

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 On 13 February 2008, the Senate referred the following documents to the Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport (the committee) for examination and report in relation to the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry portfolio and the Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government portfolio:

- Particulars of proposed additional expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2008 [Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2007-2008];
- Particulars of certain proposed additional expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2008 [Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2007-2008];
- Final budget outcome 2006-07; and
- Issues from the Advance to the Finance Minister as a final charge for the year ended 30 June 2007.

1.2 The committee was required to report to the Senate on its consideration of 2007-2008 additional estimates on 18 March 2008.

1.3 The committee considered the Portfolio Additional Estimates Statements 2007-2008 for both portfolios at hearings on 18 and 19 February 2008. The hearings were conducted in accordance with the agreed agenda as follows:

- Monday 18 and Tuesday 19 February 2008 – Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry portfolio;
- Tuesday 19 February 2008 – Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government portfolio.

1.4 The committee heard evidence from Senator the Hon Nick Sherry, Minister for Superannuation and Corporate Law, and Senator the Hon Jan McLucas, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing, both representing the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy, Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, representing the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. Evidence was also provided by Dr Conall O'Connell, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Mr Mike Taylor, Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, and officers representing the departments and agencies covered by the estimates before the committee.

1.5 The committee thanks the ministers, departmental secretaries and officers for their assistance and cooperation during the hearings.

Questions on Notice

1.6 In accordance with Standing Order 26, the committee is required to set a date for the lodgement of written answers and additional information. The committee requested that written answers and additional information be submitted by Wednesday 9 April 2008.

Additional information

1.7 Answers to questions taken on notice at the committee's additional estimates hearings will be tabled in the Senate in separate volumes entitled 'Additional information relating to the examination of additional estimates 2007-2008 – February 2008 - Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport'. Documents not suitable for inclusion in the additional information volumes will be available on request from the committee secretariat.

1.8 Answers to questions on notice received from the departments will also be posted on the committee's website at a later date.

Note on references

1.9 References to the Hansard transcript are to the proof Hansard: page numbers may vary between the proof and the official Hansard transcript.