

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications**  
**Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice**  
**Budget Estimates Hearings May 2011**  
**Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy Portfolio**  
**Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy**

**Question No: 114**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: Page 128 (25/05/2011)**

**Topic: Advertising Purchasing**

**Senator Ludlam asked:**

**Senator LUDLAM:** I would greatly appreciate that. That might be a way for SBS's funding to lift—if the fraction were shifted. I wonder, Minister, if I could ask you if that is something you have contemplated before? I know this is a whole-of-government question and I will get referred off to all sorts of other ministers and so on. But that is one way, without increasing the total spend of the Commonwealth budget, that advertising purchasing could be shifted across to this public broadcaster and perhaps even to community broadcasters. Could I ask if you could take on notice whether that has been contemplated or whether that might be a great idea.

**Senator Conroy:** I am happy to take that on notice.

**Answer:**

The Government already places advertising with SBS (see Question on Notice 61). The Commonwealth Department of Finance and Deregulation has portfolio responsibility for the Government's policy relating to the placement of Government advertising.

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**Question No: 115**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: Page 35 (26/05/2011)**

**Topic: Sunraysia-Mildura Trial**

**Senator Birmingham asked:**

**Senator BIRMINGHAM:** Will the department release or is the department willing to release that full review of the Sunraysia-Mildura trial?

**Ms O'Loughlin:** I will take that on notice, but we will look carefully at making that available.

**Answer:**

The Department commissioned KPMG to undertake an assessment of aspects of the Mildura switchover. The report is available on the Digital Ready website at:

**<http://www.digitalready.gov.au/info-centre/digital-tv-reports.aspx>**

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**Question No: 116**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: Page 36 (26/05/2011)**

**Topic: Household Assistance Scheme**

**Senator Birmingham asked:**

**Senator BIRMINGHAM:** Let us try to keep this moving on, if we can.

Was the \$69.3 million that was appropriated in 2009-10 also spread across 2010-11 to achieve the outcomes in the 250,000 households across the regions that you have described, Ms O'Loughlin?

**Ms O'Loughlin:** The original funding of \$69.3 million was to take us to the end of Queensland. The switch-off in Queensland, the minister has recently announced, is on 6 December 2011.

**Senator BIRMINGHAM:** So are we able to unpack that funding across the budget years?

**Ms O'Loughlin:** We would be able to. I do not have that figure with me, but we could take that on notice.

**Senator BIRMINGHAM:** Thank you. How much has been spent or is anticipated to be spent by the end of this financial year?

**Ms O'Loughlin:** My advice is that, at the end of this financial year, about \$10 million will have been spent on the Household Assistance Scheme. They are the latest figures that I have.

**Senator BIRMINGHAM:** At the end of this financial year, about \$10 million will have been spent of the \$69.3 million?

**Ms O'Loughlin:** That is right. I am sorry; that is what I was just going to check. The \$10 million is just rolling out the set-top box and installations to households in Mildura, regional South Australia and regional Vic, but that does not include the additional costs for things such as Centrelink costs—Centrelink write out all the letters to all the households—plus departmental costs. So, if your question is how much is left over from the \$69.3 million, I would have to take that one on notice.

**Answer:**

1. The measure announced in the 2009-10 Budget was \$69.5 million over three years (2009-10 to 2011-12).

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	Total
	\$m	\$m	\$m	\$m
<b>DBCDE</b>	2.7	26.0	25.8	<b>54.5</b>
<b>Centrelink</b>	6.2	4.9	3.9	<b>15.1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>8.9</b>	<b>30.9</b>	<b>29.7</b>	<b>69.5</b>

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2. Of the 2009-10 Budget measure:
  - a. As at 31 May 2011, the Department had expensed \$14.9 million of administered and departmental funding in relation to the rollouts in the Mildura, regional South Australia and regional Victoria switchover areas;
  - b. The Department estimates it will have expensed \$16.6 million on these rollouts by the end of 2010-11.
3. Based on the answer at 2b, at the end of 2010-11 the Department will have \$37.8 million left over from its total appropriation of \$54.5 million, to spend on the rollout of the program in the regional Queensland switchover area in 2011-12.

These figures do not include spending from funding directly appropriated to Centrelink.

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**Question No: 117**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: Pages 38-39 (26/05/2011)**

**Topic: Budget for direct payment of services**

**Senator Birmingham asked:**

**Senator BIRMINGHAM:** Of the \$308 million that is being budgeted for the extension from 1 July 2011 to February 2014, how much is being set aside for direct payment for services, the equivalent to the \$10 million installation figure you just discussed, versus other costs?

**Ms O'Loughlin:** The \$308 million is the whole cost of the program. I do not have a breakdown of those costs with me. We are happy to take that on notice.

**Senator Conroy:** I am happy to take that on notice for you, Senator Birmingham.

Of the \$308 million that is being budgeted for the extension from 1 July 2011 to February 2014, how much is being set aside for direct payment for services?

**Answer:**

Of the appropriation in the 2011-12 Budget, \$216.1 million is allocated for direct payment for services, that is, payment to service contractors.

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**Question No: 118**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: Page 39 (26/05/2011)**

**Topic: Payment made to Centrelink and Major Contractors**

**Senator Birmingham asked:**

**Senator BIRMINGHAM:** That is the forward appropriation. How much has been paid to Centrelink to date?

**Ms O'Loughlin:** I would have to take that on notice, Senator.

**Senator BIRMINGHAM:** Okay. Who else then, in terms of major contractors under the program, or recipients of the funding under the program, exist?

