

**Senate Community Affairs Committee**

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

**Budget Estimates 2013-14, 5/6 & 7 June 2013**

**Question:** E13-253

**OUTCOME:** 14 – Biosecurity and Emergency Response

**Topic:** Multi-Drug Resistant Tuberculosis Infections in Queensland

**Type of Question:** Written Question on Notice

**Senator:** Boyce

**Question:**

- a) Is the Department aware of the recent incidents involving MDRTB infections in Cairns and the Torres Strait with the death of a resident of Saibai Island -the confirmed infection of four people with whom the victim had contact including a baby, and the possible cross infection of another 61 people in North Queensland?
- b) What is the Department's view of these events as they impact on the infection risks in the Torres Strait?

**Answer:**

- a) The Department of Health and Ageing is aware of cases of recent drug-resistant tuberculosis (TB) infections in Cairns and the Torres Strait.
- b) An independent study undertaken by the Head of Epidemiology at the Victorian Infectious Diseases Services and commissioned by the Government of Papua New Guinea (PNG), *Evaluation of Risks of Tuberculosis in Western Province PNG*, has concluded that closing the Queensland Health TB services for PNG nationals on Saibai and Boigu Islands was likely to reduce the risk of the endemic spread of multi-drug resistant tuberculosis (MDR TB) to Australian residents. The study concludes that managing TB services within a PNG national program is likely to:
  - reduce the risk of MDR TB transmission to Australian residents in the short term by reducing the number of PNG nationals seeking healthcare in Australia; and
  - reduce the risk of increased drug resistance, by reducing access to second line agents and loose drugs available outside a control program.

The study also found that risk of transmission is low if contact is confined to trading, fishing and other outdoor activity.

Treatment of TB in the Torres Strait is a matter for Queensland Health.