

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee
QUESTIONS ON NOTICE—BUDGET ESTIMATES, 31 MAY 2011
Veterans' Affairs portfolio

Q No.	Program: Division or Agency	Senator	Broad topic	Question	Proof Hansard, page & hearing date or Written Q	Date rec'd	Date tabled
1	General	Birmingham	Funding	Has the Department provided any funding to any of the following organisations in the current financial year or in any of the previous three financial years? If so, please detail when it was provided and for what purpose. a. Australian Conservation Foundation b. Australian Council of Trade Unions c. Australian Youth Climate Coalition d. Climate Action Network Australia e. The Climate Institute f. Environment Victoria g. GetUp! h. Greenpeace Australia Pacific i. World Wildlife Fund Australia	Written	28.07.11	25.08.11

2	General	Humphries		I refer the minister to the statement by the Minister for Finance, Sen Penny Wong, of 21 April 2011 entitled "Driving Efficiencies in Government". In this statement the minister says: The Government has today also released the Review of the Measures of Agency Efficiency report. The central recommendation of the Review - to apply the efficiency dividend at portfolio level – will be adopted by the Government. The Government acknowledges that some agencies have been concerned about the current efficiency dividend having an unequal effect on some agencies. Adopting this recommendation will provide portfolios with more flexibility in applying the efficiency dividend, including to smaller agencies. I also refer the Minister to page 98 of the Portfolio Budget Statement for his portfolio, in which the effects of the "enhanced efficiency dividend" on the Australian War Memorial is described. I ask the Minister: 1. Does the "enhanced efficiency dividend" referred to on page 98 describe the full increase of the efficiency dividend on the Australian War Memorial for the 2011/12 and 2012/13 financial years from 1% to 1½%? 2. If it does not, to what does it refer? 3. Does the Australian War Memorial qualify as one of the "smaller agencies" that the Minister for Finance refers to in her statement? 4. Does the Department of Veterans Affairs have the "flexibility" to apply a lower efficiency dividend to the Australian War Memorial than is described on page 98 of the PBS? 5. If so, why has the Department chosen not to apply a lower efficiency dividend to the Australian War Memorial?	Written	28.07.11	25.08.11
3	1.2	Ronaldson	Service Pensions and TPI	Senator RONALDSON—Yes, indeed. Parliamentary Secretary, are you aware that under the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, with the set-top box subsidy to pensioners and vulnerable members of the community to assist in the switch over to digital television, there is an email doing the rounds—someone may well have a brief on this—suggesting that veterans receiving only a part service pension are not entitled even though they may be receiving a TPI pension? Senator RONALDSON—Okay. They would in that situation. Could you just take it on notice anyway, Mr Luckhurst. If you want to respond formally to the email, I would be grateful for that.	Pages 118 - 119	28.07.11	25.08.11

