

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS ATTORNEY-
GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

Group 2

Program 1.5

Question No. 34

Senator Wright asked the following question at the hearing on 24 February 2014:

Senator WRIGHT: I will go back to my questions regarding the Indigenous legal services and in particular the cuts to the NATSILS budget. I understand the cuts are in the vicinity of 4.5 per cent.

Senator Brandis: I am told 4.45 per cent.

Senator WRIGHT: It is 4.45 per cent?

Senator Brandis: So I am told.

Senator WRIGHT: My understanding is that the law reform and policy aspect of the work of NATSILS is two to three per cent. So it has been put to me that—

Senator Brandis: But two to three per cent of what, Senator Wright? I think we might be using metrics here that are not perfectly commensurable.

Senator WRIGHT: The information that I have is two to three per cent of their budget, and I understand that the budget is being cut by 4.45 per cent.

Senator Brandis: That is why I asked for clarification.

Senator WRIGHT: That is the information that I have. The concern that has been raised with me is: even if you can identify—and I am still not clear on how the department would identify—what are front-line services and what are not front-line services, it would inevitably involve a cut into front-line services of about 1.45 per cent, if my maths is correct.

Senator Brandis: That might be right if those assumptions were correct. I have not seen that figure of two to three per cent.

Senator WRIGHT: I might ask the department to take that on notice. I presume that if there has been a meeting recently with the director of NATSILS and the department you may have already been alerted to that issue. I think obviously that is an important one to raise. I might have time for one more quick question. If I can go back to the issue of the funding for the environmental—

Senator Brandis: As I said, Mr Cubillo, the chairman of NATSILS, met with two of my staff only a fortnight ago in Brisbane.

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

A review of total funds across the program was completed which resulted in 4.45% (\$13.25m over four years) being estimated to represent policy reform.