

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 On 13 February 2020, the Senate referred the following documents to the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee (the committee) for examination and report:

- Particulars of proposed additional expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2019 [Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2019–20];
- Particulars of certain proposed additional expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2019 [Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2019–20]; and
- Final Budget Outcome 2018–19.¹

The committee is required to examine the 2019–20 additional estimates contained in these documents in relation to the Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications portfolio and the Agriculture, Water and the Environment portfolio. Following examination, the committee is required to table its report on 24 March 2020.²

Additional Estimates Hearings

1.2 The committee examined witnesses from the Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications portfolio on 2 and 6 March 2020, and witnesses from the Agriculture, Water and the Environment portfolio on 3 and 6 March 2020. In addition, the committee conducted a cross-portfolio Murray-Darling Basin Plan matters estimates hearing on 6 March 2020 in accordance with a Senate agreement of 28 November 2018.³

1.3 The committee heard evidence from the following senators:

- Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment;
- Senator the Hon Jonathon Duniam, Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries, Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism;
- Senator the Hon Jane Hume, Assistant Minister for Superannuation, Financial Services and Financial Technology, representing the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport; and
- Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, Minister for Families and Social Services.

1.4 Evidence was also provided by:

¹ Journals of the Senate, No. 42, 13 February 2020, pp. 1283-1284.

² Journals of the Senate, No. 27, 14 November 2019, p. 852.

³ Journals of the Senate, No. 27, 14 November 2019, p. 851.

- Mr Simon Atkinson, Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications;
- Mr Andrew Metcalfe AO, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment;
- Mr Phillip Glyde, Chief Executive of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority;
- Ms Jody Swirepik, Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder; and
- Officers representing the departments and agencies covered by the estimates before the committee.

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

Questions on notice and Hansard transcript

1.6 In accordance with standing order 26(9)(a), the committee set 24 April 2020, as the date for the return of written answers or additional information, in response to questions placed on notice during the hearings. The return date was later revised to 8 May 2020.

1.7 Written answers and information provided to the committee in response to questions on notice arising from the hearings are tabled in the Senate and posted on the committee's webpage. Links to the Hansard transcripts of these public hearings, and to answers and additional information are also available on the committee webpage at: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Senate_Estimates/rrat.Record_of_proceedings

Answers to questions on notice – Supplementary Budget Estimates 2019–20

1.8 The committee undertook supplementary budget estimates hearings on 21 and 22 October 2019 for the Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities portfolio and the Agriculture and Water Resources portfolio (use new department names? Not sure since they didn't have their current names at the time of these estimates hearings). On 25 October 2019, the committee examined cross-portfolio Murray-Darling Basin Plan matters. The committee set 6 December 2019 as the deadline for return of answers to questions on notice.

1.9 The Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio took 400 questions on notice. The Agriculture and Water Resources portfolio took 211 questions on notice. The Environment and Energy portfolio took six questions on notice.

Timeliness of answers to questions on notice

1.10 The Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio submitted 339 responses to questions by the deadline. The remaining answers were received gradually between December 2019 and February 2019.

1.11 The Agriculture and Water Resources portfolio submitted all responses by the deadline.

1.12 The Environment and Energy portfolio submitted all responses to questions by the deadline. 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 transcripts.

