

Rural & Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2013

Infrastructure and Regional Development

Question no.: 207

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: National Urban Policy

Proof Hansard Page/s: 107 (18/11/2013)

Senator Ludlam asked:

Senator LUDLAM: Senator Sinodinos, since you are here representing the government, could I ask you whether it is the intention of the Abbott government to maintain, amend or abolish the National Urban Policy?

Senator Sinodinos: I will need to check with my colleague, the Deputy Prime Minister. I do not recollect us putting out a separate urban policy during the campaign.

Senator LUDLAM: If you did I missed it. But that does not actually answer my question.

Senator Sinodinos: No, but what I am undertaking to do is check with the Deputy Prime Minister.

Answer:

The work of the Major Cities Unit has been integrated into the Planning Analysis Branch in order to strengthen the link between urban policy, research and infrastructure delivery. The Government is currently working, in the budget context, to identify areas of duplication between the Commonwealth and States, and identify where the Commonwealth can best contribute on issues such as urban planning. A decision regarding the National Urban Policy will not be made until these considerations are complete.

The Planning Analysis Branch also includes regional planning undertaken by the former Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport. The new structure is further developing the integration of the Government's approach on regions and larger cities to give a much broader understanding than was possible when these functions were located in separate Departments.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2013

Infrastructure and Regional Development

Question no.: 208

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: Active Transport Policy

Proof Hansard Page/s: 108 (18/11/2013)

Senator Ludlam asked:

Senator LUDLAM: Speaking of which, Senator Sinodinos, through you to the minister responsible, does the active transport policy that the MCU developed for the former government continue in its present form?

Senator Sinodinos: I will check for you.

Answer:

The Government supports active forms of transport as an important part of Australia's transport system. The Government is currently working, in the budget context, to identify areas of duplication between the Commonwealth and States, and identify where the Commonwealth can best contribute on issues such as active transport which are traditionally the responsibility of state, territory and local governments.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2013

Infrastructure and Regional Development

Question no.: 209

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: Commonwealth Office in Northern Australia

Proof Hansard Page/s: 109-110 (18/11/2013)

Senator Peris asked:

Senator PERIS: Thank you. On page 29 of the government's policy, it says that they will move departments that have a focus on the north, or components of those departments, to Northern Australia. What plans do you have to put this policy into place?

Mr Mrdak: At this stage, as I say, our focus has been most immediately on the white paper process. I am not aware of any consideration of those changes at this stage, certainly not within our portfolio. But it is something I will take on notice, Senator, and get you a whole-of-government response to.

Senator Peris: Thank you. Will you join AQIS and CSIRO – both are named in the policy – and other departments to rent or build new Commonwealth offices in Northern Australia?

Mr Mrdak: Again, I do not have any specific knowledge of this. I will check across government and come back to you with a comprehensive response.

Answer:

The Government is now undertaking a White Paper process on Developing Northern Australia that will include consideration of the potential to relocate relevant Commonwealth agencies to workplaces in northern Australia. The Department currently has 4 officers based in Townsville and 4 officers based in Darwin. There are no immediate plans to relocate additional Departmental officers to the north in advance of the White Paper process.

CSIRO has advised that it has over 200 staff in northern Australia and a considerable non-resident science effort, supporting delivery and application of applied science to inform policy decision-making and on-ground action in northern Australia.

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Infrastructure and Regional Development

Question no.: 210

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: Commonwealth Office in Northern Australia

Proof Hansard Page/s: 109-110 (18/11/2013)

Senator Peris asked:

Senator PERIS: How many in Northern Australia or related policy areas, such as regional development or regional Australia policy, might be affected by this government policy?

Mr Mrdak: Again, without giving you some clarity around the timing and the process, I would have to come back to you on that question. Mr Collett's team has officers in Townsville and Darwin. I will take on notice any implications for them.

Senator PERIS: How many senior executive staff to you intend to send to a northern office?

Mr Mrdak: Again, I will come back to you with a whole-of-government response. That process is yet to be worked through.