**Ms O'Loughlin:** The three main areas of funding are the administered funding—that is, the payment to contractors and the compliance checking that we do, which is a separate contract, so that there are compliance checks being done. We also, as part of that broad funding envelope, have the departmental funding, which is obviously for the staff working on the program. The third major part is the Centrelink costs.

**Senator BIRMINGHAM:** If you are not able now to provide me with a breakdown across those of both expenditure to date and the budgeted breakdown of future expenditure, if you could have officers do some work on that and provide that back to us, that would be appreciated.

**Ms O'Loughlin:** We are happy to take that on notice, Senator.

**Answer:**

1. The total amount expended by Centrelink is a matter for that agency. However, Centrelink received a departmental allocation of \$15.1 million over three years in the 2009-10 Budget.
2. Currently, the other existing recipients of funding are the service contractors Hills Holdings and Skybridge Australia, appointed by the department following an open tender process.
3.
  - a. The Department's expenses for the program, as at 31 May 2011, are \$10.3 million (Administered) and \$4.7 million (Departmental). This covers the rollout of the scheme to households in the Mildura, regional South Australia and regional Victoria switchover areas.  
The total amount expended by Centrelink is a matter for that agency.
  - b. The breakdown of the 2011-12 Budget measure into the three funding areas is:

<b>Fiscal balance impact</b>	<b>2011-12 (\$m)</b>	<b>2012-13 (\$m)</b>	<b>2013-14 (\$m)</b>	<b>2014-15 (\$m)</b>	<b>TOTAL (\$m)</b>
Administered	26.1	156.4	59.5	0.0	242.1
Departmental	5.7	8.8	8.7	1.2	24.5
Centrelink	6.4	23.8	11.8	0.2	42.2

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**Question No: 119**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: Pages 39-40 (26/05/2011)**

**Topic: Household Assistance Scheme breakdown of costs**

**Senator Fisher asked:**

**Senator FISHER:** In terms of the costs which Senator Birmingham was just asking about, can you also break up the \$350 amount and—

**Senator Conroy:** That is not an amount. We can explain it again. I do not know if you have read my press release that I put out a week and a half ago, but we are happy to take you through how payments are made and what services are provided. The \$350 is not a figure that we actually pay per installation. We are happy to take you through the actual payments that are being made and how they are calculated.

**Senator FISHER:** Can you please, on notice, provide the committee with, per installation per household, what amount it is costing each and every participant in the process who helps the government deliver the HAS program?

**Senator Conroy:** I think I understand your question. I indicate again that one of the reasons we have been cautious about wanting to provide the exact dollar figure is that we actually have ongoing tendering processes. If we give an indication publicly of what have been the actual costs, you perhaps prejudice us getting better costs as we go. As you know, there have been a lot of claims from a lot of companies that they can do it cheaper. What we have said publicly—

**Senator FISHER:** All right.

**Senator Conroy:** If I could just finish: what we have said publicly is that we welcome companies' interest, we invite them to tender and we want them to try and beat the prices that we are currently paying. But if we tell people the price that we are paying then they perhaps will not necessarily try and underbid the prices when they put it in. But we welcome everybody's interest, and we invite everybody. I have written to Harvey Norman inviting them to tender and, with respect to any other company that is making the claims—and there are quite a lot of them—we invite all of them to participate in the existing New South Wales tenders. We look forward, if they are able to live up to their claim that they can do it cheaper, to them delivering a cheaper price to taxpayers.

**Senator FISHER:** Thank you, Minister. Nonetheless, I ask the department on notice to break down in dollar terms the notional, if you want to call it that, cost per household by breaking down that notional amount in terms of each—

**Senator Conroy:** We will give you the exact amounts. We can give you the breakdown.

**Answer:**

The following is an average per-participant cost of funding provided in the 2011-12 Budget to the Department and Centrelink. This cost is derived from dividing the forward estimate funding by an estimate of the number of households taking up the program's assistance.

Centrelink is responsible for sending invitation and reminder letters to all potentially eligible individuals and determining eligibility when potentially eligible people call to opt in to the scheme. Once eligibility is determined, Centrelink provides the eligible customer's details to the service contractor, so that an installation can be arranged. Centrelink also manages the reporting

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data returned by the service contractor for installation and conducts quality assurance, contacting at least 5 per cent of customers installed each month. Consequently, the relevant participants for Centrelink are all potentially eligible customers, regardless of whether or not they actually opt in to receive the service. As the Department focuses on managing the delivery of installations to those who opt in to the scheme, the relevant participants for the Department are estimated households that will receive an installation.

Budgeted item	Budget allocation			
Centrelink Departmental	\$42.247m	Potentially eligible customers	3,668,000	\$11.52/customer
DBCDE	\$24.502m	Estimated households that will receive an installation	561,000	\$43.68/household

Service contractors are required to provide a detailed, itemised schedule of costs for an installation (an extract from the tender documentation is found in attachment A) as part of the tender process. The agreed cost schedule forms part of the contract with the Commonwealth.

The actual final cost per installation will depend on the particular installation carried out at each home. Installations can vary considerably, from the installation of a set-top box in a metropolitan area to a more complex installation requiring an antenna and external cabling, the installation of satellite equipment, or an installation at a remote premises requiring long-distance travel by the installer.

