

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

Group: 2

Program: 1.5

Question No. AE15/108

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

Mr Manning: It is not correct to call it cut, Senator. Rather that funding expires at the end of the financial year. The money does not come from a different program—it all comes out of the Indigenous Legal Assistance program, which was part of yesterday's announcement. The money is still there, available for that use. The issue of whether peak bodies like NATSILS are generally able to be funded in that way is a matter before government at the moment.

Senator WRIGHT: It is still before government at this stage, but they have been operating on the understanding that they would not be re-funded when it expires. That was my understanding of their understanding.

Mr Manning: In the last month I went to their most recent meeting and essentially told them what I have just told you: that the matter is still before government. Whenever any funding is due to expire, there is always a chance that it will not be renewed but we have been keeping them aware of its status and government's consideration of it. They have known that for a little while now.

Senator WRIGHT: Were there any announcements regarding that particular program in the last budget? Was there any indication that it would not be extended?

Mr Manning: I will have to take that on notice. Certainly not in the last budget, because the only impact in the last budget was that Legal Aid Commission money we spoke about. In relation to the 2013 MYEFO and its phasing in, I will have to check whether there is an answer. I will take that on notice.

Senator WRIGHT: My understanding was that they were very much of the view that they would not be refunded, and they were making arrangements in terms of staff and so on. I am very interested to know whether or not there is a possibility or a likelihood that they may be refunded.

Mr Manning: There is certainly a possibility they may be refunded. That is a decision that is in the budget and for which recommendations have been made. I will just have to check, in relation to those advocacy changes, whether or not there was ever an announcement made. My recollection is that there was nothing that specific, but I will have to confirm that.

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

No announcement was made in the 2014 Budget about future funding arrangements under the Indigenous Legal Assistance Programme for the National Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (NATSILS).

At the time of the 2013 Mid-year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, NATSILS was advised that it was unlikely to be funded beyond its current funding agreement, which expires on 30 June 2015.

Decisions for distribution of programme funds beyond 30 June 2015, including the reinstated funds, are a matter for government.