

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

Question No. 78

Senator Humphries asked the following question at the hearing on 26 May 2011:

Senator HUMPHRIES: I want to come back to questions from the last episode of estimates in February this year. They concern the reasons behind a declaration to allow AGDRP to people living in the Gascoyne region of Western Australia... I have, in fact, now got the answer back to my question. It leaves me no better informed about the reasons for the delay.

Mr Darby: Then we take impact information from the Bureau of Meteorology; from the state governments, which have generally got the best information available; and from Geoscience Australia. We then inform the minister. It is up to the government to make the determination of a declaration of the AGDRP. It is not something which can actually be requested by the state. It is purely a Commonwealth government declaration and it is up to the government to make that declaration.

Senator HUMPHRIES: Are you responsible for garnering that information to put before the Commonwealth minister?

Mr Darby: Yes, we are. Yes, I am.

Senator HUMPHRIES: When did you put it before the minister or his office?

Mr Darby: I would need to check that date. I do not have it with me.

Senator HUMPHRIES: ...I specifically wanted to know... what information was absent from your portfolio of information that prevented the declaration from being made? I have not got time to question you further, Mr Darby. I ask you or the people at the table to take on notice the same question I asked you to take on notice on the last occasion, which is: what information was missing from the government's information about this incident in the Gascoyne? Who eventually supplied the necessary information and specifically when? When did you, if you are the responsible officer, provide that information to the minister to allow the declaration to be made? Can I have that information on notice, please.

Senator HUMPHRIES: Well, please answer those questions on notice. Would you also please give me some explanation as to why that information was apparently hard to obtain in Western Australia but was easy to obtain in Queensland, where the declarations were made very quickly after the flooding.

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

Emergency Management Australia is unable to identify any specific missing information regarding the Gascoyne floods that it had sought in order to activate AGDRP payments for that impacted region.

The Gascoyne area suffered a number of flood events from late December 2010 with river levels remaining high through to 7 January 2011. After these events the Department liaised with other agencies such as Geoscience Australia, the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) and state emergency management agencies to collect information and make an informed recommendation to the Attorney-General. This included gathering publicly available data. The information was compiled and provided to the Attorney-General on 11 February 2011.

The intent of the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment (AGDRP) is to assist people in the post-emergency phase and as such it is not unusual for the timeframe for activating such

assistance to vary. The Personal Hardship and Distress provision of the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements is the method by which immediate relief to individuals is provided.

In response to the Senator's comment regarding the activation of AGDRP for Queensland floods and by way of example, the AGDRP for Queensland was activated some 4 weeks after the flooding began. The flooding in Queensland commenced in November 2010 but the AGDRP was not activated until 1 January 2011. This followed multiple flooding events as outlined in BOM's *Special Climate Statement 24*. The time between the commencement of the flooding events and the activation of AGDRP allowed the Government to monitor and assess the impacts of the disaster and determine that further Commonwealth assistance was required in order to assist individuals to recover from the floods.