

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S PORTFOLIO

Group: 2

Program: 1.3

Question No. AE15/088

Senator Collins asked the following question at the hearing on 27 March 2015:

Mr Manning: I am not aware of any reports today, but the far west legal service is certainly a centre that was receiving supplementary funding for 2015-16 and 2016-17 and, as a result of the government's announcement tomorrow, will still receive that funding—that is right.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: Let me run through what was on ABC breakfast radio this morning. I appreciate you may not necessarily have heard that.

Mr Manning: No, I have not.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: Four staff have already resigned. They have not been told any details of how much they will be given by government. Some people have already left and started other jobs. Their principal solicitor has already resigned and accepted another job. They had already turned away clients—80 people. There is damage to staff morale. It has caused distress to vulnerable people. I am paraphrasing a radio report here. They will have to rebuild the far west legal centre from the ground up, and they are still crippled by the defunded advocacy services. Did the department or government receive any representations with respect to the far west legal centre? I think it is in Broken Hill.

Ms Jardine: Yes, I think we received representations.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: What can you tell me about those?

Ms Jardine: They generally reflected what you have just said. I think what you said is an update, but we understood that staff had left.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: The initial report I heard about this service was that it was going to close, I think, this week. Had you been advised of that?

Ms Jardine: No.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: The concerning part of this one was that they are saying—at least on radio this morning—that they had already turned away 80 people. Had you received that information?

Mr Manning: Not that I am aware of.

Ms Jardine: I would have to take that on notice. I cannot recall.

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

The Attorney-General's Department had not received this information.