Answer:

The location and staffing of Commonwealth offices in northern Australia will be impacted by the white paper on Developing Northern Australia. Once completed, the Department will have a better understanding of the future needs for staffing in the north, including the tasking of the Department's current 4 officers based in Townsville and 4 officers based in Darwin.

There are no current plans to relocate any Senior Executive staff to northern Australia in advance of the completion of the White Paper process, and following consultation with the Department of Agriculture and the CSIRO, the Department is not aware of any intentions of other Commonwealth agencies in this regard.

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Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2013

Infrastructure and Regional Development

Question no.: 211

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: Establishing Integrated Planning Commissions

Proof Hansard Page/s: 110 (18/11/2013)

Senator Ludlam asked:

Senator LUDLAM: As I was going through my checklist of former government policies. I would like to ask you about some of your own. Minister Hunt, during the election campaign, flagged the idea of establishing integrated planning commissions for each of our capital cities. The one I am aware of is the one that operated in South Australia. It worked very well and I would not mind an update on whether that commitment can be taken as policy and when that is going to happen.

Mr Mrdak: I will have to take that on notice and come back to you.

Senator LUDLAM: You are aware of the commitment that was made?

Mr Mrdak: I am not personally aware of the commitment. I will take that on notice.

Senator Sinodinos: I am aware he spoke about the matter and has written on the matter. What I am not aware of, Senator, is what specific commitment was made in the campaign. But we will follow up and see what we can find.

Senator LUDLAM: Mr Hunt has all sorts of opinions on all sorts of things which do not appear to be making their way into government policy. That was a great idea—the one that operated in Adelaide in South Australia did excellent work before it was absorbed into, I think, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. I just flag that we will be keeping an eye on that. If you can provide us with any information as that progresses, that would be appreciated.

Answer:

The Hon Greg Hunt MP, Minister for the Environment, on 5 September, 2013, stated:

“Integrated Planning Commissions for each of our capital cities. This is an idea that each city and state would have to adopt for itself, not something that is imposed on them by the Commonwealth.”

The Government is supportive of other levels of Government establishing appropriate oversight mechanisms to provide quality long term planning.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

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Question no.: 212

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: A National Liveability Index

Proof Hansard Page/s: 110 (18/11/2013)

Senator Ludlam asked:

Senator LUDLAM: The now minister also flagged that the Commonwealth would establish a national liveability index under which each city would get its own specific set of targets, annual reporting to commence from 2015. That one is a fairly specific commitment. Is that about to be rolled out?

Mr Mrdak: We are continuing work that we were previously doing in relation to performance measures for our urban areas, but I am not aware of that specific commitment. Again, can I take that on notice?

Answer:

Minister Hunt has proposed that “ the Commonwealth should establish a National Liveability Index under which each city would get its own specific set of targets. We should set a goal of beginning annual publication in 2015.”

The Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development is working with Minister Hunt’s portfolio to identify the best approach to data collection and reporting to support Government decision making.

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Question no.: 213

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: Research into Heatwave Deaths

Proof Hansard Page/s: 112 (18/11/2013)

Senator Ludlam asked:

Senator LUDLAM: Do you think that the Australian government can provide any remedy to that proposed doubling or quadrupling of heatwave deaths with the provision and delivery of Commonwealth infrastructure spending, which is what your job is.

Mr Mrdak: I am not familiar with that research.

Senator LUDLAM: You published it.

Mr Mrdak: No—

Senator LUDLAM: It is your research.

Mr Mrdak: No, we published the findings of some work in relation to the state of Australian cities. I do not think we undertook that research.

Senator LUDLAM: It has the Commonwealth government crest on the cover of the report.

Mr Mrdak: The *State of Australian cities* report contains a range of urban issues research. I do not think we undertook that research. I will take that on notice, but I do not think we undertook the actual research.

Answer:

The information published in the 2013 State of Australian Cities report which predicted an estimated number of future deaths from heatwaves in Australia was the result of an independent piece of research. The work was done by Pricewaterhouse Coopers and originally published in its 2011 report *Protecting human health and safety during severe and extreme events: a national framework*. It was reproduced with permission of the author.

