

Aid Buzz (Feb 22): Senate Estimates | IFAD lacks Coalition support | Coalition's \$800m aid bill | ARAE recap | AusAID's revised budget | More



Source: AAP/Lukas Coch

by Jonathan Pryke

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Our monthly round-up of Australian aid and development news.

Senate Estimates recap

The Senate's [additional budget estimates](#), a standard component of Australia's yearly budget process, took place last week and put AusAID under the microscope (transcript available [here](#), see p. 74 onwards). The proceedings were dominated by the stories highlighted below, but some other notable highlights include:

- Our membership of the African Development Bank is not expected until 2014-15;
- A comprehensive update on the progress of Daru hospital, PNG (p. 93);
- The announcement that AusAID's [Green Book](#), the primary source for statistical information on Australian aid (last released in 2009), will be released in March, covering the past three financial years (p. 93);
- The Australia Awards program in Afghanistan was suspended in August 2012 in accordance with AusAID's zero tolerance policy towards fraud, meaning no new long-term scholarships have been issued to the country in almost 6 months. An investigation is to be completed by mid-year.

Why the coalition won't support the International Fund for Agricultural Development

Scott Morrison, Liberal Member of the Australian Parliament for Cook, delivered a

candidate speech to the House of Representatives on the February 6 (transcript available [here](#) [pdf]) on Australia's aid program, arguing why the Coalition would not support the [International Fund for Agricultural Development Bill 2012](#). This is required for Australia to re-join the IFAD. (Australia withdrew its membership in 2004 due to a lack of focus on the Asia-Pacific and "shortcomings in management and failure to respond to serious concerns taken up with senior management".) More details on Australia's history with IFAD can be found [here](#).

Mr Morrisson stated that the coalition would not be supporting the Bill because "there remain serious question marks about this fund and its organisational capacities". Mr Morrisson also used his speech to address the \$375 million aid diversion claiming that "we are basically robbing Peter to pay Paul", and called for the Immigration Minister to "clarify exactly which outcomes of his portfolio this money will be spent in".

The Bill has yet to be voted on.

Coalitions \$800m aid policy?

Foreign aid grabbed the attention of national headlines (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) as a Coalition policy discussion paper entitled 'Vision 2030' was leaked earlier this month (summary available [here](#) [pdf]). As a part of a broader proposal to establish a new economic development zone in northern Australia the plan proposed diverting \$800 million of foreign aid to build tropical health centres in Darwin, Townsville and Cairns that would have the capacity to include "training doctors, nurses and all other medical specialists from aid recipient countries in Northern Australia". Foreign Minister Carr was quick to [slam](#) the Coalition's proposal and opposition leader Tony Abbott was quick to [throw cold water](#) on the proposal claiming that it was simply a discussion paper and not Coalition policy.

