Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2012, Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2011

Public Hearing, Canberra, Thursday 1 March 2012

Questions on Notice

Q. What is the Breakdown of SEAM Funding by Department?
Total Australian Government funding for the expansion of SEAM over the forward estimates to 2014-15 is $28.5 million. This funding consists of approximately:

- $3.6 million for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR); and
- $24.9 million for the Department of Human Services (DHS) – Centrelink

An additional amount, yet to be negotiated, will be provided to the Northern Territory Government Department of Education and Training (NT DET).

Funding allocated to DEEWR has been provided for staffing costs associated with the management, implementation and oversight of SEAM and its operation in the Northern Territory as well as the provision of a comprehensive evaluation of the trial.

Funding provided for DHS has been provided for:

- additional social workers; and
- other support workers across the Northern Territory who will support SEAM parents and families; and
- for the IT and systems changes and improvements required to implement and operate the expansion of SEAM in the Northern Territory.

Q. What will the funding for NT DET be provided for?
Funding for the Northern Territory Government, as part of the expansion of SEAM in the Northern Territory, is yet to be negotiated. Details regarding this funding amount are still to be finalised. Areas under discussion include funding for additional NT government attendance and engagement officers and funding to support IT infrastructure to support the implementation of the expansion of SEAM in the NT.

Q. What proportion of SEAM children have more than two carers?
As at 2 March 2012, less than 20 children (of those in-scope for SEAM as at 2 March 2012) had more than two carers.

Q. What is the gender breakdown of attendance plan signatories?
Attendance plans are not a requirement of the current SEAM trial. Subject to the passage of the legislation and the subsequent integration of SEAM with the NT Government's *Every Child Every Day* initiative, as of 1 July 2012, SEAM parents and carers of children with unsatisfactory school attendance will be required to participate in a conference with a representative from the school, the Northern Territory Government and a DHS social worker to discuss barriers to improved attendance and agree on an attendance plan to overcome these barriers. Parents who do not engage in the conference, or do not comply with the agreed attendance plan, may have their income support payments suspended.

Under the current trial, of those parents in the NT who received an attendance notice (as at 24 February 2012), 3.3 per cent were male, while 96.7 per cent were female.

Q. How many social workers will be in place?
As part of the expansion of SEAM in the Northern Territory, funding for social workers has been provided to DHS as follows:

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	TOTAL
Social Workers ASL	0.1	7.3	9.7	9.7	9.3	36.1

Q. Can multiple parents have their income support suspended under SEAM?
A parent/carer will be considered in-scope for the attendance component of SEAM if:

- they live in a SEAM location;
- their child attends a SEAM school; and
- they are a schooling requirement person.

A carer is a schooling requirement person if:

- the receive a schooling requirement payment; and
- they have a dependent child; or
- they have a parenting plan or court ordered responsibility for a child for at least 14 per cent of the time that the child is required to be enrolled at or attend school as required under State or Territory law.

It is possible for a child to have multiple parent/carers identified, however, carers providing informal care (such as a grandparent caring for a child on the weekend) would not meet the above conditions and would not be subject to an income support suspension under SEAM.

Where a child is identified as having unsatisfactory attendance, the education authority will contact the identified parent/carers that are considered in-scope for that child. They will be required to participate in a conference to discuss how to overcome the barriers to attendance and agree on an attendance plan.

Income support payments are withheld, as a last resort, if the identified parent/carer(s) does not then comply with the requirements specified in the compliance notice. Payments will not be withheld where there are special circumstances (such as a medical emergency) and payments will not be withheld if another person's actions impact on their ability to meet their responsibilities.

A compliance notice may be issued to the identified parent/carer(s) if they:

- fail to attend the conference;
- fail to agree to a school attendance plan, or
- fail to comply with the steps set out in the plan that they were accountable for.

The identified parent/carer(s) are only at risk of having their 'schooling requirement payments' suspended or cancelled (e.g. their Newstart and Parenting Payment). Other payments like the Family Tax Benefit and Child Care Benefit are not 'schooling requirement payments' and cannot be suspended under SEAM, allowing families to retain an income stream.

