

-COMMUNITY AFFAIRS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE – SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES - 21 OCTOBER 2010

HUMAN SERVICES PORTFOLIO

Q No.	Outcome/ Agency	Senator	Broad Topic	Question	Proof Hansard Page & Hearing Date or Written Q	Date Answer Received	Date Tabled in the Senate
HS 1	CSA	Fifield	CSA powers to obtain information	Senator FIFIELD - Would you be able to take on notice and provide the internal guidelines and procedures that you have as to when it is appropriate to use which powers, which level of officer is required to approve particular courses of action and so forth? Ms Godwin - We can take that on notice, yes.	CA 104 21/10/10	19.11.10	25.11.10
HS 2	CSA	Fifield	CSA powers to obtain information – legal action	Senator FIFIELD - Has the CSA been subject to any legal action in relation to someone considering that the CSA has abused its powers to seek information? Ms Godwin - To give you a thorough answer I would need to take it on notice. I am aware of at least one piece of litigation of that sort, but the CSA was successful in that litigation. It was not found that we were abusing our powers. It was not exactly an abuse of power case; it was one where there was a question about the way in which we interact with the tax office.	CA 104-105 21/10/10	19.11.10	25.11.10
HS 3	CSA	Fifield	CSA investigation standards	Senator FIFIELD - When the CSA conducts investigations, are you required to comply with the Australian government investigation standards? Are they relevant for the sorts of investigations you do? Ms Godwin - They are. Our investigators are trained I think to Cert IV level. I can take that and confirm, but I understand they are trained and we do seek to comply with the Commonwealth investigation guidelines.	CA 105 21/10/10	19.11.10	25.11.10
HS 4	Centrelink	Fifield	Centrelink expenditure on investigation and compliance	Senator FIFIELD - Can you take on notice to provide a breakdown of what Centrelink spends on investigation, compliance and whatever the categories are to give us a meaningful figure? Mr Withnell - I will talk to our budget area and see what we can provide.	CA 109 21/10/10	25.11.10	10.02.11

HS 5	Centrelink	Fifield	Complaints related to use of coercive powers	<p>Senator FIFIELD - Can you take on notice the number of complaints as a broad category from 2006-07 through to 2009-10 and also, as a subset of that, complaints that relate to the use of coercive powers?</p> <p>Mr Withnell - I will see what we can do. I am not sure if the complaints database has that level of granular detail. I will see what we can provide.</p>	CA 114 21/10/10	26.11.10	10.02.11
HS 6(a)	Centrelink	Fifield	Referrals to CDPP – cases involving debts over \$30,000	<p>Senator FIFIELD - Thank you. Can you advise how many cases have been prosecuted by Centrelink that involve debts to Centrelink of more than \$30,000 that have been referred to the DPP for prosecution?</p> <p>Mr Withnell - I do not have the number over \$30,000. I gave you earlier the percentage of total debts that went through, but I do not have a hard figure.</p> <p>Senator FIFIELD - Would it be possible to get that on notice?</p> <p>Mr Withnell - Over \$30,000?</p> <p>Senator FIFIELD - For each year from 2006-07 to 2009-10?</p> <p>Mr Withnell - I will see what we can provide.</p>	CA 114 21/10/10	07.12.10	10.02.11
HS 6(b)	Centrelink	Fifield	Prosecutions by CDPP	<p>Senator FIFIELD - Thank you for that. Also, can you advise how many cases the DPP prosecuted on behalf of Centrelink from 2006-07 through to 2009-10?</p> <p>Mr Withnell - I think I have provided those to you in previous estimates, but we can provide those again.</p>	CA 114 21/10/10	07.12.10	10.02.11
HS 7	Centrelink	Scullion	Job seeker contact – ratio of contact requests to participation reports	<p>Senator SCULLION - I am not looking for something specific, but can you give me the general sort of trend about what the ratio would be of participation reports to this discretion of contact requirement? If you do not know it, it —</p> <p>Ms Drayton - I do not have it with me. I can talk in general terms.</p> <p>Senator SCULLION - Would you get a lot more of one or the other?</p> <p>Ms Drayton - It has certainly been a really positive feature of the new framework in that providers have used it very readily in trying to make and keep contact with job seekers. It is something that, for the first few months of the framework as it was settling in, was used a great deal. I do not have it with me but I do have data. I know for example that for this financial year Centrelink has actioned 266,457 contact requests. It is something that has been picked up in that time frame very quickly. On notice I can get you the ratio.</p>	CA 119 21/10/10	24.11.10	25.11.10

