

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2011-2012, 19 October 2011

Question: E11-180

OUTCOME 14: Biosecurity and Emergency Response

Topic: TB IN THE TORRES STRAIT

Written Question on Notice

Senator Adams asked:

- a) How many times has the Torres Strait Cross-Border Health Issues Committee met in the past twelve months?
- b) What has been the committee's three main achievements?
- c) Are the progress reports which were provided to the Committee in September 2010 and March 2011 publicly available? Where?

Answer:

- a) The Torres Strait Cross-Border Health Issues Committee (HIC) has met twice in the past 12 months, on 30 March and 28 September 2011.

b) Package of Measures

The HIC has focused on the development and implementation of a joint Australia - Papua New Guinea (PNG) Package of Measures and addressing cross border issues around tuberculosis (TB). The Australia-PNG Ministerial Forum tasked HIC to develop this Package of Measures in 2008 to address cross border health concerns.

The PNG and Australian elements of the Package have now been agreed between the parties, and the final Package of Measures, together with a report on implementation progress to date, was presented to the 20th Australia-PNG Ministerial Forum held on 12 October 2011 in Canberra.

The following outlines the HIC's key achievements under the Package of Measures:

Building health service capacity in the Western Province of PNG through:

- Training of regional health laboratory staff in the South Fly in first level sputum sample collection and diagnosis of TB employing microscopy has been undertaken and will continue while health staff and other elements designed to improve TB services at Daru General Hospital are put in place.
- Clinical support and information sharing visits at Torres Strait thoracic clinics for clinical staff in the South Fly and at Daru General Hospital.
- TB Directly Observed Treatment Short course (DOTS) has been established on Daru Island.

- Daru General Hospital has commenced treating multi-drug resistant TB – this will be enhanced with new AusAID funding to complete the construction of a temporary isolation ward at Daru Hospital and recruitment of three nurses and three community health workers for this ward.
- Appointment of a newly recruited TB medical officer and TB program coordinator based at Daru General Hospital who will also provide TB clinical outreach to villages along the South Fly coast. This work will be assisted by the imminent purchase of a suitable all-weather vessel.
- The PNG National Department of Health has advised that it has secured funding to enable the establishment of a containment laboratory at the Central Public Health Laboratory, Port Moresby to enable TB culturing and sensitivity testing to take place.

Improve communications and links across the international border in the Torres Strait:

- The establishment of nominated contact points/communications officers has improved cross border relationships and increased information sharing.
- A HF radio/telephone interconnect system connecting the South Fly and the Australian telephone system has been established. This system was used successfully in the response to an outbreak of cholera in Daru in November/December 2010.
- HIC approved a HIC Community Communication Protocol at its meeting in September 2010.
- Arrangements for facilitated cross border movements for health workers and other designated government officials between non-declared ports in the Torres Strait Protected Zone and the South Fly coast are now in place. The facilitated cross border movement and were successfully tested during the first handover TB clinic on 13 October 2011.

Extend and continue health and related services for Torres Strait communities

- A program to detect, control and eliminate exotic, disease-carrying mosquito species in the Torres Strait and Northern Cape York Peninsula is in place and is continuing.
- The redevelopment of the Saibai Island clinic and additional accommodation for staff on Saibai Island is being progressed through Queensland Health. A land lease proposal has been approved for incorporation into an Indigenous Land Use Agreement. The clinic expansion is expected to be completed in early 2013.
- Enhanced service delivery and development of a culturally appropriate community sexual health education campaign is currently being progressed in the Torres Strait.

c) The papers for the March 2011 HIC meeting are publicly available on the Department's website.