

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 On 10 May 2005, the Senate referred to the Committee the following documents for examination and report in relation to the Transport and Regional Services and Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry portfolios:

- Particulars of proposed expenditure for the service of the year ending June 30 2006;
- Particulars of certain proposed expenditure in respect of the year ending 30 June 2006;
- Particulars of proposed expenditure in relation to the parliamentary departments in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2006;
- Particulars of certain proposed supplementary expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2005; and
- Particulars of proposed supplementary expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2005.¹

1.2 The Committee considered the Portfolio Budget Estimate Statements 2005-2006 (PBS) for the two portfolios at hearings on 23, 24, 25, 26, and 27 May 2005. The hearings were conducted in accordance with the agreed agenda as follows:

- Monday 23 May - Transport and Regional Services portfolio;
- Tuesday 24 May - Transport and Regional Services portfolio;
- Wednesday 25 May - Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry portfolio;
- Thursday 26 May - Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry portfolio followed by Transport and Regional Services portfolio; and
- Friday 27 May - Transport and Regional Services portfolio.

1.3 The Committee heard evidence from Senator the Hon Ian Campbell, the Minister for Environment and Heritage, representing the Minister for Transport and Regional Services and the Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads; Senator the Hon Ian MacDonald, Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation, representing the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Senator Colbeck, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

1.4 Evidence was also provided by Mr Michael Taylor, Secretary of the Department of Transport and Regional Services, Ms Joanna Hewitt, Secretary of the

1 Senate Journal No. 23, 'Particulars of Proposed Expenditure for 2005-06 and Particulars of Proposed Supplementary Expenditure for 2004-05 – Documents – Reference of Estimates to Legislation Committees', 10 May 2005, p. 594

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and officers representing the departments and agencies covered by the estimates before the Committee.

1.5 The Committee thanks both the Ministers and Parliamentary Secretary and departmental officers for their assistance and cooperation during the hearings.

Questions on Notice

1.6 In accordance with Standing Order 26, the Committee is required to set a date for the lodgement of any written answers or additional information. The Committee agreed that written answers and additional information should be submitted by Friday 1 July 2005.

1.7 The Committee notes that the provision of answers to questions taken on notice during the Additional Estimates was provided in a timely manner and appreciates the work undertaken by the portfolio departments to achieve this.

1.8 The Senate has determined that supplementary hearings on budget estimates will be held on Monday 31 October through to Thursday 3 November 2005.

Administration of written answers or additional information

1.9 Answers to questions on notice at the Budget Estimates hearings will be tabled in the Senate in separate volumes entitled Additional Information provided during the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee's examination of budget estimates 2005-2006. Documents not suitable for inclusion in the additional information volumes will be available on request from the Committee secretariat.

1.10 Additionally, answers to questions on notice received from the departments will be posted onto the Committee's website at a later date.

Attendance of witnesses

1.11 The Committee is concerned at the absence of senior departmental officials from both DAFF and DOTARS at the 2005-06 Budget Estimates hearings. The timing of Budget Estimates hearings is known well in advance. Accordingly, the Committee believes that senior officers should make themselves available to the Committee for the hearings unless their absence is unavoidable. The Committee is of the view that officers who were not available to the Committee on this occasion could and should have scheduled their alternative commitments around these hearings.