

PREFACE

On 08 February 2006, the Senate referred to the Committee the examination of estimates of proposed additional expenditure for the financial year 2005-2006. The Committee is responsible for the examination of the Attorney-General's portfolio and the Immigration and Multicultural Affairs portfolio.

The Committee was required to report on its consideration of the additional budget estimates on or before 29 March 2006.

Estimates hearings

The Committee met in public session on 13, 14, 17 and 27 February 2006 for a total of 29 hours 05 minutes.

Recording of proceedings

The Hansard of the proceedings records the examination of estimates and may be accessed through the internet at:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard>

The Hansard is also available on the Parliamentary database.

An index of the Hansard for each portfolio appears at Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

Ministers

The Committee heard evidence from Senator the Hon Chris Ellison, Minister for Justice and Customs who represented the Attorney-General and from Senator the Hon Amanda Vanstone, Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs.

Officers from both departments and associated agencies also appeared. The Committee thanks Ministers and officers for their assistance.

Questions on Notice

The Committee notes that the Standing Orders require the Committee to set dates for the lodgement of any written answers or additional information and for supplementary hearings. The Committee resolved that the deadline for the submission of written answers and additional information by both portfolios would be close of business on Friday, 31 March 2006.

Report

In this report, the Committee draws the attention of the Senate to issues and concerns raised over the four days on which hearings were held. These included:

- Minister Ellison advised the committee that the government had directed officers not to answer questions directed to them concerning the Cole commission of inquiry into certain Australian companies in relation to the United Nations (UN) Oil-for-Food programme, pending the completion of the commission's hearings.
- Both the Attorney-General's Department (AGD) and the Australian Federal Police (AFP) were questioned in relation to documents supplied to them concerning the actions of certain "undisclosed persons." Officers were further questioned as to how, and under what circumstances, section 72 of the Constitution, (pertaining to the removal of Federal Justices) might be activated.
- The committee inquired into the funding arrangements under which the National Community Crime Prevention Program operated. A number of questions were asked, with some taken on notice by officials, specifically concerning an application for grant funding by Hillsong Emerge.
- Both Minister Vanstone and the Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs made opening statements to the committee. The statements outlined, amongst a number of other subjects, the department's progress in implementing the recommendations of the Palmer Inquiry. At the conclusion of Mr Metcalfe's opening remarks, a document was tabled for the benefit of the committee, detailing the status of a series of initiatives being implemented as a result of the Palmer inquiry.
- The committee sought information on the initial mental health screening of detainees, the composition and membership of the detention health advisory group and the provision of any necessary follow up mental health care.
- Officers were also extensively questioned concerning the provision of Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Services (IHSS) in the Newcastle area and the death in November 2005, of Richard Niyonsaba, shortly after he and his family arrived in Australia following their acceptance as Burundian refugees from Western Tanzania.

Senator Marise Payne
Committee Chair