Final contract costs will depend on the work undertaken, which is reported, with supporting evidence, after installation. Therefore, it is not possible to identify costs per individual installation up front. This will depend on the invoicing (and evidence) provided by the contractor for each individual installation, against the agreed cost schedule which forms part of the contract (and is based on the matrix of costs illustrated in Attachment A).

Any administered budget allocation not required under the program will be returned to the Budget.







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**Question No: 120**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: Pages 40-41 (26/05/2011)**

**Topic: Household Assistance Scheme - breakdown of costs**

**Senator Fisher asked:**

**Senator FISHER:** Secondly, can the department provide on notice—assuming that the cost per household is 100 per cent—the equivalent percentages of the information I asked for previously.

**Senator Conroy:** I do not understand your question. Could you explain your question.

**Senator FISHER:** So the percentage of that 100 per cent cost, for example, per household that goes to Centrelink and its involvement in the process, and that goes to each and every other expenditure area or expenditure entity in rolling out the household assistance scheme?

**Senator Conroy:** We can give you a breakdown of the Centrelink costs, but I do not know that Centrelink, when they negotiate with us, do it on a stamp and envelope basis.

**Senator FISHER:** You misunderstand me.

**Senator Conroy:** That is why I am trying to get an understanding. That is why I am asking.

**Senator FISHER:** I do not want a breakdown—

**CHAIR:** Just hold on one second. Senator Conroy—

**Senator Conroy:** I am just asking you to clarify the question.

**Senator FISHER:** Okay. I will do so.

**CHAIR:** I understand that you are clarifying the question—

**Senator FISHER:** I am not seeking a breakdown of Centrelink's own costs but I am seeking a breakdown of the notional cost per household in both dollar terms and/or percentage terms of the amount of that notional figure per household that gets directed to each and every party involved in implementing the HAS.

**Ms O'Loughlin:** Senator, earlier on I indicated to the committee that there is not a standard per household cost.

**Senator Conroy:** Senator Birmingham indicated that he understood that. Do you understand that, Senator Fisher?

**Senator FISHER:** And find a way to come up with an average, Minister.

**Senator Conroy:** Do you understand that there is not, as the officer at the table has explained it—

**Senator FISHER:** Thank you, Minister.

**Senator Conroy:** Do you understand that?

**Senator FISHER:** Thank you, Minister. Can I hear the officer?

**CHAIR:** Senator Fisher—

**Senator Conroy:** Do you understand it? Senator Birmingham understood it.

**Senator FISHER:** Ms O'Loughlin?

**Ms O'Loughlin:** If I could just go back to what I mentioned earlier, if you look, for example, at the northern New South Wales and southern New South Wales tender, the payment schedule in that for the head contractors who are rolling out the installations is broken down to a very granular level of detail. Companies tendering need to provide us costs, for example, for a set-top box only in either Griffith and Murrumbidgee, south-west slopes and east of Riverina, Illawarra and South Coast, Central Tablelands, ACT and—

**Senator Conroy:** All on the public record.

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**Ms O'Loughlin:** So they do it by regions. Then they go through, by each of those regions, what is the call-out delivery cost. Then they go through, for each region, what is the terrestrial installation cost, what is the tuning and demonstration of existing equipment cost, the set-top box, antenna and fly leads, external antenna and cabling, user-friendly remote control, provision and installation of satellite dishes, set-top boxes, smart cards and internal cabling. That is across every single region. When we come to assess the tender, we can look at all of that and judge not just on the bottom line value for money but look at each component part—apples against apples in tendering. Therefore, it is very difficult at the back end of that to be able to provide you with a per household cost, because each household will have different needs.

**Senator FISHER:** You must be able to come up with an average, Ms O'Loughlin, and that is what I am seeking.

**Senator Conroy:** We are giving you the exact—

**Ms O'Loughlin:** We can tell you that the average cost in Victoria was just over \$200.

**Senator FISHER:** No. I am sorry to interrupt. My question seeks that you break it up, but in breaking that cost up, my question is not simply about the installer and the costs that go to the successful tenderer, it is about each and every participant in the process. The government is budgeting on Centrelink, for example, assisting with this. I am seeking that you average out those components.

**Senator Conroy:** We will go through *Hansard* and attempt to give you as much information as we can.

**Ms O'Loughlin:** We will attempt to do something that is useful; absolutely.

**Answer:**

See answer to Question on Notice.119.

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**Question No: 121**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: Page 41 (26/05/2011)**

**Topic: Authorised Installers**

**Senator Fisher asked:**

**Senator FISHER:** Thank you. What evidence is there that people are misrepresenting themselves as authorised installers? Is there any?

**Ms O'Loughlin:** We are very strict with the household assistance scheme to make sure that the head contractors and the subcontractors actually represent themselves absolutely accurately.

**Senator Conroy:** There have been incidents where people have sought to turn up on people's doorsteps to sell them various things, and they have been raised by Mr Forrest, I think. He raised one, and possibly there may be others. But they have not sought to represent themselves, as far as we are aware, as authorised installers. I am happy to be corrected on that.

**Ms O'Loughlin:** I would have to double-check that now.

**Answer:**

The department has no evidence to date of such misrepresentations.

