



Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee
Budget Estimates 2024–25
Thursday, 30 May 2024
Daily Summary

The committee met from 9.00am until 9.18pm.

The committee called the following departments and agencies:

- Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (DITRDCA)
- Office of the eSafety Commissioner
- Australian Broadcasting Corporation
- Australian Communications and Media Authority

DITRDCA – Corporate matters and general questions

- Prominence and anti-siphoning regulatory regime commencement date;
- Increases in the average staffing level over the past 2 years and the related allocation;
- Extra functions and resourcing needs across the department’s communications functions;
- Departmental appropriation funding, and specifically across the communications functions;
- Progress on the preparation of online gambling legislation and deadline for implementation;
- Process of Questions on Notice (QoN) clearance between the Department and the Minister’s Office;
- Prime Minister and Cabinet advice and guidance over the QoN clearance process and timeline compliance for the department and outstanding QoN answers from previous estimates rounds;
- Length of process of obtaining security clearance across the department and temporary security clearance arrangements;
- Consultation between department officials and the Foreign Affairs Minister and Trade Minister in relation to the draft local content and streaming quota legislation; and
- Meetings between United States companies and the department regarding the streaming quota legislation.

5.1 – Digital Technologies and Communications Services

- Timeline of the 3G network shut down and the extent of affected devices that wouldn’t be able to call 000 and Industry consultation to understand the number of affected devices;
- Modelling done by the department regarding number of affected Australians impacted by the revised anti siphoning scheme and access to free to air sporting events;
- Meetings between Minister’s Office and News Corp executives;
- Government response to the HOR Murphy Report on online gambling advertising and ministerial directions to the department;
- Issues with Australians still being able to place bets and gamble despite having signed onto the BetStop National Self-Exclusion Register;
- Funding allocations to the mobile blackspot program; and
- Progress on the age verification trials for online content and determinations being made on age limits for types of content.

Office of the e-Safety Commissioner

- The role, responsibility, and powers of the eSafety Commissioner;
- Age verification trials on social media;
- Sexual extortion of children and young adults online;
- Threshold for social media posts being classified as gender based hate speech and therefore being considered harmful by eSafety guidelines;
- Online guidance for parents when supervising their children's use of social media;
- Regulation regarding generative AI, including AI generated pornographic material;
- Definition of Class 1 material; and
- Various legal proceedings between the eSafety Commissioner and X Corporation.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)

- Progress on the independent workplace racism review at the ABC;
- Comments made by Laura Tingle at the Sydney Writers Festival and the Melbourne Writers Festival;
- Internal surveys regarding staff remuneration by demographic;
- Rebranding of ABC channels surrounding children and family content;
- ABC coverage and journalist guidance on the developing situation in Gaza;
- Meta Corporation refusing to renew contracts under the media bargaining code;
- Staffing and news coverage in regional Australia following closure of regional news outlets;
- Environmental impacts resulting from ABC operations and initiatives undertaken to move towards its emission reduction targets;
- ABC TikTok journalists' activities in relation to coverage of Israel-Palestine;
- Funding for emergency broadcasting services for the upcoming summer;
- Parramatta office staffing levels and progress made toward having 75 per cent of ABC content makers working outside of the Ultimo office; and
- Actions of certain individual journalists that may be in contravention of the ABC code of conduct.

Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA)

- AI deepfakes using the voice and likenesses of prominent figures in Australia to promote misinformation;
- ACMA reporting on free-to-air television programs and streaming video on demand (SVODs);
- Expenditure for children's drama on free-to-air television and SVODs;
- Progress on the review of the telecommunications consumer protection code;
- Funding for the review and improvement of existing scam codes for telecommunications providers; and
- ACMA investigation into the Tangerine Telecom data breach.

Agencies released from the program

- Special Broadcasting Service Corporation;
- Australian Postal Corporation;
- NBN Co Limited; and
- Classification Board.

The committee will next meet at 9.00am on Friday 31 May 2024 in Committee room 2S3 for examination of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, excluding Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development.