

Chapter 2

Portfolio specific issues

2.1 This chapter provides an overview of some of the matters raised during the committee's hearings on the Additional Estimates 2015–16. The discussion follows the outcome and agency structure.

Environment Portfolio

Department of the Environment

2.2 The committee opened the hearing with the Department of the Environment by asking general questions about:

- the potential effect of CSIRO's announcement that it is planning to reduce its work in relation to climate change science (pp 5, 7, 9–10);
- staffing figures including graduate recruitment and retention (p. 6); and
- the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Scheme (p. 8).

Outcome 1: Conserve, protect and sustainably manage Australia's biodiversity, ecosystems, environment and heritage through research, information management, supporting natural resource management, establishing and managing Commonwealth Protected areas, and reducing and regulating the use of pollutants and hazardous substances

2.3 The committee called officers in relation to Program 1.2: Environmental Information and Research. The committee discussed the following matters:

- the number of departmental officers engaged in international cetacean issues (pp 71–72);
- 2015–16 whaling season in the Southern Ocean (pp 72–73); and
- the Australian Marine Mammal Grants Program (pp 73–74).

2.4 The committee also noted that it was assisted in its examination of international whaling issues by Ms Chris Schweizer, who attended the hearing although currently on secondment to another agency.

2.5 During the course of the hearing, the committee released officers in relation to Program 1.3: Carbon Pollution Reduction—Land Sector Initiatives without providing evidence.

2.6 Officers were called in relation to Program 1.4: Conservation of Australia's Heritage and the Environment. Matters raised included:

- the finalisation of the Australian Heritage Strategy and the timeframes for implementation (pp 106–107);

- the process for sites to be added to the Australian heritage system (pp 107–108);
- bushfires in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (pp 108–113);
- the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Sharks (pp 114–115);
- an update on the nomination of the Royal National Park for United Nations World Heritage listing (pp 116–117); and
- the addition of the Parramatta Female Factory to the Australian Heritage Council's work plan (p. 117).

2.7 Officers from the department were called in relation to Program 1.5: Environmental Regulation. Matters discussed included:

- the investigation into the fire that occurred in and around Kakadu National Park in October 2015 (pp 125–126);
- Shenhua Watermark Coal Mine management plans (pp 126–127);
- approval of the Adani Carmichael Mine (pp 127–128, 133–135);
- land clearing in Northern Queensland (pp 128–130, 135–138); and
- the Environmental Impact Statement process for the Western Sydney Airport (pp 130–132).

2.8 Due to time constraints the committee did not complete its examination of Program 1.5 on 8 February. The committee agreed to hold a further hearing to continue its examination of Program 1.5 on 4 March 2016.

Outcome 2: Reduce Australia's greenhouse gas emissions, adapt to the impacts of climate change and contribute to the negotiation of an effective global solution to climate change, through developing and implementing a national response to climate change

2.9 Officers from the department were called in relation to Program 2.1: Reducing Australia's greenhouse gas emissions. Matters raised included:

- Australia's greenhouse gas emissions levels as reported in *Tracking to 2020 an interim update of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions projections* (p. 93);
- emissions abatement methodologies (pp 95, 103–104);
- greenhouse gas emissions from major bushfires (pp 96–97);
- the National Pollutant Inventory (p. 97);
- the release of the *Quarterly Update of Australia's National Greenhouse Gas Inventory: June 2015* (p. 99); and
- funding of the Emissions Reduction Fund beyond 2024 (pp 99–102).

2.10 In relation to Program 2.2: Adapting to Climate Change, matters raised included the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (pp 105–106) and the potential effect of CSIRO's announcement that it is planning to reduce its work in relation to climate change science (p. 106).

Outcome 3: Advancement of Australia's strategic, scientific, environmental and economic interests in the Antarctic by protecting, administering and researching the region

2.11 Officers from the department were called in relation to Program 3.1: Antarctica: Science, Policy and Presence. The committee joined with Dr Nick Gales, Director, Australian Antarctic Division, to offer its sincere condolences to the family of Mr David Wood, the Division's helicopter pilot, who died after a tragic accident in Antarctica on 11 January 2016 (p. 56).

2.12 Other matters examined included:

- the potential effect of CSIRO's announcement that it is planning to reduce its work in relation to climate change science (pp 57–58, 63);
- the number of grants issued through the Australian Antarctic Science Program for the current financial year (p. 59);
- an update on the negotiations for the new icebreaker (pp 59–61);
- the interactions of the climate and the currents in the Southern Ocean (p. 62);
- the Government's response to the 20 Year Australian Antarctic Strategic Plan (pp 64–65); and
- the communications technology provided to Australian stations in the Antarctic (pp 65–66).

