

Chapter 2

Examination of portfolios

Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy

2.1 The committee welcomed Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy, Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy.

2.2 During its examination, the committee raised a variety of issues which are noted below. The page numbers beside each issue refer to the proof transcript for Monday, 26 May 2008.

Australia Post

- speculation about possible closure of the Traralgon Post Office (pp 3-9, 14, 20-23, 29-30)
- application to increase the unit price for a basic postage item (p. 9, 14)
- impact of the special dividend 2008-09 (pp 10, 14, 20-23, 29-30)
- impact on contractors of rising petrol prices (p. 11)
- complaints received through the centralised complaint hotline number (p. 16)
- processing of passport applications (pp 16-17)
- closures of post offices or licensed outlets (pp 17-18)
- arrangements for the purpose-built Western Delivery Centre (pp 19-20)
- appointments to the board (pp 25-27)
- mail deliveries to Marble Bar/north west Western Australia (p. 36)
- costs of media monitoring services (p. 37)
- number of FOI requests receives (p. 38)

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

- correction of matters broadcast on *7.30 Report* programs (pp 38-42, 79-80)
- numbers of former parliamentarians and staffers employed by the ABC (p. 42)
- circumstances surrounding the ban of a TV camera from a radio interview in the Parliament House press gallery (pp 42-44, 49)
- process for selecting participants in the *Q&A* program (pp 44-46)
- participation of ABC representatives in the 2020 Summit (pp 46-48)
- proposed new selection process for new members of the Board (pp 48-49, 54-56)
- content of the 'Planet Slayer' website (pp 50-54)

- appointment of staff-elected directors (p.7)
- programming on ABC2 (pp 59-64)
- coverage of digital ABC TV broadcasts compared with that of analogue across Australia (pp 67-68)
- coverage of FM radio in Tasmania (p. 68)
- delivery of a commercial free children's channel on digital television (pp 70-71)
- style guide for ABC journalists (pp 71-73)
- replacement of the Toowong facility in Brisbane and the ongoing management of staff under workers compensation arrangements (p. 74)
- review of television production processes (pp 74-75)
- design, development and introduction of the new ABC logos (pp 75-76)
- extension of ABC stores and centres (pp 77-78)
- review of editorial policies and addition of a new section dealing with sources and status of information provided on record, for background or off the record (pp 81-83)
- *Unleashed* blog site (pp 86-87)

Special Broadcasting Service Corporation

- allegations of a peeping tom in the SBS Sydney headquarters (pp 88-90)
- increase in local content programming (pp 90-92)
- potential advertising revenue (pp 92-93)
- validity of in-program advertising on the network (pp 92-96)
- monitoring of quality, content and appropriateness of SBS Radio programs (pp 96-97)

Australian Communications and Media Authority

- black-listing of illegal websites (pp 97, 122-123)
- cybersafety, testing of ISP filters (pp 97-99)
- status of Channels A and B and proposed spectrum review (pp 99-114)
- status of Channel C (pp 113-114)
- number of registrants on the Do No Call Register (pp 114-115, 121-122)
- feedback about the register (pp 115-116)
- funding of the register and cost-recovery measures (pp 116-117)
- resourcing of ACMA (pp 118-120)
- complaint process and average turnaround time for complaints (pp 120-123)

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- issues around the transfer to Next G from the CDMA network (pp 123-124)
 - operation of the antisiphoning list (pp 124-130)
 - complaints related to SMS subscription services (pp 130-132)
 - community radio licenses (pp 132-133).

2.3 The committee continued its examination of the portfolio on Tuesday, 27 May, calling officers from the department in relation to its Output 1.1—Policy advice and program management that delivers competitively priced, accessible and high quality broadband and other communication services and that supports the digital economy.

2.4 As noted in the previous chapter, the minister stated that he did not propose to make any comments or answer any questions about the national broadband network and through the course of the day, in line with his statement, took many questions on notice, undertaking to provide answers at the end of the process.

2.5 Other issues were raised during questioning. The page numbers beside each issue below refer to the proof transcript for Tuesday, 27 May 2008.

