

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2011-2012, 19 October 2011

Question: E11-182

OUTCOME 14: Biosecurity and Emergency Response

Topic: TB AND THE TORRES STRAIT

Written Question on Notice

Senator Adams asked:

- a) The 2010-11 Annual Report also notes that communication networks with key staff in villages and the general hospital have been strengthened. Please briefly outline the key activities the Department has undertaken to achieve this?
- b) How has the relationship improved?
- c) What have been the results of improved communication?

Answer:

a) to c)

Key activities the Department has undertaken to strengthen communication networks have been progressed under the joint Australia-Papua New Guinea (PNG) Package of Measures. These include:

- The establishment of nominated contact points – communications officers - on both sides of the border has improved cross border relationships and increased information sharing. This has resulted in clarifying and resolving cross border health issues more effectively and efficiently as they arise.
- Establishment of a telephone/high frequency radio interconnect system has enabled improved real-time communication between health providers across the border.
- The inclusion of the Acting CEO of Daru General Hospital and the newly appointed TB Medical Officer, in addition to longer term representation from the National Department of Health and Western Province Health Office and Western Province Administration, has enabled better sharing of information and collaboration to resolve cross border health issues.
- Efforts have also continued to ensure communication linkages to a wider range of cross border forums such as the annual Traditional Inhabitants Meeting, Torres Strait Health Partnership Forum and the Western Province Health Steering Committee.

- Improved communication links between Australia and the Western Province assists in identifying health concerns that arise in the Torres Strait Treaty Zone and adjacent Treaty villages along the South Fly coast of PNG, and appropriate strategies and resources to address these concerns. For example, in November and December 2010, Australian and Queensland government agencies worked together to support the response to an outbreak of cholera in Western Province, PNG. Support was provided directly to Western Province through AusAID (a HIC member agency) and steps were taken by Queensland Health to protect the health of Torres Strait communities as well as ensuring adequate health service capacity should there be an influx of PNG nationals seeking treatment for cholera at Torres Strait health facilities.