Q. What are 'schooling requirement' income support payments?

Payment Group	Payment Type
Social Security Benefit	Widow Allowance
	Youth Allowance
	Newstart Allowance
	Sickness Allowance

	Partner Allowance
	Mature Age Allowance
	Parenting Payment Partnered
	Austudy
	Special Benefit
	Parenting Allowance
Social Security Pension	Parenting Payment Single
	Disability Support Pension
	Bereavement Allowance
	Age Pension
	Carer Payment
	Wife Pension
	Mature Age Partner Allowance
	Widow B Pension
	Sole Parent Pension
	Disability Wage Supplement
	Special Needs Pension
Department of Veterans' Affairs	Service Pension
	Income Support Supplement
	Defence Force Income Support Allowance

It is important to note that Abstudy (with an amount identified as living allowance) is not a schooling requirement payment.

Q. Is the figure quoted in some submissions received by the Committee of SEAM funding being upwards of $20,000 per school accurate?
No. SEAM funding is not calculated on a per school basis.

SEAM funding is calculated based on an estimated customer base across the SEAM locations and an estimate of the resourcing requirements that will be needed to implement and administer the program over time in these locations.

Hansard records show that the Northern Territory Council of Social Services (NTCOSS), in its appearance before the Inquiry on 21 February 2012, stated the average cost of SEAM was $200,000 (not $20,000) per school. We understand that the Council of Social Services reached this figure by dividing the current funding for the SEAM trial of $31.2 million by the 44 current SEAM trial schools (in QLD and the NT) and averaging this amount over the past three years of the trial. This is not an appropriate nor relevant basis for calculation.

DEEWR, following a request from the Council of Social Services, did advise that funding for the current SEAM trial was $31.2 million and that there were 44 schools located across NT and QLD that were involved in the trial.

Q. How was the 14 per cent care threshold determined?
The 14 per cent care level is as per the definition of a 'schooling requirement child' contained in s 124B(1)(b)(iii) of the *Social Security (Administration) Act 1999.*

This level of care is consistent with the minimum level of care required for a child to be a 'regular care child' of a person for the purposes of the *A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999* and the *A New Tax System (Family Assistance) (Administration) Act 1999*.

Q. Can you list programs and initiatives that support attendance, education and the SEAM program in the NT trial communities?

- The Government has provided significant extra funding through a number of measures to assist the Northern Territory government and the non-government sectors to put a real focus on lifting student performance in schools and to support students to attend school regularly.
- SEAM is only one of the many attendance measures being pursued by the Australian Government that has also invested in targeted approaches to improve school attendance.
- For example, in the current SEAM communities a range of other Australian Government initiatives such as the **Parent and Community Engagement program, Sporting Chance Program, School Nutrition Program, Additional 200 teachers, Teacher Housing and Boarding Facilities** are being delivered. In addition, the Territory government also runs its own attendance and engagement strategies and programs.
- Along with SEAM, these programs contribute to and supplement the Australian Government's efforts to improve school attendance.

Broader initiatives to improve attendance

The Australian Government, through the National Education Agreement, National Partnerships and Schools Assistance Act, is pursuing a reform agenda with COAG to improve the education outcomes including school attendance for all students.

- **The Smarter Schools National Partnership for Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities – $1.5 billion over 7 years 2008-09 to 2014-15**
- **The Smarter Schools National Partnership for Literacy and Numeracy – $540 million over 4 years 2008-09 to 2011-2012**

Through the National Partnership for Literacy and Numeracy and the National Partnership for Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities, the Australian Government is providing significant funding to states and territories to implement reform activities that will contribute to improved learning engagement and outcomes for students in participating school communities.

- **The Smarter Schools National Partnership for Improving Teacher Quality – $550 million over 5 years 2008-09 to 2012-13**

Through the Smarter Schools National Partnership for Improving Teacher Quality the Australian Government is providing $550 million over five years to support states and territories to improve the quality of the Australian teaching workforce.