HS 8	Centrelink	Scullion	Job seeker – breaches in NT	<p>Senator SCULLION - That would be useful. The reason I am asking these is that it is the first time we have had, I think, a particular demographic that are not necessarily but broadly representative of demographics in other jurisdictions. We have an opportunity to have a look quite carefully at that demographic to see exactly who is in what position—and it is easy to ask. At each set of estimates I will just be asking the same set of questions, if you like, and you will be able to provide me with that information then. I think it is very important because we will be able to see a trend, even if it is shifting from one program to another activity. We will actually see where there are jobs available if we have got the right levers to be able to move them on. It would be very useful, Ms Drayton, if I could have, on the same basis as the <i>Closing the Gap</i> report was provided, a better breakdown. Instead of 66 eight-week non-payment periods, which is the eight-week one, in the new block, if you could provide a better breakdown of the actual breaching, that would be useful.</p> <p>Ms Drayton - I would be very happy to do that.</p> <p>Senator SCULLION - I am not sure, for privacy reasons, if it can actually come down to an area; it may. But, if it does not, can you give us as much detail as possible, within those parameters?</p> <p>Ms Drayton - Can I just check: is this just in the communities or—</p> <p>Senator SCULLION - I am just trying to get the same dataset. I am looking for the 73 communities described as the NTER communities. Not all remote communities are caught in that, but most of them are.</p> <p>Ms Drayton - We can do that for you.</p>	CA 122 21/10/10	30.11.10	10.02.11
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HS 9	Centrelink	Abetz	Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme	<p>Senator ABETZ - You have sweet-talked me now. I will keep on with my questions. In relation to Student Works—and that is where I started with this line of questioning—can we have a copy of the assessment in relation to Student Works? I understand there was a written assessment undertaken by a Centrelink officer in relation to the business Student Works which, might I add, is a not-for-profit business that helps kids who are disengaged from schools, and they are genuinely engaged in manufacturing furniture. They supply Amcor, ACL, Hudson Projects. It is a very worthwhile business. It was nearly seen as a school type project, as I understand it, by the assessors rather than a genuine business that is doing a real social good along the way and has the genuine business activity of manufacturing. I have a wealth of photographs showing the machinery and the bits and pieces that are imported to Tasmania that have been manufactured to make finished products, which are then sold into the marketplace. They were assessed as ineligible. So that is it in a nutshell. Would there be any difficulty in our getting a copy of that assessment?</p> <p>Mr Maloney - It is not a case that I am familiar with specifically, but could I take that on notice?</p>	CA 125 21/10/10	26.11.10	10.02.11
HS 10	Centrelink	Abetz	Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme	<p>Senator ABETZ - Can you tell us what training the Tasmanian programs field assessors undergo before they go out making assessments?</p> <p>Mr Maloney - I would probably take on notice the detail of that training, if you like, and we can cover off the modules. It is quite extensive and covers a number of periods and some active on-the-ground work with more experienced assessors. But, if you like, I will take that on notice and get back to you.</p>	CA 125 21/10/10	26.11.10	10.02.11
HS 11(a)	Centrelink	Abetz	Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme	<p>Senator ABETZ - Can you tell us how many applicants have been rejected by Centrelink in the last three years?</p> <p>Mr Maloney - I would have to take that on notice.</p>	CA 126 21/10/10	26.11.10	10.02.11
HS 11(b)	Centrelink	Abetz	Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme	<p>Senator ABETZ - I do not want to put you to too much work, but if it is readily available I will try my luck a bit further. How many applicants have been rejected by Centrelink in the last three years, and then if you can tell us out of those - and that is where I am pushing my luck - how many were rejected because they are not in the right classification or they are not deemed to fit into categories A, B or C? How many have been rejected because the business, whilst qualifying, is deemed not to be the predominant business?</p> <p>Mr Maloney - I am pretty sure we would have that information. As for whether it is readily gatherable - I might have just invented a new word - I will take that on notice and see what I can get for you.</p>	CA 126 21/10/10	26.11.10	10.02.11

