

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
AUSTRALIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Question No. 51

Senator Siewert asked the following question at the hearing on 20 October 2008:

With regard to the impact of the efficiency dividend:

- a) how has this affected staffing
- b) how has this impacted on cuts to programs
- c) have any projects been cut, and
- d) provide details on any significant projects that have been cut as a result.

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

- a) The increased efficiency dividend combined with the loss of funding for complaint handling resources (Additional Estimates 2007-08), has reduced the total appropriated funding to the Commission in 2008-09 by about \$2.1 million from the prior year period. The Commission has received permission to draw on prior year reserves to budget for a \$700,000 operating loss in both the 2008-09 and 2009-10 which will cushion the impact of the loss on operating activities. Staffing levels are unlikely to be significantly affected in the current year as the budget cuts have generally been absorbed through re-phasing of program activities.

The Commission lodged a submission to the Joint House Committee concerning the impact of the efficiency dividend on the Commission: see http://www.humanrights.gov.au/legal/submissions/2008/20080729_efficiency_dividend.html

- b) The impact of the reduction in funds has been spread evenly across the Commission through a 14.5% cut to all operating areas in 2008-09.
- c) Projects have had to be prioritised and some have not commenced (such as implementing a new complaint database) to conform to the available budget. Some projects that were already in progress have had reduced resources dedicated to them and have therefore needed to be either re-phased or reduced in their scope or activities.
- d) A number of program activities have been re-phased to later years or the scope of the project has been reduced to conform to the available budget. Activities that have been affected include promotional, information, education, community liaison and awareness activities and those activities that require significant travel and consultation.