2011-12 Australian Review of Aid Effectiveness

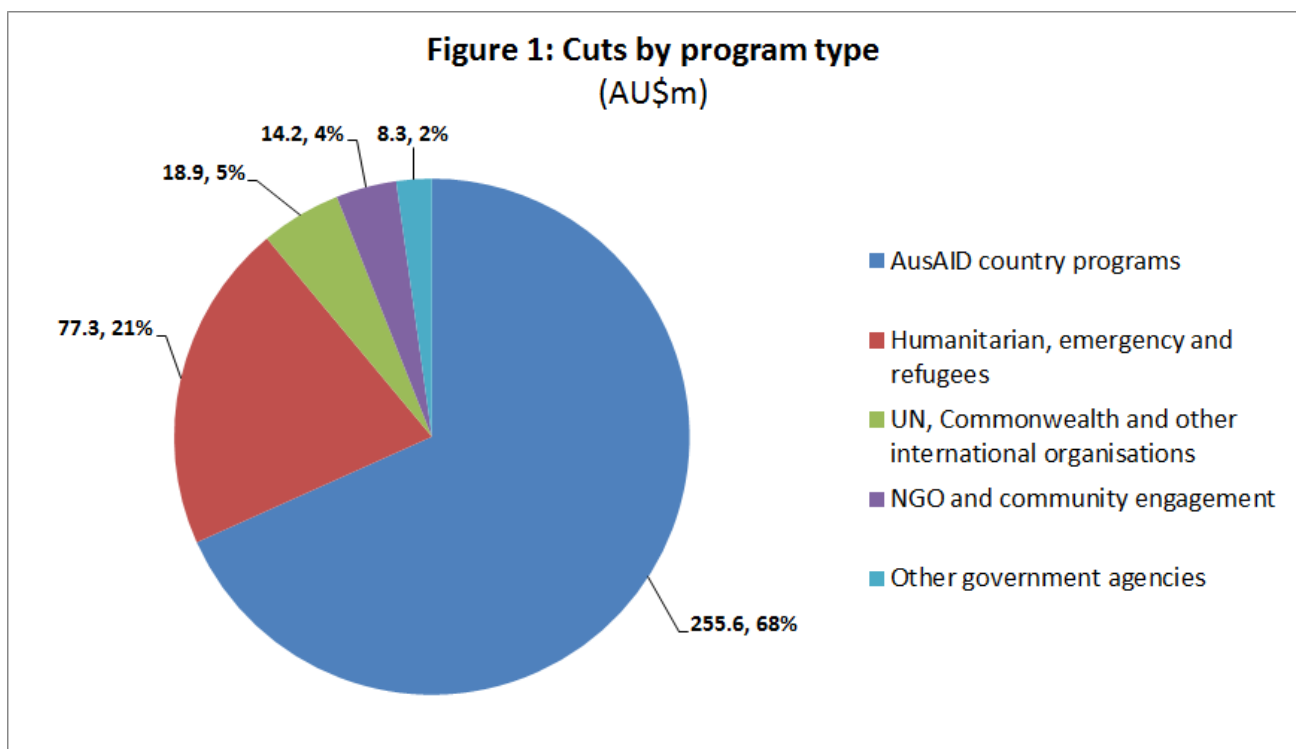
On January 25, AusAID [released](#) the first [Annual Review of Aid Effectiveness](#) (ARAE), for 2011-12 to limited fanfare. The ARAE, expected to be released at the end of last year, was recommended by the 2011 [Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness](#) to be an internal review of AusAID's performance that would feed directly into Cabinet's yearly consideration of progress against the government's four-year budget strategy, articulated in the May 2012 [Comprehensive Aid Policy Framework](#) (CAPF).

The ARAE received little public attention, but was welcomed by [International Development Contractors](#) and by [NGOs](#). Stephen Howes and Robin Davies have provided a [three-piece blog series](#) welcoming and critiquing the review. During

Senate Estimates, AusAID Director General Peter Baxter acknowledged that the ARAE was a work in progress: “[w]e certainly recognise that we can improve the product we produced this year in next year’s version, and we welcome [the Development Policy Centre’s] suggestions on how we might do that” (p. 96).

Details of the \$375m diversion

More than 6 weeks after the [confirmation](#) that \$375 million from the aid budget would be diverted to pay for the expenses of asylum seekers within Australia (see our analysis [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) AusAID has [released](#) (pdf, p. 102 onward) its updated 2012-13 budget estimates. As [our analysis](#) shows balanced cuts have been made across the entire bilateral program, with the humanitarian budget also contributing generously to the savings target. While we still don’t have the details on what projects would be cut or delayed, Minister Carr noted during Senate Estimates that “[w]e can very shortly provide details of aid expenditure across all countries. I should have that within a week or two” (p. 78). This was later confirmed by Mr Baxter.



In a follow-up [blog](#) (and note [here](#)) we explore what the \$375 million is actually going to be spent on.

The diversion took up a considerable amount of time at Senate Estimates last week, primarily around who was responsible for the ODA reporting standards of the now shifted \$375 million. From the transcript it is clear that AusAID places full reporting responsibility upon DIAC. However DIAC, in their own Senate Estimates, places the responsibility with AusAID. To quote Senator Kroger: “You can understand why we

are all confused here, when the department heads themselves are in disagreement as to how these funds are accounted for". As **noted** by Robin Davies, no-one has asked Treasury or Finance yet.

