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**Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit**  
Answers to Questions on Notice  
Inquiry into Commonwealth grants administration

**Department/Agency:** Australian National Audit Office

**Topic:**

**Date of Hearing:** 3 March 2023

**Type of question:** Hansard – Page 14-15

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 29 March 2023

**Number of pages:** [TBC]

**Question:**

**CHAIR:** This is a general question, although it's particular to this conversation. But you could also generalise. Have you noticed any differences in the outcome for programs that are administered wholly by an entity versus those administered, at least in part, by the grants hubs? Is it not a question you've thematically or forensically turned your mind to?

**Mr Hehir:** I don't think we've got enough data from the grants hub to do that yet.

**CHAIR:** Maybe just take it on notice if there are any reflections. I think from the previous hearing the deputy chair and I have a similar view based on the evidence. Maybe I'll just express my view. I think the departments agreed with that. There was no evidence of the cost savings which had been anticipated materialising one way or the other, and there wasn't much evidentiary basis for the expectations of cost savings. But there was a general view that developing expertise centrally had improved things.

**Mr Hehir:** I think we did an audit early in the grants hub which wasn't very good. I think audits subsequently using grants hubs haven't had the same deficiencies as the early ones. But we'll come back to you on that, I think.

**Mr Boyd:** It's probably a bit mixed. When you look at the Safer Communities Fund, which uses the hubs, and their assessment work there, leaving aside the issue of cost savings, the quality of the assessment work—we put some tables in the report which actually show pretty poor quality assessment work being done even in the later rounds. But then, equally, when you look at things such as car parks, whilst not subject to CGRGs, it doesn't mean that policy-owning departments, when it's not with a hub, are doing quality assessment work either. So that's what makes it a bit difficult. In large part we're not seeing high-quality assessment work in hubs or not in hubs.

**Mr Hehir:** We'll come back to you with something though.

**ANAO Response:**

The ANAO has not undertaken a sufficient number of audits which has included detailed analysis of the work of the Grants Hubs to be in a position to draw any valid conclusions on their relative performance.

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**Question:**

**CHAIR:** In a moment we will get to the pooled funding issue you have touched on, which mysteriously happened in a couple of rounds. To finish this point, footnote 37 of the audit report states: In round three, Infrastructure recorded an intention to include in its briefing to the ministerial panel any relevant information against these factors that may prove useful to the ministerial panel in its considerations, and for this purpose— it even consulted with other areas of the department. You had obviously turned your mind to a desire, a need, to provide advice to ministers on the other factors by round 3. Was that information provided to the panel in round 3, or other rounds?

**Mrs Hibbert:** I would have to take on notice exactly what was provided. It is a large package of information which addresses some of the other factors—geographic location and so on—but I couldn't say with all confidence when and what rounds.

**CHAIR:** Has the Audit Office got any observations on that point?

**Mr Hehir:** No, I do not think so.

**CHAIR:** It was not meant to be a leading question, but a point of curiosity.

**Mr Hehir:** We will take that on notice, Chair.

**ANAO Response:**

Upon further review, ANAO does not have any further observations to add to what has been included in Auditor-General Report No.1 2022-23 *Award of Funding under the Building Better Regions Fund*.

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