

Chapter 1

Introduction

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

- particulars of proposed expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2018 [Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2017-18]; and
- particulars of certain proposed expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2018 [Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2017-18].¹

1.2 The committee is required to examine the 2017-18 Budget estimates contained in these two 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 20 June 2017.²

Budget estimates hearings

1.3 The committee examined witnesses from both portfolios at hearings held between 22 and 25 May 2017.

1.4 On 28 March 2017, the Senate amended the order of the Senate of 8 November 2016 relating to the hearings for the 2017-18 Budget estimates to include a cross-portfolio estimates hearing on Murray-Darling Basin Plan on 26 May 2017.

1.5 The Budget estimates hearings were conducted in accordance with the agreed agenda as follows:

- 22 and 23 May 2017—Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio;
- 24 and 25 May 2017—Agriculture and Water Resources portfolio; and
- 26 May 2017—Cross portfolio Murray-Darling Basin Plan matters.

1.6 The committee heard evidence from the following senators:

- Senator the Hon Fiona Nash, Minister for Regional Development and Minister for Local Government and Territories (representing the Minister for Infrastructure);
- Senator the Hon Zed Seselja, Assistant Minister for Social Services and Multicultural Affairs; and

1 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 39, 9 May 2017, p. 1311.

2 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 13, 8 November 2016, p. 412.

- Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources (representing the Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources).

1.7 Evidence was also provided by:

- Mr Daryl Quinlivan, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources;
- Mr Mike Mrdak, Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development;
- Mr David Papps, Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder;
- Ms Rona Mellor PSM, Acting Auditor-General;
- Mr Phillip Glyde, Chief Executive of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority; and
- officers representing the departments and agencies covered by the estimates before the committee.

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

Questions on notice

1.9 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 that they be submitted by 7 July 2017.³

Record of proceedings

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

Note on references and additional information

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

1.12 Copies of the proof 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.

3 Once received, answers to questions on notice will be published at the following website address:
http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Senate_Estimates/rratctte/estimates/bud1718/index.