- **The National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education – $970 million over 5 years to 30 June 2013**

The Early Childhood Education National Partnership provides for a comprehensive, national approach to pre-school, and is closely linked to other elements of the Commonwealth's early childhood reform agenda, including the development of a national Early Years Learning Framework, workforce reforms and the development of a national early childhood education and care quality framework.

Main Stream Programs to support school attendance in the current NT SEAM Trial Communities

Youth Connections

Youth Connections provides a national, flexible, individualised and responsive service for young people who are most at risk of disconnecting from education or training (and therefore not attaining Year 12 or equivalent) and of not making a successful transition to further study, training or employment. Youth Connections providers run different activities in their local area that young people can come to. They also work with other service providers in their local region to improve the support available to young people.

School Business Community Partnerships Brokers

The School Business Community Partnership Brokers (Partnership Brokers) program fosters a whole-of-community approach to supporting young people as they learn and develop.

The program operates nationally with providers contracted in 107 Service Regions and is based on the principle that education and training for young people is a collective responsibility. Some Service Regions have significant Indigenous populations. In these Service Regions, Partnership Brokers are brokering Indigenous focused partnerships that support Indigenous young people to develop and make a successful transition through school to further education, training and work.

The communities of Wadeye, Tiwi Islands, Katherine and Katherine Town Camps, Hermannsburg and Wallace Rockhole are located across three Partnership Broker Regions; Darwin and Tiwi; Victoria – Daly, Katherine and Roper Gulf; and Macdonell and Alice Springs.

Katherine and Town Camps

- The Partnership Broker is working with NT DET to ensure other stakeholders understand the Learn and Earn policy for early school leavers.

- Youth Connections also provides case management to young people from both Katherine and Katherine town camps

Tiwi Islands

- The Partnership Broker has the Growing Young Women partnership at Tiwi College, which will be consolidated this year as partners work closely to ensure girls' participation and attainment through extended learning, experiential mentoring and counselling.

- The Youth Connections provider in the region is also a member of this partnership.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policies and programs to support school attendance

Key

Schools in current SEAM trials
Schools in SEAM Expansions
Schools not in SEAM trials

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan - Progressing National Collaboration Actions

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan agreed by all Education Ministers and endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments brings together National Agreements and Partnerships commitments to support the Closing the Gap objectives. The plan includes a number of actions specific to improving school attendance.

Dare to Lead Program

The Dare To Lead project aims to influence systemic change in schools to achieve positive educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through professional development and support for school principals. By creating better educational environments to enhance quality teaching for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, there is a greater chance that attendance and engagement will improve, meaning more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will achieve Year 12 or equivalent.

The following schools are members of the Dare to Lead Coalition:

Katherine

- Katherine High School
- Clyde Fenton School in Katherine
- Katherine South Primary School

- MacFarlane Primary School in Katherine East
- St Joseph's Catholic College in Katherine
- Wugularr Primary School in Beswick
- Yarralin School via Katherine
- Amanbidji School in Katherine
- Barunga Community Education Centre in Katherine
- Bulla Camp School in Katherine
- Bulman School in Katherine
- Jilkminggan School in Mataranka
- Kalkaringi School via Katherine
- Katherine Group School
- Manyallaluk School in Katherine
- Marrara Christian School in Katherine
- Mataranka School in Mataranka
- Pigeon Hole School via Katherine
- Robinson River School in Katherine
- Timber Creek School via Katherine
- Urapunga School via Katherine

Alice Springs

- Wallace Rockhole School in Alice Springs

Wadeye

- Our Lady of the Sacred Heart
- Thamarrurr Catholic School

What Works

The What Works project comprises professional development which targets teachers using a set of materials designed to assist in planning and taking action to improve education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. By participating in What Works, teachers are supported to build their cultural awareness, form partnerships with parents and communities, and systematically work through Indigenous education issues.

