided on 20 December 2017.

Note on references

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