

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question No. LGRD 01

Division/Agency: Local Government and Regional Development

Topic: Barcaldine Tree of Knowledge Project

Hansard Page: 9 (21/10/08)

Senator McGAURAN—I would like to tick you off in regard to answering of questions. I put a very serious series of questions in regard to Labor's dead stump at Barcaldine. I got some answers and others just dropped out, such as the state of the tree at the moment. Remember, I held up a picture of it being pulled out of the ground? One of the questions was: is it still there? So could you go back and look at the actual questions that I asked in relation to the dead stump and attend to it, please?

Senator Conroy—I am happy, if there has not been an answer provided, to raise that with the Minister's office. If you have received an answer, you may or may not like the answer, and that is unfortunately the nature of questions and answers, but if you have not received an answer to questions, I am happy to take that up on your behalf.

Answer:

The Hon Gary Gray AO MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia, and my Department are in correspondence with the Barcaldine Regional Council about the Tree of Knowledge project. The Council has until 1 February 2009 to submit information about the project.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question No. LGRD 02

Division/Agency: Better Regions

Topic: Townsville and Darwin Regional Offices 2008-09 Budget

Hansard Page: 54 (21/10/08)

Senator IAN MACDONALD—And budgets of \$580 million and \$260 million respectively?

Mr Angley—Yes. There has been no change.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—That was for the 2007-08 year. What budgets have you allocated for them internally for the 2008-09 year?

Mr Angley—I will take that on notice, but it would be about the same as last year, because we have not changed their responsibilities

Answer:

The 2008-09 budget figures are \$626,993 for Townsville Regional Office and \$308,150 for Darwin Regional Office. This is an increase on 2007-08 expenses.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question No. LGRD 03

Division/Agency: Local Government and Regional Development
Topic: Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce – Members Biography
Hansard Page: 55 (21/10/08)

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Is it for secretarial support?

Mr Angley—Yes. We have allocated 1½ staff to the taskforce.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Do you have their names?

Mr Angley—One is the secretary of the taskforce, Andrew Dixon, who followed the function, and another staffer inside his section.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I think the Minister has announced the composition of the taskforce.

Mr Angley—Yes, he has.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Have all the people who were previously on it, apart from the politicians, been re-appointed?

Mr Angley—They were all invited to join the reformed Committee or stay on the Committee. One of them said no because they were too busy.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Who was that?

Mr Angley—I will just check my notes. Noel Pearson said he was too busy with his other work in his community, so he did not accept a new appointment.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Is he the only one?

Mr Angley—Yes.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Can you tell me who the new people are?

Mr Angley—Yes. I will just read them off the press release. There are Richard Ah Matt, David Baffsky, Dr Stuart Blanch, David Crombie, Ms Elaine Gardiner, Dr Rosemary Hill, Dr Andrew Johnson, Ms Shirley McPherson, Mr Lachlan Murdoch, Mr Michael Roche, Mrs Terry Underwood, Mr Walybuma Wunungmurra and Professor Bob Wasson.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I am familiar with those who used to be on it. Can you give me, perhaps on notice, a short biography, or was it in the Minister's press release?

Mr Angley—No, it was not in the press release. There is some commentary on the members, but we can certainly provide that.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I would like a bio on who and what they are and where they hail from.

Mr Angley—We will provide it for all the members.

Answer:

Mr Joe Ross is the Chair of the Taskforce.

The new members of the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce Taskforce are:

- Mr Richard Ah Mat, Non-Executive Director, Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation;

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

- Dr Stuart Blanch, Manager of Northern Landscapes, World Wildlife Fund;
- Ms Elaine Gardiner, Chair, Ord Irrigation Cooperative;
- Dr Rosemary Hill, Vice-President, Australian Conservation Foundation and Senior Scientist, CSIRO - Sustainable Ecosystems;
- Ms Shirley McPherson, Chair, Indigenous Land Corporation;
- Mr Michael Roche, Chief Executive, Queensland Resources Council;
- Mr Walynbuma Wunungmurra, Chair, Northern Land Council; and
- Prof Bob Wasson, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Charles Darwin University.

Mr Lachlan Murdoch, Mr David Baffsky AO, Mr David Crombie, Mr Andrew Johnson; Ms Terry Underwood OAM and Mr Joe Ross agreed to remain.

