

Finance and Public Administration Legislative Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Australian Public Service Commission

Estimates 2005-06 – Budget Estimates, May 2005

Question: PM 61

Topic: Indigenous employment in the APS

Senator Carr asked:

Measures to retain Indigenous employees

In response to a question on notice from February (PM1), APSC advise that a number of agencies reported that they did not use measures to retain Indigenous employees during 2003-04. These agencies included the Attorney-General's Department (AG's) and the Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTARS).

1. Is the APSC aware of whether AG's has now introduced measures to retain its Indigenous staff? If so, please describe these measures. Have any particular measures been taken in relation to the staff who transferred from ATSIC/ATSIS?

The APSC is asking the Attorney-General's Department for information on these matters as part of the 2005 State of the Service Agency Survey which is due with the APSC on 15 July 2005. In the meantime the Attorney-General's Department advises:

- that the employment conditions applying to former ATSIS staff were picked up and included in the Attorney-General's Department certified agreement
- a comprehensive Induction Program was conducted to induct the employees into the Department
- a cultural awareness program has been developed
- a selection criteria which seeks a 'Demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the challenges associated with Indigenous Service Delivery' applies to all positions in the Indigenous Law and Justice Branch
- the Department is participating in the APSC Indigenous Graduate Program
- the Attorney-General's Department supports the Indigenous Leadership Program, and would be prepared to take staff on placement and identify those who may wish to attend in the next round.

2. Is APSC aware of whether DOTARS has introduced any measures to retain its two Indigenous staff and/or to attract more? Is so, please describe these measures.

DOTARS currently has two staff who have identified themselves as Indigenous. In the past 12 months DOTARS has supported one of these employees in their participation in the APSC's Indigenous leadership programme.

DOTARS has made the employment of Indigenous Australians a priority and has put in place the following measures in order to attract and retain Indigenous staff:

- An evaluation of the Workforce Diversity Program (WDP) 2001-2004 is currently being undertaken.
- Employment of Indigenous Australians is to be included in the new WDP being developed. This will include strategies to source Indigenous employees through the graduate intake, cadetships and as trainees.
- DOTARS has sought information about providing cultural awareness training for all staff, but particularly those working with Indigenous people and communities to ensure they have the support for their current and future Indigenous employees.
- DOTARS is an active participant in the APSC's Indigenous Graduate Recruitment Programme and is aiming to recruit Indigenous graduates this year. DOTARS is also targeting indigenous people in its own graduate recruitment program.
- DOTARS has actively encouraged its staff to take part as Indigenous Community Volunteers. DOTARS was the first Commonwealth agency to support a staff member to participate in the programme.

3. If either AG's or DOTARS has not introduced measures to retain their Indigenous staff, will APSC be taking any action to encourage them to introduce such measures?

Not applicable

4. Will APSC be taking any action in relation to the other agencies which do not currently have specific strategies for the retention of Indigenous employees?

The APSC will be seeking to actively engage with agencies as part of the implementation of our proposed APS Employment and Capability Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Part of this strategy seeks to promote better practice examples of Indigenous retention strategies to APS agencies, and in doing this to actively encourage Agencies to consider the retention of Indigenous employees as part of their ongoing workforce planning requirements.

Separations of Indigenous employees

In February the APSC provided some preliminary data on the separation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous ex-ATSIC staff up to 31 December 2004. Ms Tacy also indicated that since that time, two Indigenous SES officers had left the APS.

5. Are any updated figures available on separation of ex-ATSIC staff from the APS since these figures were provided?

The data provided in February was from preliminary returns provided by some agencies. There is no comparable updated data available. Comprehensive data on ex-ATSIS staff, and on Indigenous employment more generally, will be available when this data is provided by agencies and verified by the Commission as part of our 2004/05 State of the Service data collection process. We would expect this data to be

available in October 2005, with more comprehensive analysis available when the State of the Service Report is tabled in November.

6. Are any updated figures available on the separation of Indigenous staff more broadly?

See 5 above. General data will be available when the 2004/05 State of the Service data collection process and analysis is completed.

7. In particular, what information is available about the comings and goings of Indigenous SES staff?

Information about the engagement and separation of Indigenous staff will also be available when the 2004/05 State of the Service data collection process is completed (October 2005).

8. In February, Ms Tacy stated that the APSC was exploring the reasons for Indigenous staff separations with the Indigenous Employees Network, but that you did not have a definitive answer on the reasons for such separations at that stage. Is it possible to provide a more definitive answer now?