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**Question No: 122**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: Page 42-43 and 51 (26/05/2011)**

**Topic: Successful Tenderer and how they comply with the Fair Work Act**

**Senator Fisher asked:**

**Senator FISHER:** Thank you. Can I ask you on notice to come back to me on how the department satisfies itself that a successful tenderer who says they do comply with the Fair Work Act indeed does so. Finally on that point, and then I have one more question, is \$50 sufficient for a successful tenderer to pay a person to install a set-top box? Does that comply with the Fair Work Act?

**Ms O'Loughlin:** I cannot offer an opinion on that. It would be dependent upon a range of circumstances—where a person was going, how simple the installation was. So I am not prepared to offer an opinion on that because I cannot...

**Senator FISHER:** Thank you very much. Madam Acting Chair, can I clarify for the record, my questions before lunch about allegations about installers being paid \$50 for the job. It was reported in the *Weekend Australian* on 14 May, on page 9, under the heading 'PM counters rort blowout claims'. There was a quote there from a Mildura based contractor who installed set-top boxes under the pilot scheme who claimed he received as little as \$50 for installations.

**Ms O'Loughlin:** We would be happy to look into the matter.

**Senator FISHER:** Thank you.

**Answer:**

1. How does the department satisfy itself that a successful tenderer who says they do comply with the Fair Work Act indeed does so?

In accordance with the Fair Work Principles, it is a mandatory condition for participation in the Request For Tender for the provision of services under the Household Assistance Scheme that tenderers comply with the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) and that they specify compliance when responding to the tender.

Tenderers are required to provide genuine dispute resolution procedures in their enterprise agreements made under the Fair Work Act after the commencement of the Fair Work Principles (Cth) equivalent to those in Schedule 6.1 of the Fair Work Regulations 2009.

Tenderers are required to provide information to the Commonwealth about their workplace practices relating to compliance with workplace relations laws, occupational health and safety laws and workers' compensation laws including:

- a. details of any outstanding claims (not including decisions under appeal) made by a court or industrial tribunal against them;
- b. advice of other court and industrial tribunal findings, orders and penalties made against them for a period of two years prior to the Commonwealth approach to market;

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- c. evidence of their demonstrated commitment to promoting fair, cooperative and productive workplace relations, including, where appropriate, supporting apprenticeships and education and training in the workplace; and
- d. if the tenderer is a successful tenderer, an undertaking to provide the Commonwealth with details of all court and industrial tribunal findings, orders and penalties made against them and their subcontractors during the Initial Term (and any extension of the term) of the agreement. These details must include information about what action was taken or is proposed to be taken in relation to each finding, order or penalty.

The Commonwealth's Fair Work Principles preclude the Commonwealth from entering into contracts with entities that have not fully complied with all court or industrial tribunal decisions against them in relation to workplace relations law, occupational health and safety law or workers' compensation law (not including decisions under appeal).

It is a term of the Deed of Agreement between the Department and the successful tenderer that the tenderer complies with the Fair Work Act.

2.

- a. Is \$50 sufficient for a successful tenderer to pay a person to install a set-top box?

The payments for services made by service contractors under the scheme to their sub-contractors are the subject of negotiation and agreement between these parties. The department is not a party to these matters. It should be noted that services under the scheme may range from a straightforward installation of a set-top box through to a complex installation of satellite equipment. The time needed for such work may range from a period of less than one hour to several hours.

- b. Does that comply with the Fair Work Act?

The application of the Fair Work Act to such a case would depend on a number of factors, particularly whether the person receiving the payment was an employee or an independent contractor. The Fair Work Act establishes the Fair Work Ombudsman with functions that include ensuring compliance with the Fair Work Act. Questions about compliance with the Fair Work Act should be referred to the Fair Work Ombudsman.

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**Question No: 123**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: Page 52 (26/05/11)**

**Topic: HAS Switchover State Consultations**

**Senator Birmingham asked:**

**Senator BIRMINGHAM:** I am certainly not advocating that. You have touched a bit on state issues. You talked about what the Victorian Department of Human Services has done. Did the government consult with all state housing authorities when setting up this scheme?

**Senator Conroy:** I know that we had discussions with the South Australian housing authority.

**Ms O'Loughlin:** We have had ongoing consultation with each of the state and territory public housing authorities as we move into a switchover area. So we certainly had discussions with South Australia. We had lengthy and ongoing discussions with Victoria. We have also been in discussions with the Queensland Department of Communities, who have indicated that they are currently considering meeting the cost of upgrading external antennas, where required, for public housing tenants. So the task force has been on the ground talking to the state government agencies.

**Senator BIRMINGHAM:** Were these agencies consulted before the guidelines were developed?

**Ms O'Loughlin:** I do not believe so, but they have certainly been very well consulted post the rollout.

**Senator BIRMINGHAM:** It would seem to be the wrong way around to consult them after the guidelines have been developed.

**Ms O'Loughlin:** There was a very lengthy development process for this program. We were certainly well aware that there were complexities with public housing, but we were also very well aware that that the decision was made fairly early on that the program would not roll out into rental properties which had tenancy arrangements, as the minister said, because the antennas belong to the landlord and are part of the property.

**Senator BIRMINGHAM:** If you could provide on notice when the meetings occurred and also the time line for the development of the guidelines and the rollout of the program that would be good. As I said, it does seem odd that consultation happened after guidelines were finalised, but you have just responded to that. With regard to public housing properties, we have covered the issue of multi-unit dwellings. However, for detached properties I gather the ruling to date in both South Australia and Victoria is that the tenant is responsible. From your understanding, is that what both of those state governments have decided?

