

The Senate

Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee

Additional estimates 2015–16

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Committee Membership

Committee members

Senator Linda Reynolds CSC, Chair	LP, Western Australia
Senator Anne Urquhart, Deputy Chair	ALP, Tasmania
Senator Chris Back	LP, Western Australia
Senator the Hon Eric Abetz	LP, Tasmania
Senator the Hon Lisa Singh	ALP, Tasmania
Senator Larissa Waters	AG, Queensland

Substitute members

Senator David Bushby (LP, Tasmania) for Senator Abetz on 8 and 9 February 2016 and Senator Sam Dastyari (ALP, NSW) for Senator Singh on 9 February 2016

Senators in attendance

Senator Catryna Bilyk	ALP, Tasmania
Senator the Hon Doug Cameron	ALP, NSW
Senator Matthew Canavan	NATS, Queensland
Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy	ALP, Victoria
Senator Katy Gallagher	ALP, ACT
Senator Glenn Lazarus	IND, Queensland
Senator David Leyonhjelm	LDP, NSW
Senator Scott Ludlam	AG, Western Australia
Senator John Madigan	DLP, Victoria
Senator Gavin Marshall	ALP, Victoria
Senator Bridget McKenzie	NATS, Victoria
Senator Nick McKim	AG, Tasmania
Senator Deborah O'Neill	ALP, NSW
Senator Barry O'Sullivan	NATS, Queensland
Senator Lee Rhiannon	AG, NSW
Senator Janet Rice	AG, Victoria
Senator Rachel Siewert	AG, Western Australia
Senator Robert Simms	AG, South Australia
Senator Dean Smith	LP, Western Australia
Senator Zhenya Wang	PUP, Western Australia
Senator Peter Whish-Wilson	AG, Tasmania
Senator John Williams	NATS, NSW
Senator Nick Xenophon	IND, South Australia

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Chapter 1

Additional Estimates 2015–16

Introduction

1.1 On 4 February 2016, the Senate referred the following to the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee (the committee):

- Particulars of proposed additional expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2016 [Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2015–16];
- Particulars of certain proposed additional expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2016 [Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2015–16]; and
- Final Budget Outcome 2014–15.¹

1.2 A reporting date of 1 March 2016 was set for the committee's report on the 2015–16 Additional Estimates.² On 29 February 2016, the Senate agreed to extend the tabling date to 16 March 2016 to allow the committee to complete its examination of the proposed additional expenditure and outcomes for the Environment portfolio.³

Portfolio coverage

1.3 The committee has responsibility for examining the expenditure and outcomes of the following:

- Environment Portfolio; and
- Communications and the Arts Portfolio.⁴

Hearings

1.4 The committee's examination of the Environment Portfolio commenced on Monday, 8 February 2016. The committee agreed, pursuant to standing order 26(4), to hold a further hearing on Friday, 4 March 2016 to continue its examination of Program 1.5: Environment Regulation. The committee further agreed to examine the programs not called on 8 February 2016 at that hearing as follows:

- 1.1: Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and the Environment;
- 1.5: Environmental Regulation;
- 1.6: Management of Hazardous Wastes, Substances and Pollutants;

1 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 137, 4 February 2016, p. 3720.

2 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 124, 10 November 2015, p. 3336.

3 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 142, 29 February 2016, p. 3837.

4 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 1, 12 November 2013, p. 16.

- 1.7: Cities and the Built Environment;
- 4.1: Water Reform; and
- 4.2: Commonwealth Environmental Water Office.

1.5 The committee's examination of the Communications and the Arts Portfolio took place on Tuesday, 9 February 2016.

1.6 The committee took evidence from Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, Minister for Education and Training representing the Minister for the Environment; Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources representing the Minister for the Environment; Senator the Hon Mitch Fifield, Minister for Communications and Minister for the Arts; and Senator the Hon Arthur Sinodinos AO, Cabinet Secretary representing the Minister for the Environment, together with officers from the relevant departments and agencies. The committee thanks the Ministers, departmental secretaries and the officers who appeared before it.

1.7 The Sydney Harbour Federation Trust was not required to attend.

Questions on notice and Hansard transcripts

1.8 In accordance with standing order 26(9)(a), the committee set Friday, 8 April 2016, as the date for the return of written answers or additional information for the hearing held on 8 February 2016. The committee agreed to 22 April 2016 from the hearing held on 4 March 2016.

