

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 On 2 April 2019, 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 expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2020 [Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2019–20]; and
- particulars of certain proposed expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2020 [Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2019–20].¹

1.2 The committee is required to examine the 2019–20 estimates contained in these documents in relation to the Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities portfolio and the Agriculture and Water Resources portfolio. Following examination, the committee is required to table its report by 14 May 2019.²

Budget estimates hearings

1.3 The committee examined witnesses from the Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities portfolio on 4 and 8 April 2019, and witnesses from the Agriculture and Water Resources portfolio on 4 and 9 April 2019. Due to the prorogation of the Parliament, the cross-portfolio Murray-Darling Basin Plan matters estimates hearing did not take place.

1.4 The committee heard evidence from the following senators:

- Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie, Minister for Regional Services, Sport, Local Government and Decentralisation, representing the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport;
- Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, representing the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport; and
- Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck, Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, representing the Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources.

1.5 Evidence was also provided by:

- Dr Steven Kennedy, Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities;
- Mr Daryl Quinlivan, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources; and
- officers representing the departments and agencies covered by the estimates.

1 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 141, 2 April 2019, p. 4815.

2 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 133, 29 November 2018, p. 4329.

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

Questions on notice and Hansard transcript

1.7 In accordance with standing order 26(9)(a), the committee set 24 May 2019, as the date for the return of written answers or additional information, in response to questions placed on notice during the hearings.

1.8 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

1.9 This report does not attempt to analyse the evidence presented during the hearings. However, it does provide a summary of some of the key issues that were covered by the committee for each portfolio.

Answers to questions on notice – additional estimates 2018–19

1.10 The committee undertook additional estimates hearings on 18 and 19 February 2019 for the Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities portfolio and the Agriculture and Water Resources portfolio. On 22 February 2019, the committee examined cross-portfolio Murray-Darling Basin Plan matters. The committee set 29 March 2019 as the deadline for return of answers to questions on notice.

1.11 The Infrastructure and Regional Development portfolio took 136 questions on notice. The Agriculture and Water Resources portfolio took 140 questions on notice. The Environment and Energy portfolio took 3 questions on notice in the cross-portfolio hearings.

Timeliness of answers to questions on notice

1.12 The Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities portfolio submitted all responses by the deadline. All responses were provided on 28 and 29 March 2019.

1.13 The Agriculture and Water Resources portfolio submitted all responses by the deadline. All responses were provided on 28 March 2019.

1.14 The Environment and Energy portfolio submitted all responses by the deadline. All responses were received on 18 March 2019.

Note on references

1.15 References to the Hansard transcript are to the proof Hansard; page numbers may vary between the proof and the official Hansard transcripts.