

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

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

Question: E13-254

OUTCOME: 14 - Biosecurity and Emergency Response

Topic: Papua New Guinea Treaty Villagers' Reports of a Visit by the Queensland Chief Health Officer

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Boyce

Question:

- a) Villagers along the PNG -Torres Strait coast line have reported to the visiting chief medical officer of Queensland that TB cases are on a dramatic rise and that villagers say the Australian funded sea ambulance is not regularly visiting the region to distribute TB medications and that the TB crisis and the attendant concerns of villagers along the southern coastline of PNG are being ignored. Is the Department aware of these matters?
- b) Has the Department sought information from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and/or AusAID about those matters? What information has been sought? In what form? Can you please provide it?
- c) Has the Department sought information/ briefing from or with the Chief Medical Officer of Queensland about these matters? Has that briefing occurred? If not when is one scheduled?

Answer:

- a) The Department of Health and Ageing participated in a Treaty Awareness Visit (TAV) to the Papua New Guinea (PNG) Treaty Villages on 16-27 June 2013. TAVs provide an opportunity to talk with traditional inhabitants about the provisions of the Treaty, and other issues such as cross border health concerns. The Torres Strait Cross Border Health Issues Committee (HIC) met on 9 October 2013 and received updates on the distribution of drugs to PNG Treaty Villages, and the operation of the sea ambulance.
- b) The Department receives regular updates on cross border health issues through the HIC, which the Department chairs. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – Australian Aid is represented on the HIC and provides updates on Australia's aid program in PNG at HIC meetings and through informal advice between HIC meetings. DFAT also provides updates on Australian aid delivery in Western Province on its website: <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/countries/pacific/png/Pages/tb-png.aspx>
- c) Queensland Health, as a member of the HIC, provides regular updates on cross border issues in the Torres Strait to HIC meetings. The Queensland Chief Health Officer attended the HIC meeting held on 30 April 2013 in Cairns, and Queensland Health participated in the 9 October HIC meeting in Port Moresby, PNG.