

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 On 13 February 2014, the Senate referred the following documents to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee (the committee) for examination and report in relation to the Agriculture portfolio and the Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio,:

- particulars of proposed expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2014 [Appropriation Bill (No.3) 2013-14]; and
- particulars of certain proposed expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2014 [Appropriation Bill (No.4) 2013-14].¹

1.2 The committee is required to report to the Senate on its consideration of 2013-14 additional estimates on 18 March 2014.

Variation of portfolios

1.3 On 12 November 2013, the Senate amended the continuing order relating to the allocation of departments and agencies to committees.² The change of allocations reflected the Prime Minister's announcement regarding the machinery of government changes.³

Additional Estimates hearings

1.4 The committee considered the Portfolio Budget Statements 2013-14 for all portfolios at hearings on 24 and 25 February 2014. The hearings were conducted in accordance with the agreed agenda as follows:

- Monday 24 February – Infrastructure and Regional Development; and
- Tuesday 25 February – Agriculture.

1.5 The committee heard evidence from:

- Senator the Hon David Johnston, representing the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development,
- Senator the Hon Eric Abetz, representing the Minister for Agriculture; and

1 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 14, 13 February 2014, p. 484.

2 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 1, 12 November 2013, p. 16.

3 The Hon Tony Abbott MP, Prime Minister of Australia, 'The Coalition will restore strong, stable and accountable government', media release, 18 September 2013. For more information see <http://www.pm.gov.au/media/2013-09-18/coalition-will-restore-strong-stable-and-accountable-government>

- Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Agriculture.

1.6 Evidence was also provided by:

- Mr Mike Mrdak, Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development;
- Dr Paul Grimes, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture;
- officers representing the departments and agencies covered by the estimates before the committee.

1.7 The committee thanks the ministers, departmental secretaries and officers for their assistance and cooperation during the hearings.

Changes to departmental structures

1.8 Under the Administrative Order of 18 September 2013, the Department of Infrastructure and Transport was renamed the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development. The Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport was abolished with functions relating to regional development, local government and territories being transferred to the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development. The relevant outcomes relating to these functions are Outcomes 3 and 4.⁴

1.9 The Sugar Research and Development Corporation (SRDC) closed on 30 September 2013 with functions, assets and research being transferred to the industry-owned company Sugar Research Australia. The Agriculture portfolio roles and responsibilities have not changed since the publication of the 2013-14 Portfolio Budget Statements.⁵

Questions on notice

1.10 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 17 April 2014.

Additional information

1.11 Answers to questions taken on notice at the committee's Additional Estimates hearings will be tabled in the Senate in separate volumes entitled 'Additional information relating to the examination of Additional Estimates 2013-14

4 Portfolio Additional Estimates Statements 2013-14, *Infrastructure and Regional Development Portfolio*, p. 13.

5 Portfolio Additional Estimates Statements 2013-14, *Agriculture Portfolio*, p. 3.

February 2014, Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee'. Documents not suitable for inclusion in the additional information volumes will be available on request from the committee secretariat.

1.12 Answers to questions on notice received from the departments will also be posted on the committee's website at a later date.⁶

Note on references

1.13 References to the Hansard transcript are to the proof Hansard; page numbers may vary between the proof and the official Hansard transcript.

6 Answers to questions on notice, once received, will be published at the following website address:
http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Senate_Estimates/rtratctte/estimates/add1314/index