

Chapter 1

Budget Estimates 2015-16

1.1 On 12 May 2015 the Senate referred the following to the Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee (the committee) for examination and report:

- Particulars of proposed expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2016.
- Particulars of certain proposed expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2016.
- Particulars of proposed expenditure in relation to the parliamentary departments in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2016.
- Particulars of proposed additional expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2015.
- Particulars of certain proposed additional expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2015.¹

1.2 The 'Particulars' documents relating to proposed additional expenditure and certain proposed additional expenditure for the year ending 30 June 2015, did not relate to portfolios for which the committee has oversight.

Portfolio coverage

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

- Parliament;²
- Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio;
- Finance Portfolio; and
- Cross Portfolio Indigenous Matters.

Portfolio Budget Statements 2015-16

1.4 The Portfolio Budget Statements 2015-16 for the parliamentary departments, the Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio and the Finance Portfolio were tabled in the Senate on 12 May 2015.³

1 *Journals of the Senate, No. 92, 12 May 2015, p. 2561.*

2 As a matter of comity between the Houses neither House inquires into the operations of the other House. For this reason, neither the annual report of, nor the proposed expenditure for, the Department of the House of Representatives is referred to a Senate committee for review.

3 *Journals of the Senate, No. 92, 12 May 2015, pp 2561-2562.*

Hearings

1.5 The committee held public hearings on 25-29 May 2015. The parliamentary departments were examined on 25 May, the Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio (excluding Indigenous matters and the Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General) was examined on 25 and 26 May, the Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General was examined on 27 May, the Finance Portfolio was examined on 27 and 28 May, and the Cross Portfolio Indigenous Matters hearing was held on 29 May 2015.

1.6 The committee took evidence from the President of the Senate, Senator the Hon Stephen Parry, and the following Ministers accompanied by officers of relevant departments and agencies:

- Senator the Hon George Brandis, Attorney-General, representing the Prime Minister;
- Senator the Hon Mathias Cormann, Minister for Finance, and also representing the Prime Minister;
- Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women;
- Senator the Hon Michael Ronaldson, Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Special Minister of State; and
- Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion, Minister for Indigenous Affairs.

1.7 The committee expresses its appreciation for the assistance of the President, Ministers and the officers who appeared.

1.8 Over the course of the hearings, the committee took evidence from the following departments and agencies:

Parliamentary departments

- Department of the Senate
- Parliamentary Budget Office
- Department of Parliamentary Services

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

- Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (including the Office for Women and excluding Outcome 2 – Indigenous)
- Independent National Security Legislation Monitor
- Office of the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security
- Australian National Audit Office
- Australian Public Service Commission
- Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman
- Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General

Finance Portfolio

- Department of Finance
- ASC Pty Ltd
- ComSuper
- Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation
- Australian Electoral Commission

Cross Portfolio Indigenous Matters

- Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (Outcome 2 – Indigenous)
- Department of Health (in relation to Indigenous Health issues)
- Northern Land Council
- Tiwi Land Council
- Office of Township Leasing
- Indigenous Land Corporation
- Aboriginal Hostels Limited
- Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations

Review of the Cross Portfolio Indigenous Matters hearing

1.9 The committee notes the early completion of the Finance Portfolio by the dinner break on the second day of examination which may be due to the privatisation of Medibank Private and its removal from the Finance Portfolio. The committee believes that the reduced number of agencies may facilitate an early start to a discrete examination of Indigenous matters during the next Budget Estimates week in 2016 consistent with the ‘separate time’ for the cross portfolio estimates hearing on Indigenous matters as set under the Standing Order of the Senate of 26 August 2008. The committee notes that Additional Estimates and the Supplementary Budget Estimates rounds, which run over two days, may not allow for the cross portfolio estimates hearing on Indigenous matters to begin during those hearings, so they would still be held on a separate day unless otherwise agreed by the committee.

Recommendation 1

1.10 The committee recommends that when the Senate sets the dates for the 2016 Estimates hearings that the ‘separate time’ for the cross portfolio estimates hearing on Indigenous matters not be restricted to the Friday of each estimates week.

Questions on notice and Hansard transcripts

1.11 The committee has set 10 July 2015 as the date for the return of answers to questions on notice arising from the Budget Estimates 2015-16 hearings. This information, together with the Hansard transcripts of proceedings of hearings, are published on the committee's website at:

http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Senate_Estimates/fapacte/estimates/bud1516/index

Note on references

1.12 References to the estimates Hansard are to the proof Hansard; page numbers may vary between the proof and the official Hansard transcript.