The biographies of Taskforce members are included at Attachment A.

[LGRD 03 – Attachment A]

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question No. LGRD 04

Division/Agency: Local Government and Regional Development

Topic: Northern Land and Water Task Force – Members Credentials

Hansard Pages: 55-56 (21/10/08)

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I understand the Chairman is Mr Ross.

Mr Angley—Joe Ross, yes.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Can you enlighten me on the qualities that Mr Ross has? I presume these are ministerial appointments, are they?

Mr Angley—Yes, they are.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—What qualifications were the Minister looking for that led to that appointment? Is that a fair question?

Mr Angley—Perhaps I should consult directly with the Minister on that. I would just make two points. One is that he is from northern Western Australia and the other is that he was on the original taskforce. I think they were two of the main attractions.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I would appreciate it if you could consult with the Minister. Has the taskforce met?

Answer:

Appointments to the Northern Land and Water Taskforce were made by Parliamentary Secretary Gary Gray MP.

The Taskforce Chair, Mr. Joe Ross, is the Chair of the Northern Australia Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA) Indigenous Water Policy Group (IWPG) and Chair of the Australian Governments Indigenous Youth Leadership Programme. He is a member of the Bunuba people in the Kimberley region of Western Australian and lives in Fitzroy Crossing.

As Chair of the IWPG, Mr Ross facilitates the group's direction and objectives, to inform the Indigenous peoples of northern Australia about water reform under the National Water Initiative and to engage in research relating to Indigenous interests, rights, responsibilities and interest in water resources in the north of Australia.

Mr Ross is a Graduate of the Australian Rural Leadership Program (Course 5) and was awarded a Centenary medal for his active role in creating innovative leadership programs to provide skills development opportunities for young Indigenous leaders, enabling them to contribute in shaping the future of their Rural communities and Australia. Mr Ross was also a delegate to the Australian 2020 summit.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question No: LGRD 05

Division/Agency: Local Government and Regional Development

Topic: Office of Northern Australia – Budget Allocation

Hansard Page: 56 (21/10/08)

Senator IAN MACDONALD—You are confirming that \$2 million will be \$800,000 for the two offices, plus the accommodation and travel for the taskforce and other support. Is that basically what it will be doing?

Mr Angley—No. It is a bit broader than that. Those things that you have named do not take up the whole budget. There will be other material and the Minister will decide.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Is it possible to take on notice the Department's internal budget allocation for the Office of Northern Australia?

Mr Angley—I will take that on notice. It is departmental funding.

Answer:

In the 2008-09 Budget, \$8.0m over four years was allocated to support the operation of the Office of Northern Australia (ONA). In the 2008-09 DITRDLG portfolio budget allocation process, the budget allocated to ONA for 2008-09 is \$2.0 million.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Senate Estimates October 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question: LGRD 06

Division/Agency: Local Government and Regional Development Division
Topic: **Regional Development Australia (RDA) – Appointments Process**
Hansard Page: 58 (21/10/08)

Senator ADAMS—Could you tell me when the new Chairs for the RDA will be appointed and how the appointments will be made?

Mr Angley—No. That process is still being considered by the Parliamentary Secretary and the Minister.

Senator Conroy—That is a matter for the Minister.

Senator ADAMS—We will leave that. Will these appointments be made from recommendations received from a local level or from recommendations from existing consulting Committee Boards?

Senator Conroy—They are matters under consideration at the moment and I am not sure that there is any more information I can give you than that.

Senator ADAMS—How will the Minister make sure that the new Chairs have the skills and capacity to undertake the role?

Senator Conroy—I am confident that the Minister will take into account all the necessary factors, but I am happy to take that question on notice and come back to you if there is any further information the minister would like to give you.

Senator ADAMS—There is an example in Western Australia, but our head office in Perth is gone. I think if these RDAs are going to be successful, the Chairs are an absolutely essential component and they must understand the regions. They must understand the geographical differences if the regions are amalgamated and the way these regions work, because what was there before was a very good set-up for all Federal Members of Parliament. To lose the information that flowed between the members of Parliament and the Chairs and their boards is a retro-grade step. Also, for Western Australia especially, with no-one in Perth at all and the decisions being made in the eastern States, that is a retro-grade step. This is the reason that I am so keen that these chairs are fully up to speed with the areas that they are representing. It is very important.

