



Australian Government
**Department of Industry, Science,
Energy and Resources**

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Senator Paul Scarr
Chair
Senate Economics Legislation Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Scarr

On reviewing the Proof Hansard of the testimony given by the department at the Senate Estimates hearing on 28 October 2021, we find that some of the information provided to the Committee would benefit from clarification and correction.

The following exchange occurred between myself and Senator Cox:

Ms Richards: Would you like me to talk to you about the work we've been doing with the community in Western Australia?

Senator COX: Yes.

Ms Richards: As Mrs Urquhart said, the Square Kilometre Array observatory project is going to involve the construction of the world's largest radio telescope. One of the telescopes will be in South Africa. The other telescope, which will be a low frequency telescope, is being built on the lands of the Wajarri Yamatji people at Boolardy Station. It's currently part of the **Murchison Widefield Array**. It's about an eight-hour drive north of Perth and about a five-hour drive east of Geraldton.

Senator COX: It is my country, yes.

Ms Richards: Your country, Senator; we are conscious of that. We have been conducting negotiations with the Wajarri Yamatji community. They commenced in October 2016. We've had 13 SKA Indigenous land use agreement negotiation meetings with the community representatives. The most recent of those took place in April 2021. As you would appreciate, we have had some disruption in our ability to meet on country with representatives as a consequence of COVID restrictions on gatherings, but also the closure of the WA border. An in-principle agreement was reached with the community on a benefits package in late 2017. Since that time, we've been working with the community around some elements of potentially redesigning the arms of this telescope to avoid large and significant heritage areas for the community. That's meant that we've had ongoing negotiations about the benefits package, and those negotiations are still underway. To explain that, there were

some areas of country that the community asked to be avoided by the science activity on that site. Because the science project is unlike a resources project—it has a significantly less invasive impact on land—we are able to work with the community to redesign elements of the telescope's layout to avoid those areas of country that the community have identified. It does mean at the moment that we are negotiating with some adjacent landholders to purchase a prospective lease and additional land in order to get the design of the telescope right in a way that suits the scientists but also respects the cultural heritage that's been identified by the community.

Senator COX: Are you able to tell me which particular sites they are?

Ms Richards: In what sense do you mean, Senator?

Senator COX: The ones that have been indicated that they've asked you not to—

Ms Richards: There was some open country at the bottom of the **Murchison Widefield Array**. I can provide some precise detail and information on notice, if that would help—

Senator COX: Thank you.

I inadvertently spoke in error and referred to "*Murchison Widefield Array*" rather than "*Murchison Radio-astronomy Observatory*". To ensure accuracy of the testimony, I hope to update the Hansard record of my testimony.

I apologise for any inconvenience caused and ask that you alert other members of the Committee to this correction.

Yours sincerely

Ms Janean Richards