AusAID web watch

Our monthly update on what's new in the content and appearance of AusAID's **website**. As reported last month, all country pages are now updated to their new 'transparency' versions, but some **thematic pages** (like **economic growth**) have yet to change.

New country strategies

- Australia has **released** [pdf] its final version of the Myanmar country strategy 2012-14. This and the release of the Bangladesh country strategy last month brings 15 of the top 20 (according to our **research**) bilateral aid recipients under finalised country strategies.

New thematic strategies

- AusAID has **released** its **Child Protection Policy**. It puts child protection on the agenda by following five key principles: zero tolerance of child exploitation and abuse; recognition of the best interests of the child; sharing responsibility for child protection; procedural fairness; and a risk management approach to reduce the risks of child exploitation and abuse with aid activities.
- AusAID has **released** the **Accessibility Design Guide**, a 'companion volume' to the *Development for All: Towards a disability-inclusive Australian aid program 2009–2014* strategy. It provides guidance on the design and implementation of development initiatives that can enable people with a disability to participate equally in social and economic life.

Reviews

- AusAID has released its mid-term review of the **AusAID NGO Cooperation Program Partnership Agreements** and the **management response**, agreeing to all the recommendations and the findings that, while the Partnership program has considerable potential, there are areas that need to be improved for this to be realised (including better communication and more systematic and dedicated resources). The new **MoU signed** with NGOs in late 2012 reflected the findings of the Review.

Aid visitors

Our monthly account of visitors to Australia with an aid connection:

- Female parliamentarians and candidates from across the Pacific [joined](#) Australian female MPs in Sydney on February 9 and 10 to attend a Pacific Women's Parliamentary Partnerships forum. This was a part of the \$320 million, 10-year [Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development](#) initiative.
- Sir Mekere Morauta and the team appointed to review the [Pacific Plan in 2013](#) met with academics at ANU last week. More details available in next week's Pacific Buzz.

9th Australasian development economics workshop 2013 @ ANU

ANU will be [hosting](#) the 9th Australasian development economics workshop on June 6 and 7. The conference committee has put out a call for papers. Interested parties can register to attend [here](#).

In brief

Eight of the 27 stories released in AusAID's [newsroom](#) since the last [Aid Buzz](#) have discussed humanitarian crises, including commitments of \$29 million. Let's see if this trend continues.

According to a [local media outlet](#), the Australian High Commissioner to PNG Ian Kemish announced a short term assistance package on Manus island to run health and education projects.

AusAID has [signed](#) a new Memorandum of Understanding on development cooperation with Myanmar, the first between the two nations.

Australia and the UK have set up the [Myanmar Education Consortium](#) to provide support and funding to education NGOs. Australia has contributed \$15 million to the initiative. This includes the [opening](#) [pdf] of a joint office in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar.

Applications are now open for the [Government Partnerships for Development](#) facility, which will encourage partnerships in support of Australia's ODA objectives between Australian public sector organisations and their counterparts in Australian ODA-recipient partner countries.

AusAID has [released](#) a [working paper](#) based on its research into the prevalence and experiences of violence against women with disability in Cambodia.

AusAID has [announced](#) the results of the 2012 round of the AusAID Development Research Awards Scheme (ADRAS) that will see \$28.7 million to universities and research centres across the world. A full list of winning submissions can be found [here](#).

DEVPOLICYBLOG

The Office of Development Effectiveness released a **Communiqué** from the latest Independent Evaluation Committee meeting in December 2012.

AusAID is **opening** an office in Mongolia.

Deborah Stokes, a senior career officer with DFAT, will **replace** Ian Kemish as High Commissioner to Papua New Guinea in March.

*Jonathan Pryke is a Researcher at the **Development Policy Centre**.*

Author/s:

Jonathan Pryke

Jonathan Pryke worked at the Development Policy Centre from 2011, and left in mid-2015 to join the Lowy Institute, where he is now Director of the Pacific Islands Program. He has a Master of Public Policy/Master of Diplomacy from Crawford School of Public Policy and the College of Diplomacy, ANU.

Link:

<https://devpolicy.org/aid-buzz-feb-22-senate-estimates-ifad-lacks-coalition-support-coalitions-800m-aid-bill-arae-recap-ausaids-revised-budget-more-20130221/>