1.9 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 transcripts of these public hearings and to answers and additional information are available on the internet at:

www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Senate_Estimates/ecctte/estimates/add1516/index

Answers to questions on notice – Supplementary Budget Estimates 2015–16

1.10 The committee's examination of the Department of the Environment and its agencies for the Supplementary Budget estimates took place on 19 October 2015 and 13 November 2015.

1.11 The committee agreed to three dates for the return of answers to questions on notice from the Environment portfolio. Answers to Senator Urquhart's questions on notice in relation to programs 1.1, 1.4, 1.6, the Clean Energy Regulator and the Climate Change Authority were due to the committee by 4 November 2015. The committee set 4 December 2015 as the date for the return of answers to questions on notice arising from the hearing on 19 October 2015. Finally, answers to questions

taken on notice arising from the hearing on 13 November 2015 were due to the committee by 15 January 2016.

1.12 The committee's examination of the Communications and the Arts portfolio took place on 20 October 2015. The committee held a separate hearing with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) on 30 November 2015. The committee set 4 December 2015, as the date for the return of answers to questions on notice from the Communications and the Arts portfolio. The committee set 27 January 2016, as the date for return of answers to questions from the ABC.

Timeliness of answers to questions on notice

1.13 On 2 November 2015, the Department of the Environment indicated to the committee that it was not able to provide the answers to Senator Urquhart's written questions on notice by the due date of 4 November. The department advised that it would endeavour to provide the responses by 11 November 2015.

1.14 On 11 November 2015, the Department of the Environment provided answers to 63 of the 77 questions placed on notice by Senator Urquhart; seven more were provided on 12 November 2015. A further six answers to questions on notice were provided on 24 November 2015 and the final answer was provided on 3 December 2015.

1.15 The committee acknowledged that the Department of the Environment had provided the majority of answers to the questions on notice from Senator Urquhart and, at the hearing on 13 November 2015, the chair commented that this had been very helpful to the committee.

1.16 In relation to the remaining questions on notice the committee received the majority of the answers from the Environment portfolio that were due on 4 December by Friday, 21 December 2015. All answers were provided by 28 January 2016.

1.17 The committee did not receive any answers to the questions on notice from the Communications and the Arts portfolio by the due date of 4 December 2015. The first answers were received on 8 December 2015. Answers to 60 questions were provided between 8 December and 22 December 2015 and 80 answers were provided between 25 January and 8 February 2016.

1.18 The ABC did not provide any answers to the 24 questions on notice by the due date of 27 January 2016. The committee received the first seven answers on 8 February 2016.

1.19 The committee received the remaining 22 answers to questions on notice, including 17 from the ABC and five from across the department and agencies, on the

morning of the committee's Additional Estimates hearing with the Communications and the Arts portfolio.⁵

1.20 At the Additional Estimates hearing with the Communications and the Arts portfolio, the committee expressed its concern that no answers to questions on notice had been received by the due date and that many answers were provided either on the Friday afternoon before the hearing or moments before the hearing commenced. The chair noted that the provision of answers so close to the hearing, provided little time for senators to review the answers and to prepare any supplementary questions that they may have for Additional Estimates hearing.⁶

1.21 The Secretary of the Department of Communications and Arts, Dr Heather Smith, responded to the committee's concerns regarding the lateness of answers to questions on notice and stated:

I did note that you wrote to the department yesterday about the need to ensure the timely coordination and response to questions asked by the committee. There were a number of factors contributing to the lateness of the [answers], including that many of the questions required coordinating responses from portfolio agencies of which we now have significantly more since the administrative order changes. I do wish to assure the committee, though, that the department does take the provision and tabling [of answers] very seriously and we will ensure a better response rate going forward.⁷

1.22 Dr Smith went on to inform the committee that administrative arrangements would be put in place to improve advice to portfolio agencies about questions on notice. Dr Smith concluded that the Department of Communications and the Arts 'will endeavour to ensure being more timely for the next estimates'.⁸

1.23 While welcoming Dr Smith's commitment to improving the timeliness of the provision of answers, the committee notes that comments were included in its report on the Additional Estimates 2014–15 concerning the late provision of the answers to questions on notice by the then Communications portfolio. The committee reiterates its comments regarding the importance of the provision of answers to questions on notice and its expectation that answers will be provided by the due date.

