

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

SENATE ESTIMATES SESSION

Supplementary Budget Estimates 18-22 November 2013

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Outcome/Program: 1.1 Prime Minister and Cabinet

Topic: National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development

Senator: Senator Dean Smith

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Question:

Senator SMITH: So am I correct in saying that the Commonwealth did its own research, its own due diligence and developed its own view about where the best locations would be and the states and territories developed their own understanding and then they came together and negotiated it?

Ms Hosking: I do not think it was two such separate processes as you are describing. I think it was more that in combination. Obviously this going back beyond the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet but my understanding is that there would have been a more shared process that relied to a fairly significant degree on the advice coming from the state and territory governments about where the need was in their own jurisdictions.

Senator SMITH: So who made the final decision? How did the final decision-making process work? Who had the final sign off on the sites?

Ms Hosking: I think we will have to take that one on notice to go back to the detail. My understanding is there would have been an agreement between the relevant ministers, but I think we need to confirm that given the passage of time and the machinery-of-government changes.

Ms Carroll: What normally happens in national partnership agreements is that a final proposal would be put from the states for the Commonwealth minister at the time for agreement, so effectively because it is a Commonwealth-state agreement there is agreement between the state government and the Commonwealth government at the time. Broadly, that would be the Commonwealth minister at the time with the relevant state or territory minister at the time.

Senator SMITH: So the state sends to the Commonwealth its preferred locations, the Commonwealth looks at that and says, 'Yes, we agree,' or, 'No, we do not agree, and this is our final list for you to sign'; is that right?

Ms Carroll: I think as Ms Hosking said, there would be a lot of negotiation going on both at the officials level before it got to ministers and then the final process would be that a final set of locations would be provided for agreement.

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

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Senator SMITH: I appreciate that. I would be interested in knowing—and you can take this on notice—how the final list was different from the original list that was provided to the Commonwealth by each state and territory.

Ms Carroll: We will see if that is possible to get. We will see what is possible.

Senator SMITH: And in addition to that where the final decision was actually made—was it a ministerial decision, was it a department decision et cetera. This is a six-year program with 38 planned to be built and we still have eight that have not yet been completed. What is the reason for the delay? We are talking about family centres, child-care services et cetera. Why the delay over six years?

Ms Hosking: My understanding is that there are a range of different.....

Senator SMITH: If we look at the eight where there is a delay, can you identify which jurisdictions they fall into? I am particularly interested to know whether the eight are in one jurisdiction or if they are spread evenly?

Ms Hosking: Five of the centres that have not yet been constructed are in the Northern Territory. Two of the other ones are in WA and one is in New South Wales.

Senator SMITH: What is the reason for the delay? Can you tell us what you know but also take it on notice.

Ms Hosking: I can provide more details, but essentially it is a combination of a complex consultation process for the communities about the nature of the centres.

Senator SMITH: Do some communities think that a childcare service or a family service is not important?

Ms Hosking: I do not think that is the case.

Senator SMITH: These negotiations on the rollout of a childcare centre and a family services centre in the Northern Territory have been taking six years.

Ms Hosking: There is a complex combination of reasons. Some issues surrounded land tenure in the Northern Territory that have been quite complex and have taken some time to resolve. There have been interim services provided in communities in the meantime, but we have been concerned particularly in the Northern Territory about the delays and have been in regular contact with the Northern Territory government trying to help them to get the centres resolved within the life of the partnership.

Senator SMITH: On notice, Ms Hosking, could you provide some explanation for the delay around those eight sites? Could you also detail for me what community consultations have taken place across those areas?

Answer:

The previous government made the final decision on Children and Family Centre site locations when the then Commonwealth Minister for Education endorsed the locations proposed by state and territory governments.

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

SENATE ESTIMATES SESSION

Supplementary Budget Estimates 18-22 November 2013

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

The Commonwealth Government provided two broad criteria to state and territory governments for site selection. Children and Family Centres were to be established in areas of high Indigenous population and high levels of disadvantage.

The National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development specified that a minimum of 35 Children and Family Centres be established in urban, regional and remote locations. State and territory governments were asked to consider establishing additional Children and Family Centres where possible. Queensland and Tasmania each agreed to provide one additional CFC at Doomadgee (QLD) and Geeveston (TAS).

State and territory governments submitted proposed site locations for 37 CFCs. All of the proposed site locations met the criteria provided and were endorsed by the Commonwealth Government between March and October 2009.

South Australia proposed an additional site location for a Children and Family Centre at Pukatja in 2010, which was endorsed by the Commonwealth Government in May 2010.

The final list included site locations for 38 Children and Family Centres.

As at 10 December 2013, 25 of the 38 Children and Family Centres have been completed. Of the remaining 13 Children and Family Centres not yet constructed:

- Five in NSW are in the final stages of construction and are expected to be completed by the end of 2013 ; and
- Eight are scheduled for completion in 2014 (1 in NSW, 1 in QLD, 1 in WA and all 5 sites in the NT).

State and territory governments have reported unforeseen delays against initial timeframes due to a range of issues. Some of the key delays include:

- Longer than expected community consultation;
- Land tenure issues;
- Delays with development applications;
- Difficulty identifying a suitable site e.g. soil contamination identified during site preparation; and
- Natural disasters e.g. bushfires and flooding.

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SENATE ESTIMATES SESSION

Supplementary Budget Estimates 18-22 November 2013

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

As at 10 December 2013, there are eight (8) Children and Family Centres scheduled for completion in 2014 (1 in NSW, 1 in QLD, 1 in WA and all 5 sites in the NT).

Site & State	Reason for delay
Mt Druitt (NSW)	Difficulty securing suitable land, delays with the Development Application and difficulty finalising the designs within the construction budget. Significant delays (of nearly five months) to the commencement of construction were due to Local Health District upgrade works and negotiation of a lease agreement with NSW Health.
MacKay (QLD)	Significant construction delays due to cyclone flooding and damage early in 2013 and months of unseasonal rain.
Roebourne (WA)	Difficulty reaching agreement on site selection and extended consultation with community. Construction progress was slowed down by the removal of asbestos and site remediation.
Maningrida (NT)	Significant delays have occurred due to the NT governments focus on service delivery from interim premises and not on construction of the permanent premises, extensive and extended community consultation, land tenure and lease negotiations and local infrastructure up-grades.
Ngukurr (NT)	Significant delays have occurred due to the NT governments focus on service delivery from interim premises and not on construction of the permanent premises, extensive and extended community consultation, land tenure and lease negotiations and local infrastructure up-grades.
Yuendumu (NT)	Significant delays have occurred due to the NT governments focus on service delivery from interim premises and not on construction of the permanent premises, extensive and extended community consultation, land tenure and lease negotiations and local infrastructure up-grades. Minor delays with site preparation have occurred due to issues with the water supply to the site.
Gunbalanya (NT)	Significant delays have occurred due to the NT governments focus on service delivery from interim premises and not on construction of the permanent premises, extensive and extended community consultation, land tenure and lease negotiations and local infrastructure up-grades. Additional delays have occurred because of the need to conduct a second construction tender process as satisfactory submissions were not received for the first tender process.
Palmerston (NT)	Significant delays have occurred due to the NT governments focus on service delivery from interim premises and not on construction of the permanent premises, extensive and extended community consultation, land tenure and lease negotiations and local infrastructure up-grades. There have been delays in site selection and signoff.

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Consultation occurred across all communities via reference groups and working groups consisting of Indigenous elders and community members. Consultation occurred at all stages including site selection, design construction and service delivery.