

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

Output 1.1

Question No. 57

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

With regard to the Indigenous counselling Service Indigerelate provided by Interrelate in Lismore, can the Attorney-General advise:

- a) What outreach services have been provided by Indigerelate to Indigenous communities in northern NSW since the inception of this program?
- b) Has an evaluation of the effectiveness of these services been conducted against the outcomes outlined in the tender agreement?
- c) If so, when was it conducted and what were the results?
- d) What is the process by which the evaluation of an Indigenous outreach service, such as Indigerelate, is conducted?
- e) Is the evaluation undertaken by independent evaluators?
- f) What feedback was sought from Indigerelate staff, previous and existing, in the course of the program evaluation?
- g) Is the Attorney-General aware of any complaints about the effectiveness of the outreach services since the program has been operating?
- h) Has the Attorney-General's department contacted any former or existing staff member from Indigerelate in regards to concerns about provision of services to Indigenous communities in Northern NSW?
- i) What, if any, actions have been taken to investigate any complaints made?

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

- a) Indigerelate is not funded as a stand alone service. It is a part of Interrelate Family Centres, which runs the Lismore Family Relationship Centre. The Family Relationship Centre as a whole provides outreach in Ballina/Byron, Casino, Kyogle and Tweed Heads.
- b) The Australian Institute of Family Studies has been contracted to undertake an evaluation of the family law reforms. The Family Relationship Centres are included as part of that evaluation.
- c) The evaluation is currently underway.
- d) The Department would contract an independent organisation to undertake such an evaluation. The process would depend on the type of service evaluated.
- e) Evaluations are normally conducted by an independent evaluator.
- f) Indigerelate is not funded as a stand alone service. Staff of Interrelate, including those involved in Indigerelate, have the opportunity to provide input through staff surveys being conducted as part of the AIFS evaluation.
- g) and h) The Attorney-General's Department is not aware of any complaints from the public about the effectiveness of the outreach services. The Department was contacted by two Interrelate

staff members involved in Indigerelate in late 2006 and early 2007 about concerns they had about local Interrelate management. They mainly related to internal management issues but included concerns relating to the reporting of Indigenous outreach.

- i) The callers did not want Interrelate to be contacted. In these circumstances, the Department was unable to investigate the concerns about management. However, the Department was able to look into the reporting of outreach by examining information provided by Interrelate and was satisfied that there had been no incorrect reporting by Interrelate on Indigenous outreach. The internal management issues were subsequently dealt with by Interrelate when the callers raised the same issues in the presence of Interrelate staff in March 2007.