

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing 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: Aboriginals Benefit Account Advisory Committee

Senator: Senator Cory Bernardi

Question reference number: 232

Type of Question: Hansard

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 17 January 2014

Number of pages: 2

Question:

CHAIR: So there was a subcommittee of the ABA Advisory Committee?

Ms Gumley: It was not a formally—

CHAIR: That is my terminology.

Ms Gumley: There was a small group of members of the ABA. The ABA committee has delegates from the land councils, and, in the last one, there was a meeting of the land councils, who came together to see whether the department had picked up all of the matters at hand. That is partly because, in this instance, it was the executives of the land councils that met to take on the issue. That is important because the land councils were the ones that were thinking about becoming the equity partners in the organisation. The ABA committee usually has individual delegates representing the land council, but, because this was such a substantive proposal and had the commercial development aspects, the land council chairs, or their representatives, were at that meeting.

CHAIR: It is through naivety that I am asking this question. There is a governance issue in my mind that you have prompted. Is the ABA providing the funds—the \$90 million—for this? Am I correct?

Ms Gumley: Not quite. The ABA committee is an advisory group to the minister. The minister takes the decision on the expenditure of the ABA funds, so the minister approves projects. The committee can give advice to the minister, and the relevant minister will take that into account.

CHAIR: And yet it was not the full committee that provided that advice or signed off in the end; it was a section of it. Is that correct?

Mr Stacey: The situation was that the former minister, anxious to see the matter settled after a lot of work done to assess and work through, asked for a meeting of the committee, but not all members attended that meeting. It was not a subcommittee; the chair and senior members from NLC, CLC and Anindilyakwa Land Council on Groote Eylandt were there. A meeting was called, but not all members were able to attend.

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing 18-22 November 2013

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

CHAIR: Are you able to provide me with—and you may want to take this on notice—the members who did attend and those who were eligible to attend?

Mr Stacey: Yes.

Ms Gumley: Yes

Answer:

The role of the Aboriginals Benefit Account Advisory Committee (ABAAC) is to provide advice and recommendations to the Minister for Indigenous Affairs in relation to grants made under subsection 64(4) of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (the Act). Its members comprise a Chair, appointed by the Minister, and seven members appointed by the Northern Land Council, five elected by the Central Land Council, one elected by the Tiwi Land Council and one elected by the Anindilyakwa Land Council.

The grants are sourced from the Aboriginals Benefit Account (ABA) and decisions about these grants are made by the Minister for Indigenous Affairs having regard to the advice of ABAAC.

The \$90 million Staff Housing proposal was first presented to a full ABAAC meeting in November 2012. At this meeting, ABAAC referred the proposal to a sub-committee consisting of nine ABAAC members which met in February 2013 to address ABAAC's questions about the proposal. Further revisions of the Staff Housing proposal were considered at the next two full ABAAC meetings held in April and July 2013.

At the request of the former Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin MP, the Chair of ABAAC called a meeting to discuss outstanding applications not previously resolved by ABAAC including the Staff Housing proposal. ABAAC members at the meeting were the ABAAC Chair, Ms Patricia Brahim, the Chair of the Central Land Council, Mr Maurie Ryan, and the Chair of Anindilyakwa Land Council, Mr Tony Wurrmarrba. The former Minister, the Deputy Chair of the Northern Land Council, Mr Sammy Bush Blanas, the Chief Executives of the Central and Northern Land Councils and senior officials of the former Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs also attended. The Tiwi Council were unable to attend due to a major funeral.

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing 18-22 November 2013

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

At the meeting the Land Council Chairs presented the views of their respective ABAAC members and a revised Staff Housing proposal was supported to be sourced from the ABA.