

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 On 13 May 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 Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio and the Agriculture portfolio:

- particulars of proposed expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2015 [Appropriation Bill (No.1) 2014-15]; and
- particulars of certain proposed expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2015 [Appropriation Bill (No.2) 2014-15].¹

1.2 The committee was required to report to the Senate on its consideration of 2014-15 budget estimates on 24 June 2014.²

Budget Estimates hearings

1.3 The committee considered the Portfolio Budget Statements 2014-15 for all portfolios at hearings between 26 and 29 May 2014. The hearings were conducted in accordance with the agreed agenda as follows:

- Monday 26 and Tuesday 27 May 2014 – Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio; and
- Wednesday 28 and Thursday 29 May 2014 – Agriculture portfolio.

1.4 The committee heard evidence from the following senators:

- Senator the Hon David Johnston, Minister for Defence (representing the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development); and
- Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Agriculture (representing the Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development).

1.5 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 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 27, 13 May 2014, p. 778.

2 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 6, 4 December 2013, p. 224.

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

Changes to departmental structures

1.7 Following the government's announcement of the site for the construction of the Second Sydney Airport at Badgerys Creek, along with the commitment to the construction of additional western Sydney road infrastructure, the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development was, at the time of the Budget Estimates hearing, in the process of establishing the Western Sydney Unit. The committee was advised that the Western Sydney Unit would be fully operational from 1 July 2014.

1.8 The Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation and Wine Australia Corporation will merge to form a new statutory marketing authority, the Australian Grape and Wine Authority (AGWA), to commence on 1 July 2014. The AGWA will fall within the Agriculture portfolio.

Questions on notice

1.9 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 25 July 2014.

Additional information

1.10 Answers to questions taken on notice at the committee's Budget Estimates hearings will be tabled in the Senate in separate volumes entitled 'Additional information relating to the examination of Budget Estimates 2014-15 May 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.

1.11 Answers to questions on notice received from the departments will also be posted on the committee's website at a later date.³

Note on references

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

3 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/bud1415/index