

The Senate

Community Affairs
Legislation Committee

Additional estimates 2002-03

March 2003

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Membership of the Committee

Senator Sue Knowles, Chairman	LP, Western Australia
Senator Brian Greig, Deputy Chair	AD, Western Australia
Senator Guy Barnett	LP, Tasmania
Senator Kay Denman	ALP, Tasmania
Senator the Hon Bill Heffernan	LP, New South Wales
Senator Steve Hutchins	ALP, New South Wales
Senator Tsebin Tchen substituted for Senator Heffernan for the Additional Estimates hearings on 12 and 13 February 2003	LP, Victoria

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

Report on Additional Estimates 2002-2003

- 1.1 The Senate referred the following documents to the Committee for examination and report:
- on 12 December 2002 - the particulars of proposed additional expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2003 in relation to the portfolios of Family and Community Services and Health and Ageing and
 - on 6 February 2003 - Issues from the Advance to the Minister for Finance as a final charge for the year ended 30 June 2002.
- 1.2 The Committee has considered the additional expenditure of the portfolios set out in their respective Portfolio Additional Estimates Statements 2002-2003 and related budgetary documents. Explanations relating to the estimates were received from Senator the Hon Amanda Vanstone, Minister for Family and Community Services and Senator the Hon Kay Patterson, Minister for Health and Ageing and officers from the portfolio Departments at hearings held on 12 and 13 February 2003. The Committee expresses its appreciation for the assistance of the Ministers, Mr Mark Sullivan, Secretary, DFaCS and Ms Jane Halton, Secretary, DoHA, and the officers who appeared before it.
- 1.3 In accordance with Standing Order 26, the Committee has agreed that the date for submission to the Committee of written answers or additional information relating to the expenditure is 14 March 2003.
- 1.4 The Committee discussed many of the expenditure revisions and information contained in the Portfolio Additional Estimates Statements. These discussions are detailed in the Committee's *Hansard* transcripts of 12 and 13 February 2003, copies of which will be tabled in the Senate. *Hansard* transcripts of the estimates proceedings are also available on the Internet at <http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/committee/comsen.htm> Volumes of Additional Information received by the Committee containing answers to questions taken on notice and tabled documents relating to the Committee's hearings, will also be tabled separately in the Senate and be accessible on the Committee's Internet site at http://www.aph.gov.au/senate_ca
- 1.5 The Committee discussed a range of issues with both portfolio departments.
- 1.6 In the Family and Community Services portfolio the Committee discussed at length data matching, the Family Tax Benefit and Child Care Benefit, and in particular issues relating to overpayments.¹

1 *Committee Hansard* pp.CA21-32.

- 1.7 The Secretary of FaCS chose to use the Estimates hearing as the most appropriate forum to respond to a press release issued by the Shadow Minister for Children and Youth and the Shadow Minister for Employment Services and Training concerning a FaCS report relating to the Job Placement, Employment and Training (JPET) funding application process.²
- 1.8 The drafting and content of a submission by Centrelink to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Ageing attracted a considerable amount of debate. The content and ideas expressed in the submission had received some publicity. Centrelink advised the Committee that they were not a 'policy body' and that the submission was in the form of a 'discussion paper' that was a compilation of ideas and views that had been expressed to them. General discussion ensued on some of the subject issues raised in the submission.³
- 1.9 The Health and Ageing portfolio was questioned at length on the impact of the deteriorating figures on bulk-billing and their impact for Medicare costs, and the related possibilities of improvement or 'reform' of the Medicare system.⁴
- 1.10 A number of important administrative and process issues involving both portfolios were raised during the estimates discussions and are detailed in the *Hansard* transcripts of evidence.

Senator Sue Knowles
Chairman
March 2003

2 *Committee Hansard* pp.CA53-54.

3 *Committee Hansard* pp.CA11-16.

4 *Committee Hansard* pp.CA102-117.