**Ms O'Loughlin:** Yes.

**Answer:**

a. The Department held the following meetings:

- i. 10 December 2009, with five South Australian departments to present details about the switchover timeframe and the need to upgrade multi-dwelling units and single dwellings;
- ii. 17 March 2010, with the South Australian Department of Families and Communities and Department for Transport, Energy and Infrastructure;



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- iii. 22 September 2010 with the Department for Families and Communities and Housing
- iv. 23 February 2011, with the Victorian Department of Human Services.
- v. 8 March 2011 with the Queensland Department of Communities.

The Department also had informal contact with state housing authorities on numerous occasions via email and telephone.

- b. The timeline for the development of the Household Assistance Scheme Guidelines is shown in the table below.

Initial draft	September 2009
Input from Centrelink and the Department of Veterans' Affairs	January 2010
Input from Consumer Expert Group and the Commonwealth Ombudsman.	March 2010
Guidelines approved	March 2010
Guidelines published	June 2010

- c. The timeline for the rollout of the Household Assistance Scheme to date is shown in the table below:

2009-10 Budget announcement	May 2009
Mildura Pilot Request for Tender (RFT) released	June 2009
Mildura Deed of Agreement signed	December 2009
Regional South Australia RFT released	December 2009
Mildura rollout commenced	January 2010
Regional Victoria RFT released	April 2010
Regional South Australia Deeds of Agreement signed	June 2010
Regional South Australia rollout commenced	July 2010
Mildura rollout completed	September 2010
Regional Victoria Deeds of Agreement signed	September/ October 2010
Regional Victoria rollout commenced	October 2010
Regional Queensland RFT released	October 2010
Regional NSW RFT released	April 2011
Regional South Australia rollout completed	April 2011
Regional Queensland Deeds of Agreement signed	May 2011
Regional Queensland rollout commenced	June 2011

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**Question No: 124**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: In Writing**

**Topic: Digital television—Queensland**

**Senator Macdonald asked:**

- a. When is the switchover to digital-only free-to-air television scheduled for regional Queensland?
- b. Do you have figures of how many households have already converted to digital TV?

**Answer:**

- a. 6 December 2011
- b. The Digital Tracker Survey for Quarter 1, January-March 2011, shows that 83 per cent of regional Queensland households have converted to digital.

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**Question No: 125**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: In Writing**

**Topic: Digital television—Queensland**

**Senator Macdonald asked:**

- a. I understand broadcasters are rolling out new digital transmitters to those regions about to make the switch - what regions are still without these new digital TV transmitters?
- b. What TV transmitters will be available to those residents living in regional remote areas in North/West Queensland?
- c. I was recently in Georgetown and I was told by the council they had concerns that the transmitters would not be adequate for the digital television roll out?

**Answer:**

- a. As of 24 June 2011, broadcasters are planning to complete the roll out of new digital sites in regional Queensland as follows:
  - Rainbow Beach: 28 June 2011
  - Top Camp (Toowoomba South): 30 June 2011
  - Wonga Beach: 30 July 2011

As of 24 June 2011, broadcasters are planning to complete the upgrade of self-help sites in regional Queensland as follows:

- Goldsborough Valley (Little Mulgrave): 13 July 2011
  - Redlynch: between 12 and 14 July 2011
  - Conondale: a date to be advised. The transmitter site serving Conondale is in the Brisbane switchover area although it serves areas to north in the Sunshine Coast. Negotiations are taking place between broadcasters and the local council to upgrade the site prior to switchover which, for this area, is 30 June 2013
  - These dates may be subject to change.
- b. The upgraded transmitters at Goldsborough Valley and Redlynch (detailed above) will serve regional north/west Queensland.

Remote areas of Queensland will be served by the digital upgrade of existing commercial broadcaster transmission sites at Barcaldine, Blackall, Charleville, Cloncurry, Cooktown, Cunnamulla, Hughenden, Longreach, Mitchell, Mount Isa (partially upgraded), Roma, St George, Thursday Island, Weipa and Winton. These upgrades are expected to occur progressively over the next 12 months.

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- c. The SBS and commercial television broadcasting services are currently provided in Georgetown by way of an analog self-help retransmission tower. The ABC currently provides analog television services from the Georgetown site. Neither the SBS or the commercial television broadcasters are upgrading their services at the Georgetown site. Generally, households in areas where self-help towers are not being upgraded would move to the VAST service. However, the Etheridge Shire Council which operates the tower has decided to upgrade it to digital itself. Councils which choose to upgrade their self-help towers themselves must do so at their own cost.

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**Question No: 126**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: In Writing**

**Topic: Digital television—Theodore QLD**

**Senator Nash asked:**

- a. What TV reception does the Theodore, Qld, region currently receive?
- b. Is there any disparity between Theodore CBD and the surrounding regions?
- c. What service will the people of the Theodore region receive with the switchover of digital TV?
- d. How will the service be delivered?
- e. Will the people of Theodore CBD be included in the licence area to receive the VAST service? If not, why not?

**Answer:**

- a. The town of Theodore is currently served terrestrially by the ABC which provides services in analog and digital. There are no other television services provided terrestrially in Theodore. People outside of the coverage area of the ABC transmitter in Theodore are most likely to receive their television services by satellite.
- b. The areas outside of the coverage area of the Theodore ABC transmitter receive no terrestrial services.