HS 12	Centrelink	Siewert	Job seeker – use of computer	<p>Senator SIEWERT - I really want to get this clear so that I do not go away with a misunderstanding. You are telling me that you have job seekers coming in that have never used a computer and their job service providers have not found that out?</p> <p>Ms Drayton - That is the feedback from some of the very vulnerable job seekers we had very recently. There was some feedback from one of the areas where that was certainly the case.</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT - Is that being followed up in terms of going back to their JSA provider?</p> <p>Ms Drayton - I can follow that up. I am not sure whether it has been. I do not have the details of the case. It was reported back through the areas. I can certainly follow that up with the area that raised it.</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT - I am amazed that you could get job seekers coming into a Centrelink office who have been in the system—we are talking now about the people that have been already part of the process, are we not? So, not the Job Ready mob?</p> <p>Ms Drayton - It could have been Job Ready. We do this—</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT - How could they be Job Ready and have never touched a computer before?</p> <p>Ms Drayton - It could be from any of the strains where people are having the opportunity to lodge their SU19 online for the first time.</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT - I would really appreciate it if you could get back to us with whether that has been followed up with the service provider.</p> <p>Ms Drayton - I can do that.</p>	CA 127 21/10/10	26.11.10	10.02.11
HS 13	Centrelink	Siewert	Income management - letters	<p>Senator SIEWERT - Can you tell me how many people received the letter of 13 August? You will probably have to take it on notice.</p> <p>Mr Tidswell - We will have to take that on notice.</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT - And in which communities?</p> <p>Mr Tidswell - We will have to take that on notice.</p>	CA 130 21/10/10	25.11.10	10.02.11

HS 14	Centrelink	Siewert	Income management - letters	<p>Senator SIEWERT - So, people who are not covered now under the legislation for age pension got a letter saying, 'You will be income managed under the Long-term Welfare Payment Recipient Initiative from 11 October.' They were no longer covered by the legislation and yet they got that letter?</p> <p>Ms Cartwright - I will have to take that one on notice and check the letter. That letter does not appear to be the one that would go to an age pensioner under the Northern Territory emergency response to invite them to have a conversation about options for them to exit off income management, if that was their choice.</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT - I want to be really clear about this. You are now saying this letter is not the letter that went to age pensioners?</p> <p>Ms Cartwright - It may not be. I want to clarify that.</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT - Can you bring that back to me tomorrow, not in three months time? I am not trying to be rude, but on notice usually means three months down the track.</p> <p>Mr Tidswell - We will be there tomorrow and so we can make sure that we get on top of this. The challenge for us is that we have multiple letters generated for various events. We would need to make sure of the triggers for each letter and each customer group so that we are absolutely accurate.</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT - That is why I asked if this was the letter that went to age pensioners.</p> <p>CHAIR - Maybe tomorrow we could get a full suite of the letters, options and also the attachment to which Senator Siewert refers that Centrelink sent out for this change.</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT - Yes.</p>	CA 130-131 21/10/10	26.11.10	10.02.11
HS 15	Centrelink	Siewert	Income management – written instructions for exiting	<p>Ms Ramsey - If we can be given details we will follow that up. There are quite clear written instructions about the process that staff are to follow.</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT—I would appreciate it if you could provide those instructions.</p> <p>Ms Ramsey—Yes. We will take that on notice.</p>	CA 132 21/10/10	02.12.10	10.02.11