4	1.4	Ronaldson	Veterans' Advocacy Funding Cut	In 2007, Labor promised to increase funding for the Building Excellence in Support and Training (BEST) programme by \$8 million. At the time, Labor said: <i>Labor believes that these programs are invaluable to the ex-service community. Well trained and supported ESOs and individuals contribute greatly to improving the operation of DVA – and they also provide a saving to government through their work.</i> <i>In recognition of this fact, Labor will commit an additional \$8 million to support ex-service organisations to provide essential services for their members.</i> In 2011-12, the Government will slash \$4 million from the BEST programme, and \$4 million from Veteran and Community Grants, which assist with providing social and interactive events to veterans and to prevent isolation. This is outrageous. At the last election, Labor made no mention of cutting funding. The Coalition, on the other hand, promised to increase BEST and TIP funding by \$2.5 million per year for the next three years – a total new investment of \$7.5 million. At the time, the Coalition indicated this additional funding would assist with implementation of the recommendations of the Advocacy Funding Review which were, at the time, still secret. The recommendations of this Review were made public after the election and in February this year the Government announced it had accepted all 45 recommendations. Not one of the recommendations called for a cut in funding. The review said that BEST funds were limited, and rather than cut funding, suggested that more needed to be done to work within current funding envelopes. It even suggested a means test of ex-service organisations to see whether the individual organisations could contribute more of their own financial resources to assist the local veteran community. The Review did, however, recommend the establishment of veterans' support centres across Australia, with working models to be established in Queensland and regional New South Wales. Again, when asked, the Government says it will not force organisations together. But the cut in funding suggests otherwise. This is means testing and forced amalgamations by stealth. How can the Government build these new centres whilst at the same time cutting \$4 million cut in BEST funding over the forward estimates? Won't this severely jeopardise the work of the largely-volunteer ex-service organisations across Australia? Minister, why has the Government slashed this funding, just months after accepting the recommendations of an internal Advocacy Funding Review which did not identify a need to cut funding, but rather suggested there may not be enough funding presently? How do you justify yet another breach of trust with the veteran and ex-service community.	Written	28.07.11	25.08.11
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5	2.1	Ronaldson	PTSD Programs	Senator RONALDSON—In the quality assurance of PTSD programs annual report, on page 1, the document says only nine of the 12 PTSD programs were active during the 2009-10 financial year. I want to know what are those programs, what do they do, how does a veteran access them, are they publicised, why were only nine of them active during that last financial year and if not, why not? Do you want to take that on notice? Mr Campbell—Given the time and the question, I think we will take that on notice.	Page 117	28.07.11	25.08.11
6	2.3	Ronaldson	Veterans' Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme	Minister I note your Department's explanation for the major adjustment in the cost of your flawed Pharmaceutical Reimbursement Scheme. This scheme is making up for Labor's broken 2007 election promise to relieve the 'burden on veterans of the cost of medications to treat their war caused disabilities'. Labor's 2007 "Plan for Veterans' Affairs" went on to say "this will be a key objective to be addressed in our first term of Government". Of course the veteran and ex-service community, and the Coalition, know that a solution was not delivered ahead of the last election. Instead, Labor promised to deal with the issue if reelected in 2010. Their second-rate scheme leaves our more than 1,500 of our most disabled war veterans as well as war widows and orphans. Labor's scheme relies on a complex reimbursement of out of pocket expenses, which will not help those veterans on limited or fixed incomes deal with the rising prices of other items. In contrast, the Coalition's scheme, which covered 87,000 disabled veterans, including all 27,000 TPI pensioners, delivered immediate relief for the disabled veteran once they had paid for 30 scripts. The Department is still unclear about how the scheme will work, and the Parliament is yet to see legislation to enact Labor's second-rate scheme. But I do have some concerns about the cost. During a recent Senate Estimates hearing, your Department's Secretary told the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade committee that the rise in the cost of the scheme from \$18.2 million to \$30.1 million: <i>"It is not a blow out. It is a combination of two things. The costing in the government's election was over a shorter period than the budget costing and it was done on a cash basis, whereas the budget costing is done on a fiscal basis."</i> So, during the election, Labor chose to deliberately misrepresent the cost of their scheme. Why? Why did they not cost the scheme during the election in the same way they claim the Coalition should have costed our military superannuation reform proposals? Why is it one rule for you and one rule for us?	Written	28.07.11	25.08.11