2.13 The committee held an additional hearing on 4 March 2016 to complete its examination of the Environment Portfolio. Officers from the Department of the Environment were called in relation to:

- Program 1.1: Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and the Environment;
- Program 1.5: Environmental Regulation;
- Program 1.6: Management of Hazardous Wastes, Substances and Pollutants;
- Program 4.1: Water Reform; and
- the Commonwealth Environmental Water Office.

2.14 Officers were called in relation to Program 1.1: Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and the Environment. Matters discussed included:

- the review of Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (pp 3–4);
- the Reef 2050 Plan (4–5);
- the Reef Trust (pp 5–7);

- the Green Army Programme (pp 7–8);
- funding of the Tamar River Recovery Plan under the National Landcare Programme (pp 9–12);
- the Threatened Species Strategy and recovery plans (pp 13–14);
- Christmas Island Frigate Bird (p. 20);
- baiting feral dogs and cats to protect threatened species (pp 20–21);
- planned burns in regional forests (p. 22); and
- the Leadbeaters Possum Recovery Plan (p. 23).

2.15 The committee continued its examination of Program 1.5: Environmental Regulation and canvassed issues related to land clearing in far north Queensland (pp 24–27) and prescribed burnings in forests or on publicly owned land (pp 27–30).

2.16 Officers were called in relation to Program 1.6: Management of Hazardous Wastes, Substances and Pollutants. Matters canvassed by the committee included:

- evidentiary certificates issued for hazardous waste (p. 44);
- the announcement by the Hon Peter Dutton MP, Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, that the Australian Border Force has initiated an Independent Review of Australia's Asbestos Border Control Management policy (pp 44–45, 47); and
- the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the Rotterdam Convention (p. 45).

2.17 The committee called officers in relation to Program 1.7: Cities and the Built Environment. Matters discussed included:

- the Cities and Built Environment Taskforce's definition of a 'city' (pp 30–31);
- the achievements of the Cities and Built Environment Taskforce (p. 31);
- the staffing arrangements of the Cities and Built Environment Taskforce (pp 32–33); and
- the timing for the release of the State of Australian Cities Report (33–34).

2.18 The committee notes that following the change to the Administrative Arrangement Orders, Cities and the Built Environment has transferred to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The committee examined this program with the Department of the Environment as it was included in this portfolio's Additional Estimates Statement and Appropriation bills.

Outcome 4: Improve the health of rivers and freshwater ecosystems and water use efficiency through implementing water reforms, and ensuring enhanced sustainability, efficiency and productivity in the management and use of water resources

2.19 Officers were called in relation to Program 4.1: Water Reform at the committee's hearing on 4 March 2016. The committee discussed the advice provided by the Independent Expert Scientific Committee on Coal Seam Gas and Large Coal Mining Development in relation to the scope and method of bioregional assessments (pp 35–36).

2.20 The committee called officers in relation to Program 4.2: Commonwealth Environmental Water Office at its hearing on 4 March 2016. Matters raised included the Water Amendment (Review Implementation and Other Measures) Bill 2015 (pp 38, 40) and the research surrounding the potential use of an Indonesian strain of herpes virus in the Murray-Darling Basin to cull common carp (p. 39).

Australian Renewable Energy Agency

2.21 The committee called officers from the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) and canvassed the following matters:

- vacancies on the board of ARENA that have been vacant since midnight on 16 January 2016 (p. 118, 120);
- large-scale solar and solar-related projects (pp 118–119); and
- the number of renewable energy projects in Western Australia (p. 121).

Bureau of Meteorology

2.22 Officers were called from the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) and matters examined included:

- the recent announcement to automate weather observations in 24 regional monitoring stations across Australia and to consolidate BOM staff into eight activity hubs, which will be located in seven capital cities and Cairns (pp 16–21, 26);
- the potential effect of CSIRO's announcement that it is planning to reduce its work in relation to climate change science (pp 21–26, 29);
- extreme weather events and the severity of the current fire season (pp 27–29); and
- reports that the Doppler radar at Mount Stapylton regularly malfunctions (pp 31–32).

Clean Energy Finance Corporation

2.23 The committee called officers from the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC) and discussed the following matters:

- the challenges for new renewable energy projects (pp 76–77);
- developments in household power generation and battery storage (p. 78);
- the Australian Government's policy to abolish the CEFC (pp 79, 85);
- private sector investment in the CEFC's projects (p. 80); and
- the CEFC's residential energy efficiency project with St George Community Housing (pp 81–82, 85).

Clean Energy Regulator

2.24 Officers from the Clean Energy Regulator were called and matters examined included:

- the Lake Bonney Wind Farm Pty Ltd (pp 121–122);
- the assets of the Redbank Power Station (p. 122);
- renewable energy large-scale generation certificates (pp 122–123); and
- results from a voluntary survey of power stations (p. 124).