HS 16(a)	Centrelink	Siewert	Income management - exemptions	<p>Senator SIEWERT - Thank you. I would like to go to the number of people that applied for exemptions. I have been told that number by FaHCSIA, but they also told me that I needed to ask you about some of the reasons. They also told me the number of refusals. Obviously I do not want any information that is going to personally identify people, but I am interested to know some of the reasons for refusal.</p> <p>Ms Cartwright - The majority of the reasons for exemptions being rejected were that the customer had not provided the information in the required time. In the Northern Territory we have set up a special unit that looks at exemptions only to ensure that we have some consistency of decisions, and where customers cannot obtain all of the information that they might need to apply for an exemption and be successful in that attempt we will help the customer wherever possible. I can take that on notice to get you more specific details, but the majority are because the customer was not able to satisfy the requirements to prove that they were eligible for an exemption.</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT - If you could take it on notice, that would be appreciated.</p>	CA 133 21/10/10	02.11.10	10.02.11
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HS 16(b)	Centrelink	Siewert	Income management – exemption documentation	<p>Senator SIEWERT - If you could take it on notice, that would be appreciated. Again, I have anecdotal evidence, so I would appreciate your feedback on it, regarding what level of documentation you require to substantiate a claim for an exemption. For example, it has been suggested to me that somebody needs to provide a police report that they have not been subjected to domestic violence. I understand domestic violence is one of the indicators for vulnerability. How do you substantiate domestic violence and are you requiring police reports?</p> <p>Ms Ramsey - I am certainly unaware of that being requested, but that is something that we will go back and ask from the exemption team.</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT - That would be appreciated. I do not know if you can do this now, but can you provide us with a list of the sorts of documentation that you are seeking from people to prove or otherwise their application for an exemption?</p> <p>Ms Cartwright - Parents with dependent children will be asked to provide evidence that their school-age children are enrolled and regularly attending school, which is usually via a school report.</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT - Do they go to school and ask for a report that the school provides to say that they have been attending for 13 weeks?</p> <p>Ms Cartwright - They need to be attending school for the past two terms or a semester with no more than five unexplained absences during the term or semester, and the school is providing those reports for us. Parents of children younger than school age are asked to provide things like their child's participation in approved activities, child immunisation details, attendance at regular health check-ups or attendance in preschool or early childhood activities. Customers who do not have dependent children will be asked to provide evidence that they have been working for more than 15 hours a week for at least six months in the last 12 months or evidence that they are full-time students.</p> <p>Ms Ramsey - With the vulnerability factor the assessment is done by a social worker and would be part of an interview with a social worker. It would be a general assessment. We will go back and check what evidence is being requested, but I would expect that it would be more of a professional interview.</p>	CA 133 21/10/10	02.11.10	10.02.11
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HS 17(a)	Centrelink	Siewert	Vulnerable classification	<p>Senator SIEWERT - I would like to go back to the number of people that have been classified as vulnerable. I may have taken these figures down wrongly, and if I have I apologise. I noted 30 to 35 people. That may be one that FaHCSIA said that I needed to ask you to confirm.</p> <p>Ms Cartwright - I would like to take that one on notice and perhaps provide you with that answer tomorrow.</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT - It would be appreciated if you could.</p>	CA 133 21/10/10	24.11.10	25.11.10
HS 17(b)	Centrelink	Siewert	Vulnerable classification - location	<p>Senator SIEWERT - It would be appreciated if you could. I am being very conscious, at the moment, of not trying to ask you to identify regions because of the relatively low numbers, but I am interested to know broadly—I will probably have to ask next time—which areas of people with vulnerability are being assessed as vulnerable and which are getting exemptions.</p> <p>Ms Ramsey - The numbers are still developing in the Darwin area, because the rollout has not been completed. We may be able to provide it in zones rather than locations.</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT - Zones would be very useful.</p> <p>Ms Cartwright - My data says 27 customers have been assessed for income management under the vulnerable status, but I will confirm that tomorrow.</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT - Thank you. Also, if it is possible, can you highlight which ones come from the age pension strain and DSP. Is that possible?</p> <p>Ms Cartwright - I might not be able to provide that tomorrow, but I can certainly take it on notice.</p>	CA 133 21/10/10	24.11.10	25.11.10
HS 18	Centrelink	Siewert	BasicsCard – WA evaluation	<p>Senator SIEWERT - Thank you. I would like to move to BasicsCard. It is not BasicsCard in the NT, which we will be doing tomorrow; it is the general BasicsCard. In other words, I do not want to be told that I have to ask that tomorrow. I was making it clear—</p> <p>Mr Tidswell - I think you have it listed for tomorrow on the agenda.</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT - I want to do WA.</p> <p>Mr Tidswell - We can do BasicsCard there.</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT - Can we do it there?</p> <p>Mr Tidswell - In one hit, yes. It would be hard to differentiate and pull material out on the BasicsCard.</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT - I was not after some data. I have a general question around the WA evaluation that was released a couple of weeks ago that made a comment about the number of BasicsCard transactions that had failed. Do you want to take that on notice for tomorrow?</p> <p>Mr Tidswell - We can.</p>	CA 134 21/10/10	24.11.10	25.11.10