Senator Conroy—I will take that on board and I will pass those sentiments on to the Minister.

Answer:

The Parliamentary Secretary is writing to current Chairs of RDA committees asking that they extend their Chair appointments up to 30 June 2009 to assist with the transition of ACCs to RDA committees.

The processes for appointing RDA Chairs beyond 30 June 2009 is under consideration.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question No. LGRD 07

Division/Agency: Local Government and Regional Development

Topic: List of Approved Regional Projects

Hansard Page: 64 (21/10/08)

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Senator McGauran is always welcome in Queensland. At last Estimates we were trying to get a list of projects that had been funded by the Government. The department and the minister at the time said, ‘We cannot get them.’ Do you remember that we had the farce of running around? And then we found that Mr Jim Turner from Cairns, the Labor Member for Capricornia, came out whilst we were trying to get them here with a whole list of them. I asked you—

Senator Conroy—I think that is not an accurate statement.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I asked you on notice whether you could find out how he knew when we could not find out. You offered to get me the information. The answer I got on notice was: the Department does not hold this information. Of course I knew the Department would not. The question was to you, Minister, and you undertook to get an answer from the Minister. Could I put on notice now the same question so that you can find out all those months ago now how Mr Turner could get something that the Committee of the Parliament could not? Could you take that on notice?

Senator Conroy—I appreciate that. I want to assure you that when the *Tree of Knowledge* at Barcaldine next comes up I will have your quotes there listed in with Bruce Scott’s, Greg Hunt’s, Ian Campbell’s and Vaughan Johnson’s in supporting the project.

Answer:

There are no further updates to the response provided after the Budget Estimates in May 2008.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question No. LGRD 08

Division/Agency: Local Government and Regional Development

Topic: Dysart Sports Centre Project

Hansard Pages: 64-65 (21/10/2008)

Senator IAN MACDONALD—The Dysart Sports Centre was a *Better Regions* election commitment. I did ask last time whether the Department had received an application for it and had rejected it. Again, I do not want to put the Department in a difficult position. They did not answer the question on whether the Department had previously dealt with the application for the Dysart Sports Centre and had rejected it. The answer I got was: the Dysart Sports Centre was a *Better Regions* election commitment. This means that whilst the Department could not favourably fund it, because it is a Labor Party commitment, it goes ahead. Could you double-check the question and the answer and come back to me on whether or not the Department did previously reject an application for the Dysart Sports Centre? I will put that on notice? At the last Estimates back in May, just after the Budget, it was said that the Government had taken no decision involving the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal past the current commitment, which expires on 30 June 2009. Does the Government have any intention of supporting that philanthropic unit which has done so much for rural and regional Australia?

Answer:

The Regional Partnerships program has now closed.

Advice to government, whether current or previous governments, is provided in confidence.

In relation to the question about the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal, please refer to pages RRRRA&T 64 and 65 of the Hansard Transcript on Tuesday 21 October 2008 where Senator Conroy has answered this question.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question No. LGRD 09

Division/Agency: Local Government and Regional Development

Topic: Regional Partnership Funding Program – Applications Process

Hansard Page: 65 (21/10/2008)

Senator ADAMS—How does the Government justify that it accepted applications for *Regional Partnership* funding right up to Budget night given the fact that it was clear that the program was going to be axed? I would just like you to note that the Perth office was processing these applications.

Senator Conroy—I think we covered that extensively at the last Estimates—

Senator ADAMS—I did not actually ask that question.

Senator Conroy—The general issue of decisions and processing was covered extensively. I can only refer you back to *Hansard* from the last Estimates. It really was canvassed at length.

Senator ADAMS—That question was not asked.

Senator Conroy—I am happy to take that on notice. If there is anything new you would like to know we would be happy to add to it, but we did cover that generic issue.

Answer:

The decision to close the *Regional Partnerships* program was announced in the 2008/09 Budget.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question No. LGRD 10

Division/Agency: Local Government and Regional Development

Topic: Barcaldine Tree of Knowledge Project

Hansard Page: 66 (21/10/2008)

Senator McGAURAN—Could the officers please take on notice and certainly let me know if the Labor Party at any time made a suggestion to pay any amount to this museum?

