

Senate Inquiry: The administration, management and objective of Australia's overseas development programs in Afghanistan in the context of the 'Transition Decade'

## **Additional Comments**

### **Senator Lee Rhiannon for the Australian Greens**

#### **Introduction**

1.1 The Australian Greens initiated this Senate Inquiry in order to: evaluate Australia's experience of delivering aid in Afghanistan over the last decade; help ensure our overseas aid program makes a real difference to the lives of Afghan people in the 'transition decade' and; capture recommendations that can be applied to boost the effectiveness of aid in other militarised environments.

1.2 Australia has provided over \$700 million in ODA to Afghanistan since 2000 and this amount is expected to rise to \$250 million per annum as troops withdraw in the 'transition decade'.

1.3 The Australian Greens are grateful to the Committee Senators and to the Secretariat for their work and engagement with this Senate Inquiry and we appreciate that the Committee accepted many of the Australian Greens' recommendations in the Chair's report. The Australian Greens would also like to thank the many people and organisations that made submissions and shared their knowledge with the Committee.

#### **Recommendations**

1.4 Afghanistan remains one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world.

1.5 The Australian Greens welcome the Committee's recommendations to improve and boost aid going to programs focused on empowering women, improving education participation and outcomes, and safeguarding food security.

1.6 We also support the Committee's acknowledgement of the important role that NGOs have played, in the absence of strong governance structures in Afghanistan, in ensuring that aid reaches the people that need it and in particular, reaches beyond Kabul. The Australian Greens strongly support the Committee recommendations 22 and 23 that the Australian government should do more to foster the use of local NGOs and we hope that AusAID proactively takes up these recommendations.

1.7 The Australian Greens have reservations with recommendation 21 regarding funding channelled through Afghan's national budget and the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. We would have preferred that the Committee's report picked up additional points from Inquiry submissions to refine this recommendation.

1.8 For example, the joint submission from Save the Children, Oxfam and World Vision recommended that, in guaranteeing aid flows to the Afghan national budget, that Australia should promote a process that includes adequate investment in capacity building for key government ministries and capacity assessments of key ministries prior to awarding funds.

1.9 Similarly this recommendation would have benefitted from specifying the importance of the Australian government supporting the Afghan government to ensure that its own development strategy includes a commitment to the provision of essential services, such as health and education, and that the Australian government continues to use and expand on models for service delivery that have had proven success, such as the Basic Package of Health Services.

1.10 With regard to setting a benchmark that 50 per cent of ODA is channelled through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) in recommendation 21, the Australian Greens would like to add a requirement that AusAID monitor, measure and publicly report on the performance of multilateral organisations, such as the ARTF, against the AusAID's own objectives, including tracking which projects Australian ODA actually funds, the speed at which such funds are disbursed and the quality of aid ultimately provided.

1.11 A significant focus of the Senate Inquiry was the effectiveness or otherwise of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) delivered by the Australian Defence Force (ADF), especially in Uruzgan Province.

1.12 Evidence to the Committee raised concerns that aid administered by the ADF was too focused on short-term and quick-fix objectives that were more directed to winning hearts and minds than delivering sustainable and effective development outcomes. Additionally, that militarised aid distorts the distribution of aid to regions experiencing conflict, that it places greater obstacles to community participation and that it increases risk for the safety of aid workers. Chapter 8 of the Committee Report details many of the concerns raised in the submissions.

1.13 During the course of the inquiry it was revealed that the ADF had wrongly categorised almost \$190 million in military spending as ODA. In addition, it was revealed that the ADF had little to no information on 31 (or 65 per cent) of its \$34.1 million of ODA eligible projects in the Uruzgan province conducted since 2006. The ADF could not track whether 32 (or 67 per cent) of its ODA eligible projects constructed using military aid had been attacked. The projects about which it has no information included: half of its education projects; half of its health projects; five out of six of its community projects; and ten out of eleven of its transport projects.

1.14 It was also revealed that neither the ADF, AusAID nor the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) undertook any independent evaluation of the development impact of these projects, beyond the ADF assessing the projects for 'fitness for purpose and construction standards' after completion.

1.15 These admissions reflect poorly not only on the ADF but how the overseas aid budget has been managed by the Australian government in Afghanistan. This issue is particularly relevant as increasing amounts of Australia's ODA is administered through various government departments.

1.16 Proper monitoring and evaluation of projects is the bedrock of good government policy.

1.17 In this respect, the Australian Greens strongly support Committee recommendation 1 which seeks a comprehensive review of Australia's mission in

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Uruzgan and the impact of the ADF-delivered ODA in Afghanistan. We do not have confidence however that the Australian Civil Military Centre is the most appropriate body to undertake this review.

1.18 Portfolio responsibility for the Australian Civil Military Centre resides with the Minister for Defence and its mandate is to 'improve Australia's effectiveness in civil-military collaboration for conflict and disaster management overseas'. The Australian Greens consider that this review would be more appropriately conducted by a body that is at arm's length from the military and has specific focus or expertise in the aid arena, such as the Office of Development Effectiveness.

1.19 It is with these issues in mind that the Greens make the following additional recommendations, focused on improving the management of ODA, the challenge of delivering ODA in a militarised environment and AusAID's increasing focus on promoting mining as a pathway to development.

## **Additional recommendations**

### *Managing Australia's overseas aid*

1.20 The Australian Greens strongly support recommendations 33 to 36 which address shortcomings in assessing, reporting and evaluating ODA spending across government departments. Evidence to the Senate Inquiry revealed that there is a need to refine the whole-of-government reporting and evaluating mechanisms for ODA to ensure Australia's aid is effective and targeted where possible to the UN's Millennium Development Goals. There is also a need to ensure proper transparency and scrutiny of Australia's overseas aid.

### **Recommendation 1**

**1.21 That the Australian government clarifies the government's accepted definition of ODA to make clear that spending by other government departments will only be considered ODA if the primary objective of that spending is poverty alleviation and community empowerment.**

### **Recommendation 2**

**1.22 That AusAID be established as an independent department, separate from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, with its own cabinet-level minister.**

### *Militarised aid*

### **Recommendation 3**

**1.23 Recognising the risk of social dislocation and mistrust in the period leading up to and immediately following troop withdrawal, that AusAID conduct an assessment of past ODA projects delivered by the ADF in Afghanistan and hold talks with community leaders to determine how this infrastructure can effectively meet the needs of the community.**

**Recommendation 4**

**1.24 That the Australian government ensure that attacks on ODA-funded projects are publicly reported on with full disclosure of damage to the project, the number of people killed and injured, and the impact the attack has had on the operations of the project.**

**Recommendation 5**

**1.25 That where possible in future militarised conflicts, the Australian government direct aid away from projects connected with the ADF in order to focus on the construction of civil and social infrastructure and projects directly targeted at poverty alleviation and community empowerment.**

***Mining for development***

1.26 The Australian Greens have strong reservations about whether focusing aid on promoting mining projects is an effective, proven or sustainable use of Australia's aid budget to alleviate poverty in developing countries.

1.27 We welcome that the Committee has given some focus to refining the direction of Australia's mining-related aid in recommendations 17–20 but the Australian Greens maintain that the recommendations could have been stronger:

**Recommendation 6**

**1.28 Considering the negative impact that mining has had on many communities in low income countries, that AusAID directs aid towards community and institutional development in preference to programs that promote mineral extraction.**

**Recommendation 7**

**1.29 That the Australian government introduce legislation to regulate Australian mining enterprises conducting business overseas, so they are bound by the same social and environmental conditions as they are in Australia.**

Senator Lee Rhiannon  
Australian Greens