

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Budget Estimates Hearings May 2016

Communications Portfolio

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 10

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Pages 91-92, 05/06/2016

Topic: Public interest immunity claim

Senator Reynolds, Linda asked:

CHAIR: Our committee is now resuming after a short break for a private meeting. There are two things that I would like to raise. Firstly, Ms Guthrie and your officials, unfortunately I do not think you are going to make your seven o'clock flight tonight. I just thought it might be prudent to advise you. You might like to make some alternative arrangements. Also for Australia Post, for Mr Fahour, who was due to come on now, we understand that there is a nine o'clock flight to Melbourne. It might be prudent to have a look at alternative arrangements, but we expect you will be able to get home tonight. Minister, in relation to the previous line of inquiry to the ABC, can we clarify for the purpose of the committee the status of the public interest immunity claim. Were you or was the ABC making one? Can you clarify.

Senator Fifield: No. I do not think the ABC was making a public interest immunity claim. I think the officers were speaking to the extent that they were able, taking into account considerations of board confidentiality. I think that the best approach would be if we took the question on notice.

CHAIR: Okay. Thank you.

Senator DASTYARI: I would be happy for that to be the course. There are two matters. I have a physical copy of the report now. This is the report that was referred to. We will table it. We can deal with that later. I am very conscious of time.

...

Senator DASTYARI: I understand. Senator Fifield, I am happy for these questions to be taken on notice. I am happy to come back to this matter perhaps at a later Senate estimates hearing. I would also like clarification over the ABC position, and I believe they should consider a policy position about to what extent they will—at a helicopter level—outline what matters the board does or does not deal with. If you could take on notice revisiting a policy decision, perhaps not going to the specifics but more broadly to give people confidence and avoid what has become a catch 22 situation, which is: 'It is a matter for the board, but we can't tell you what the board is dealing with.' Also, Senator Fifield, if you could take on notice further consideration of whether the best way of handling this is a public interest immunity claim. At the end of those answers to question on notice, perhaps a new committee can consider whether or not it is something the Senate committee chooses or does not choose to accept. In that light and in being completely reasonable, which I always am, I have a series of other questions about a series of different matters, but I note the next Senate estimates hearings later in the year; we will have plenty more time to go through them. As sign of good faith in Senator Reynolds, I will cede my time.

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Answer:

The ABC was not making a public interest immunity claim.

In response to the question as to what matters the ABC Board deals or does not deal with, the ABC will answer questions as to whether the ABC Board did or did not consider a matter. Conversations between individual Board members are not appropriate for disclosure.