

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Budget Estimates 30 May 2013

Question: 111

Topic: Allegation made in Norfolk Island Legislative Assembly

Asked By: Senator HUMPHRIES

Type of Question: RRA&T 108

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 26 July 2013

Number of pages: 1

Senator HUMPHRIES: It is a bit of a vicious circle, but okay. There was an allegation made in the legislative assembly for Norfolk Island in March last year by the then minister for health, Mr Sheridan, that this department—that is, your department—earlier that year had refused to allow the Norfolk Island government to enter into a memorandum of understanding with New South Wales for the provision of health services on Norfolk Island. Is that allegation true?

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

Answer:

The Department did not take a decision to refuse to approve the MOU with New South Wales for the provision of health services as suggested by the Norfolk Island Minister.

In February 2012, the Department was unable to consider the MOU without advice from Norfolk Island Government as to the estimated costs. It requested advice from the Norfolk Island Government at this time. The Norfolk Island Government did not provide this advice until 17 October 2012.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Budget Estimates 30 May 2013

Question: 112

Topic: MOU between NSW and Norfolk Island

Asked By: Senator HUMPHRIES

Type of Question: RRA&T 108-109

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 26 July 2013

Number of pages: 2

Senator HUMPHRIES: I will read you what Mr Sheridan said in Hansard. This is 7 March, and he was the health minister at the time. He said:

The Department would need to receive this information within a reasonable timeframe to consider the proposal and provide approval before any arrangements are entered into.” Also the Department stated that—

he is quoting here apparently from a communication from the department—

“Until such a time as these matters are rectified— I will come back to what those matters are— the Commonwealth cannot consider approving the proposal to execute the Memorandum of Understanding.”

It was frustrating when this advice was received, as the whole intent of the MOU was to facilitate access to improved medical services of which were not available on Norfolk Island.

Ms Fleming: It is certainly true that expenditure above \$50,000 has to be approved by me, and that goes to the heart of the issue of the solvency of the Norfolk Island government. I would have to take that on notice and come back to you. I am not specifically familiar with that particular incident, but I will—

Mr Eccles: It could well have been a point in time. We will look into it, but at the moment the contract with New South Wales health is running well and services are being purchased through New South Wales. As Ms Fleming said, it is working fine. We will take that on notice and come back to you.

Senator HUMPHRIES: Were you in that role, Ms Fleming, in March 2012?

Ms Fleming: Yes, I was in the role from about January, but I was also responsible for a range of other matters and my focus on Norfolk is not complete in my memory at that time. I would have to take it on notice.

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Senator HUMPHRIES: Good. If there was a decision by the department to refuse to approve a MoU with New South Wales for the provision of health services, as the Norfolk minister suggested, why did the department not refer to this decision in its response to question on notice No. 95 from the February 2013 additional estimates? Obviously if there was such a decision, it would be nice to know why that was not referred to in the answer to question No. 95.

Ms Fleming: I am happy to take that on notice. I just do not recall the incident.

Senator HUMPHRIES: Did the Commonwealth to make that decision in 2012 because it did not consider that improving access to medical treatment off island represented value for money? Take that on notice as well please, if the answer is that there was such a decision by the Commonwealth.

Answer:

The Department did not take a decision to refuse to approve the MOU with New South Wales for the provision of health services as suggested by the Norfolk Island Minister.

Question 95 from Additional Estimates did not refer to a decision of the Department as the process was still underway.

In February 2012, the Department was unable to consider the MOU without advice from Norfolk Island Government as to the estimated costs. It requested advice from the Norfolk Island Government at this time. The Norfolk Island Government did not provide this advice until 17 October 2012, the MOU was signed in December 2012.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Budget Estimates 30 May 2013

Question: 113

Topic: Withdrawal of Norfolk Island Cabinet Submission

Asked By: Senator HUMPHRIES

Type of Question: RRA&T 109

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 26 July 2013

Number of pages: 1

Senator HUMPHRIES: It was widely reported that there was a cabinet submission prepared in relation to Commonwealth support for Norfolk Island. It was also widely reported that, following Minister King's visit to the island, or at least contemporaneous with that visit, that submission was withdrawn. I am not asking what was in the submission, but I understand it related to Norfolk Island. Is it true that a submission at that time was withdrawn from processing towards the cabinet?

Answer:

The Department does not discuss Cabinet processes. The Government continues to consider elements of Norfolk Island reform.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Budget Estimates 30 May 2013

Question: 114

Topic: Norfolk Island Cabinet Submissions

Asked By: Senator HUMPHRIES

Type of Question: RRA&T 111

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 26 July 2013

Number of pages: 1

Senator HUMPHRIES: I am not asking you what was in a cabinet submission. I am asking: did the administrator say those things and did they have a bearing on the process of dealing with the cabinet submission, not what the cabinet submission said.

Senator Lundy: That is not an appropriate question either, because you are asking the officer to reflect on conversations in relation to cabinet considerations.

Senator HUMPHRIES: It was not a conversation—it was a broadcast. The administrator said these things in a broadcast to the population of the island.

