

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

BUDGET ESTIMATES 2017

Attorney General's Department

Program: 1.2 AGD Operating Expenses - National Security and Criminal Justice

Question No. BE17-034

Senator Pratt asked the following question on 24 May 2017:

Senator PRATT: I note that this year's budget commits only just over \$9 million for CVE programs and that it drops to just over \$6 million per year in the following three years. Does this indicate a downgrading of the commitment to countering violent extremism, compared with the announcement?

Ms Jones: No—there has been some phasing of the money that we received 2014 across the forward estimates. But we would be looking to maintain our level of activity and in fact increase it, particularly in developing materials around addressing the extremist narrative on social media.

Senator PRATT: Was the \$64 million I mentioned over the forward estimates?

Ms Jones: That is correct.

Senator PRATT: So it includes the \$9 million for this year, including the budget money previously, and \$6 million in the following three years. Why is there a difference of \$3 million a year between this year and the following three years?

Ms Jones: I would need to check the breakdown across the four years. I should note that \$45 million of that \$64 million was allocated to the Attorney-General's Department. The remainder was allocated, I believe, to the AFP. In regard to the phasing of the money, I would need to take that on notice—

Senator WATT: If you have the budget papers handy you might be able to have a look. It is program 1.7 in the portfolio budget statements—I do not have a page number but it is table 2.1. The measure—about half way down the page—'Countering violent extremism to prevent terrorism' for 2016-17, if you would like to look it up now.

Senator PRATT: There is a spike in funding this year compared with last year but I cannot see what the funding was in the 2014-15 year. In which year will that \$64 million commitment be completed? Is that in 2020-21?

Ms Jones: Yes.

Senator PRATT: So the remainder of the \$64 million was spent in the preceding 2014-15, 2015-16 years?

Ms Jones: I am sorry. In regard to the exact breakdown, we certainly put additional funding in the first years in order to be able to do the intervention program and build up—the sequencing of that funding across the forward estimates, obviously, the 2018-19, 2019-20, and 2020-21 was just a split across those programs. If I could take on notice to give you more detail about how we see that being allocated across the programs?

Senator PRATT: All right. If you have not quite an extra \$2 million in the fund for next financial year, what are you expecting to achieve with that extra \$2 million?

Ms Jones: The significant activities we will be undertaking next year are particularly focused on the counter-narrative social media work. In terms of the ongoing impact and influence of extremist narrative, we see that as a really significant and enduring issue. It is not strictly associated with ISIL. We see other groups such as al-Qaeda learning from ISIL in terms of much

more sophisticated use of social media. Notwithstanding that ISIL itself may be experiencing some diminution in its territorial control in Iraq and Syria, we consider the ongoing risks associated with that extremist material to be quite significant.

Senator PRATT: What is the rough breakdown of how next financial year's \$9 million will be spent?

Ms Jones: I do not have here with me tonight a table that sets that out. I can get it for you.

Senator PRATT: You do not have a rough idea? If you could also take on notice what elements of that program are likely to be dropped in the following three years because of the funding difference between '17 and '18 and the three forward years?

Ms Jones: I can do that.

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Senator PRATT: For the sake of brevity, could you take on notice what specific services or programs are funded within that budget line item—and we have had some discussion of these—including a view towards ongoing service delivery funding within countering violent extremism.

The response to the honourable Senator's question is as follows:

There is no reduction in funding in the out-years. Funding in 2017-18 includes additional one-off funding to support implementation of a dedicated CVE community advice and support helpline in NSW and the development of a national approach to these services.

The breakdown of funding in 2017-18 is as follows:

- \$3.07 million for intervention programs and related education and awareness initiatives under the Living Safe Together program
- \$3.02 million to combat terrorist propaganda (particularly online), and
- \$3.2 million to support the implementation of the community advice and support helpline.