

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

**Program:** 1.8 Australian Government Disaster Financial Support Payments

**Question No. BE16/024**

**Senator Cameron asked the following question at the hearing on 5 May 2016:**

Senator CAMERON: But this is more than cleaning up. This is basically the Queensland community being denied \$1 billion for use in Queensland, and it is not in the forward estimates for this budget, so how can they be assured that they will be paid this \$1 billion that has been used to get them back into more productive approaches after a disaster? How can they be assured?

Mr Crosweller: The money is budgeted for the next two financial years to pay Queensland back. Once the claim is acquitted, the payments will be made.

Senator CAMERON: As soon as it is acquitted, it will be paid? That is what you are saying?

Mr Crosweller: Over two financial years.

Senator CAMERON: Why over two financial years?

Mr Crosweller: That was the decision of the government.

Senator CAMERON: That is a government decision. So, even if they can acquit within a month, the government has made a decision that the money will be withheld and will not be paid until over two financial years. That is a penalty against the Queensland population, isn't it?

Mr Crosweller: All I can do is cite the budget papers. The budget identifies two payments, in 2016-17 and 2017-18.

Senator CAMERON: That is a political decision, isn't it?

Mr Crosweller: It is a decision of the government, Senator.

Senator CAMERON: It is a political decision of the government to withhold this money from the Queensland government, even if they can reconcile, for two years.

Mr Crosweller: I can only reiterate that it is a decision of the government.

Senator CAMERON: I think that says it all. This is a political decision, and you should be ashamed of yourself, Senator Brandis.

CHAIR: Come on!

Senator Brandis: Senator Cameron, I think your characterisation of the decision, if I may say so, is completely wrong.

Senator CAMERON: It is not.

Senator Brandis: But, if you want me to inquire of the minister as to the bases of the decision, I am happy to take the question on notice.

Senator CAMERON: I am happy for you to do that.

Senator Brandis: Thank you.

Senator CAMERON: Can you also then provide on notice whether, when the reconciliation is finished, Queenslanders can get access to the money that they are entitled to under the NDRRA, and it is not withheld for political reasons over two years?

Senator Brandis: I am not sure whether that really is a question, but I am quite certain that people in every state in Australia including my own do have access to that to which they are entitled. You have raised a particular matter: why was this payment in two instalments over two years? I will find out the reasons for that.

...

Senator CAMERON: If I ask the question, I can go. Senator Brandis, could you also inquire if it is possible for the Queensland population, the Queensland government, to receive that \$1 billion as soon as the reconciliation is made, consistent with the ANAO and departmental requirements?

Senator Brandis: I have already given you that assurance, Senator, but I will make an inquiry as to the bases of these decisions about staging the payments.

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

Decisions about the timing of payments following completion of the reconciliation process will be made through normal budget processes.