

Bridget McKenzie

The Nationals Senator for Victoria

Estimates Update



Hi all,

Supplementary Budget Estimates is a process we use in the Senate to hold the government to account and expose their frightening record of waste and mismanagement.

Read on for some of the news from this round of estimates hearings, held 15-19 October 2012.

Regards,

Bridget



LGA superannuation not so 'super'

Senator McKenzie asked officials from the Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport about the \$396.9m superannuation funding shortfall burdening Victorian local governments due to the Local Authorities Superannuation Fund Defined Benefit Plan.

"The City of Greater Bendigo alone has to find \$10.3m this financial year. Loddon and Campaspe are also among those LGAs considering cuts to programs and services in order to make up the shortfall," Senator McKenzie said.

Although the issue is largely one for state and local governments, the department promised to get back to Senator McKenzie with information on their work with Victorian councils to help resolve the issue.

Dan O'Brien, Deputy Secretary, told Senators that "as you well understand, many local government authorities are always marginal... These are all factors that the state governments are more than aware of, and manage day in and day out".

Year of the Farmer flops

Senator McKenzie has questioned the cancellation of many Year of the Farmer activities, including the Innovation and Technology Expo in Melbourne this December, which was to be the cornerstone event on the Year of the Farmer calendar.

Now it appears the organisers of the Year of the Farmer have run into financial troubles and Victorians are the ones who will miss out.

Departmental officials told the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee that despite a strong roster of commercial support, organisers behind the Year of the Farmer events have had to pull out from many events in the latter part of the year.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry provided seed funding to establish 2012 as the Year of the Farmer.

Then in March, a further \$500,000 in funding was announced by the Minister – despite the department having not yet assessed whether the expenditure of the initial funding indicated the idea would be a success.

"Their poor process meant that the government didn't even know whether it was throwing good money after bad," Senator McKenzie said.

"It is disappointing that such a great idea, with fantastic corporate and community support, has not come to a more positive conclusion.

"Agriculture has framed the Aussie way of life and is a significant contributor to our nation's economy.

"Every year should be celebrated as Year of the Farmer," said Senator McKenzie.





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Cyber trolls put on notice No NBN near Napoleons

Cyber safety was a feature of Senator McKenzie's questioning throughout Estimates.

A member of the Coalition Online Safety Working Group, Senator McKenzie turned her focus to actions related to online trolls and bullies.

Andree Wright, Acting General Manager at the Australian Communications and Media Authority emphasised the importance of people being aware and protecting their friends.

"We have repeatedly emphasised the important role of the bystander in assisting victims of trolling and cyberbullying," Ms Wright said.

"Trolling has been a focus of media attention in recent weeks. The community has decided that bad behaviour online is not acceptable, the same as it wouldn't be on our streets, and they are voicing that opinion to make sure something gets done about it," said Senator McKenzie.

"Online bullies will increasingly find they are held to account for their hurtful activities".



Napoloens, near Ballarat, will have to wait an extra three years to connect to the NBN after NBN Co downgraded their service from fixed wireless to satellite following a planning dispute.

Local residents were told that instead of being amongst the first to connect to a fixed wireless service, they will be able to access satellite internet – in three years time – after Golden Plains Shire refused NBN Co's planning application for a fixed wireless tower on the basis of the tower's expected visual impact.

"In local communities throughout regional Victoria, both amenity and access to services are vitally important issues. One should not have to be compromised in order to have the other," Senator McKenzie said.

"NBN Co has taken an extraordinary step in refusing to work with the Golden Plains Shire despite them having approved NBN Co's other tower planning applications".

"NBN Co is punishing the community rather than working with them to find a suitable location for a single fixed wireless tower to serve Napoleons' residents," said Senator McKenzie.



NBN Co

Labor's NBN: Go Go Escargot!



In brief...

Asylum seekers average 2,400 per month

More than 7,200 asylum seekers arrived by boat in the first three months of this financial year – five times as many as estimated by the Government.

In 2011/12 every boat arrival cost taxpayers \$12.8 million, or roughly \$172,700 for every person on board.

Carbon Tax Kitchen Farce

Astoundingly, \$79,700 was spent building 3 fake kitchens for the Government's Carbon Tax advertising campaigns. Using real kitchens would have cost \$5,000 a day.

The cost of shooting the first round of ads was \$350,000 and \$340,000 for the second round - before buying airtime.

Stay tuned for further advertising to sell the tax Labor promised not to introduce. In anticipation, the advertising agency involved has had its contract increased by 50% to \$3 million.

NDIS – Where's the money coming from?

The Secretary of the Department of Finance confirmed there is no funding for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) beyond the forward estimates.

The Government has provided only a quarter of the money needed for the first phase of the NDIS and nothing beyond that.

Contact Bridget

Need help with a federal government issue? Does a loved one have a 90th or 100th birthday or milestone anniversary coming up? Please contact my electorate office to see how we can assist.

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