

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates 13-16 Feb 2012

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Outcome/Program: 1.1.1 Domestic Policy

Topic: COAG agreements -1 July 2012 - 31 August 2012

Senator: Senator Payne

Question reference number: 22

Type of Question: FPA, P75, 13 February

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 March 2012

Number of pages: 2

Question:

Senator PAYNE: If you come back to me on that, that would be helpful. I want to ask a further question about your answer to question on notice 55 from the previous estimates. I asked whether those existing COAG agreements that have outcomes with 1 July deadlines or deadlines shortly after the new financial year commences have been amended to have 30 June deadlines as recommended by the COAG reform council. Very helpfully, the answer that I received was "no". I would be grateful for a more appropriate answer to that answer and so, to make sure that there is no doubt attached to this, I would be grateful if you could provide a list of every outcome under every COAG agreement that has a deadline between 1 July and 31 August and an explanation as to why this recommendation from the CRC, which was a particularly sound recommendation to enable better accountability, has either not been considered or rejected by the government.

Ms Cross: We will see whether it is possible to pull that advice together. It would be a fairly large task, given the number of agreements, but we will see what can be done.

Answer:

The Department considers that providing a list of every outcome under every COAG agreement with a deadline between 1 July and 31 August would involve an unreasonable diversion of resources.

However, the Department can advise that the intent of the CRC recommendation has been met through the CRC's own reporting arrangements. In its Seamless National Economy performance reports the CRC has commented on relevant activity in the first quarter of the financial year after the reporting period.

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates 13-16 Feb 2012

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

For example, the 2009-10 performance report took into account milestones that occurred early in 2010-11 for health workforce, standard business reporting and food regulation.

From the perspective of accountability, and payments flowing from the agreements, it does not matter whether reporting deadlines are 30 June or in the period 1 July to 31 August as no payments are made to the States and Territories unless the relevant Commonwealth minister is satisfied that the milestones and reporting requirements have been met.

It would not be good use of Commonwealth or State resources to negotiate changes to milestone timing points or reporting deadlines from July-August to 30 June. There are currently over 80 National Partnership Agreements, and considerable resources would need to be diverted to review all the agreements and associated implementation plans. Furthermore, any changes would need to be agreed by all relevant jurisdictions.