

Chapter 4

Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport portfolio

Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

4.1 This chapter contains the key issues discussed during the 2011-12 additional estimates hearings for the Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport portfolio. A number of agencies provided evidence at the same time during these hearings, and as such this chapter reflects that arrangement. A complete list of all the topics discussed, and relevant *Hansard* page numbers, can be found at Appendix 5.

4.2 The committee heard evidence from the department on Tuesday 14 February 2012. The hearing was conducted in the following order:

- Corporate Services
- Regional Development
- Local Government
- Services to Territories
- Australia Council
- Office for the Arts; Screen Australia; National Film and Sound Archive; National Gallery of Australia; National Library of Australia; National Museum of Australia (appeared concurrently)
- Office for Sport; Australian Sports Commission (appeared concurrently)

4.3 The committee began its proceedings with the Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport (DRALGAS) with an opening statement by the Secretary, Ms Glenys Beauchamp. Ms Beauchamp provided information relating to the creation of the department, and its main policies and programs. Ms Beauchamp informed the committee that DRALGAS was created on 14 December 2011, and that its key functions are:

...the provision of community infrastructure and services in regional and local government areas and financial support to local government; maintaining good governance in the Australian territories and providing essential services for the non-self governing territories; providing opportunities for participation and access to Australia's arts and culture; to promote excellence and provide support for cultural heritage; and providing opportunities for community participation in sport and recreation; and to promote excellence in high-performance athletes.¹

1 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 14 February 2012, p. 83.

4.4 The committee sought further information on how the department was planning to meet the efficiency dividend. Ms Beauchamp informed the committee that the machinery of government changes that created the department may actually assist in meeting the efficiency dividend, as DRALGAS has a number of locations across Australia, and it may now be possible to co-locate the sport, arts and regional functions to save on accommodation.²

4.5 The committee questioned DRALGAS on a range of programs and grants that it administers in regional Australia and local government areas. In particular, the committee sought further information on the Community Infrastructure Grants program. Officers detailed the assessment process, the amount of funding allocated to each approved application, and provided an update as to the status of each project.³

4.6 The committee asked similar questions in relation to the Regional Development Australia Fund, and sought information on the progress of the 292 requests for feedback that the department had received from participants of the first round of applicants for the fund.⁴

4.7 The committee sought further information on the North Queensland Irrigated Agriculture Strategy, a study that will be conducted by the CSIRO. Officers informed the committee that it is a joint initiative, with funding from both the Commonwealth and Queensland governments. The strategy will work with farmers and regional communities to look at viability and farm practices around irrigated agriculture on the Flinders and Gilbert rivers.⁵

4.8 Officers explained that while it will build on work done previously through the Sustainable Water Futures program, the CSIRO will be implementing technology that has the ability to look into catchments and water modelling at a level of detail that has not been possible before. This will allow the CSIRO to look at surface water opportunities, as well as storage opportunities.⁶

4.9 The committee sought further information on the Australia Council's notice for review process, and its fair notice provisions. Officers told the committee that the fair notice provisions generally provide a 12-month notice period, from when bodies are told they are put 'on notice', to when they are notified that their funding will be discontinued. Officers also told the committee that in some cases, it is possible to be put on notice for multiple years, before a decision is made to discontinue funds.⁷

2 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 14 February 2012, pp 91–92.

3 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 14 February 2012, pp 83–86.

4 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 14 February 2012, pp 86–87.

5 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 14 February 2012, p. 94.

6 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 14 February 2012, pp 94–95.

7 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 14 February 2012, p. 118.

4.10 The committee discussed the register of peers, and the processes involved in applying to join the register. Officers explained that any individual can apply to join the register of peers, but whether or not that individual is selected to peer review work is a decision for the board.⁸

4.11 The committee sought further information on the review of the Australia Council. Officers informed the committee that the outcomes of the review will be reflected in the National Cultural Policy, which has received 450 submissions, and has held significant consultation with the sector.⁹ Officers also told the committee that while the review of the Australia Council will not be made public while the National Cultural Policy is in development, it will be a decision for the minister whether the review is released once the National Cultural Policy has been completed.¹⁰

4.12 The National Gallery of Australia, National Film and Sound Archive, National Library of Australia and National Museum of Australia were each asked what actions had been put in place to meet the 1.5 per cent efficiency dividend:

- The National Gallery of Australia told the committee that it postponed several exhibitions, reduced the number of touring exhibitions by a small amount and have not filled the 17 positions made vacant in 2011.¹¹
- The National Film and Sound Archive told the committee that it is reducing costs on travel, and is looking into the use of mobile phones and ICT services to find efficiencies.¹²
- The National Library of Australia told the committee that it has reduced the level of retrospective cataloguing, increased the charges for inter-library loans and reduced the level of support for some internal help desk services.¹³
- The National Museum of Australia told the committee that in 2011-12 it undertook a round of voluntary redundancies, reduced the temporary exhibition program, and the smaller exhibitions have been reduced from twelve to six.¹⁴

4.13 The committee also discussed a further \$7.5 million of funding allocated to the Football Federation of Australia announced in the Portfolio Additional Estimates

8 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 14 February 2012, p. 120.

9 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 14 February 2012, p. 124.

10 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 14 February 2012, p. 125.

11 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 14 February 2012, p. 129.

12 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 14 February 2012, p. 129.

13 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 14 February 2012, p. 129.

14 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 14 February 2012, pp 129–130.

Statements. Officers informed the committee that the funding was already accounted for and is not additional funding.¹⁵

4.14 The committee sought further information on what input the Office for Sport had in the recently announced \$15 million upgrade to Bellerive Oval in Tasmania. Officers explained that the Office for Sport provided background information on the plans for the redevelopment of the oval to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and that the funding was made as a separate process from Regional Development Australia.¹⁶

Senator Glenn Sterle
Chair

15 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 14 February 2012, pp 131–132.

16 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 14 February 2012, pp 135–136.