Professional development activities have been provided at:

- St. Joseph's Catholic College in Katherine
- Tiwi College
- Jilkminggan Primary School in Mataranka

School-Community Partnerships have been developed or are in progress at:

- Katherine South Primary School
- Clyde Fenton Primary School in Katherine
- Wugularr Primary School in Beswick

Sporting Chance Program

The Sporting Chance Program uses sport as a vehicle to increase the level of engagement of Indigenous young people in schooling to improve their education, training and employment outcomes. The program has been implemented with providers working together with schools, education authorities, sporting bodies, businesses and community groups.

There are two elements to the Sporting Chance Program:

- **School-based sports academies** – innovative, intensive and high-quality, sports-focussed learning and development. The academies are targeted at secondary students only and currently have up to 5,000 participants.
- **Education Engagement Strategies** - a range of sport and recreation-based activities to engage students in education in remote communities (less intensive – a few visits per community a year). The education engagement strategies are targeted at remote primary and secondary students. Currently this element targets around 6,000 students.

Tiwi Islands

The Clontarf Foundation operates a boy's only school-based sports academy at Tiwi College. The project supports up to 40 Indigenous boys and has been operational since 2008. In 2012 the Clontarf Foundation will receive $110,000 for the Tiwi Academy. This money is allocated to the Clontarf Foundation not the school.

Katherine

The Clontarf Foundation operates a boy's only school-based sports academy at Katherine High School. This project supports up to 110 Indigenous boys and has been operational since 2008. In 2012 the Clontarf Foundation will receive $200,000 for the Katherine Academy. This money is allocated to the Clontarf Foundation not the school.

A girl only school-based sports academy also operates from Katherine High School. This project supports up to 70 Indigenous girls and has been operational since 2010. Katherine High School manage this project with funding be allocated to the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (NTDET). In 2012, NTDET will receive $152,000 to operate the girl's only academy.

Hermannsburg

In 2012 the Clontarf Foundation are in negotiations with N'taria School to establish a boys only school-based academy. These negotiations are on-going.

Stronger, Smarter Learning Communities project

The SSLC Project aims to develop a 'high expectations' and relational approach to Indigenous education in a range of targeted school/community sites, each networked to others in their region and elsewhere in Australia. The Project aims to improve educational factors such as attendance and engagement.

- Minyerri School in Katherine is a Hub School.

Parental and Community Engagement program

The Parental and Community Engagement Program is a community driven program for parents and carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. It supports initiatives that assist families and communities to engage in their children's education through participation in educational decision

making, developing partnerships with education providers and supporting and reinforcing their children's learning at home, in order to improve the educational outcomes of their children.

PaCE is expected to impact positively on school attendance as it enhances capability, understanding and engagement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents.

There are currently a number of PaCE projects in the Northern Territory Communities:

Wadeye

- Thamarrurr Incorporated

Katherine

- Education Transformations

Wallace Rockhole (Alice Springs)

- Department of Education and Training

Tiwi islands

- Australian Red Cross Society
- Tiwi Enterprises Pty Ltd

Focus School Next Steps Initiative

The Australian Government is providing $30 million to support 101 Focus Schools to improve education outcomes for some 9000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The Stronger Smarter institute of the Queensland University of Technology has been contracted to administer the initiative on behalf of the Australian Government.

- Katherine South Primary School
- Nhulunbuy Primary School
- Larapinta Primary School

Three New Boarding Facilities

To assist remote students to access secondary schooling and complete Year 12 or its equivalent, three new boarding facilities are being established in the Northern Territory. The Australian Government has provided a contribution of $28.9 million for the construction and operation of three facilities in remote locations. A further $15 million capital contribution has been committed by the Indigenous Land Corporation, bringing the total investment to $43.9 million.

These facilities, to be built in Wadeye, Garrthalala (East Arnhem) and the Warlpiri Triangle, are being implemented in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and outstations they will service and builds on the Government's initiatives to provide more opportunity and choice for remote students.