Climate Change Authority

2.25 The committee called officers from the Climate Change Authority and canvassed the following matters:

- the release of the Authority's second draft report of its Special Review: Australia's Climate Policy Options (pp 86–87);
- staffing figures and arrangements (pp 87–88);
- the outcome of the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris (pp 87, 90); and
- global carbon budgets (p. 91).

Director of National Parks

2.26 The committee called the Director of National Parks, Ms Sally Barnes, and discussed the following matters:

- the status of the draft management plans for the south-west, north-west, north, temperate east networks and the Coral Sea marine reserves (pp 66–67);
- the budget for the review of marine parks and reserves (pp 68–69); and
- the assessment of the potential impact of coral bleaching on marine parks and reserves (p. 70).

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

2.27 The committee called officers from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. Matters canvassed included:

- the threat of coral bleaching on the reef becoming more frequent and severe (pp 33–34, 35–36);
- the Crown-of-thorns Starfish Eradication Program (pp 34–35, 42);
- varieties of seagrass in the marine park and the risks and vulnerabilities of those species (p. 36);
- the use of drum lines in the marine park to reduce interactions with sharks (pp 37–38);
- the potential effect of CSIRO's announcement that it is planning to reduce its work in relation to climate change science (pp 38–39);
- actions being taken to improve water quality (p. 39);
- interactions with the tourism industry on marine plastic pollution (p. 40); and
- the Reef Guardian Fishers Program (p. 41).

National Wind Farm Commissioner

2.28 This was the National Wind Farm Commissioner's first appearance at Estimates and the committee congratulated Mr Andrew Dyer on his appointment. At the conclusion of Mr Dyer's opening statement the following matters were discussed:

- reporting arrangements (p. 45);
- establishment of the National Wind Farm Commission including office location, number of staff and contact details (pp 45–46, 54–55);
- the number of complaints received about wind farms (pp 46–47, 49, 55); and
- the Commissioner's powers to request information (p. 48);

Office of the Supervising Scientist

2.29 The committee discussed the following matters with the Office of Supervising Scientist:

- the number of vacant positions on the Alligator Rivers Region Advisory Committee (p. 11);
- the Northern Territory Government's investigation report into the leach tank failure at the Ranger uranium mine site (pp 12–13); and
- the process to establish the security bond for the rehabilitation of the Ranger uranium mine site (pp 14–15).

Communications and the Arts Portfolio

Department of Communications and the Arts

2.30 The committee commenced its examination of the Communications and the Arts portfolio with general questions to the Department of Communications and the Arts. Matters raised included the lateness of the provision of answers to questions on notice to the committee (pp 4–5) and the future funding for community broadcasters (pp 5–6).

Outcome 1: Promote an innovative and competitive communications sector, through policy development, advice and programme delivery, so all Australians can realise the potential of digital technologies and communications services

2.31 Officers were called in relation to Program 1.1: Digital Technologies and Communications Services. Matters canvassed included the future funding to support community broadcasters (pp 94–95) and the Mobile Black Spot Program prioritising funding for areas that are prone to bushfires (pp 95–96).

Outcome 2: Participation in, and access to, Australia's arts and culture through developing and supporting cultural expression

2.32 The committee called officers in relation to Program 2.1: Arts and Cultural Development and discussed the following matters:

- the timing of the Government's response to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Reference Committee's report on the impact of the 2014 and 2015 Commonwealth Budget decisions on the Arts (pp 87–88);
- the reallocation of \$8.0 million per annum of funding to the Australia Council to support small to medium sized arts organisations (pp 88–91); and
- the three grant recipients from the Catalyst—Australian Arts and Culture Fund (pp 92–94).

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

2.33 The committee noted that this was the last appearance of Mr Mark Scott, Managing Director, Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), before the committee at Estimates. Mr Scott will conclude his term in May 2016 after ten years as Managing Director of the ABC. The chair, on behalf of the committee, acknowledged Mr Scott's contribution to the estimates process:

...On behalf of the committee I would like to thank you very much for your contribution to the estimates process. On behalf of myself and committee members past and present, thank you very much for your appearance and

your support of this committee and for all the work that you have done in this role. Congratulations and thank you.¹

2.34 Other matters discussed included:

- the ABC's bid for the Asian Cup in 2015 (p. 43);
- the ABC's decision to air *Foreign Correspondent* at the same time as *Dateline* on the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) (pp 43–44);
- the possibility of merging ABC and SBS into a single public broadcaster (pp 44–45);
- broadcasting of the National Livestock Reporting Service at an earlier time on the rural report and *Country Hour* (pp 45–46);
- the provision of rural and regional service including funding and programming (pp 47, 63–64);
- changes to local radio across rural and regional Australia (pp 49–50);
- editorial policies and the coverage in New Matilda on matters relating to NBN Co (pp 50–58, 61–62);
- reporting on renewable energy matters (p. 58); and
- the ABC's reporting of the National Broadband Network (pp 60–61).

