

## **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 2012-13 budget estimates hearings for the Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport portfolio. A complete list of all the topics discussed, and relevant page numbers, can be found at appendix 5.

4.2 The committee heard evidence from the department on Thursday 24 May 2012 from the following outcomes and agencies:

- Corporate Services
- Regional Development
- Local Government
- Services to Territories
- Office for the Arts
- Australia Council
- Screen Australia
- National Gallery of Australia
- National Library of Australia
- National Museum of Australia
- Australian National Maritime Museum
- National Film and Sound Archive of Australia
- Australian Film, Television and Radio School
- Office for Sport
- Australian Sports Commission
- Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority

4.3 The committee began its proceedings by seeking clarification on an internal department document that stated that the department had an overallocation of \$2.2 million. The Secretary, Mrs Glenys Beauchamp, explained to the committee that the internal document was developed for the department prior to the machinery of government changes in December 2011, which affected the department's portfolio

responsibilities. Mrs Beauchamp informed the committee that the department is now set to run on budget.<sup>1</sup>

4.4 The committee sought further information on the number of voluntary redundancies that have been offered in the department. Mrs Beauchamp told the committee that there has been a budget reduction from 2011-12 to 2012-13, for several reasons, including a number of concluding one-off programs. Mrs Beauchamp further added that due to the machinery of government changes, and the acquisition of the Office for the Arts and the Office for Sport, the department is able to consolidate its corporate functions, declaring some positions excess.<sup>2</sup>

4.5 Officers told the committee that the department is aiming for a reduction of approximately 110 employees. Of the 90 employees that expressed an interest in a voluntary redundancy, 86 have been offered by the department. However, officers told the committee that they expect that a significant proportion will not take the voluntary redundancy after receiving financial advice. The committee heard that it is likely that about 60 voluntary redundancies will take place.<sup>3</sup>

4.6 The committee discussed the economic diversification package for Tasmania. Officers explained to the committee that it is being delivered through multiple departments, but that the Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport is responsible for a \$16 million package that has been committed to 10 projects through a joint decision-making process between the Tasmanian and Commonwealth Governments.<sup>4</sup>

4.7 The committee sought an update on the Community Infrastructure Grants Program. Officers informed the committee that of the 87 projects, 61 are approved with funding. Of the projects that remain unapproved, two have had assessments completed and are with the Minister for consideration, four are under assessment, 12 are providing additional information to the department, and eight are in the process of finalising their costings.<sup>5</sup>

4.8 The committee discussed the Regional Development Australia (RDA) Fund Round 1 and asked the department if it had received any feedback on the program. Officers told the committee that the department sought feedback for Round 1 in

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1 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 24 May 2012, pp 5–6; tabled document no. 1 can be found at: [http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate\\_Committees?url=rrat\\_ctte/estimates/index.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate_Committees?url=rrat_ctte/estimates/index.htm)

2 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 24 May 2012, pp 6, 8 and 13.

3 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 24 May 2012, pp 11 and 25.

4 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 24 May 2012, p. 16; the list of projects was tabled and can be found at: [http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate\\_Committees?url=rrat\\_ctte/estimates/index.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate_Committees?url=rrat_ctte/estimates/index.htm)

5 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 24 May 2012, p. 23.

sessions conducted by the chair of the independent panel and at the national RDA forum. Officers told the committee that 'vast improvements' have been made to RDA Fund Round 2 as a result.<sup>6</sup>

4.9 The committee sought an update on the progress of the myregion website. Officers told the committee that phase 2 of the website was delivered and launched on 18 May 2012, and that on average, the website has 10 000 visits per month. During the phase 2 development, the website project had employed up to five staff in that process, however, officers noted that this will be reduced to two ongoing staff.

4.10 The committee sought an update on the National Disaster Recovery Taskforce. Officers told the committee that the taskforce remains engaged with Queensland in particular, with over \$5 billion worth of reconstruction works either completed, underway or about to take place. The budget for the 2010-11 financial year was \$1.427 million, for 2011-12 it was \$6.934 million, and for 2012-13 it is \$4.733 million.<sup>7</sup>

4.11 The committee discussed the North Queensland Irrigated Agriculture Strategy. Officers informed the committee that \$10 million has been allocated for 2012-13, and that a steering committee and a governance board have been established for the project. Officers provided the names of each member of the committee and the board, and undertook to provide on notice the money spent on the strategy to date, as well as the work plan for the \$10 million allocated.<sup>8</sup>

4.12 The committee sought further information on Financial Assistance Grants, noting that the funding allocated for 2012-13 to local governments had been brought forward to 2011-12. Mrs Beauchamp emphasised to the committee that the decision to bring funding forward was a decision for government. Mrs Beauchamp did, however, note that 369 of the total of 566 local government areas had been affected by natural disasters in recent years.<sup>9</sup>

4.13 The committee sought further information on the Minister's announcement of \$2.9 million for the second stage of the Norfolk Island Reform Package. Officers detailed several projects, including \$1.5 million over two years to complete the pest and disease survey, which will give further consideration to including Norfolk Island in the Australian quarantine zone. A review of services provided by the Norfolk Island hospital has been allocated \$100 000, with another \$100 000 allocated to improve the tourist experience in Kingston and Arthur's Vale. The development of a waste management strategy has also been allocated \$200 000.<sup>10</sup>

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6 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 24 May 2012, pp 26–27.

7 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 24 May 2012, pp 29–30.

8 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 24 May 2012, pp 43–44.

9 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 24 May 2012, pp 57–58.

10 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 24 May 2012, p. 69.

4.14 The committee asked the Office for the Arts and the Australia Council about a review into the Australia Council, which the Minister announced would contribute to the National Cultural Policy. Officers informed the committee that while the review into the Australia Council had been released, the date for release of the National Cultural Policy had not been announced yet.<sup>11</sup>

4.15 The committee noted the additional funding for several of the Arts agencies and sought further information on what proportion of that funding would alleviate the efficiency dividend.<sup>12</sup>

**Senator Glenn Sterle**  
**Committee Chair**

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11 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 24 May 2012, pp 72–73.

12 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 24 May 2012, pp 73, 74, 75, 76, 92–93 and 94–95.