

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
BUDGET ESTIMATES 2015-16

Finance Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of Finance

Outcome/Program: 2/2.2

Topic: Scoping study – Australian Hearing Services

Senator: Cameron

Question reference number: F75

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: Friday, 10 July 2015

Number of pages: 3

Question:

1. Are the Minister and Department aware of the fears and concerns expressed by parent groups and Australian Hearing clients should Australian Hearing be privatised and sold?
2. Has the scoping study been completed? On what date? What was the final cost of the scoping study? What amounts have been paid to each of the consultants?
3. When did the Minister receive the completed scoping study?
4. Has the Minister for Human Services been briefed on the findings of the scoping study? On what date? By whom?
 - a) Has the Department of Human Services been briefed? On what date? By whom?
 - b) Has Australian Hearing been briefed? On what date? By whom?
 - c) Who else has been briefed on the findings of the scoping study? On what date? By whom?
5. Who is carrying out the further consultations indicated in the Minister's media release on 8 May 2015? Please list who is being consulted and on what date(s).
6. Will the Minister or Department release the scoping study? When?
 - a) If not, will the Minister or Department release the findings of the scoping study?
 - b) If not, as the findings of the scoping study are specifically referred to in the Minister's media release dated 8 May 2015, what is the Minister or Department consulting about?
7. Will the Minister listen to the parent and client concerns and rule out privatising Australian Hearing?

Answer:

1. Stakeholders in the Deaf community, including parent groups, have communicated their views in relation to the future ownership of Australian Hearing throughout the scoping study process, as well as through stakeholder information sessions that were conducted by the Departments of Health, Social Services and Finance in June 2015.

2. The scoping study was completed in December 2014. The total cost paid to external advisers is \$549,229, comprising \$219,864 to PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), the scoping study business adviser and \$329,365 to Herbert Smith Freehills, the scoping study legal adviser.
3. December 2014.
4. The scoping study business adviser, PwC, briefed the Minister for Human Services on the key findings of the scoping study on 27 January 2015.
 - a) The Department of Human Services was represented on the Scoping Study Steering Committee. The Committee met for a final time on 5 December 2014 to discuss the draft key findings of the scoping study.
 - b) Australian Hearing management and the Board were briefed on the key findings of the scoping study on 5 June 2015 and 26 June 2015 respectively, by representatives of the Department of Finance.
 - c) The scoping study business adviser, together with a representative of the Department of Finance, briefed the Minister for Health, Assistant Minister for Health and the Assistant Minister for Social Services and/or their advisers on 12 February 2015.
5. Representatives from the Departments of Health, Social Services and Finance. Stakeholder information sessions were held in:
 - Canberra – 16 June 2015
 - Sydney – 19 June 2015
 - Melbourne – 22 June 2015
 - Western Australia (teleconference) – 2 July 2015

Stakeholders invited to the sessions were:

- Hearing Aid Audiometrist Society of Australia
- Canberra Deaf Children's Association
- Deafness Forum of Australia
- Australian Medical Association
- National Disability Services
- National Rural Health Alliance
- Services for Rural and Remote Allied Health
- ACT Deafness Resource Centre
- Consumer Health Forum of Australia
- The Shepherd Centre
- National Ethnic Disability Alliance
- National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (which also represents the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance)
- Australian Association of Audiologists in Private Practice
- Deaf Society of NSW
- Hear and Say
- Self Help for Hard of Hearing People

- Australian and NZ Association of Neurologists
- Royal Australasian College of Physicians
- People with Disability Australia
- Australian Society of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery
- Australian College of Audiology
- Aussie Deaf Kids
- Parents of Deaf Children
- Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children
- Australasian College of Ear, Nose and Throat Physicians
- First Peoples Disability Network Australia
- Audiology Australia
- Deaf Children Australia
- General Surgeons Australia
- Children with Disability Australia
- Better Hearing Australia
- First Voice
- Royal College of Surgeons
- Women with Disabilities Australia
- Deafness Council of Western Australia

6. Consistent with past practice, the Government does not intend to publicly release such reports. It should be noted that Australian Hearing is a commercially exposed business operation, which operates largely in a competitive market where there are another 250 competing providers.

a) and b). The Department of Finance provided information on the key findings of the scoping study at the stakeholder sessions on 16, 19 and 22 June 2015. The presentation is available through the department's website.

7. A range of views were expressed by groups representing the deaf community. The Government will consult further with stakeholders as it develops and implements a plan for Community Service Obligation clients to transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme during its national rollout, and to prepare the hearing industry to offer quality support for its clients.