

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Human Services Portfolio

Department of Human Services

Additional Estimates February 2005

Question: HS30

Outcome 1, Output 1.1 - Effective delivery of Australian Government service to eligible customers

Topic: Centrelink's role in Australia's response to The Tsunami Crisis

Hansard Page/Written Question on Notice: Written

Senator Evans asked on 15 February 2005:

- (1) Please provide an outline of Centrelink's involvement in the whole-of-Commonwealth Government response to the Indian Ocean tsunami.
- (2) How much has it cost Centrelink to carry out these additional functions?
- (3) Is there an ongoing role for Centrelink in the tsunami response?
- (4) Is there any additional financial commitment for Centrelink in future years?

Answer:

(1) and (3)

Immediately after the disaster, Centrelink provided eight professional staff to work offshore with the overseas posts in Thailand and Sri Lanka providing a Family Support service, which offered personal support, information and counseling to Australians affected by the disaster.

Centrelink Call Centres provided an overflow capacity to assist the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFaT) with their Consular Hotline (1800 002 214). More than 100 Centrelink staff were physically deployed to the DFaT Call Centre between 26 December 2004 and 15 January 2005 to assist in answering calls and data entry.

Centrelink operates the Tsunami Assistance Hotline, which was set up to operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week from 29 December 2004. From 25 February 2005, the Hotline became operational from 8:00am to 8:00pm (AEDST) seven days a week, with emergency after hours social worker referral service. The Hotline provides information about financial assistance, counseling, medical and health information, and makes referrals to other government agencies for people affected by the Tsunami Disaster. Offers of volunteer assistance are also being referred to the relevant organisations. The hotline number is 1800 057 111.

Centrelink specialist staff in conjunction with state government and community agencies met people returning from the Tsunami affected regions at Australian airports to provide advice on available assistance and provided referrals to professional support and counselling. Centrelink also assisted with booking domestic travel and accommodation for affected people returning from Tsunami affected regions on chartered flights.

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Centrelink is delivering the Tsunami Recovery Assistance Package, which consists of payments for:

- domestic travel within Australia following emergency evacuation from the affected areas;
- assistance with funerals and associated costs;
- assistance for people returning to Australia; and
- reuniting families with hospitalised victims.

Centrelink social workers are continuing the Family Liaison Officer (FLO) services within Australia. This role consists of being the contact person and coordinator of assistance for each family member affected by the Tsunami. It is anticipated that this service will be ongoing for a lengthy period.

Centrelink was represented on the Interdepartmental Emergency Task Force (IDETF) during its activation. Centrelink is also represented on the Tsunami Domestic Recovery Taskforce (TDRTF) which includes Commonwealth/State/Territory and NGO representatives.

(2) The anticipated cost to Centrelink to respond to the tsunami crisis in 2004-05 is \$3.431 million.

(4) The anticipated cost to Centrelink to respond to the tsunami crisis over the next four financial years is \$0.905 million in 2005-06; \$0.364 million in 2006-07; \$0.262 million in 2007-08 and \$0.201 million in 2008-09.