Wadeye

Construction of the first facility and staff accommodation at Wadeye is well underway, with anticipated completion by March 2012. Contract negotiations are underway with experienced service provider, Aboriginal Hostels Limited, to operate and manage the Wadeye facility.

200 Additional Teachers in the Northern Territory

The Australian Government supports Northern Territory remote schools with an additional 200 teachers, to be recruited by the end of 2012, at a total cost of $107.8 million.

As at 24 February 2012, a total of 196 Full Time Equivalent teachers were in place.

- 170 in DET schools (from NT DET report October 2011)
- 23 in Catholic schools (from NT CEO report February 2012); and
- 3 in Independent Schools (NT CEO Report February 2012).

NT CEO Program period: due for completion on 31 December 2012.

The intent of the Additional 200 Teachers funding is to employ additional teachers to be allocated to and retained in remote community schools. This addresses the issue of access to quality teaching, directly engages young people in education and supports the aspirations of Indigenous communities.

The funding specifically assists education providers to meet the needs of an anticipated 2000 additional students expected to re-engage with school as a result of the NTER welfare reform (Income Management) measures. The 200 Additional Teachers measure is one of a range of measures taken by the Australian Government as part of its commitment to Closing the Gap on Indigenous disadvantage. Specifically it relates to the following targets to halve the gap:

- in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children within a decade; and,
- in Year 12 attainment or equivalent by 2020.

Teacher Housing

The shortage of available teacher housing remains a major challenge to the successful recruitment and deployment of teachers to remote Northern Territory communities

- Wadeye Teacher Housing: In 2009 the Australian Government provided $5 million to the NTCEO for the Wadeye Teacher Housing project, for the construction of up to 10 teacher houses in Wadeye. 5 dwellings have been completed with the remaining 5 to commence construction in 2012.
- The Northern Territory Catholic Education Office (NT CEO) received $1.65 million for the construction of four teacher houses in remote communities (2 dwellings to be constructed at Wadeye, 1 dwelling at Bathurst Island and 1 dwelling at Santa Teresa). All houses have been completed.

The School Nutrition Program (SNP)

Provides breakfast and/or lunch service for school aged children attending school in prescribed communities of the Northern Territory. The program aims to support better school attendance and improved learning and engagement in education. SNP also funds providers to employ local workers

to prepare and deliver the meals, to ensure adequate kitchen facilities and equipment are available, and to support professional development activity.

Wadeye, Tiwi Islands, Hermannsburg and Wallace Rockhole have School Nutrition Program in their schools.

Current Attendance projects

- **The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan - The School Attendance Evidence Base Project**

The Australian Government is taking responsibility, on behalf of MCEECDYA, for a project to "develop a better evidence base of what works in improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student attendance". The project arises from national collaborative action number 22 from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan. The evidence base will assist school leaders and education practitioners to make better informed decisions about how to improve school attendance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

- **Tri-border Attendance Strategy Project**

Under the Tri-border Attendance Strategy Project DEEWR, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and South Australia departments of education as well as the Western Australia Catholic Education Office, the Northern Territory Association of Independent Schools develop strategies to improve participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in approximately 246 participating schools in the tri-border area.

- **National Attendance Awareness Strategy**

The Australian Government has allocated $2 million in 2011 from the Smarter Schools National Partnerships Strategic Initiatives fund to commence work towards a public awareness strategy on attendance and engagement. DEEWR has commissioned ORIMA Research to undertake developmental research to inform how this information strategy is best designed and conducted with a particular focus on how best to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and low socio-economic communities.

- **Cape York Welfare Reform – Student Attendance Case Management Framework**

The Attendance Case Management Framework (ACMF) uses a behavioural management approach to set a community wide expectation of 100 per cent attendance by all students at school. Cape York Partnerships delivers the Attendance Case Management project in the four Cape York Welfare Reform communities. This four-year project is funded by FaHCSIA for approximately $4.2 million. DEEWR provides funding to the Cape York Institute, Cape York Partnerships and the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy. The ACMF supports the links established under the Family Responsibilities Commission Act between school attendance and income management of welfare payments.