

Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts
Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice
Additional Estimates Hearings February 2009
Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy Portfolio

Question No: 21

Hansard Ref: Written

Topic: Efficiency Dividend

Senator Birmingham asked:

1. How has the Department implemented the one-off two per cent efficiency dividend (ED)?
2. Where have savings been achieved – i.e. which programs/resources have been cut?
3. Has the Department had to reduce any activities that it considers to be ‘core business’ or has it had to reduce service standards as a result of the ED

Answer:

The answer to the honourable Senator’s question is as follows:

- 1 & 2. The changes in funding as a consequence of the 2008-09 Budget, including the impact of the one-off efficiency dividend, were taken into account as part of the Department’s internal budget setting process. In setting budgets, the Department and its managers look at staffing profiles, efficiencies in service delivery and discretionary expenditure where the savings can be made. Savings are being made across a range of areas, including for example, from streamlining of administrative processes and economies in travel costs.
3. No.

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Question No: 22

Hansard Ref: Written

Topic: Efficiency Dividend - Staffing

Senator Birmingham asked:

Have staffing numbers been reduced as a result of the efficiency dividend and/or other budget cuts? If so at what level?

Are there any plans for staff reductions? If so, please advise details i.e. reduction target, how this will be achieved, services/programs to be cut etc.

Answer:

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

Since the formation of the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy on 3 December 2007, staffing levels have increased in some areas that have attracted additional budget funding, whilst they have decreased in other areas. This trend will continue in 2009-10 with a re-structuring of the Department that is due to take effect in June of this year.

There is likely to be little change to the current staffing numbers in the Department. The final number of staff will not be available until the Budget is announced and the staffing arrangements associated with the Department's Budget measures and the restructure are finalised.

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Question No: 25

Hansard Ref: Written

Topic: Appropriations

Senator Birmingham asked:

Noting the Government's *Federal Financial Relations Bill 2009*, which appropriates money to Treasury to pass on to the States;

- Does the Department receive any appropriations that will be transferred to the Treasury Department?
- What are these?

Answer:

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

No.

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Question No: 27

Hansard Ref: Written

Topic: Depreciation

Senator Birmingham asked:

1. Did the Department use any depreciation funding for recurrent expenditure in 2007-08?
2. Has the Department used any depreciation funding for recurrent expenditure this year?
3. Has any depreciation funding been used for purposes other than the replacement of capital items in 2007-08?
4. How much has the Department spent on the replacement of capital items in the first six months of 2008-09?

Answer:

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

1. No.
2. No.
3. No.
4. For the 6 months to 31 December 2008, the Department spent \$1.640 million on the purchase of capital items. These purchases included the replacement and/or augmentation of existing assets as well as the acquisition of new assets.

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Question No: 28

Hansard Ref: Written

Topic: Stimulus Package

Senator Birmingham asked:

1. Does the Department have any involvement in measures announced as part of the \$42 billion budget stimulus package?
2. If so, was (and when was) the Department asked for input before the stimulus package was announced?
3. When did the Department know details about the stimulus package affecting its portfolio?

Answer:

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

1. No.
2. Not applicable.
3. Not applicable.

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Question No: 32

Hansard Ref: Written

Topic: Program underspends/lapsing

Senator Birmingham asked:

Which programs are currently tracking for an underspend this financial year?

Answer:

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

The following programs are currently tracking for an underspend this financial year:

- Connect Australia
- Regional Equalisation Plan
- Television Towers

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Question No: 33

Hansard Ref: Written

Topic: Program underspends/lapsing

Senator Birmingham asked:

How many of the Department's funding programs/budget measures lapse this Financial Year and what are they?

Answer:

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

Funding for the following programs/budget measures are currently scheduled to terminate this financial year:

- Components of Connect Australia (Mobile Connect and Broadband Connect);
- Australia-Japan Free Trade Agreement - commencement of negotiations;
- Digital Dividend;
- Telecommunications Action Plan for Remote Indigenous Communities; and
- Television Black Spots Program – Alternative Technical Solutions.