HS 19	Centrelink	Siewert	Income management - appeals against vulnerable classifications	<p>Senator SIEWERT - I have another question on the vulnerability category. Have there been any appeals lodged? As I understand it, the only way you can deal with the classification of vulnerable is using the normal SAP process. Is that a correct understanding?</p> <p>Ms Cartwright - The normal process for appeals, yes.</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT - Have any been lodged against the vulnerable classification?</p> <p>Ms Cartwright - There are so many folders here.</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT - I do not mean to keep jumping around. It is one I missed on my list.</p> <p>Mr Tidswell - Is this about appeals?</p> <p>Ms Ramsey - Appeals against—</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT – Specifically - and I will come to the broader appeals in a minute - it is appeals against being classified as vulnerable, because that is where I am presuming that Centrelink has most of those. It may be an incorrect assumption that Centrelink has made that decision to class someone as vulnerable.</p> <p>Ms Ramsey - That is right.</p> <p>Ms Cartwright - We have had nine appeals under the new income management regime. I will have to take it on notice to see whether any of those nine are under the vulnerable category.</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT - That would be appreciated. Thank you. Do you still have appeals outstanding from the old income management process?</p> <p>Ms Ramsey - Under the Social Security Tribunal?</p> <p>Senator SIEWERT - Yes.</p> <p>Ms Cartwright - I will have to look through my folder. I could tell you tomorrow.</p>	CA 134 21/10/10	24.11.10	25.11.10
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Written Questions on Notice

