

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates 24-28 February 2014

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Outcome/Program: 1.1 Prime Minister and Cabinet

Topic: Aboriginals Benefit Account

Senator: Senator Zed Seselja

Question reference number: 144

Type of Question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 11 April 2014

Number of pages: 3

Question:

1. What was the increase in Commonwealth funding from the Aboriginals Benefit Account for the Northern Territory Land Councils over the last five financial years?
2. Could you explain how the increase came about and what additional benefits were generated?
3. Over that same period, can you comment on the state of the Aboriginals Benefit Account which funds the Land Councils?
4. How many Northern and Central Land Council representatives were in the delegation that visited Canberra during the week of 10 February 2014?
5. How many days were spent in Canberra?
6. Can the Department estimate what the cost of this trip would be?
7. How many meetings did the Land Councils attend while they were in Canberra? Did all representatives attend these meetings?
8. Is the Department aware of any outcomes of this trip?

Answer:

1. Funding to the Northern Territory Land Councils paid from the Aboriginals Benefit Account (ABA) under subsection 64(1) of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (Land Rights Act) has increased by \$10.577 million over the last five financial years; from \$27.613 million in 2008-09 to \$38.190 million in 2012-13.
2. The budget increases were approved by the former Minister for Indigenous Affairs in response to submissions made by Land Councils, including through the annual estimates process provided for under the Land Rights Act. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is not in a position to explain what additional benefits

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were generated as a result of these increases. This would require significant time and resources, including consultations with the Land Councils, to assess benefits.

3. Please see PM96 and PM97.
4. The Northern Land Council has advised that it sent a delegation of 13 persons, comprising nine Executive Council Members (including the Chairman and Deputy Chairman) and four staff members. The Central Land Council has advised that it sent a delegation of 13 persons comprising the Chair, seven Executive Members, the Director and four staff members.
5. The Northern Land Council has advised that its delegation spent six days in Canberra. The Central Land Council has advised that its delegation spent three days in Canberra.
6. The Northern Land Council has estimated its costs at \$48,340 and the Central Land Council at \$33,678.
7. The Northern Land Council has advised that representatives attended over 17 separate meeting and engagements while in Canberra. All Northern Land Council representatives attended almost all meetings, with the occasional exception. The Central Land Council has advised that representatives attended 13 separate meetings and engagements while in Canberra. All Central Land Council representatives attended seven meetings with a limited number of representatives attending six meetings.
8. The Northern Land Council has advised that the primary outcome of this trip was to meet with members of the Commonwealth Parliament regarding the regulation promulgated in December 2013 under section 28A of the Land Rights Act. The Northern Land Council also met with Aboriginal organisations and their representatives, and other non-Government entities.

The Central Land Council has advised that the outcome(s) of the trip comprised:

- meeting with Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion, Minister for Indigenous Affairs;
- meeting with Senator Rachel Siewert;
- meeting with Executive staff, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet;
- meeting with the Chair of the Indigenous Advisory Council;
- attending the tabling of the Close the Gap report by the Prime Minister and the reception that followed;

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- meeting with the Leader of the Opposition, Shadow Indigenous Affairs Minister, Shadow Attorney General, the Member for Lingiari and Senator Nova Peris; and
- visiting the Lucas Heights reactor in Sydney.