

Yankalilla Area School

Senate Inquiry Submission - Consideration of the Federal Government's Primary Schools for the 21st Century program

I am submitting this information as Chairperson of the Governing Council, for Yankalilla Area School in South Australia.

(i) Conditions and Criteria for project funding:

We believe that the South Australian Government (SA DECS) is misappropriating Federal BER money to fulfill a State responsibility.

When the BER program was launched, the Federal Government stated in the media on several occasions, that State Governments were not able to use the BER money to fund any existing programs or obligations. We believe Fire Storage Tanks are an example of this happening in South Australia.

SA DECS have told me that all schools in SA, deemed high fire risk, receiving BER funds for a new building in Round 2 or 3, are being treated the same. We believe this means approximately 20 schools are installing these tanks. Assuming they come at a similar cost to ours at Yankalilla Area School, then this equates to at least \$2,000,000 of Federal Government money being misappropriated.

(ii) Use of local and non-local contractors

NIL

(iii) Role of State Governments

a. SA DECS have not responded to numerous requests asking for information in writing regarding Fire Storage Tanks:

1. Who made the decision that they would be part of BER spending?
2. When was the decision made (i.e. timing in relation to BER program roll out)?
3. Which schools are affected?

b. Where is the consistency? During a phone conversation with Peter Whiteman (SA DECS Asset Services), he said that the decision to include Fire Storage Tanks in all new building BER contracts for High Fire Risk schools, was made after Round 1 BER recipients had received funding and engaged a builder. Therefore, Round 1 schools do not have Fire Storage Tanks as part of their building contract but Round 2 and 3 recipients do. According to Peter, Round 1 schools that need tanks and other High Fire Risk schools that did not build new buildings with BER funding, "will be looked at in the second half of 2010". He did not have an answer when asked who would be paying for their tanks.

c. Many of our questions have been ignored. We feel that any written response reads like a press release and information given over the phone is inconsistent and contradictory.

(iv) Timing and budget issues

Yankalilla Area School

NIL

(v) Requirements for school signs and plaques

NIL

(vi) Management of the program

- a. Neither the State nor Federal Government is yet to provide us with a response that shows an understanding of the point we are raising. Yet Julia Gillard is constantly heard in the media saying things like: with 9500 schools receiving funding less than 100 schools have registered a complaint with her office. This is particularly frustrating when we have tried on several separate occasions to “register a complaint” without success. The only response we have received, on behalf of Julia Gillard, is to our letter in February 2010. It informs us that there is no additional money available for our school. It did not tackle the issue of misappropriation.

What does all this mean for Yankalilla Area School?

Our school received funding in Round 2 of the Primary Schools for the 21st Century BER funding program - \$1,525,000 to build a new classroom and \$475,000 to refurbish our hall.

After blow outs in the cost of our new classroom – site specific (e.g. removal of trees, site preparation, retaining, etc) PLUS Fire Storage Tanks – we only have \$58,000 remaining for hall refurbishments. That is not enough money to replace the 2 storage sheds which we demolished in order to erect the new classroom.

Put simply, we believe we should have \$161,000 of BER money remaining, to improve our hall. Additional storage will be our priority, so the original plans to also upgrade bathrooms and kitchen area will not be possible.

Anna Richards

Chairperson, Governing Council