Australia Council

2.35 The committee called officers from the Australia Council and discussed the impact of funding cuts (pp 66–68) and the level of funding provided to the youth arts sector (pp 68–69).

Australian Communications and Media Authority

2.36 The committee noted Mr Chris Chapman, Chair, Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), was completing his chairmanship of the ACMA after 10 years in that position. Under the *Australian Communications and Media Authority Act 2005*, the chair cannot serve more than 10 years.

2.37 Mr Chapman, in his opening statement, provided the committee with an overview of his time as Chair of the ACMA. He remarked that:

...I have over these 10 years seen six prime ministerships, served under five communications ministers, served with six department secretaries, come before six Senate estimates committee chairpersons, regulated with 15 outstanding authority members, chaired—unbelievably—246 authority meetings, and participated in 56 authority strategy sessions. Today, as I

1 Senator Linda Reynolds CSC, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2016, pp 41–42.

understand it, I am the longest serving agency head in the Commonwealth's 194 agencies.²

2.38 The committee congratulated Mr Chapman on his appointment as president of the International Institute of Communications, which will commence in April 2016. Mr Chapman is the first president of the International Institute of Communications from the Asia-Pacific region in the Institute's 46 year history.³

2.39 Other matters raised included:

- regional broadcasters licence obligations for local content (pp 17–20);
- the allocation of spectrum for emergency services (p. 21); and
- local content arrangements (pp 22–23).

Australian National Maritime Museum, Bundanon Trust, Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House, National Film and Sound Archive, National Gallery of Australia, National Portrait Gallery of Australia, National Library of Australia and National Museum of Australia

2.40 The committee called officers from the Australian National Maritime Museum, Bundanon Trust, Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House, National Film and Sound Archive, National Gallery of Australia, National Portrait Gallery of Australia, National Library of Australia and the National Museum of Australia. Officers from each agency were asked to explain the effect of the Australian Government's decision to introduce a three per cent efficiency target in order to achieve savings of \$36.8 million over four years, as announced in the 2015–16 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (pp 77–87).

Australia Post

2.41 In his opening statement, Mr Ahmed Fahour, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, provided an update on the reforms to the Australia Post letter service, including the increase in the basic postage rate and the introduction of a new two-speed delivery service for regular mail. At the conclusion of the opening statement, the committee discussed the matter of post office boxes including the maintenance, pricing system and national vacancy rate (pp 24–25).

2.42 Other matters discussed by the committee included:

- payments to licensed post offices for street deliveries of parcels (p. 27);

2 Mr Chris Chapman, Chair, Australian Communications and Media Authority, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2016, p. 15.

3 *Proof Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2016, p. 16.

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- the decline in the volume of letters (p. 30);
 - the postcode allocation system (pp 31–32); and
 - the appointment of Mr Bruce McIver to the Australia Post Board (pp 33–39).

National Broadband Network Co Ltd

2.43 Mr Bill Morrow, Chief Executive Officer, made an opening statement and provided the committee with an update on the progress of the rollout of the National Broadband Network (NBN) since Supplementary Budget Estimates (pp 97–99).

2.44 The committee canvassed the following matters with NBN Co:

- the lateness of answers to questions on notice (p. 99);
- rollout of the NBN to towns in West Coast Tasmania (pp 99–101);
- financial highlights including the average revenue per user (pp 103–104);
- capacity and use of the second NBN satellite (pp 105–106);
- staffing figures (p.106);
- complaints regarding fibre to the node, including slow speeds, delayed connection times and disrupted services (pp 107–109); and
- the rollout of the NBN in South Australia (pp 109–110).

Screen Australia

2.45 The committee called officers from Screen Australia and discussed the following matters:

- staffing figures (p. 70);
- reductions in funding (pp 70–71);
- the launch of the Gender Matters National Hub (pp 71–72);
- reductions in funding over the past four years (p. 73); and
- investment in the Australian film industry (pp 73–75).

Special Broadcasting Service

2.46 The committee called officers from the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) and examined the following matters:

- SBS's budget position (pp 7–8);
- its discussions with the Australian Government regarding its triennial funding from 1 July 2016 (pp 8–10);
- bidding for the Asian Cup and the reasons for its decision to not proceed with its bid (pp 10–11);

- the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's decision to air *Foreign Correspondent* at the same time SBS broadcasts *Dateline* (p. 12);
- its digital radio channel *Chill* (pp 12–13); and
- the payment of bonuses to senior executives (p. 14).

Senator Linda Reynolds CSC

Chair