

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates 20-24 October 2014

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Outcome/Program: Outcome 2: Indigenous
Topic: Incarceration of people with cognitive impairments

Senator: Senator Rachel Siewert

Question reference number: 56

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Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 5 December 2014

Number of pages: 2

Question:

Senator SIEWERT: I do understand that the issues are complex and that is the very reason why we need to come up with something more than just acting each time an issue arises. I would contest the issues around the numbers going up. We know there is a significant issue around FASD. We know that we could potentially see more interaction of people with the justice system. What processes have you put in place from a Commonwealth perspective in terms of talking to the jurisdictions? Quite frankly, I am sick of writing to each jurisdiction and raising this issue because I get the same response. Are you undertaking any action that puts this on the agenda and starts facilitating a discussion with the state and territories?

Senator Scullion: It is a matter of ongoing conversations and discussions with the states and territories, but I have to say that in this particular case people are watching how we go with this. We are still determined to have the outcome that a much better balanced level of amenity is achieved. I would like to congratulate the minister and the Northern Territory government for their cooperation in this matter. No-one has walked away from it and there have been difficult circumstances. Where we end up in the Northern Territory is really going to inform where we end up with things like the level of amenity. In terms of exactly where those conversations are up to, as much as I can, I will take that question on notice and let you know where we are up to with the various jurisdictions. I am being frank about saying that I think everybody is watching this space, because it is emblematic. I was not disputing what might happen in future; my reference to numbers was purely historical.

Senator SIEWERT: I take your point. I would appreciate it if you could take that on notice.

Answer:

The Department has commenced bilateral discussions with states and territories on a range of issues affecting Indigenous Australians, including community safety and justice.

Funding of \$9.2 million over four years has been identified for activities under a FASD Action Plan. This funding was announced by the Assistant Minister for Health, Senator the Hon Fiona Nash, on 25 June 2014. The Department of Health has led the development of the FASD Action Plan in consultation with relevant agencies, FASD experts, and key stakeholders.

In addition, the Australian Government currently supports activities to reduce the demand and supply of alcohol in Indigenous communities, including legislated alcohol restrictions in the Northern Territory, additional support for policing, and improved access to substance use prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and aftercare services for Indigenous people, including those in rural and remote areas.