A transmitter in Moura, about 45 kilometres north of Theodore, providing digital services from all broadcasters commenced on 23 June 2011. Before that date, only the ABC provided services, in both analog and digital.

There is also a self help retransmission site in Cracow, about 45 kilometres south of Theodore, which currently provides the ABC, SBS, Imparja and Seven Central television services in analog only. This tower will not be upgraded to digital. People served by this tower are eligible to move to the VAST service and are eligible for assistance under the Satellite Subsidy Scheme.

- c. People in Theodore and the surrounding area are entitled to access the VAST service, if they do not have any terrestrial coverage, although they are not eligible for assistance under the Satellite Subsidy Scheme. Theodore will also continue to receive the terrestrial ABC digital service from the Theodore transmitter.
- d. See answer above to (c).
- e. Yes.

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**Question No: 127**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: In Writing**

**Topic: Digital television—VAST**

**Senator Nash asked:**

Please provide details about the VAST system?

**Answer:**

1. The Australian Government is providing funding of \$375.4m over 12 years for the direct-to-home digital Viewer Access Satellite Television (VAST) service.
2. In the Northern Territory, Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania, the Eastern VAST service is provided by Eastern Australia Satellite Broadcasters Pty Ltd, which is a joint venture company owned by Imparja Television and Southern Cross Media.
3. In Western Australia, the Western VAST service is provided by WA Satco Pty Ltd, which is a joint venture company owned by WIN Television and Prime Television.
4. The national broadcasters, the ABC and the SBS, also provide their digital channels on the VAST service.
5. To be eligible to receive commercial television services broadcast via the VAST service, viewers must be:
  - a. in remote Australia; or
  - b. currently authorised to receive their television services by way of the Aurora remote area broadcasting service as an out-of-area service; or
  - c. in regional or metropolitan areas but are unable to receive adequate terrestrial television reception from the transmitters that serve the area in which they live;
  - d. currently relying on a self-help facility that is not converted to digital by commercial broadcasters or the current operators and who are not able to receive an adequate digital signal from another transmitter serving their area.
6. Unlike the commercial television services, there are no eligibility requirements for accessing the ABC and the SBS through the VAST service.
7. The VAST service provides the same number of television channels that are available in capital cities.
8. The Eastern VAST service features channels carrying programs sourced from Southern Cross Seven, Imparja Nine and the Ten network, and the main national broadcaster services, ABC1 and SBS ONE, together with digital standard definition (SD) channels ABC2, ABC3, SBS TWO, 7TWO, GO!, and Eleven, and the high definition (HD) channels ABC News 24 HD, SBS HD, 7mate (Seven HD), GEM (Nine HD), and ONE HD (Ten HD).

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9. The Western VAST service currently features all of the ABC and SBS channels, as well as the main commercial television channels of WIN, Golden West Network (GWN) and Ten. From August 2011, the Western VAST service will also carry the additional commercial multichannels of 7TWO, 7mate, Go!, GEM, Eleven and ONE.
10. The Eastern VAST service also provides viewers with access to the local regional news services currently broadcast by the regional commercial television broadcasters in their relevant terrestrial licence areas. These services are provided through dedicated news channels which viewers may access by pressing 4 on their remote control and then selecting the appropriate service for their location.
11. The news services of the national broadcasters, the ABC and the SBS, are also provided. ABC news is provided through ABC1 on a state basis and through the ABC's news channel, ABC News 24.
12. To receive the VAST service, viewers will need to purchase a VAST set-top box (which comes with a smart card) and a satellite dish. The retail cost of a VAST set-top box and smart card equipment is about \$280 (including GST) and about \$100–\$200 for a satellite dish, depending on the size of dish required. The hourly rate of satellite antenna installers will vary depending on the location of the premises, building type and other individual factors.
13. Viewers who need to move to the VAST service will generally be able to apply to access the service about six months before switchover in their digital switchover area.
14. Viewers who are in the Remote Central and Eastern Australia (RCEA) licence area, and viewers who are currently authorised to receive their television services by way of the Aurora service may access the VAST service now.

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**Question No: 128**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: In Writing**

**Topic: Digital television—VAST**

**Senator Nash asked:**

1. Why do people on VAST have to accept the loss of their local TV signal and pick up news and commercials from Alice Springs?
  - a. Where local business cannot advertise to their local community and people feel disconnected from their community.

**Answer:**

1. Commercial channels on the Eastern VAST service are provided jointly by the remote area broadcasters, Southern Cross Media and Imparja. These channels include advertising and news that reflects their source. A large proportion of people who watch the VAST service are likely to live in remote areas and will therefore effectively watch their 'local' service.

The Eastern VAST service also provides viewers with access to the local regional news services currently broadcast by the commercial broadcasters in their relevant terrestrial licence areas, as well as local regional news from other parts of eastern and central Australia. These services are provided through dedicated news channels which viewers may access by pressing 4 on their remote control and then selecting the appropriate service for their location.

Viewers interested in Queensland regional news, for example, will be able to view WIN regional news from Bundaberg, Cairns, Mackay, Rockhampton, Sunshine Coast, Toowoomba and Townsville; Regional Seven news from Cairns, Mackay, Rockhampton, Sunshine Coast, Townsville and Wide Bay; the Southern Cross Queensland news; and the NBN Gold Coast news.

