

Chapter 1

Budget Estimates 2012–13

1.1 On 9 May 2012, the Senate referred to the Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee (the Committee), the following documents for examination and report:

- particulars of proposed expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2013;
- particulars of certain proposed expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2013; and
- particulars of proposed expenditure in relation to the parliamentary departments in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2013.

Portfolio coverage

1.2 The Committee has responsibility for examining the expenditure and outcomes of the:

- Parliament¹;
- Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio; and
- Finance and Deregulation portfolio.

1.3 Appendix 1 lists the departments, agencies, authorities and companies under the portfolios mentioned above.

Hearings

1.4 The Committee held public hearings on Monday, 21 May through to Thursday, 24 May 2012. Over the course of the four days of hearings—totalling over 33 hours—the Committee took evidence from the President of the Senate, Senator the Hon. John Hogg; Senator the Hon. Chris Evans, Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research; and Senator the Hon. Penny Wong, Minister for Finance and Deregulation, together with officers of the departments and agencies concerned. The Committee expresses its appreciation for the assistance of the President, Ministers and the officers who appeared before it.

1.5 The Independent National Security Legislation Monitor; the National Australia Day Council; the Albury-Wodonga Development Corporation; and the Australian River Co Ltd were not called by the Committee.

1 As a matter of comity between the Houses, neither House inquires into the operations of the other House. For this reason, neither the annual report of, nor the proposed expenditure for, the Department of the House of Representatives is referred to a Senate committee for review.

1.6 The Hansard transcripts of evidence are available on the internet at: <http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/index.htm>

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 that written answers and additional information be submitted by Friday, 6 July 2012.

1.8 Further written information from departments and agencies will be tabled, as received, in the Senate. This information is available on the Committee's website: http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate_Committees?url=fapa_ctte/index.htm

Procedural and other matters

Provision of answers to questions on notice

1.9 At the commencement of the estimates hearings a number of answers to questions on notice remained outstanding from the Additional Estimates hearings of February 2012. The final two answers from the Department of Finance and Deregulation portfolio were provided to the Committee on Wednesday, 23 May. The Committee acknowledges the speed with which some answers were provided following the Additional Estimates hearing, however the Committee notes that the estimates process is an important accountability mechanism and committees expect timely responses to the questions put to departments and agencies.

Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General

1.10 During its examination of the Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General, Mr Brady, Official secretary provided evidence that the Governor-General had not engaged Mr Bob Ellis as a speechwriter. The Official Secretary provided a clarification of this evidence following information from the Governor-General that the Governor-General had on one occasion informally sought ideas from Mr Ellis for her 2011 Melbourne Cup speech. There was no payment from the Office for Mr Ellis's services and the information had not been previously communicated to any staff member at Government House, including the Official Secretary. In light of Mr Brady's prompt correction and the above information, the Committee accepted the evidence and clarification provided.