

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 12 February 2013

Question: 84

Topic: Constitutional Recognition of Local Government - Meeting with Local Government Ministers

Asked By: Senator JOYCE

Type of Question: RRA&T 113 - 114

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 5 April 2013

Number of pages: 1

Senator JOYCE: When was the last time that Minister Crean and any of the local government ministers from any of the states sat in a room together?

Ms Fleming: There was a local government ministerial forum. I would have to check the date.

Answer:

A joint meeting of the Council of Australian Governments Regional Australia Standing Council and the Local Government Minister's Forum was held on 18 April 2013.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 12 February 2013

Question: 85

Topic: Constitutional Recognition of Local Government - Meeting with WA Minister

Asked By: Senator JOYCE

Type of Question: RRA&T 114

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 5 April 2013

Number of pages: 1

Ms Fleming: There are a number of issues related to the constitutional recognition of local government. One is the timing of a referendum, and the IDC is looking at the timing and the risk issues. The other is the success factors or preconditions of success set out by the Australian Local Government Association and other experts, building on parliamentary reports in previous periods. Technically, there is still time to have a referendum and the JSC's final report will advise a joint parliamentary view as to whether the success factors, in their opinion, are likely to be met.

Senator JOYCE: Obviously states have every right to raise their concerns. There are states with serious concerns, one of them being, obviously, Western Australia; another one, to a lesser degree, being Victoria. Has the minister basically entered into closer negotiations with the Western Australians as to how we can deal with the issues of difference?

Ms Fleming: The minister has indicated that he is waiting for the final report. The JSC will have another hearing on 20 February and there will be a number of parties called to that, including me, and we will hear again what the states' positions are. Western Australia certainly raised its position in its submission to the JSC, and other states are still to confirm their position.

Senator JOYCE:When was the last time Minister Crean and the Western Australian minister sat in a room together?

Ms Fleming: I would have to take that on notice.

Answer:

There is ongoing discussion with the WA Government on a range of issues affecting local government.

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Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 12 February 2013

Question: 86

Topic: Financial Assistance Grants Review - Hearing Dates

Asked By: Senator JOYCE

Type of Question: RRA&T 115

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 5 April 2013

Number of pages: 1

Senator JOYCE: So it has not. How is the FAGs review progressing, that is, the financial assistance grants system, for those listening on radio?

Ms Fleming: The Grants Commission has set hearing dates. I have to look up the exact dates for you. Submissions are due by 1 March this year. Then I think there will be a series of meetings in Canberra. I have to take on notice the actual date of those meetings.

Answer:

Financial Assistance Grants Review submissions to the Commonwealth Grants Commission closed on 1 March 2013, with hearings held in Canberra on 10 April 2013.

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Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Additional Estimates 12 February 2013

Question: 87

Topic: Funding for Financial Assistance Grants and Supplementary Funding to SA Roads

Asked By: Senator JOYCE

Type of Question: RRA&T 116

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 5 April 2013

Number of pages: 1

Senator JOYCE: Can you provide a list of expenditure under each of the following programs for financial years, beginning 2007-08, and include the most up-to-date spending for the current financial year? Can you also provide forecasts or projections for these programs over the forward estimates—the financial assistance grants and the supplementary funding to South Australian roads? You might take that on notice.

Ms Fleming: The forward estimates for financial assistance grants are in the budget papers. We can provide historical data back to 2008 for that program.

Answer:

The following table shows program expenditure for Financial Assistance Grants and Supplementary funding to South Australian councils for local roads for the period 2007-08 to 2012-13.

Program expenditure 2007-08 to 2012-13

Program	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2012-13	2012-13
						Expenses to date*	Remaining expenses**	Total Estimate
	'000s	'000s	'000s	'000s	'000s	'000s	'000s	'000s
Financial Assistance Grants	1,780,805	2,351,298	1,979,941	2,088,867	2,680,434	805,537	268,513	1,074,050
Supplementary funding to SA councils for local roads	13,592	14,267	14,821	15,566	16,153	12,646	4,216	16,862

*Expenses as at 28 February 2013.

** Remaining expenses due 15 May 2013.

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Question: 88

Topic: Financial Assistance Grants - Administration Charges

Asked By: Senator JOYCE

Type of Question: RRA&T 116

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 5 April 2013

Number of pages: 1

Senator JOYCE: Are there any grants from the government to local government that lose an administration charge on the way through?

Ms Fleming: I would have to take that on notice.

Answer:

No administration charges are incurred by any proponents in the receipt of funding provided through local government programs administered by the Department.

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Additional Estimates 12 February 2013

Question: 89

Topic: Australian Local Government Workforce and Employment Census

Asked By: Senator JOYCE

Type of Question: RRA&T 117

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 5 April 2013

Number of pages: 2

Senator JOYCE: Can you provide an update of the Australian Local Government Workforce and Employment Census? I think it is being coordinated by the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government.

CHAIR: Can you make that your last question, Senator Joyce? Senator Fawcett is patiently waiting.

Ms Beauchamp: We will take that on notice.

Senator JOYCE: You will have to take this on notice, then. I also want to know how much funding has been provided for it.

Ms Fleming: For the centre, or for that project?

Senator JOYCE: I am interested in the census.

Answer:

The Australian Local Government Workforce and Employment Census (the census) is part of a suite of initiatives funded under the Local Government Reform Fund.

The census is designed to collect standardised workforce data from all 565 councils across Australia, to allow workforce analysis by region, state and council classification.

The census will enable councils to benchmark themselves against aggregated groupings of councils (national, state, and regional). The information will be used to improve workforce planning capacity within individual councils and to support sector-wide and jurisdictional efforts to address skill shortages, enhance the professionalism of local government and facilitate greater workforce diversity.

The census will also develop and maintain a nationally consistent dataset on women's participation in the local government sector, including both elected representatives and senior management positions.

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The census deadline was extended from December 2012 to 21 January 2013 to provide councils affected by adverse weather events more time to respond. More than 160 councils across the country participated in the census, and a wide variety of council types and sizes is represented.

Data collation and verification has been done and analysis is under way. Initial results will be available to the Department in March 2013.

\$300,000 (GST exclusive) was allocated for the census.

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Question: 90

Topic: Ernst and Young - Key Areas of Work

Asked By: Senator FAWCETT

Type of Question: RRA&T 118

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 5 April 2013

Number of pages: 1

Senator FAWCETT: The chair is snapping at my heels about time, so could I ask you to take this on notice: could you come back to the committee with a brief of the key areas of that work that Ernst & Young is looking at?

Ms Beauchamp: Sure.

Answer:

This information is available on the Department's website.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

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Additional Estimates 12 February 2013

Question: 91

Topic: Referendum on Constitutional Recognition of Local Government

Asked By: Senator BUSHBY

Type of Question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 5 April 2013

Number of pages: 1

If a referendum were to be held on Constitutional Recognition of Local Government in conjunction with this year's Federal election, or otherwise, what processes would the Government and/or the Department follow to ensure the decision of who to fund to conduct any 'Yes' or 'No' campaigns is made in a transparent and open manner?

Answer:

The Government will ensure that should it decide to fund partisan campaigns the process will accord with the Government's responsibilities to open and transparent decision-making.