

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

Group: 2

Program: 1.5

Question No. AE15/089

Senator Collins asked the following question at the hearing on 27 March 2015:

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: I am happy to take your suggestion that the anomaly was that one particular example of four of five. But there are a number of services which I still want to understand—the circumstances around what is happening to them to the best that we are able. You have taken on notice also the Yarra Ranges legal centre. The next one I want to ask about is the closure of the Nhulunbuy service. What can you tell me about that one?

Mr Manning: That is the centre run by NAAJA in the Northern Territory, is that the one you are referring to?

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: Yes.

Mr Manning: That body made a decision to close that centre. I do not have the details with me; I think it was last year that they announced that.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: You do not have the details?

Mr Manning: I do not have the details of the date they made the announcement.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: No, I am after the details of the—

Senator Scullion: I have some background knowledge, because I have had discussions with NAAJA about this. Again, there is no really unique assumption I can make from this, but I have yet to hear from NAAJA, in consideration of yesterday's announcement, about whether or not their decision to close Nhulunbuy was in fact a rationalisation in front of what they thought might be able to happen. You also have to take into consideration that about the time they made that announcement there was also an announcement that the fundamental economy of Nhulunbuy—that is, the bauxite mine—indicated it would close its alumina production, and it has since has. Again, I am not sure, and I do not wish to verbal them, but it is something that is a matter for NAAJA. A number of things happened around that time that certainly would have had an impact on what they considered the provision of those services. It could have been an anticipation of the budget and it could also have been associated with the closure of the mine.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: Can I understand what representations they made to either the department or the government as to the circumstances that would lead to the closure.

Mr Manning: We can take the question in relation to details on notice, but at that time there was uncertainty in relation to the proposed budget cuts and about the quantum that each of the ATSILSs would receive. My recollection is that, at the time, NAAJA attributed the decision, at least in part, to that uncertainty. My recollection is also that it did not mean a cessation of services in that area but rather that they would provide them from one of their other offices on a circuit basis, if you like, rather than having a permanent presence. The decision of yesterday will

mean that they will not receive the impact of the funding reduction, because of the cuts that were proposed up until yesterday.

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

North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) advised the Attorney-General's Department by email on 30 June 2014 that it was intending to close its Nhulunbuy office in December 2014.

The Attorney-General's advisors met with NAAJA on 4 August 2014 in Nhulunbuy. The Attorney-General met with NAAJA in Darwin on 14 August 2014.