

**Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee**  
**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**  
**Additional Estimates 2015 - 2016**

**Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio**

**Department/Agency:** Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet  
**Outcome/Program:** Outcome 2: Indigenous  
**Topic:** Committee members - Aboriginals Benefit Account

**Senator:** Peris, Nova

**Question reference number:** 110

**Type of question:** FPA Friday 12 February 2016, pages 58 & 59.

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 1 April 2016

**Number of pages:** 2

**Question:**

Senator PERIS: Minister, a few estimates ago we were talking about the ABA and the committee members of it. How many currently sit on the ABA committee?

Senator Scullion: I will just have to find somebody who can assist. If not, I will just have to take that on notice.

Senator PERIS: It was your intention some time ago to reduce the number of committee members. Is that still your intention or has the number been reduced?

Senator Scullion: The refresh of the board was to also include some independent directors, as we spoke about earlier. I might have to take the numbers of notice, but it was my intention to be able to remove the chairperson. We currently have seven members from the land councils: five members from the Central Land Council, one member from the Tiwis and one member from Anindilyakwa. That is the current circumstance. We are working with the board to ensure that we have the addition of, I think, two independent individuals. I will have to take the question on notice about where we are up to. My intention to provide that has not diminished. It is motivated simply by cost. The money is not a saving to us; it is to the Aboriginal Benefits Trust Account, but, as you would know, in coming to government we discovered that it is being mined. It is not being sustainable. Because the land councils are supported by it and so much is being supported by it, we have to be as rigorous as we can in creating efficiencies.

The two elements include the time under which they meet, which is very expensive, so we are looking at ways to pre-brief people better so that the department can have a complete briefing. Sometimes you have to take time nutting out what is there when you are there, and we can shorten that. The other side of it is reducing the membership because of the time it takes to churn through some of the work. We are talking to the ABA about that. We are not directing that, but, at the end of the day, we have to have some efficiencies about that, because the cost of running that meeting to make the decisions has escalated and is quite considerable and we need to make efficiencies where we can. Everyone has made efficiencies in that area. Of course, the efficiency dividend is returned to Aboriginal people. It does not go anywhere else; it does not come back to the Commonwealth or anywhere else. We need to

ensure that the ABA is on a sustainable footing and we are doing everything we can to move it back there. We will take the timing on notice.

**Answer:**

The Aboriginals Benefit Account (ABA) Advisory Committee currently consists of a Chair appointed by the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion (Minister) and 14 members elected by the four Northern Territory Land Councils. Members comprise:

- 7 from the Northern Land Council,
- 5 from the Central Land Council,
- 1 from the Anindilyakwa Land Council; and
- 1 from the Tiwi Land Council.

The term of the current Chair of the Committee, Mrs Patricia Brahim, will expire on 30 June 2016. An Expression of Interest (EOI) process is being conducted by the Department, to identify a suitably qualified candidate for the position of Chair from 1 July 2016.

Under subsection 65(4) of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*, the Minister is able to appoint up to two members to the Committee who have demonstrated expertise in land management, or business or financial management. An EOI process is being conducted to identify up to two members with expertise in land management or business or financial management (Independent Members) for appointment to the Committee.

To pursue possible efficiencies in the operation of the Committee, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion, wrote to the Land Councils in August 2014, seeking their views on possible reductions. No decision has been taken to reduce the size of the Committee.