A survey was sent to Indigenous employees registered on the Commission's employee networks. In the survey staff were asked: "What has influenced Indigenous staff to leave the public service?" Respondents provided free form text answers. A total of 427 different reasons were given by the respondents and after analysis classified into three main categories. Indigenous specific issues were mentioned by 37% of respondents (including lack of cultural awareness and culture of racism), management related by 38% (including lack of support and low job satisfaction) and government issues by 26% (including the policy direction and policy change) - (rounding adds to 101%).

The results of this survey have been considered in the development of the Commission's expanded Employment and Capability Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees.

Indigenous Employees Network

9. In relation to the Indigenous Employees Network, Ms Briggs mentioned in February that the APSC had established a national forum of network chairs, whereby "a person from each state meets with [her] and makes suggestions around policy directions and so on". How many times has Ms Briggs met with the national forum this year?

The National Forum has met once this year. The Forum was addressed by Ms Pat Turner, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Coordinator on behalf of the APSC Executive at that meeting. Ms Briggs met with the Forum at their previous meeting in December 2004. The date of the next meeting of the forum is currently being finalised. Ms Briggs is expecting to meet with Chairs at that time.

10. To the extent that individual networks meet within Departments and within states, is the APSC aware of which networks are actively meeting and which are not? Please provide details if possible.

The APSC does not gather data on individual agency networks and their meetings, other than as reported by agencies in response to general questions around Indigenous retention strategies in the State of the Service Employer Survey.

Indigenous employment strategy

11. In February, the APSC talked about the Indigenous employment strategy that has been put in place. Please provide an update on how the implementation of this strategy is progressing.

In response to the priority the Commission has accorded the issue of Indigenous recruitment and retention in the APS, a cross-Commission taskforce was established in March 2005 to review and expand the existing Indigenous employment strategy. An APS Employment and Capability Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders has been developed, and is to be considered by the Indigenous Secretaries Group meeting in August 2005 (The heads of departments administering the Australian Government's Indigenous programs). This strategy builds on the work currently being undertaken by the Commission, and incorporates additional recruitment and retention initiatives and a framework for supporting whole-of-government Indigenous service delivery.

The Commission continues to progress initiatives under our existing strategy, including:

- the trainee pilot programme with the Ngunnawal Aboriginal Corporation
- an APS wide Indigenous Graduate Programme in 2006
- a suite of Indigenous specific development programmes
- an evaluation of Agency approaches to attraction and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees
- support for employee networks

12. In particular, what were the outcomes of the trial of training for ICC staff that was to occur on 6 and 7 March? What lessons were taken from that trial? What is the current timeframe for rolling out the training program across the country?

The Indigenous Coordination Centre Training was piloted at two sites. These sites were chosen by the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination. The first pilot was conducted in Katherine in the Northern Territory on 8 and 9 March 2005 and the second in Melbourne on 17 and 18 March 2005.

The key lessons from the pilots centred on the requirement for ICCs to have in place clear and coordinated administrative arrangements (in relation to staffing matters), and also the importance for having practical structures in place to assist staff in working whole-of-government. The training package was expanded to include a range of modules that can be specifically tailored to meet individual ICC needs, and

rollout of the programme is progressing well. The expected completion date for this training is 23 August 2005.

13. Are all agencies actively participating in the Indigenous Employment Strategy?

The Commission promotes recruitment initiatives under its Indigenous Employment Strategy to all agencies, who then consider the particular initiative or programme having regard to their ongoing workforce planning and business needs. Our retention programmes, including the Commission's suite of Indigenous Development Programmes, are widely supported throughout the APS, and attract participants from a wide range of, but not all, agencies.

We are also looking to broaden the participation of agencies by offering a wider range of recruitment and retention initiatives under the new APS Employment and Capability Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees.

14. Ms Briggs also mentioned a steering committee at deputy secretary level, which she chairs. Which Departments are represented on that committee? How many times has this committee has met since 1 July 2004? Please provide details of the attendees and apologies for each of these meetings.

Agencies represented on the Steering Committee:

- Australian Customs Service
- Australian Taxation Office
- Australian Federal Police
- Centrelink
- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
- Department of Education, Science and Training
- Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
- Department of Health and Ageing
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Islander Studies
- Department of Family and Community Services
- Department of Transport and Regional Services
- Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination
- Department of Communication Information Technology and the Arts

The Steering Committee has met twice, since 1 July 2004.

At the first meeting scheduled on 4 March 2005, all agencies attended, with the exception of the Department of Communication Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) who were not represented on the initial Committee.

At the second meeting of 10 June 2005 all agencies were represented with the exception of the Australia Tax Office and the Department of Communication Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA). DCITA has been the latest agency to be included on the Steering Committee Group and will attending the next scheduled for the end of August 2005.