

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 On 9 February 2017, the Senate referred the following documents to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee (the committee) for examination and report:

- Particulars of proposed additional expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2017 [Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2016–17];
- Particulars of certain proposed additional expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2017 [Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2016–17]; and
- Final Budget Outcome 2015–16.¹

1.2 The committee is required to examine the 2016–17 additional estimates contained in these documents in relation to the Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio and the Agriculture and Water Resources portfolio. Following examination, the committee is required to table its report on the 2016–17 additional estimates.² On 23 March 2017, the committee decided to hold a spill-over hearing on 20 April 2017 with the Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio. However, the hearing didn't proceed. In lieu of the hearing, senators were invited to provide additional written questions for which responses were due on 26 April 2017. To allow for this process, the original date for the estimates report was extended from 28 March 2017 to 4 May 2017.³

Additional Estimates hearings

1.3 The committee examined witnesses from the Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio on 27 February and 20 April 2017, and witnesses from the Agriculture and Water Resources portfolio on 28 February 2017.

1.4 The committee heard evidence from the following senators:

- Senator the Hon. Fiona Nash, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Local Government and Territories, Minister for Regional Communications (also representing the Minister for Infrastructure); and
- Senator the Hon. Anne Ruston, Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources (representing the Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources).

1.5 Evidence was also provided by:

1 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 26, 9 February 2017, pp. 888–889.

2 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 13, 8 November 2016, pp. 411–412.

3 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 34, 23 March 2017, p. 1150.

- Mr Mike Mrdak, Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development; and
- Mr Daryl Quinlivan, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources; and
- officers representing the departments and agencies covered by the estimates before the committee.

1.6 The committee thanks the ministers, departmental secretaries and officers for their assistance and cooperation during the hearings.

Questions on notice

1.7 In accordance with Standing Order 26, the committee is required to set a date for the lodgement of written answers and additional information. The committee resolved to extend the return date for the majority of written answers to questions on notice from 18 April 2017 to 26 April 2017.⁴ However, the original deadline of 18 April was retained for responses from the Agriculture and Water Resources portfolio to Senator Urquhart's questions on Tasmanian water and sewerage infrastructure.

1.8 The committee also set three separate dates for the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources to supply information connected to the outbreak of white spot disease in prawns. The first tranche of information is due on 26 April with the second due on 3 May and final tranche due on 10 May 2017.

Record of proceedings

1.9 This report does not attempt to analyse the evidence presented during the hearings. However, it does provide a summary of the issues that were covered by the committee for each portfolio.

Note on references and additional information

1.10 References to the Hansard transcript are to the proof Hansard; page numbers may vary between the proof and the official Hansard transcripts.

1.11 Copies of the Hansard transcripts, documents tabled at the hearings, and additional information received after the hearings will be tabled in the Senate and available on the committee's website.

4 Once received, answers to questions on notice will be published at the following website address:
http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Senate_Estimates/rtratcte/estimates/add1617/index