# DEVPOLICYBLOG

# Senate submissions reveal a unified aid community

By Jonathan Pryke
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Submissions to the Senate inquiry into Australia's overseas aid program are now in, and last Friday, Devpolicy joined others in Sydney to answer the committee's questions. In total there were 68 submissions to the committee, including our own, from a broad range of individuals and organisations.

Nearly a third of the submissions come from organisations with interests in international public health, and particularly medical research. These urge continued adherence to the aid program's 2013 *Medical Research Strategy* as well as delivering on the total funding commitment that came with it. This is an impressive lobbying effort for a financially minor part of the aid program.

Another third of the submissions come from the NGO sector, with the most notable being those from the Australian Council for International Development, Oxfam and World Vision. Unsurprisingly, the submissions present a largely unified front in support of funding for NGOs, but they also make recommendations in relation to the aid program as a whole.

Most of the other submissions come from a variety of individuals, special-interest groups (I'm looking at you 'Centre for Internet Safety'), and development contractors. Aside from the medical research bodies mentioned above, universities were conspicuous by their absence. A few think tanks—the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, the Development Policy Centre and the Centre for Independent Studies—chanced their arms.

If one abstracts away from the more self-serving elements of individual submissions, the picture is one of a unified aid sector—much as we found in our stakeholder survey last year. The aid community is worried about the perfect storm of mid-year aid budget cuts, a far-reaching administrative merger and potentially dramatic staffing reductions, and is focusing on how to minimise the risk of it all going terribly wrong. The threat of losing the aid program's most skilled staff in the transition to DFAT management is a key concern. The sector is also clearly concerned about the absence of a climate change and environment agenda in the aid program. This was the area in which there were the most frequent calls for funding and policy clarity.

Of particular note were the submissions from DFAT and the Treasury. The Treasury submission provides a handy summary of all the recent cuts to the aid program (totalling

$10.2 billion over five years across both governments) as well as an interesting assessment of the ODA/GNI ratio as a way of determining aid volume. The DFAT submission provides some additional clarity about integration processes behind the scenes, the timing of key announcements (the 2014-15 budget should be a blockbuster), the much talked about 'new' objective for the aid program, priorities for the aid program (economic growth, education, gender), and staff retention.

**About the author/s**

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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.

The Devpolicy Blog is based at the Development Policy Centre, Crawford School of Public Policy, College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University.