7	2.4	Ronaldson	Mental Health Funding	Senator RONALDSON—.....Mr Campbell, am I correct in saying that since 2009-10 the government has not increased or appropriated any new specific funding in the portfolio for the treatment of mental health amongst veterans and the ex-service community? I think there were two measures: in 2008-09 the commitment of the \$3.8 million for the nine strategic mental health initiatives, and then in 2010 the Dunt review with about \$9.4 million. Is that correct—two measures since that time? Mr Campbell—In terms of budget measures, yes. But of course there is a lot of expenditure under those measures and under health expenditure generally. Senator RONALDSON—Were there any new health measures, then, since 2008-09? Mr Campbell—In the 2009-10 budget, the major new health initiative was what is called the Coordinated Veterans Care Program, which rolled out from 1 May. I think that is the major one, but I would ask Mr Rochow to go back to our budget documentation to see if there are any others. Senator RONALDSON—I think I might have said 2008-09; I meant 2009-10. Mr Campbell: Yes, and the one I talked about was the major one in the budget for 2009-10. Mr Rochow—Unfortunately I do not have the numbers with me for the year in question that you have indicated, but one of the major initiatives was the Dunt review. There was money allocated for case managers and the like for that particular budget measure, which was specifically directed at mental health. I am happy to take on notice that particular question in terms of any other measures. Senator RONALDSON—I have got a number of questions in relation to the Dunt review, which I will probably end up putting on notice now, Mr Rochow, but if you or one of your fellow officers have got something else there then I am happy to hear it now. Mr Rochow—No, I do not have those available with me here tonight, but I am happy to take that on notice.	Page 89	28.07.11	25.08.11
8	2.5	Ronaldson	VVCS Co-location - Lismore	Senator Ronaldson—When was the corporate outsourcing done? Was there a contractor engaged in that? Ms Dotta—No, I do not have that information available; I will need to take that on notice. We were required to advise the owner by 31 March, and we contacted the real estate agents in the lead-up to that. Senator RONALDSON—When? Ms Dotta—I would have to take the actual dates on notice and come back to you.	Page 93	28.07.11	25.08.11
9	2.7	Ronaldson	Mental Health	Senator RONALDSON—Indeed, the suicide prevention funding 2009-10 goes through until 2012-13, is that right, and as you say the mental health workers funding has now finished. You are going to take on notice where that February trial has been funded from. So to answer my very first question, there has been nothing since the 2009-10 budget in relation to that mental health area?	Page 98	28.07.11	25.08.11

10	2.7	Ronaldson	Notations of client records	Ms Bell—No, that is not correct. Sorry, Senator, if I was not making myself clear. This protocol was in development for some time. By the time the protocol was endorsed, case coordinators had been introduced. So there are elements of this protocol that are still highly relevant and guide people in a number of ways that they conduct administration. Specifically for clients at risk of self-harm or threatening harm to others there is a new referral mechanism which has superseded. That does not mean that there are not notations on the system and the notation that would appear now with case coordination is in case coordination. They would refer a person who is viewing the system to the fact that the client has been referred to case coordination. I think earlier you asked me the question of what would be the sort of notation that you would see on the system; that would be the sort of notation you would see on the system. Senator RONALDSON—Can you just take this on notice because I, quite frankly, do not have the time, and nor have you, to go through the full answer. I cannot see, at a quick glance, any reference there to case coordinators taking over the effective role or superseding the details of the protocol. If it is there, I apologise. I do not think it is. If you could take that on notice and indicate to me where that would appear, or where it does appear, given that I think it was a very significant lengthy question with a very significant answer and it was not there. So can I just be absolutely clear: is there any ongoing notation on DVA files under the protocol system of people assessing whether a client is at risk?	Page 99 & 100	28.07.11	25.08.11
11	2.7	Ronaldson	Staff training – annotations of client records	Senator RONALDSON—What training is there for staff in relation to what annotations they should be making on a file if they are concerned? If there is no training then please just say there is no training and then I can move on to my next question. Ms Bell—I guess what I am saying, Senator, is that I cannot answer that. I will have to take that on notice.	Page 100	28.07.11	25.08.11
12	2.7	Ronaldson	Staff training – annotations of client records	Mr Campbell—I will make a comment and then I will undertake to come back to the committee in writing. The comment I will make is that I think the paragraph you have read from, and you have read it very accurately, is ambiguous to say the least, and I think therefore it is very unhelpful. The point that I think is being made there— Mr Campbell—.....So I ask you to let me go away and make sure my interpretation of this—and I do acknowledge that it is not that well written— is correct. Then I will come back to the committee. But I can assure you that my position as secretary is that people in the department do not just ring the VVCS about a client because of a phone call. They should not and I do not think they currently do that, but I would like to take that away and come back to you. Mr Campbell—As I said, I will take this away because I am not happy when I read that sentence. I will take it away and I will come back to the committee. But what I will not countenance, which is information going from the department to the VVCS , is something that I do not think any of my staff countenance. I will give an undertaking to you and the committee that I will go away and examine this and clarify it, and I will come back to the committee.	Page 105	28.07.11	25.08.11

