

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Budget Estimates Hearing 24 May-3rd June 2010

Question: PM25

Topic: COAG meeting - Closing the Gap

Type of Question: Hansard, F&PA58, 25 May

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Senator PAYNE-Specifically on that Darwin meeting, if that was genuinely the Closing the Gap COAG meeting? and it was by any standards, and certainly by the standards of previous meetings, an expensive meeting-your answer to my question notes that departmental advisers attended from PM&C, from Treasury, from Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and the Productivity Commission. How can you have a meeting on Closing the Gap in Indigenous affairs without FaHCSIA?

Dr Grimes-I would have to take that on notice.

Senator PAYNE-What do you think, Dr Grimes? Is it possible to legitimately hold the meeting on Closing the Gap without FaHCSIA in attendance?

Dr Grimes-I think this probably reflects the areas where COAG was seeking specific briefing, but I would have to take that on notice.

Answer:

Since the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) was established in 1992, it has been uncommon for officials from Commonwealth Departments or agencies other than the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to attend meetings. Since December 2007 Treasurers have participated in COAG meetings and as such advisers from their Departments have participated.

When COAG had sought specific briefings on work being undertaken it has invited guests, usually officials from line agencies, to speak to the meeting. In light of this,

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the Chair of the Productivity Commission, Mr Gary Banks AO, gave a presentation to COAG at its meeting Darwin in July 2009 on the findings of the report *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2009*. This presentation coincided with the joint launch of the report by the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin MP, and Mr Banks.

The Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government attended the meeting in his capacity, at the time, as the Commonwealth Coordinator-General and briefed COAG on the implementation of the Nation Building and Jobs Plan.

While no officials from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs attended the meeting, they nonetheless made a significant contribution to it through documentation prepared for COAG's consideration by the Working Group on Indigenous Reform.