

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Budget Estimates Spill-over June 2017

Communications Portfolio

Department of Communications and the Arts

Question No: 286

Program 1.1

Hansard Ref: Page 11, 15/06/2017

Topic: Medical Alarm Assistance Scheme

Senator O'Neill, Deborah asked:

Senator O'NEILL: Is it a policy decision that is now in your remit in a way that it was not previously, because it was seconded out to NBN Co.

Senator Fifield: It was not seconded out; it was an operational NBN Co decision. As portfolio minister and shareholder minister I have taken a close interest in this, and I have asked for some scenarios to be looked at, options examined and advice provided.

Senator O'NEILL: So were you responsible for it when NBN Co made the decisions, or was it responsible for it?

Senator Fifield: I would have to check, but I think those decisions might have predated me being in the portfolio. But to my understanding NBN Co, as part of its job of assisting people to migrate, established this arrangement to facilitate migration, which is part of its responsibility.

Senator O'NEILL: So NBN Co is responsible for picking the winners and leaving out the non-monitored alarms. You are not taking responsibility for that? Did it do it or did you do it?

Senator Fifield: NBN Co was looking at the issue of where there was an Australian standard as one of the things that guided it in the development of the medical alarm assistance scheme.

Senator O'NEILL: So you let technology make the decision without considering equity of access for all people who were using monitored and non-monitored alarms?

Senator Fifield: I will check the dates as to when NBN Co took those decisions.

Senator O'NEILL: And it did take those decisions, not you as the minister?

Senator Fifield: It was something that fell within the remit of NBN Co's responsibilities.

Answer:

On 5 March 2015, NBN Co Limited (nbn) wrote to Shareholder Ministers advising that the nbn Board had agreed to support a Medical Alarm Subsidy Scheme.