13	3.1	Ronaldson	Rotary Kokoda Memorial Walk	Senator RONALDSON—In relation to the Rotary Kokoda memorial wall and walk, under the act I think the minister may consult persons or bodies that the minister thinks it is appropriate to consult. Is that right? Mr Evans—Yes, that is correct. Senator RONALDSON—Did the minister undertake any consultations in relation to this request? Mr Evans—The minister considered a brief that was provided by me and responded to that. Senator RONALDSON—Yes, okay, but did the minister consult a person or body? I am presuming that you do not fit into that part of the act—that it is someone outside, exterior to that. So was there any consultation undertaken? Mr Evans—I am not in a position to answer that question, Senator. To the best of my knowledge the minister responded to the brief that I put forward. Senator RONALDSON—Surely you can say whether there was consultation or not. Mr Evans—I would say that if I knew whether there was, but as I do not, I cannot. Senator RONALDSON—Will you take it on notice for me? Mr Evans—Yes. Senator RONALDSON—Has the minister visited the memorial? Mr Evans—I cannot answer that. Senator RONALDSON—Can you take it on notice? Mr Evans—Yes, I can.	Page 121	28.07.11	25.08.11
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14	3.2	Ronaldson	Centenary of ANZAC commemoration	Minister, finally I draw your attention to the Government's less than admirable record in the area of commemorations. Under this Government, the Australian War Memorial was forced to consider closing one day per week to save money because you had cut their funding by 20 per cent. It was only after considerable pressure from the community, and the Coalition, that you were dragged kicking and screaming to address this sorry state of affairs. The Coalition welcomes the Government's commitment of an additional \$8 million per year for the Australian War Memorial. Although there remains doubt about the Government's commitment to the redevelopment of the World War One galleries, given only \$1.7 million has been committed for feasibility study. The Government must guarantee that this work will be completed well ahead of the ANZAC Centenary in 2015. Minister, on 21 October last year the Prime Minister wrote to you about the funding crisis at the Australian War Memorial and instructed you to bring forward a Cabinet submission on the funding options. I note that her letter did not call for a funding review. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister also instructed you to: <i>"Detail suggestions for the Centenary of ANZAC and other important WW1 anniversaries"</i> This year's Budget, however, remains silent on any proposals for commemoration. On 26 March this year, you and the Prime Minister received the Report of the National Commission on the Commemoration of the Centenary of the ANZAC Landing. At the time, the Prime Minister indicated she would form an ANZAC Centenary Advisory Board <i>"to progress the work of the commission and provide strategic advice on the planning and implementation of ANZAC Centenary events and initiatives."</i> Yet this Board is yet to be appointed, well at least to be publicly announced. So not only is there no money for the ANZAC Centenary commemorations, but, since late March, nothing further has happened to progress the commemorative agenda. This is deeply troubling for the wider Australian community. Just last week, the Coalition heard how the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne needs to know in six months whether there will be Commonwealth assistance for refurbishment of the Shrine ahead of the ANZAC Centenary. The Shrine is, of course, one of three Military Memorials of National Significance. Similarly, the community of Albany needs certainty about funding for their proposed ANZAC Interpretive Centre – a Centre which, I note, received strong endorsement from the National Commission. Minister, you say that you will make an announcement in the third quarter of this year. But why has it taken you so long, especially given the Prime Minister asked you to do this last October?	Written	28.07.11	25.08.11
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15	AWM	Trood	Volume Three of the Official History	At the Additional Senate Estimates hearings in February 2011, the issue of a possible rewrite of volume three of the official history was raised. Has any progress been made to the possible funding of such a rewrite? According to an article in the <i>Canberra Times</i> (27 April 2011) “Mr Ekins said revising or withdrawing an official history would end a tradition of independence that dated back to the work of Charles Bean after World War 1.” Is this view shared by the War Memorial in relation to the possible rewriting of the third volume of the official history? What assurances can the War Memorial offer to the Vietnam Veterans Federation that their concerns regarding the content of the third volume of the official history will be addressed?	Written	28.07.11	25.08.11
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