Mr Eccles: I am not aware of the broadcast, but we will certainly have a look into it. On this general line of questioning, if you are comfortable, my preference would be to take on notice and provide you with the information to the full extent we are able around the government's consideration of these issues and their intentions when it comes to continuing the discussions we are having with the Norfolk Island people and the leadership team.

Answer:

The Department does not discuss Cabinet processes. The Government continues to consider elements of Norfolk Island reform.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Budget Estimates 30 May 2013

Question: 115

Topic: Resident Population of Norfolk Island

Asked By: Senator BACK

Type of Question: RRA&T 111

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 26 July 2013

Number of pages: 2

Senator BACK: I do not if you can answer these questions now. If you cannot, please be kind enough to take them on notice. The information that I would like to know is, for the five calendar years—and five years would appear to be a reasonable length of time—from 2008 to 2012: the resident population divided into those under 18 years of age and those equal to and above 18 years of age for each of those five years; the number of visitors to Norfolk Island in each of those five years; and what the revenue of the Norfolk Island government has been in each of those five years, with you including and highlighting one figure, the Australian government support that makes up part of that revenue, and the expenditure.

Answer:

Resident population:

The Norfolk Island Government undertake a census of the population and housing of Norfolk Island every five years. The following information was extracted from the Norfolk Island Census of Population and Housing dated 8 August 2006 and 9 August 2011. Further information can be found at <http://www.info.gov.nf/reports/Census/>

Census year	19 years of age and under	Over 19 years of age	Total population
2006	387	1476	1863
2011	434	1361	1795

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Visitor numbers:

Source: Norfolk Island Government website

<http://www.info.gov.nf/reports/Visitor%20Statistics/>

Financial Year	Total inbound visitors
2005-06	28 219
2006-07	34 310
2007-08	35 399
2008-09	29 639
2009-10	26 399
2010-11	24 268

Please note: Tourist numbers from December 2011 were not available on the Norfolk Island Government website.

Norfolk Island Revenue

This is a matter for the Norfolk Island Government.

Australian Government direct support to Norfolk Island Government since 2010-11

Year	Commonwealth Funding	Breakdown
2010-11	\$5.7 million	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$5.7 million to fund Norfolk Island Government operations
2011-12	\$14.1 million	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$2.9 million in emergency assistance for 2011-12 to support public health and welfare, and energy supply; \$11.2 million to terminate the contract with Air Nauru
2012-13	\$4.9 million	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$0.1 million to undertake a review of the services provided by the Norfolk Island Hospital \$0.1 million to improve the tourist experience in the Kingston and Arthur's Vale Historic Area; and \$0.2 million to construct a waste management quarantine centre \$4.5 million in emergency funding targeting reforms to immigration, health services, competition and public sector reform
2013-14	\$4.4 million	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$4.4 million in emergency assistance

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Question: 116

Topic: Economic Wellbeing of Norfolk Island

Asked By: Senator BACK

Type of Question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 26 July 2013

Number of pages: 1

Senator BACK: I am just anxious to get a snapshot to inform myself as to what lies ahead. I would be very interested to have a look at: that 15-year window, particularly the last five years; the communications I have had with people on Norfolk Island; the advice they are giving; the questions that we have discussed in the last two or three estimates when Senator Humphries has been unable to be here; and, obviously—with a very keen interest—the economic well-being of islands. If you are able to give me that information, and any other information that you can give me that would help me to inform my understanding, I would be appreciative.

Answer:

A number of reports relating to the economic well-being of Norfolk Island have been released since 2008 including:

- September 2008 - Select Committee on State Government and Financial Management - Report can be found at <http://apo.org.au/content/senate-select-committee-state-government-financial-management>
- April 2011- Wellbeing Report – Norfolk Island — Deloitte Access Economics. Report can be found at www.info.gov.nf/.../wellbeing/Wellbeing%20Report_Final_27Apr2011.pdf
- December 2011 - Update to Review of the Financial Capacity of Norfolk Island - Commonwealth Grants Commission. Report can be found at www.cgc.gov.au/attachments/.../Norfolk_Island_2011_Final_Report.pdf
- March 2012 – Norfolk Island Economic Development Report – ACIL Tasman. Report can be found at www.regional.gov.au/territories/norfolk_island/edr.aspx

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

Budget Estimates 30 May 2013

Question: 117

Topic: Funding of reseal of Norfolk Island Runway

Asked By: Senator HUMPHRIES

Type of Question: RRA&T 115

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 26 July 2013

Number of pages: 1

Senator HUMPHRIES: I understand that the next reseal of the island's airport runways is due. Will the Commonwealth fund this reseal as it has in the past?

Ms Fleming: We would have to consider that in our process.

Senator Lundy: We will take that one on notice.

Answer:

The Norfolk Island Airport is the responsibility of the Norfolk Island Government.

The Norfolk Island Government resurfaced the runway in 2005. This work was funded by a \$12 million interest free loan from the Australian Government. To date the Norfolk Island Government has only repaid \$0.6 million of this loan.

It is anticipated that the runway will need to be resurfaced in approximately 2020.

The Australian Government would consider any request from the Norfolk Island Government to provide assistance on its merits, should such assistance be required.