SENATE EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

2003-2004 SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING 6 NOVEMBER

EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS PORTFOLIO

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Outcome 1: An effectively functioning labour market

Output Group 1.1: Labour market policy and analysis

Question Number: W286-04

Question:

Senator Webber asked the following written question on notice:

On December 12, 2002 A consultation paper "Building a simpler system to help jobless families and individuals" was launched jointly by the Ministers for Family and Community Services and the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations – the launch of the paper was followed by a consultation process.

- (a) What was the timetable for the consultation process?
- (b) How much did the consultation process cost?
- (c) Who was consulted?
- (d) What were the issues raised?
- (e) What were the outcomes?
- (f) What is the timeline for decisions to be made and for actual changes to occur?

Answer:

- (a) The consultation process commenced with the release of the consultation paper, *Building a simpler system to help jobless families and individuals*, on 12 December 2002. Ministers made a call for public submissions and this was followed by further calls in advertisements placed in major metropolitan and regional newspapers in February, March and June 2003. The closing date for submissions was 20 June 2003. In addition, a series of round tables and focus groups were conducted. The first of these was held on 3 March 2003 and the last was on 27 May 2003.
- (b) The approximate cost of the consultation process was \$330,000. This includes the cost of printing, distributing and launching the consultation paper, establishing a call centre to field queries, placing advertisements in newspapers calling for submissions, engaging a consultant to facilitate the process, hiring of venues and catering and the cost of travel of Welfare Reform Consultative Forum members to host the round tables.
- (c) Consultations covered a broad cross-section of the community. The call for public submissions ensured that anyone with an interest in welfare reform had

the opportunity to have their views considered. A total of 210 written submissions were received. The breakdown of submissions by respondent type was as follows:

- community/welfare sector organisations, 75 submissions;
- other organisations, 11 submissions;
- individuals, 124 submissions.

FaCS and DEWR invited 356 stakeholders to the round tables, which were held across Australia. Participants were selected to reflect a range of experience and expertise and ensure a representative cross-section of the community. A total of 203 stakeholders from 179 organisations attended the round tables. They included people from the community/welfare, business/industry, employment services, academic and government sectors.

Focus groups were held with 88 income support recipients receiving the range of working age income support payments. Groups were carefully selected to bring together people at similar stages of life. In addition, 23 people attended focus groups aimed at retired people and people aged 18-65 in paid work and not receiving income support. These sessions were held to obtain views of people not receiving working age income support.

- (d) The consultation process was largely based around the consultation paper and therefore focused on the objectives and values, principles and design features of a new system. Round table and focus group participants were given the opportunity to identify the positive and negative features of the current welfare system. Participants were then asked to identify what the objectives and design principles for a new system should be. Finally, the discussion focused on the key design features for a new system, particularly around issues of eligibility, assistance, incentives for participation and requirements. While there was broad support for reform, a wide variety of views were expressed about the scale of reform and key priorities.
- (e) There are no outcomes as yet as the Government is currently considering the feedback it has received from the community through the round tables, focus groups and public submissions.
- (f) The Government is considering the issue and no public announcement has been made as yet.