

**Senate Finance and Public Administration Standing
Committee**
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
ADDITIONAL BUDGET ESTIMATES 2008-09 (February 2009)

PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET PORTFOLIO

Department/Agency: Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman
Outcome/Output Group:
Topic:

Senator: Senator Ludlam
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Number of pages: Two
Answer: 44(a-j)

44(a)

The Commonwealth Ombudsman currently has no plan to close the Western Australian office but is considering a range of proposals to reduce the high cost of office accommodation for that office. Given the absence of any plan to close the Western Australian office we have not developed any plans for alternative service delivery models.

44(b)

The Commonwealth Ombudsman does not have any proposals to close any State offices but is reviewing service delivery and cost of operations in all offices constantly.

44(c)

As identified in the answer to the previous question this office has a process of constantly reviewing costs and service delivery. The option of closing State offices or using State offices in alternative forms of service delivery has been considered at various times, including the option of consolidating the South Australian and Western Australian offices. At this stage there are no plans to close either office but as noted above, the cost of operating both offices, and the quality of the service we can deliver from them, will be kept under constant review.

44(d)

We have not been provided with advice as to our 2009/10 budget. This will await normal budget processes.

44(e)

Deputy Ombudsman Ron Brent was referring to the property costs of the Western Australian office in relation to the staff that we accommodate in the premises. The cost per officer for lease of our Western Australian premises is by far the highest of any of our offices. The cost for our Western Australian office is \$24,000 per annum per officer, the cost for our South Australian office is \$8,400 per annum per officer, and the cost for our Queensland office is \$12,900 per annum per officer.

44(f)

The Ombudsman is currently considering alternative proposals for reducing the rental cost of our Western Australian office. Although we have no plans, we are currently actively pursuing the option of cheaper accommodation either by a different configuration of office space in the current premises or through moving to cheaper premises.

44(g)

Operating across various time zones will always provide logistical challenges for any office. Although our business hours for taking complaints formally cease at 5.00pm we operate the public contact team until 6.00pm to accommodate some of these time differences. Nevertheless, this still means that from 4.00pm Western Australian time callers from that State are put through to our voicemail system. On average we receive only about one call per day from WA in this time period.

44(h)

Given the absence of any current plans to close the Western Australia office we are not considering alternative arrangements to replace the detainee visits program. Should we ever close the Western Australian office an alternative program of visits would be arranged. The cost of flying staff from other offices would be offset by savings from the current lease costs of the Perth office.

44(i)

We currently provide outreach visits to indigenous communities from our indigenous unit, which is based in Canberra, with two staff located in Darwin and office premises in Alice Springs. Any expansion of outreach to indigenous communities would be expected to come principally from this team. Other outreach in Western Australia will continue to be provided by the Western Australian office, and there are no plans to change this arrangement. Again I note that should we close the Western Australian office, the cost of outreach being delivered from another State office would be offset by the current rental cost of the premises in Perth.

44(j)

We have no current plans to close the Western Australia office but if necessary, the cost of flying staff from Adelaide to Perth would be offset by the current costs of the Perth premises.