

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Budget Estimates May 2017

Communications Portfolio

Department of Communications and the Arts

Question No: 22

Program 1.1

Hansard Ref: Page 64, 24/05/2017

Topic: Round 3 – Departments website

Senator Urquhart, Anne asked:

Senator URQUHART: Thank you. For round 3 of the program last week, the department's website said that the Australian government has committed an additional \$60 million to a third round of funding. As part of this commitment the Australian government has announced a number of priority locations which may receive funding for a mobile base station under round 3. A competitive process to allocate round 3 funding is expected to commence in 2017. Late last week that was changed and the words about a competitive process are no longer on the website. However, the minister's media release of 9 March 2017 still had this reference to the competitive process. Why did the reference to the competitive process get deleted from the department's website?

Mr Paterson: I am going to have to take that on notice. I was not aware those words had been removed. It has every intention to conduct a competitive process. I honestly do not know what happened there. I will look into it and take it on notice, but the intention is to conduct a competitive process for the allocation of funding.

Senator URQUHART: If you could take that on notice.

Mr Paterson: Yes.

Senator URQUHART: I am also interested in what has changed about the process for round 3 that caused that change in language.

Senator PATERSON: As the program administrator, there has been no change in regard to the intention of running a process where you have—

Senator URQUHART: So the process is the same?

Mr Paterson: You have carriers who will compete for the locations, so you will get a competitive tension per priority location, which is similar to the first two rounds. Even though the locations have been announced, you will still have that competition between the carriers. So it will be a competitive process when we go to market.

Senator URQUHART: It just seems strange that it has been removed.

Mr Paterson: It is strange and if it has changed I will change it back.

Senator URQUHART: You are going to change it back?

Mr Paterson: Yes.

Senator URQUHART: So it should not have been changed? Is that what you are saying?

Mr Paterson: It should not have been changed.

Answer:

The Department of Communications and the Arts website was amended to incorporate the link to the list of 125 Priority Locations previously announced by the Government. The text referring to 'a competitive process' was inadvertently removed during this website update.

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The website has now been updated to reflect that funding for the Priority Locations round of the Mobile Black Spot Program will be allocated through a competitive process. The updated text can be viewed at www.communications.gov.au/mobile_coverage.