

**Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee**  
**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**  
**Budget Estimates 2017 - 2018**

**Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio**

**Department/Agency:** Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

**Outcome/Program:** Outcome 2: Indigenous

**Topic:** Community Development Programme - Evaluation

**Senator:** Siewert

**Question reference number:** 92

**Type of question:** FPA Friday 26 May 2017, page 36

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 7 July 2017

**Number of pages:** 3

**Question:**

Senator SIEWERT: I wanted to go firstly to the comments that you made, Minister, about checking out store data. Have you got anything that you got informally in terms of a formal evaluation of the, as you said, anecdotes of the stores? If you have, can you provide that? If not, why was it not written down?

Ms N Williams: Where we received very specific examples of a particular store, or a community or an individual has suggested that there has been a drop in store sales that has resulted perhaps from the penalties, we have certainly undertaken an investigation of that specific instance.

Senator SIEWERT: Could you take that on notice and provide where you have done that.

Ms N Williams: We can do that.

Senator SIEWERT: In terms of the evaluation process, will the interim report contain in-depth methodology, including the questionnaires that were asked of participants?

Ms N Williams: I would need to check on that as to whether that is the intention of the evaluators, but I do not see why it should not.

Senator SIEWERT: If you could check on that and perhaps ensure that it is or is not the intention.

Ms N Williams: And, if it is not the intention, I would be more than happy to provide that to the committee on notice.

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. Thank you for the questions on notice. I had asked for—this is for the employment outcomes—this regionally and, while you did provide a list of where some of the outcomes were, you did not provide the detail of the number of outcomes. I have just heard what you have said, and you said that in your response to the questions on notice. If we are going to do a proper evaluation of this process, it is only fair that we get to see where these outcomes are regionally. I asked that particular question on purpose so that we could see whether they are in the most remote areas or where they are spread. So you gave them for Western Australia, New South Wales et cetera—I am sorry, I just do not buy the commercial-in-confidence response, because that enables the government to hide behind where this may be being successful or not.

Senator Scullion: What we will do is: we will follow the rules of this committee and provide

you with a reason about commercial in confidence, if that is your wish, and that is a requirement of the committee that was outlined by the chair when we started.

Ms N Williams: Certainly; and we will look at scope, too. We will look at what we can provide you with while also retaining the privacy of the individual jobseekers.

Senator Scullion: We will do our best to provide all the information we can but, if we are restricted, it is not because we make that choice; it is that it is a commercial arrangement between someone else.

Senator SIEWERT: It is the requirements that you write into the contracts and, as I said, it does not enable us to do our job.

Senator Scullion: Well, we can do what we can but, in a partnership, we require the permission of the other party to be able to release it. That is a normal commercial process. That is recognised by the Senate and that is why it is in the standing orders. As I have indicated, we will do our best to provide all the information we can, as we always do, but it is quite a serious matter that is outside of our hands. We will check on that commercial in confidence and, as such, we will provide what we are able to.

**Answer:**

Store Data

The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet ('the Department') takes any allegation that penalties relating to the Community Development Programme (CDP) are causing undue financial hardship and reducing community store sales very seriously.

Across all Outback Stores, sales fluctuate with a number of stores increasing in sales and others decreasing.

The Department has investigated specific claims that CDP has impacted store and/or food sales in Kintore, Tiwi Islands, Arnhem Land and Maningrida. These claims were not substantiated following investigation of trends in CDP compliance compared with store sales, interviews by departmental staff in community with store managers, and assessments of the impact of broader factors affecting sales as detailed above.

Evaluation Methodology

The draft interim report will contain in-depth methodology and details questions that were asked of participants. The Minister for Indigenous Affairs will consider the report and the suitability of its publication.

Commercial in Confidence

Under paragraph 4.10 of the *Senate Estimates Guidelines for Official Witnesses*, the disclosure of commercial information needs to balance public interest and the provision of appropriate protection of commercial interests on a case-by-case basis.

The release of job seeker and income support data are governed by protocols. Disclosure is considered against legislative requirements, with the objective to protect privacy and ensure the confidentiality of the personal information. This is in line with the *Privacy Act*.

The Department has reviewed the request for regional level data. As previously advised, the provision of data at the region or community level would reveal matters that are commercial-in-confidence or breach the privacy of individual job-seekers.