

**Economics Legislation Committee**  
**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**  
Industry, Innovation and Science Portfolio  
2017 - 2018 Budget Estimates  
31 May – 1 June 2017

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**AGENCY/DEPARTMENT:** DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE

**TOPIC:** AAO to be run by a consortium of universities

**REFERENCE:** Questions on Notice (Hansard, 1 June 2017, page 75)

**QUESTION No.:** BI-41

Senator KIM CARR: So the AAO will now be run by a consortium of universities led by the ANU. Is that the case?

Ms Weston: That is correct.

Senator KIM CARR: When will that be in place?

Ms Weston: My colleague is very close to the action. I will get her to—

Ms McLaughlin: The AAT—the telescope that the AAO currently owns and operates at Coonabarabran—will be operated by a consortium led by the ANU. That will come into effect from 1 July 2018. With respect to the operations of the AAO in North Ryde and their instrumentation capability, it will not necessary be led by ANU. We anticipate having an expression-of-interest process to identify which university or universities or other institutions would seek to host and continue that activity, but with the visibility—the decision of the AAL board to provide that NCRIS operating money. That is where that \$5 million a year would go.

Senator KIM CARR: Can you give me a list of the full consortium of universities?

Ms McLaughlin: No. We are not able to do that yet. With respect to the telescope, ANU has agreed to lead that work and has—

Senator KIM CARR: Who else is involved?

Ms McLaughlin: A number of universities.

Senator KIM CARR: But you cannot tell me who they are?

Ms McLaughlin: The processes around determining the membership of that consortium have not concluded.

Senator KIM CARR: Hang on. You are relying on their money. You must be able to know who is paying.

Ms McLaughlin: We know a number of the universities that are involved, but there are others who need to be consulted and who may end up contributing in addition.

Ms Weston: We will take that on notice because we need to clarify with the ANU where they have got with this.

Senator KIM CARR: It has been put to me that there is actually a funding cliff here from 2020. You are saying to me that it is not true.

Ms Weston: That impasse has been resolved.

Senator KIM CARR: When was that resolved?

Ms Weston: As part of this process.

Senator KIM CARR: That is what I am saying. You need to be able to say who is going to pay.

Ms McLaughlin: We will take that on notice.

Ms Weston: I believe that there is that cover, but I would like to confirm with the ANU before I finalise that information.

Senator KIM CARR: You will take that on notice.

Ms Weston: Yes.

Senator KIM CARR: Thank you. That is very good. The table I referred to was not 133; it was 131.

Ms Weston: Yes, sorry.

## **ANSWER**

The key scientific functions of the Australian Astronomical Observatory (AAO), namely, the operation of the Anglo-Australian Telescope, and the development and building of innovative optical astronomical instrumentation, will continue under new domestic arrangements.

The new domestic astronomy capabilities will be structured to support Australia's ongoing participation in front-line international astronomical facilities, including the European Southern Observatory and the Giant Magellan Telescope project, and to deliver essential scientific and economic returns on Australia's public investment in fundamental astronomical research.

Operations of the Anglo-Australian Telescope at Siding Spring Observatory from 1 July 2018 will be funded by a consortium of Australian universities, led by the Australian National University. At this stage, UNSW Sydney, Swinburne University of Technology and the University of Sydney have also agreed to contribute towards the costs of operating the AAT.

The optical instrumentation capabilities currently carried out by AAO based at North Ryde will be transferred from the department to the research sector. Details of the optical instrumentation arrangements will be resolved over coming months in consultation between the department and research sector stakeholders.