Senator Conroy—That is not a question—that is for the officers.

Senator McGAURAN—Just do the plaque.

Answer:

The Department is not aware of any such suggestions.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question No. LGRD 11

Division/Agency: Local Government and Regional Development

Topic: Business Enterprise Centres

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Adams asked:

Bearing in mind that Government criticised that RP funding was given out ‘without proper guidelines’, how does Government/Department justify that Minister Emerson delivered his election promise to give every one of the 30 BCE members \$30,000 over three years – without any questions, guidelines or assessment?

Answer:

This matter is not within the Department’s responsibilities.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question No. LGRD 12

Division/Agency: Local Government and Regional Development

Topic: Approved Regional Partnerships Projects

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Adams asked:

1. Prior to the axing of the RP program the Government received 494 applications for funding. Government/Department please explain and give out a chart, showing in detail at which stage of assessment every single project had been at the eve of Budget Night?
2. How many projects in total were fully assessed before Budget Night?

Answer:

All applications were under assessment. None of them had been fully assessed.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question No. LGRD 13

Division/Agency: Local Government and Regional Development

Topic: Regional Partnerships Program – Application Process

Hansard Page/s: Written Question

Senator Adams asked:

1. There are rumours that RP applications were accepted and processed in Perth right up to Budget Night. Government/Department please confirm this information?
2. If so, how does Government/Department justify that it accepted applications for RP funding right up to Budget Night, given the fact it was clear this program would be axed?
3. How does Government/Department justify that the list of the approved 86 RP projects first went to the ABC, then to local ACC's and only then, hours later, to the Senators involved in the Estimates Hearing?
4. How does Government/Department justify the exclusion of some projects with 'business focus'?
5. If Government/Department does not like Business focus why does it then give money to BCEs without any review?

Answer:

1. All applications to the Regional Partnerships program were submitted to National Office in Canberra. Applications were not accepted and processed in the Department's other Offices.
2. The decision to close the Regional Partnerships program was announced in the 2008/09 Budget.
3. The Department does not hold this information.
4. The decision to exclude for-profit and private companies' projects was made by Government.
5. This matter is not within the Department's responsibilities.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question No. LGRD 14

Division/Agency: Local Government and Regional Development

Topic: Closure of the Perth Office

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Adams asked:

How does Government justify this loss of corporate knowledge?

Answer:

The Department actively manages regional programs including oversight of projects.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question No. LGRD 15

Division/Agency: Local Government and Regional Development

Topic: Better Regions Program – Projects Approval Process

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Williams asked:

Has there been any attempt by the Government to influence the approval of Projects under the Better Regions programme based on what electorate the project is situated as suggested in the media recently by the Member for Longman?

Answer:

All the *Better Regions* projects are analysed and considered for funding in line with the *Better Regions* Guidelines.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question No. LGRD 16

Division/Agency: Local Government and Regional Development

Topic: Golden City Support Services – Bendigo, Victoria – Carer Respite House Project

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Williams asked:

What is the current status of an application for funding made by Golden City Support Services Bendigo Victoria to construct a carer respite house for families?

Answer:

Hon Bill Shorten MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services, has met with the Macedon Ranges Respite Service and negotiated a partnership with his Victorian state counterpart to ensure that adequate respite services are provided in the Macedon Ranges Region. Golden City Support Services has been awarded funding through a joint arrangement between the Australian and Victorian State Governments. This funding was announced on 14 August 2008.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question No. LGRD 17

Division/Agency: Local Government and Regional Development

Topic: National Broadband Network

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Minchin asked:

The Government has previously stated that it will spend up to \$4.7 billion of taxpayer money on a National Broadband Network, does this figure still represent the Government's absolute maximum contribution.

Answer:

The Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government does not have portfolio responsibility for the National Broadband Network.

Matters relating to the National Broadband Network should be directed to the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy.

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Senate Estimates October 2008
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

Question No. LGRD 18

Division/Agency: Local Government and Regional Development

Topic: Australian Council of Local Governments

Hansard Page: Written Question

Senator Fifield asked:

In relation to the first meeting of the Australian Council of Local Governments: Is there a budget for the meeting?

Answer:

Yes.