

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

Group: 2

Program: 1.5

Question No. AE15/090

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

Mr Manning: In relation to the Indigenous Legal Assistance Program, we do not require services to be provided in particular locations. That is left to the providers. Obviously, there would be a limit to that. They have made a decision more than 12 months before receiving a funding reduction to close a particular office. As I said earlier, in their public statements they attributed some of that to some funding uncertainty, but whether or not that its entirety of the factors that were taken into account in their decision-making process, as I think the minister indicated, is a matter for the NAAJA board. As I said earlier, they are servicing from the Darwin office on a circuit arrangement, as they do in a number of other locations.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: Do you know what impact there is of moving to a circuit type delivery? In similar terms to what we were just talking about with respect to the far west legal service, which says that it has turned away 80 people, do we know what the impact is of a service such as the Nhulunbuy one moving to being operated on a circuit basis?

Mr Manning: I would have to take that on notice. I do not have that information here.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: You will correct the evidence if you are wrong about exactly when the service closed, too, I am sure.

Mr Manning: I think there is a difference, potentially, between when that service closed and when the leasing et cetera terminates. As I said, I am advised that it has already occurred, but they are probably still—

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: Perhaps if you could just take on notice—

Mr Manning: but I will clarify.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: when it did close.

Mr Manning: Certainly, Senator.

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

The North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) advised the Attorney-General's Department by email on 30 June 2014 that their Nhulunbuy office would close in December 2014. Staff have moved to the Darwin office but the department understands NAAJA will continue to pay the rent on its Nhulunbuy Office until 30 June 2015.

The department understands that NAAJA made an operational decision to close the office to save on overheads as that office accounted for a small portion of the services they provide. Services to that area are now provided from Darwin, in the same way NAAJA services the rest of their region, by flying into communities and staying there to attend circuit courts and provide assistance in family law and civil matters on a needs basis. NAAJA provide services which meet a 'cluster' of legal needs so that both criminal and civil lawyers assist the client in a holistic way.