

Senate Finance and Public Administration Standing Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
BUDGET ESTIMATES – 29 MAY 2008

Human Services Portfolio

Department/Agency: Centrelink
Outcome/Output Group: Outcome 1, Output 1.1
Topic: Northern Territory Intervention



Senator: Siewert

Question reference number: HS25a-k

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 11 July 2008

Questions:

HS25a

Is Centrelink aware of people on income management in the Northern Territory discarding their "store cards" leaving credit still on the cards?

HS25b

What is Centrelink doing to ensure this does not occur?

HS25c

How much has been spent on stored valued cards under the NT Intervention?

HS25d

Please provide a break down against major providers (eg, Coles, Woolworths, Kmart).

HS25e

How much has been redeemed? Please provide detail against the major providers

HS25f

How many Centrelink staff have been employed in total under the NT intervention?
How many in the NT?

HS25g

How long do those officers stay in the NT on average?

HS25h

What is the pay structure for officers working in the NT? Do they get paid more for working in the NT on the Intervention?

HS25i

What is average cost of keeping an officer in the NT?

HS25j

How much has been spent on Travel Allowance for staff working on the Intervention?

HS25k

What additional benefits or allowance do (staff working on the Intervention) receive?

Answers:

HS25a

No specific cases have been provided to Centrelink to enable the matter to be fully investigated. However, Centrelink has worked with individual customers and relevant stores to ensure that customers understand how to use the cards and how to obtain balances remaining on these cards.

HS25b

Centrelink Managers have working relationships with relevant merchants at the local level. One key point of discussion is reinforcing to customers that store cards are reusable until the balance is reduced to zero and that stores can confirm balances.

Staff in stores support customers by:

- circling or highlighting store card balances on customers receipts;
- encouraging customers to swipe their card to check the balance before they shop. Woolworths advise the majority of customers are now quite comfortable using the swipe machine to check their card balance; and
- advising customers at the time of purchase of the balance on their card and if there is any difference ask if they wish to use cash or keycard to make up the difference. Customers are aware that they can use their normal keycard along with their stored value cards to make a purchase.

Centrelink staff discuss key messages with customers about using store cards and provide a postcard style handout including the following information:

- how to see how much money is left on their store card;
- not to discard their store card until all money is used;
- store cards cannot be used to get cash from the store; and
- store cards should not be traded, sold or given to anyone.

HS25c

As at 31 May 2008, a total of \$9,092,932 has been spent on stored value cards under the Intervention. This is made up of \$9,088,010 on purchasing stored value cards and \$4,922 on freight and handling fees.

HS25d

The break down of stored value cards purchased against major providers, to 31 May 2008, is as follows:

Woolworths	\$3,968,500
Coles	\$2,404,040
K-Mart	\$2,096,290
Target	\$ 619,180
Total	\$9,088,010

HS25e

This information is not available from the major providers.



HS25f

Since the start of the intervention, a total of 809 staff have been employed on the Intervention for varying periods of time.

On 31 May 2008, 253 staff were located in the NT working on the Intervention.

HS25g

Six months is the average length of stay in the NT.

HS25h

Centrelink employees who are working in the NT on the Intervention have their employment conditions covered by the Centrelink Agreement (2006 - 2009) or an Australian Workplace Agreement. These agreements set out the classification structures, salary rate, leave etc for the employees.

The base pay structure does not differ from other employees working in Centrelink, but specific allowances may be payable as detailed in HS25k.

HS25i

The detailed information required to answer the question is not readily available. To obtain this information would be highly resource intensive and we cannot justify the level of expenditure that would be required to obtain it.

HS25j

As at 31 May 2008, a total of \$3,284,856 had been spent on Travel Allowance for staff working on the Intervention.

HS25k

The NT response allowance of \$150 gross per week is paid after a 21 day qualifying period to all employees who have relocated temporarily to the NT to assist with the response.

In addition, an Intervention locality allowance is paid to all employees working in defined Centrelink intervention 'field' teams in recognition of the 'hardship' of working in very remote/difficult conditions. An amount of \$150 gross per week is paid from the date of commencement with the field team.

Number of pages: Three

