

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade

Review of the Defence Annual Report 2015-16 – 23 February 2017

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Defence

Topic: Power outages - contingencies

Question reference number: 1

Senator: Reynolds.

Type of question: asked on Thursday, 23 February 2017, Hansard page 12.

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: Monday 6 March 2017.

Question:

CHAIR: Have you got any figures available—again, I am happy for you to take it on notice—for how many outages there were, what the impact was and what the cost was? Obviously there is a cost associated with running your own generators.

Mr Grzeskowiak: I would not have those figures available. We could take some of those questions on notice and see what we could have a look at. We would be able to know how long we ran the generators for and therefore what the consumption of diesel fuel is—although cost is an interesting one. We run our emergency generators regularly as part of a routine process of ensuring they are going to work when we need them to work, so, if we have to run them for real, it just means we can delay the next regular test. Therefore, you could argue there would not be much difference in cost at all if you look over a longer period.

CHAIR: Could you take on notice what interruptions there have been over the last few months—

Mr Grzeskowiak: Just in South Australia?

CHAIR: No, nationwide. So what interruptions have there been and what potential impact has there been. What facilities were prioritised and which ones were not? What contingencies do you have in place and how do you categorise that?

Mr Grzeskowiak: We will take that on notice, have a look and see how much information we can give the committee in a public forum.

Answer:

In the period since the interruption of the power supply to RAAF Base Edinburgh in South Australia on 28 September 2016, there have been no known power outages at Defence bases.

Defence was asked on 10 February 2017 by NSW and ACT authorities to decrease energy use where possible due to extreme weather conditions. Garden Island and Australian Signals Directorate assets operated from contingency power sources. Defence operations were not impacted.

On each occasion of reduced dependence on the mains power supply, the backup power equipment provides power to the most critical areas of the bases in accordance with established priorities. For operational and security reasons the specific prioritisation is classified but in general terms, priority is given to facilities that directly support operational capability.

It is estimated that approximately 31,000 litres of fuel was used by power generation systems during these incidents; however, as the systems are tested regularly, a proportion of this consumption would have been consumed during the regular testing regime and as such does not necessarily represent an additional cost.