As these local regional news services are taken directly from the terrestrial services, all the content will be the same, including some local advertising which is contained within the news programs.

The VAST service will for the first time allow many viewers in central and eastern regional Australia who have previously only received commercial news services from the central Australian broadcasters to receive regional news services from around Australia.



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**Question No: 129**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: In Writing**

**Topic: Media Access Review**

**Senator Fifield asked:**

- a. Can the Department provide a recommendation by recommendation breakdown of the progress of the 22 recommendations the government has committed to implement from the Media Access Review Final Report?
- b. Which recommendations are behind schedule for implementation?
- c. Regarding recommendation 4 (captioning targets) were 'appropriate targets' for captioning agreed to in the first quarter of 2011. What are they?
- d. Regarding recommendations 17 and 18 (accessible cinema), is the timeline for the Cinema Access Implementation Plan been met. Are all major chains on track to meet their commitments?

**Answer:**

- a. The Media Access Review report, released in December 2010, sets out a range of Government actions to address issues raised in the Review. Implementation of the recommendations from the Media Access Review Final Report is being progressed in accordance with the actions in the Review report.
- b. There is no required timetable for implementation. However, two of the 22 recommendations do specifically refer to 2011:
  - Recommendation 4 proposed that the Government include captioning targets in the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* for subscription broadcasters, provided appropriate targets can be agreed in the first quarter of 2011
    - The government intends to introduce legislation to give effect to this recommendation into Parliament in the 2011 Spring Sittings;
  - Recommendation 5 proposed that the Government commission a technical trial of audio description on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in the second half of 2011, subject to funding approval.
    - The Government intends to commission such a trial in the second half of 2011, subject to funding approval. Options for funding are being considered. The timetable for the trial itself may be affected by when any such funding became available.
- c. Agreement to all targets was not finalised by the end of the first quarter of 2011. Proposals from the Australian Subscription Television and Radio Association are under consideration by the Government.

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- d. The Cinema Access Implementation Plan (the Plan) states that by the end of 2014 captions and audio description will be available in 242 screens.

Under the first phase of the Plan, by December 2010, 24 additional accessible screens were to become available using new technology for closed captioning (Captiview) and audio description.

The Department has been advised that there have been delays in the roll-out schedule due to international factors beyond the control of the cinema chains, including standardisation of technology and licensing arrangements.

Despite this delay, all major cinema chains (Hoyts, Village Cinemas, Event Cinemas (Greater Union Birch Carroll and Coyle), and Reading Cinemas) have confirmed that they will deliver on their final commitments of 242 screens by the end of 2014.

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**Question No: 130**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: In Writing**

**Topic: Design of the HAS**

**Senator Fisher asked:**

1. Can the department list the number of advisory and working groups involved with the Digital Switch over.
  - a. When were they set up?
  - b. How do members get on these groups – are they invited, do they apply, can they just join?

**Answer:**

1. The Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy has two advisory groups and four working groups involved with the Digital Switchover Taskforce. The two advisory groups are the Industry Advisory Group, and the Consumer Expert Group. The four working groups, which are sub-committees of the Industry Advisory Group, are the Supply Chain Working Group, the Housing and Property Working Group, the Communications Working Group and the Transmission and Spectrum Working Group.

Industry Advisory Group (IAG)

- a. The IAG was set up in 2007 and the first meeting was held on the 4<sup>th</sup> October 2007
- b. The Minister invites Members to the IAG.

Consumer Expert Group (CEG)

- a. The CEG was set up in 2009 and the first meeting was held on the 7<sup>th</sup> May 2009.
- b. The Minister invites Members to the CEG.

Supply Chain Working Group (SCWG)

- a. The SCWG was set up in 2007.
- b. The members were nominated or suggested by the IAG representatives and key stakeholders directly involved with the Digital Switchover.

Housing and Property Working Group (HPWG)

- a. The HPWG was set up in 2007.
- b. The members were nominated or suggested by the IAG representatives and key stakeholders directly involved with the Digital Switchover.

Communications Working Group

- a. The Communications Working Group was set up in 2007.
- b. The members were nominated or suggested by the IAG representatives and key stakeholders directly involved with the Digital Switchover.

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Transmission and Spectrum Working Group (TSWG)

- a. The TSWG was set up in 2007.
- b. Membership of the Transmission and Spectrum Working group consists of representatives nominated by the commercial and national television broadcasters and representatives of the Australian Communications and Media Authority and the Department.

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**Question No: 131**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: In Writing**

**Topic: Design of the HAS**

**Senator Fisher asked:**

When was the industry first engaged on the HAS, was it before the Request for Tender (RFT) for the Mildura switchover?

**Answer:**

The Government first engaged industry on the HAS prior to the Mildura RFT being released.

Following the announcement of HAS in the 2009-10 budget and during the development of HAS in 2009 the department consulted industry through:

- quarterly Industry Advisory Group (IAG) meetings; and
- quarterly Consumer Expert Group (CEG) meetings.

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**Question No: 132**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: In Writing**

**Topic: Design of the HAS**

**Senator Fisher asked:**

Why did the government undertake the design of the HAS without any industry consultation?

**Answer:**

Please see the answer to Question on Notice 131.