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Infrastructure and Regional Development

Question no.: 214

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: Debate: Roads are good for Mental Health

Proof Hansard Page/s: 113 (18/11/2013)

Senator Ludlam asked:

Senator LUDLAM: Senator Sinodinos, are you aware of that particular contribution to the debate: roads are good for mental health?

Senator Sinodinos: This was while Mr Abbott was opposition leader?

Senator LUDLAM: Yes, that is right.

Senator Sinodinos: I cannot recall. Are you sure it was not something in *Battlelines* or something like that?

Senator LUDLAM: No, it is very recent. It is within the last few months.

CHAIR: What was the context?

Senator LUDLAM: I am trying to establish whether or not it is official government policy that roads are part of your mental health platform.

Senator Sinodinos: We will find where the quote came from.

Senator LUDLAM: All right. Could you provide me with an expression of whether that is policy now.

Senator Sinodinos: It is an ongoing debate.

Answer:

In January 2013 the Prime Minister (then Opposition Leader), while pledging support for the Gateway Motorway extension in northern Brisbane, noted that better roads, where traffic is able to flow more efficiently, can benefit the environment and community as well as the economy. The Government is committed to investing in infrastructure, including roads, to drive improved productivity and facilitate economic growth. Where these investments reduce congestion, both individuals, the community and the natural environment can benefit from reduced travel times and reduced vehicle emissions.

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Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2013

Infrastructure and Regional Development

Question no.: 215

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: Office of Northern Australia Staffing

Proof Hansard Page/s: Written

Senator McLucas asked:

1. How many staff were employed in the Office of Northern Australia as at 1 July 2013?
2. I understand there are 12 people currently (as at November 2013) employed in the Office of Northern Australia. Where are they located (name the city/town) and how many are each location?
3. What work is happening in terms of planning for increases or decreases in staff numbers and/or the location of staff?

Answer:

1. As at 1 July 2013, 15 staff (including 2 on a part-time basis) were engaged within the ONA and West Branch on Office of Northern Australia matters.
2. As at November 2013, 11 staff were directly employed in the Office of Northern Australia. Six staff were located in Canberra and five in regional offices, comprising two in Townsville, two in Perth, and one in Darwin. In addition, the Department is supporting the Northern Australia White Paper Taskforce in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet through the secondment of seven officers.
Other areas across the Department are also providing significant levels of support on Northern Australia including staff based in Darwin and Townsville. Additional Canberra based staff handling infrastructure investment, transport security, planning, stakeholder liaison, policy, and data analysis, also support the work of the Office of Northern Australia.
3. Once the White Paper is completed and the government has taken decisions in relation to its future policy, the Department will have a better understanding of the future workload of the Office of Northern Australia and will plan staffing levels and locations accordingly.

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Question no.: 216

Program: n/a

Division/Agency: (PAR) Policy and Research

Topic: Urban Policy

Proof Hansard Page/s: Written

Senator Sterle asked:

1. Who administers the National Urban Policy?
2. What is the status of the Urban Policy Forum?
3. When did it last meet, and when is the next meeting scheduled?
4. What current work centred on urban policy is underway within the Department?
5. What is the status of the Major Cities Unit? Where are its former staff?
6. Has the new Government expressed a view about the status or priority of urban or cities policy within the Department?

Answer:

1. The Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development.
2. The Government is currently working, in the budget context, to identify areas of duplication between the Commonwealth and States, and identify where the Commonwealth can best contribute on issues such as urban planning.
3. The last meeting of the Forum was on the 27 June 2013. There are currently no meetings scheduled.
4. A range of work is underway that will contribute to the implementation of urban policy matters across the Department including liaison with states and territories on long term land use planning, research and analysis on spatial trends in population, employment and migration, and a series of network analyses to inform future Australian Government investment decisions in transport infrastructure.
5. The work of the former Major Cities Unit has been integrated into the Planning Analysis Branch. The staff of the former Unit are located in that Branch.
6. As a major investor in transport infrastructure, including infrastructure networks affecting cities, the Government recognises the importance of long term strategic planning in driving these decisions.
The Government also recognises that infrastructure planning spans all levels of Government and has made a number of comments reflecting this, linked to planning for and investment in Australia's future infrastructure needs.