- minister's attendance at community cabinet meetings (p. 48)
- cost of minister's overseas travel (p. 48)
- answers provided to questions put on notice at the additional estimates round in February 2008 (pp 50-57)
- process for responding to FOI requests (pp 59-60)
- media monitoring arrangements (pp 60-61)
- condition precedent in the OPEL contract (pp 83-94)
- progress of the digital switch-over process (pp 94-101)
- introduction of digital tracker to monitor digital uptake (pp 97-99)
- identification of black spots in digital coverage (pp 99-100)
- complaints received about the CDMA switch-off (pp 101-103)
- equivalent coverage issues between CDMA and Next G services (pp 103-104).

Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts

2.6 On Wednesday, 28 May the committee commenced its examination of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts portfolio and welcomed Senator the Hon Penny Wong, Minister for Climate Change and Water, and representing the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, the Hon Peter Garrett MP, and portfolio officers.

2.7 The Secretary of the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts tabled corrigenda in relation to the portfolio budget statements.¹

2.8 The committee commenced with general questions of the portfolio including about the impacts on the department and its agencies of the 2% efficiency dividend. It then moved to agenda items. The page numbers refer to the proof transcript for 28 May 2008.

Outcome 2—Australia’s interests in Antarctica are advanced

Australian Antarctic Division

- revenue resulting from the memorandum of understanding with the Japanese government for the resupply of their Antarctic station (pp 30-33, 37-38)
- cooperative research relationships with Japan (pp 32-35)
- funding allocated to the Australian Centre for Applied Marine Mammal Science and projects being undertaken (p. 34)
- tourism in the Antarctic (p. 41)
- arrangements for the Antarctic air link (pp 42-44)
- maintenance costs of the Antarctic runway (p. 44)
- removal of toxic waste from Wilkins Base (pp 44-45)
- monitoring of melting ice sheets and glaciers (pp 46-48)

Outcome 1—The environment, especially those aspects that are matters of national environmental significance, is protected and conserved

Bureau of Meteorology

- tsunami warning centres (pp 49-51)
- impact of the additional efficiency dividend (pp 52-53)
- staffing of field offices (pp 52, 60-61)
- funding for the Water for the Future program (pp 54-58, 62-65)
- audits of the emergency warning systems (p. 58)
- introduction of a new forecasting system (p. 59)

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

- illegal fishing in the green zones (pp 65-68)
- status of shark stocks on the reef (pp 69-70)
- impacts of climate change on the reef (pp 73-76)

1 *Committee Hansard*, 28 May 2008, p. 5.

Sydney Harbour Federation Trust

- transfer of former submarine base HMAS *Platypus* to the Trust (pp 76-78)
- revenue generation through leasing of Trust properties (p. 78)

Office of the Supervising Scientist

- production levels at the mines (p. 81)
- monitoring of the mining operations (pp 81-82)

Director of National Parks and Parks Australia Division

- visitor numbers at Kakadu since removal of entry fees (p. 83)
- increase in camping fees (pp 83-84)
- assessment of the mine on Christmas Island (p. 86)
- funding for the national reserve system (pp 86-88)
- management of invasive species, both weeds and feral animals (pp 88-90)
- Australian National Botanic Gardens: visitor numbers, sustainable water supply, capacity to respond to climate change (pp 90-92)
- National Landscapes partnership with Tourism Australia (p. 92)

2.9 Having concluded its examination of agencies, the committee called officers from the department in relation to outputs under Outcome 1:

Output 1.1—Energy efficiency and climate change action

- green loans proposal (pp 93-111)
- introduction of a means test for the photovoltaic rebate (pp 111-128, 129-137)
- solar hot water rebate guidelines (pp 128-129)
- Green Vouchers for Schools program/National Solar Schools plan (p. 138)

Output 1.2—Conservation of the land and inland waters

- funding under the Caring for our Country program (pp 138-144)
- development of a business plan (p. 144)

2.10 The committee continued its examination of Output 1.2 on the following day and page references below refer to the transcript of hearing for Thursday, 29 May 2008.

