

**SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS**  
**ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S PORTFOLIO**  
**BUDGET ESTIMATES OCT/NOV 2022-23**

**PA-Australian Human Rights Commission**  
**LCC-OBE22-121 - AHRC - General Administrative Issues**

**Senator Paul Scarr asked the following question on 21 November 2022:**

1. In this year's Budget, the Government announced \$31.8 million over 4 years from 2022-23 for AHRC to provide additional resourcing. The AHRC will also receive an additional \$7.4 million per year ongoing.
  - a. What additional resources will be covered by this funding?
  - b. Does this funding relate to the new AHRC responsibilities resulting from the enforcement of positive duty?
  - c. How many additional staff will be hired as a result of this increase?
2. At the last Estimates, the financial expenditure of the Commission, and ongoing funding concerns relating to some over-expenditure, lack of forecasting and lack of tracking was discussed. Please provide an update on this issue, and whether the financial outlook of the Commission has improved?
  - a. At last Estimates, an internal steering committee recommended improvements to expenditure tracking. What systems have been put in place to improve the financial management process?
3. What is the current staffing level of the Australian Human Rights Commission? What is the current ASL cap for the Commission?
  - a. Has this increased since FY 2021-22?
4. A one-off, \$16 million payment was allocated to the Australian Human Rights Commission to address overspending, particularly with regard to staffing levels. How much of that amount has been spent to date?
  - a. According to last Estimates, \$2 million of that bailout package was allocated to redundancy packages for staff who could not be retained due to overspending. How many staff were made redundant?
  - b. Of those redundancies, how many were voluntary and how many were involuntary?

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

- 1. The AHRC will also receive an additional \$7.4 million per year ongoing.**
  - a. What additional resources will be covered by this funding?**

The additional resourcing announced in the October Budget largely ensures the Commission can operate sustainably at our current staffing level.

**b. Does this funding relate to the new AHRC responsibilities resulting from the enforcement of positive duty?**

No, the funding to implement the Commission's positive duty responsibilities is included in the Women's Safety measure.

**c. How many additional staff will be hired as a result of this increase?**

The funding largely ensures the Commission can continue to operate sustainably at our current staffing level. In addition, we are expecting to recruit 9 additional temporary staff from January 2023 to address the complaints backlog. This is funded through a temporary increase in our revenue from Government from 2022-23 to 2024-25.

**2. At the last Estimates, the financial expenditure of the Commission, and ongoing funding concerns relating to some over-expenditure, lack of forecasting and lack of tracking was discussed.**

**Please provide an update on this issue, and whether the financial outlook of the Commission has improved?**

Following the October 2022 Budget, the Commission is now operating at a sustainable level. Planning and recruitment is underway to ensure the successful implementation of the Commission's new responsibilities included in the Budget.

**a. At last Estimates, an internal steering committee recommended improvements to expenditure tracking. What systems have been put in place to improve the financial management process?**

The internal process improvements that the Commission has adopted over the last 12 months to enhance our financial management are:

- Development of a Budget Management Policy with guiding principles that align to the Commonwealth Budget Management framework and our obligations under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*.
- Managing the Budget at a consolidated level and circulating finance reports to Budget Managers on a monthly basis.
- Introduction of thresholds for budget vs actual expenditure variance reporting.
- Oversight by the Commission's Budget Steering Committee (BSC) of our consolidated monthly financial results split between core activities and externally funded projects. The BSC also reviews information about significant variances between budget and actual expenditure and opportunities and risks to meeting budget.
- The minutes of BSC are shared with Commission Members and the Audit and Risk Committee.

Going forward a key focus for the Commission will be enhancing the Commission's ability to prepare informed revenue and expenditure forecasts through greater collaboration between Budget Managers and the Finance team.

### **3. What is the current staffing level of the Australian Human Rights Commission?**

Headcount as of 23 November was 144 (44 are external funded project staff)

Full Time Equivalent (FTE) as of 23 November was 127.24 (37 externally funded project staff)

Average Staffing Level year to date (from Jul to 23 Nov) 124.5 (including 36 externally funded project staff)

### **What is the current ASL cap for the Commission?**

The ASL cap rule has been removed across the Commonwealth. The Oct 2022 PBS forecast an ASL for 2022-23 of 151.

#### **a. Has this increased since FY 2021-22**

Yes in 2021-22 it was 133.9.

### **4. A one-off, \$16 million payment was allocated to the Australian Human Rights Commission to address overspending, particularly with regard to staffing levels. How much of that amount has been spent to date?**

The \$16m equity injection was used to replenish the cash reserves in relation to previous overspends, to meet the redundancy commitments of the organisation and support the Commission's operations to 30 June 2022. Overall the Commission reported a total comprehensive loss in our 2021-22 financial statements of \$0.8m.

#### **a. According to last Estimates, \$2 million of that bailout package was allocated to redundancy packages for staff who could not be retained due to overspending. How many staff were made redundant?**

Nine staff were made redundant

#### **b. Of those redundancies, how many were voluntary and how many were involuntary?**

All redundancies were voluntary