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**Question No: 133**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: In Writing**

**Topic: Design of the HAS**

**Senator Fisher asked:**

- a. What is the main role of the CEG?
- b. Why was the CEG not asked to contribute to the design of the scheme but rather to the characteristics of the STB?

**Answer:**

- a. The main role of the Consumer Expert Group (CEG) is to represent consumer perspectives about the digital television switchover program to the Digital Switchover Taskforce.
- b. The CEG held its inaugural meeting on 7 May 2009. By this date the Household Assistance Scheme had already been developed by the Department and approved by the Government for implementation.

The CEG Members are briefed regularly on the operation of the scheme and any issues arising, every three months at their meetings.

The Members provided advice on aspects of the scheme and several Members have been involved in the consultations regarding the trial of the new “talking” set top box, from the perspective of the needs of consumers with disabilities.

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**Question No: 134**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: In Writing**

**Topic: Design of the HAS**

**Senator Fisher asked:**

Why has the Government deemed it necessary for the department to spend taxpayers money designing a new - voice to text STB - surely there is an industry standard that is appropriate OR better still a better, more efficient way to assist Australians in the switch to Digital Television?

**Answer:**

The Household Assistance Scheme provides practical assistance to vulnerable Australians to switch to digital television. Consistent with the scheme's broad objective, the Department identified an opportunity to develop and trial a set-top box with a text-to-voice facility, to assist sight impaired citizens to convert to digital television.

There is currently no voice-to-text box available in Australia. In consultations with disability groups there was strong support for the development of such a box to ensure that visually impaired Australians could make the switch to digital more easily. This Australian-first initiative was undertaken within the overall budget of the scheme, is consistent with the Scheme's objectives and has been welcomed by disability groups.



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**Question No: 135**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: In Writing**

**Topic: Design of the HAS**

**Senator Fisher asked:**

Why is an eligible pensioner disadvantaged if they have gone out and bought the cheapest Standard Definition (SD) only Set Top-Box STB *by doing so they render themselves ineligible for HAS assistance but do not have the 5 HD of the 16 digital channels*)?

**Answer:**

The focus of the Household Assistance Scheme (HAS) is about providing assistance to the most vulnerable Australians to convert to digital television. The Scheme provides practical help to install equipment for those who would be unable to convert themselves without the type of assistance that the Scheme provides. This includes people who may be isolated or do not have skills or facility to be able to install and use the new equipment required. Without the HAS, these Australians would lose their free-to-air television services at switchover. People who have already switched to digital television are not eligible for assistance under the Scheme as it is not focused on upgrading equipment or converting spare TVs.

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**Question No: 136**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: In Writing**

**Topic: Design of the HAS**

**Senator Fisher asked:**

Why are the poorest of the eligible – those who rent their premises rather than own it – not eligible for any assistance relating to an upgraded external aerial?

**Answer:**

The current policy in relation to tenanted premises is that the property owner is responsible for any work required to install or upgrade an external antenna or cabling to receive digital TV. This is in recognition that:

- The renter may not be in a position to approve works on the property they occupy
- The aerial is a fixture that adds value to the property, and the purpose of the Scheme is to provide assistance to benefit pensioner household's not third party property owners.

An exception is made in relation to satellite dishes (see answer to Question on Notice 137).

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**Question No: 137**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: In Writing**

**Topic: Design of the HAS**

**Senator Fisher asked:**

While renters are excluded from HAS external aerial help why are renters in an Satellite Subsidy Scheme environment eligible for the equivalent external aerial upgrade, IE a satellite dish?

**Answer:**

Under the Household Assistance Scheme, eligible people who do not own their premises, but who require a Viewer Access Satellite Television (VAST) service, are also eligible for a full installation, including a satellite dish.

A satellite dish is required to receive satellite television in every case. Hence installation of a VAST set-top box without a dish would not provide access to free to air television. For this reason the government agreed that every satellite installation should include a dish.

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**Question No: 138**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: In Writing**

**Topic: Design of the HAS**

**Senator Fisher asked:**

How many claims have been made against the 12-month warranty of the set-top box?

**Answer:**

As at 30 June 2011, there have been approximately 41,000 installations carried out under the scheme. During this time, there have been 669 claims made under the 12-month warranty of the set-top box. A total of 504 set-top boxes have been replaced.

The number of set-top boxes replaced as a proportion of installations undertaken in regional Victoria, when compared with regional South Australia, has decreased significantly. This is partly attributed to improvements made to the functionality of the set-top box in regional Victoria.

As noted in Question on Notice 139, there were 134 callouts in regional South Australia for customers who required the installation of a patch to their set-top box. As a result of the requirement to install a patch, the service contractor provided a new set-top box for those customers who requested a replacement.

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**Question No: 139**

**Program No. 1.3**

**Hansard Ref: In Writing**

**Topic: Design of the HAS**

**Senator Fisher asked:**

In reference to QoN 407 from February Estimates regarding a batch of faulty set-top boxes given to pensioners - how many set-top boxes required the patch to fix the fault? What was the process for pensioners? What warranty exists on the work to rectify the fault?

**Answer:**

There were 134 customers that required the installation of a software patch for their set-top box. Upon identification of the issue, the service contractor contacted all affected customers by telephone, to arrange for a technician to attend their premises to install the patch on their set-top box. The set-top box is covered by a 12-month manufacturer's warranty. The installation of the software patch does not affect these arrangements.