Output 1.2—Conservation of the land and inland waters

- investment framework development (p. 5)
- funding for the environmental stewardship component of Caring for our Country (p. 6)
- programs under Caring for our Country (pp 6-17)

- Green Vouchers for Schools/National Solar Schools program (p. 17)
- Community Water Grants program (pp 18-19)

Output 1.3—Conservation of the coasts and oceans

- appointment of a whale envoy (pp 19-29, 42, 45-46)
- delegates to the International Whaling Committing meeting in Chile (pp 30-31)
- joint Australia-Japanese research in the Antarctic (pp 32-40)
- use of *Aurora Australis* for resupplying Japanese base (p. 44)
- funding for marine protected areas (pp 48-49)
- shark fisheries on the Reef (pp 53-54)

Output 1.4—Conservation of natural, indigenous and historic heritage

- listing of convict sites on the World Heritage List (pp 56-57)
- listing of Ningaloo Reef on the National and World Heritage List (pp 57-63)
- Burrup petroglyphs (pp 65-66)
- listing of Kingston and Arthur's Vale Historic Area on the World Heritage List (pp 66-67)

Output 1.5—Response to the impacts of human settlements

- status of Traveston Crossing Dam project (pp 67-69)
- ban on plastic bags (pp 71-74)

Outcome 3—More efficient and sustainable use of Australia's water resources**National Water Commission****Output 3.1—Sustainable management of water resources****Output 3.2—Achieving efficiencies in water use**

- allocation of funds for water projects in Western Australia (pp 74-79)
- water package for Tasmania (pp 81-86)
- Murray-Darling Basin reform memorandum of understanding (pp 87-95)
- purchase of water (pp 95-96)
- review of the Ramsar wetlands (pp 98-99)
- illegal diversions of water in NSW (pp 99-102)

2.11 At the conclusion of the examination of the water resources outcome, the committee proceeded to examine outcome 4, the cultural sector, and welcomed Senator the Hon Jan McLucas, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing, representing the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Arts.

Outcome 4—Development of a rich and stimulating cultural sector for all Australians

Australia Council

- impact of the 2% efficiency dividend (p. 104)
- implementation of the orchestra review (p. 105)
- vacancies on the governing council (p. 107)

Australian Film Commission (AFC) Film Australia Limited (FA), Film Finance Corporation (FFC) and Screen Australia

- amalgamation of functions of the AFC, FA and FFC into Screen Australia (pp 108-109)
- divesting of the Film and Sound Archive (p. 109)
- appointment of a CEO (pp 109-110)
- audience share at the box office for Australian films (p. 111)

Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS)

- move to new premises (pp 113-114)
- student numbers (pp 113-114)
- impact of the efficiency dividend (pp 114-115)
- monitoring of employment opportunities for graduates (p. 115)

Australian National Maritime Museum

- proposed trips for HM Bark *Endeavour* (pp 115-117)
- impact of the efficiency dividend (p. 117)

National Library of Australia

- progress of capital works at the Library (p. 118)
- impact of the efficiency dividend (p. 118)
- depreciation funding arrangements (pp 118-119)
- proposed new Treasures Gallery (p. 119)
- digitisation of newspapers program (p. 120)

National Gallery of Australia

- report on the cancer cluster investigation (pp 121-122)
- progress of building works (p. 122)
- proposed exhibitions (p. 123)
- impact of the efficiency dividend (pp 123-124, 125-126)

National Museum of Australia

- visitor numbers at the Museum (p. 126)
- implementation of the Carroll report recommendations (pp 126-127)
- impact of the efficiency dividend (pp 127-128)

Bundanon Trust

- visitor numbers (p. 129)
- upgrade of access road (pp 129-130)

Australia Business Arts Foundation

- review of AbaF (p. 131)

Output 4.1—Policy advice, program management and agency support which promotes excellence in, preservation and maintenance of, and access to Australia’s cultural activities, national cultural collections and buildings, and Indigenous languages

- funding for Regional Arts Australia (pp 131-132, 133)
- government response to the Indigenous Arts report (pp 132, 134)
- funding for cultural training institutions (pp 135-136)
- refurbishment and redevelopment at Old Parliament House (pp 136-137)
- progress of the new National Portrait Gallery (pp 137-138)

Senator Anne McEwen
Chair