



Australian Government
Department of Social Services

Senator Marielle Smith
Chair
Community Affairs Legislation Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Subject: Tabling of the Department of Social Services 2022-23 Annual Report

Further to the appearance of the Department of Social Services (the department) before the Community Affairs Legislation Committee on 25 October 2023, I write to clarify my evidence relating to the tabling the department's 2022-23 annual report (the report). I did not have all of the detail to hand yesterday and feel it necessary to allay any concerns that the Committee may have. I have outlined below the key steps involved in the tabling of the report, including the processes and timeframes undertaken to meet legislative obligations.

The *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act) section 46 (2) outlines that the report must be given to the responsible Minister by “the 15th day of the fourth month after the end of the reporting period for the entity”, or “the end of any further period granted under subsection 34C(5) of the *Acts Interpretation Act 1901*”.

Further, the *Acts Interpretation Act 1901* subsection 34C(3) details that where timing for the presentation of the report is not specified, that the Minister shall cause a copy of the report to be laid before each House of the Parliament within 15 sitting days of that House after the day on which they receive the report.

It was this legislative basis that framed my evidence in relation to Senate Estimates yesterday.

There is of course the Department of Finance's Resource Management Guide 135 and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's Tabling Guidelines which outline an expectation that normally reports are tabled on or before 31 October and it is expected annual reports are tabled prior to the October Estimates Hearings. This ensures annual reports are available for scrutiny by the relevant Senate standing committee.

Completion of the department's 2022-23 annual report was delayed due to the finalisation of the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) Financial Statements and Annual Performance Statements audits and signing. As you will note on page 171 of the department's report, the Financial Statements were signed off by the ANAO on 10 October 2023 which determined the subsequent timeframes for producing and tabling the report.

This delayed timeframe resulted in the department providing the final copy of the report to all three responsible Ministers on 12 October 2023, in order to meet the legislative requirement under the PGPA Act. In that advice the Department proposed a tabling date of 24 October 2023 as this was assessed as the earliest possible tabling given the necessary processes that had to be followed. All relevant Ministers approved both the version of the report provided and the proposed tabling date between 15 and 17 October 2023.

Once considered by Ministers, the report was subject to final review and edit, final graphic design and typeset and the development of accessible versions, as well as development of the index for the hard copy. The report was provided to the printing service provider to allow enough time for it to be printed and distributed.

As the report was tabled out of a parliamentary sitting period, the department was required to seek the agreement of the Minister for Social Services, the Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, to the tabling of the report. This agreement was promptly received on Friday, 20 October 2023.

The department's report was delivered to Parliament House on Monday, 23 October 2023 and subsequently tabled on Tuesday, 24 October 2023.

While I acknowledge the tabling date was very close to the hearing, given the circumstances outlined above I hope the Committee can see that considerable efforts were made by the department and all relevant Minister's offices to expedite the tabling.

I hope the above clarifies how the department prepared the report and I will endeavour to deliver future reports in better time. I look forward to continuing to work productively with the Committee, including on any additional questions you might have in regards to this matter.

Regards

Ray Griggs AO CSC
Secretary
Department of Social Services
26 October 2023