1.24 At the committee's second hearing with the Department of the Environment, the Secretary, Dr Gordon de Brouwer, also commented on the timely provision of

5 Of the five answers provided across the Communications and the Arts portfolio: three were from NBN Co; one from Program 2.1: Arts and Cultural Development; and one from the National Film and Sound Archive.

6 See *Proof Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2016, p. 4.

7 Dr Heather Smith, Secretary, Department of Communications and the Arts, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2016, pp 4–5.

8 Dr Heather Smith, Secretary, Department of Communications and the Arts, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2016, pp 4–5.

answers to question on notice and indicated that the chair would be provided with information on the way in which the Department of the Environment undertakes the grouping of answers.

Claims of commercial confidentiality

1.25 The committee has examined answers to questions on notice from Budget estimates 2015–16 and Supplementary Budget estimates 2015–16 in relation to claims that information was not provided on the basis that it was commercial-in-confidence. The committee notes that some answers from agencies in the Communications and the Arts portfolio contained this claim. While a number of answers included an indication of the potential commercial harm of providing the information, some answers claiming confidentiality did not provide any basis for such a claim.

1.26 The committee again draws the attention of departments and agencies to Senate Procedural Order of Continuing Effect No. 11 of 30 October 2003 relating to claims for the withholding of information on the grounds that it is commercial-in-confidence.⁹ Without the required statement indicating the commercial harm that may result from the disclosure of the information, the committee is unable to consider whether it should require the answer or should not press the question.

1.27 At Budget Estimates 2015–16, Australia Post requested that the answers to five questions on notice be provided to the committee confidentially. As all evidence relating to estimates, including answers to questions on notice, must be in public session the committee agreed to receive this information under Standing Order 25(2)—its power to inquire into the performance of departments and agencies. The questions were in relation to its contracts, parcel sorting machines, digital mailbox and the forecast decline of mail volumes. The committee, upon receipt of the answers to questions on notice and in consultation with Australia Post, agreed to make public the answers to two of the five questions and these have been published with the portfolios answers to questions on notice.

Attendance of witnesses

1.28 The committee notes that most departments and agencies in the Environment portfolio and the Communications and the Arts portfolio were well prepared for the Additional Estimates hearings.

1.29 In relation to NBN Co, the committee noted that senators seek detailed information on highly technical matters. The committee had requested that a number of NBN officers attend the Additional Estimates hearings to respond to these questions. However, the officers requested were unavailable due to prior commitments and only Mr Bill Morrow, Chief Executive Officer, and Mr Stephen Rue, Chief Financial Officer, attended the hearings. The committee suggested that it would be

9 The Senate, *Standing Orders and other orders of the Senate*, August 2015, p. 131.

helpful to senator attending the hearing if NBN Co would consider having the appropriate officers either attend or be contactable via email during estimates hearings. The committee notes Mr Morrow responded that, if an indication of the topics to be canvassed at the hearing was provided, that the appropriate officers would be available.¹⁰

Senators' guidance document

1.30 The committee would again like to thank both the Department of the Environment and the Department of Communications and the Arts for each preparing a 'guidance document' for the Additional Estimates hearings. The guidance documents provided a comprehensive overview of the outcome structure of each department and were very helpful to committee members in establishing the correct area in which to ask their questions.

Record of proceedings

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

Note on references and additional information

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

1.33 Copies of the Hansard transcripts, documents tabled at the hearings, and additional information received after the hearings are tabled in the Senate and available on the committee's website.

10 Mr Bill Morrow, Chief Executive Officer, NBN Co, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2016, p. 133.

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.

- 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

Appendix 1

Additional Estimates programs

The Senate BUSINESS OF COMMITTEES

This document is issued as a guide to Senators
Business listed is subject to change

It should be noted that times allocated for the consideration of outcomes, items and agencies within portfolios are indicative only.

Senators, staff and departments should liaise with secretariats on the progress of portfolios during the estimates process.

SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Public Hearings: ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES FOR 2015–16
Monday, 8 February and Tuesday, 9 February 2016
Committee Room 2S3
Parliament House
Canberra ACT

To be televised on Channel 111/Radio 91.1
http://www.aph.gov.au/News_and_Events/Watch_Parliament

MONDAY, 8 February 2016

Time Environment Portfolio

9.00 am	General questions of the Department
9.40 am	Office of the Supervising Scientist
10.00 am	Bureau of Meteorology
	Morning Tea: 10.30 am to 10.45 am
10.45 am	Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority
11.30 am	Outcome 3: Antarctica
11.50 am	Director of National Parks
	Lunch: 12.20 pm to 1.20 pm
1.20 pm	National Wind Farm Commissioner
1.50 pm	Program 1.2: Environmental Information and Research
2.20 pm	Program 1.3: Carbon Pollution Reduction – Land Sector Initiatives

2.35 pm	Program 2.1: Reducing Australia's Greenhouse Gas Emissions
3.25 pm	Program 2.2: Adapting to Climate Change
	Afternoon Tea: 3.55 pm to 4.10 pm
4.10 pm	Program 1.4: Conservation of Australia's Heritage and the Environment
4.40 pm	Clean Energy Finance Corporation
5.10 pm	Australian Renewable Energy Agency
5.40 pm	Climate Change Authority
6.10 pm	Clean Energy Regulator
	Dinner: 6.30 pm to 7.30 pm
7.30 pm	Program 1.5: Environmental regulation
8.30 pm	Program 1.6: Management of Hazardous Wastes, Substances and Pollutants
8.45 pm	Program 1.7: Cities and the Built Environment
	Tea Break: 9.15 pm to 9.30 pm
9.30 pm	Program 4.1: Water Reform
10.00 pm	Commonwealth Environmental Water Office
10.30 pm	Program 1.1: Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and the Environment
11.00 pm	Adjournment

TUESDAY, 9 February 2016

AGENDA

Time Communications and the Arts Portfolio

9.00 am	General questions of the Department
9.40 am	Special Broadcasting Service
	Morning Tea: 10.10 am to 10.25 am
10.25 am	Australian Communications and Media Authority
10.40 am	Australia Post
11.10 am	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
	Lunch: 12.55 pm to 1.55 pm
1.55 pm	Australia Council
2.25 pm	Screen Australia
2.55 pm	Australian National Maritime Museum Bundanon Trust National Film and Sound Archive National Gallery of Australia National Library of Australia National Museum of Australia National Portrait Gallery of Australia Old Parliament House (The Museum of Australian Democracy)
	Afternoon Tea: 3.25 pm to 3.40 pm
3.40 pm	Program 2.1: Arts and Cultural Development
4.40 pm	Program 1.1: Digital Technologies and Communications Services
5.10 pm	NBN Co
	Dinner 6.30 pm to 7.30 pm
7.30 pm	NBN Co (<i>continued</i>)
	Tea Break: 9.00 pm to 9.15 pm
9.15 pm	NBN Co (<i>continued</i>)
11.00 pm	Adjournment

The Senate BUSINESS OF COMMITTEES

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Senators, staff and departments should liaise with secretariats on the progress of portfolios during the estimates process.

SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Public Hearings: ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES FOR 2015–16
Friday, 4 March 2016
Committee Room 1S4
Parliament House
Canberra ACT

Audio to be broadcast on Channel 932/Radio 89.1
http://www.aph.gov.au/News_and_Events/Watch_Parliament

FRIDAY, 4 March 2016

Time	Environment Portfolio
8.00 am	Program 1.1: Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and the Environment
10.00 am	Program 1.5: Environmental regulation
	Morning Tea: 10.30 am to 10.45 am
10.45 am	Program 1.5: Environmental regulation (<i>continued</i>)
11.15 am	Program 1.7: Cities and the Built Environment
11.45 pm	Program 4.1: Water Reform
12.15 pm	Program 4.2: Commonwealth Environmental Water Office
12.45 pm	Program 1.6: Management of Hazardous Wastes, Substances and Pollutants
1.00 pm	Adjournment

Appendix 2

Tabled documents

Monday, 8 February 2016

National Wind Farm Commissioner

Opening statement

Tuesday, 9 February 2016

Australian Communications and Media Authority

Opening statement

Australia Post

Opening statement

NBN Co Ltd

Opening statement

Friday, 4 March 2016

Senator O'Sullivan

Documents relating to land clearing in far north Queensland