HS 20	DHS	Fielding	Incoming Government Briefing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Did the department prepare a post-election brief for a returned Labor Government (the so-called 'Red Book')? 2. Can the department provide the committee with a copy of this brief? 3. If not, can the department outline its reasons for refusing to provide a copy of this brief? 4. If the department will not provide a copy of this brief because it contains confidential or sensitive information, can the department provide a redacted copy of this brief as was done by the Treasury Department? 5. Has the Minister given any instructions to the department regarding the release of this brief and if so, what were these instructions? 6. Did the department prepare a post-election brief for a newly elected Coalition Government (the 'Blue Book')? 7. Can the department provide the committee with a copy of this brief? 8. If not, can the department outline its reasons for refusing to provide a copy of this brief? 9. If the department will not provide a copy of this brief because it contains confidential or sensitive information, can the department provide a redacted copy of this brief as was done by the Treasury Department? 10. Has the Minister given any instructions to the department regarding the release of this brief and if so, what were these instructions? 	Written Q	10.12.10	10.02.11
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HS 21	Child Support Agency	Xenophon	Change of assessment / financial records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What services are available through the CSA for parents who wish to have a reassessment of the amount of child support paid to them? • To what extent does the CSA examine a person's financial records when determining the amount of child support to be paid? • What measures does the CSA have in place to ensure that parties are paying the correct amount, and are not doctoring or providing misleading information about their finances? • Of the cases assessed each year, can the CSA provide the number that require higher than average levels of investigation into a person's financial records? • Of the investigations conducted in to a person's financial records, what percentage are found to be misleading? • Does the CSA employ or contract forensic accountants to assess these types of records? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ If so, how much is spent on forensic accountants, and how many staff? • Are the services of forensic accountants available to CSA's clients through the CSA? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ If not, are there any plans to provide this service? • Does the CSA acknowledge that there are cases when the services of forensic accountants may be required, and that such services may be out of reach for people on a limited income? • What other services does the CSA have for assisting people in this position, if they cannot access forensic accountants? 	Written Q	26.11.10	10.02.11
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HS 22	Centrelink	Colbeck	Jobs and Skills Expo in Devonport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When was this date set for the expo? • What correspondence was there between the Department and Sid Sidebottom's office regarding this event? When? From which officer? • What was the cost of promoting the event? • Where was it promoted? • Was a consultant/contractor used to run this event in any way? What was their cost? • What was the total cost of holding the event? • Did any Centrelink or other Departmental officers travel from Hobart or other capital cities to attend the event? If so, what was the cost of their travel and accommodation? • How many exhibitors participated? Can you please provide a list. Is this number of participants above or below the average number that attend these Expos held in other parts of Australia? • A joint media statement (by Treasurer Wayne Swan, Minister Jason Clare, Sid Sidebottom and Dick Adams) on the day of the Devonport Jobs and Skills Expo claimed 150 jobs and apprenticeships were on offer at this event. How was this figure determined and precisely how many of these jobs were filled on the day? • What advice, of a media, policy or other type, did the Department provide to any of these Ministers/MPs about this event? When? • How many Jobs and Skills Expo events have been conducted in Tasmania since 1 January 2008? In what locations and on what dates did these events occur? What were there total costs? 	Written Q	02.12.10	10.02.11
HS 24	Centrelink	Siewert	Debt recovery	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is the process by which individuals can negotiate to reduce the debt recovery rate changing so that anyone seeking to reduce their debt rate below 15% must renegotiate that rate every 12 weeks? 2. If yes, why? 3. What impact is this expected to have on people in hardship? 4. What will be the additional cost to Centrelink in administering this program? 	Written Q	30.11.10	10.02.11

HS 25	CRS Australia	Fifield and Boyce	Staff Satisfaction	<p>Senator FIFIELD—Internal staff satisfaction: do you have happy staff?</p> <p>Mr Robinson—We have very happy staff. I am very pleased to advise that our staff satisfaction ratings have improved since our last survey in 2008 across a range of issues.</p> <p>Senator BOYCE—Do you have those figures; from what to what?</p> <p>Mr Robinson—I would have to find all the details for you. It was an eight per cent increase, I recall, in the staff satisfaction overall figure.</p> <p>Mr Pratt—Traditionally, CRS Australia has had quite high staff satisfaction levels in any event, and they have improved in recent years...</p> <p>Mr Pratt—I was just searching the annual report trying to find exactly that.</p> <p>Mr Robinson—In terms of job satisfaction, 95 per cent of respondents indicated that they feel their job makes a worthwhile contribution. That is a very positive result for us. I do not have the actual percentage breakdown item by item. We could provide that on notice for you if you like.</p>	CA 106	24.11.10	25.11.10
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