

Senate Economics Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Additional Estimates

2014 - 2015

Department/Agency: Treasury

Question: AET 23

Topic: IGR - Net Overseas Migration (NOM)

Reference: Hansard page no. 63 - 25 February 2015

Senator: Wong, Penny

Question:

Senator WONG: In relation to the consultation with the Treasurer on the NOM, has the NOM been the subject of consultation for the purposes of the IGR—this is beyond the forwards—with the Treasurer or his office?

Mr Ray: It has been the subject of consultations with the Treasurer.

Senator WONG: In the context of that consultation, do you generate a range of options for consideration?

Mr Ray: In context of that consultation, we provide advice to the Treasurer on what we think an appropriate base case assumption might be. If you recall, in previous IGRs what has happened is that the government on each occasion has published a base case and then, certainly in the 2010 IGR, there was sensitivity analysis around that.

Senator WONG: Has a final decision been made on the appropriate base case assumption?

Mr Ray: The government has not yet settled the final document.

Senator WONG: Sorry?

Mr Ray: The government has not yet settled the final document. Until then it is not final.

Senator WONG: You do not settle the document in one go, do you?

Mr Ray: No, but—

Senator WONG: Presumably this—

Mr Ray: But—

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Senator WONG: Mr Ray, can I finish the question and then maybe we will see if we need to have an argument?

Senator Ronaldson: You are straying very close into advice to and from government with this question.

Senator WONG: He has not actually heard the question. What I am asking is whether or not the base case assumption has been finalised. Presumably that is one of the key parameters or assumptions—I am sorry, I am not sure which of the terms is correct—that you need to generate a great deal of other aspects of the report.

Mr Ray: Yes, it is a key parameter to the report. But until a government document is published it is not final.

Senator WONG: Sure.

Mr Ray: So it is with that caveat. The Treasurer has said publically that it is going to be released in the next few weeks.

Senator WONG: Who makes the final decision on that key parameter?

Mr Ray: The government.

Senator WONG: So, the Treasurer?

Mr Ray: It is up to the government how they decide.

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Senator WONG: In terms of your advice, and I am not asking what your advice was, but I am asking about the range from—

Senator Ronaldson: Come on.

Senator WONG: I am not going to ask quantitatively. I am trying to get some sense of whether the—

Senator Ronaldson: You have sat on this side before.

Senator WONG: Can he at least wait until I have finished the question? Can I just please ask the question and then he can decide if he is going to object to it.

CHAIR: Senator Wong.

Senator WONG: Thank you. In assessing the appropriate base case assumptions, I assume there is a range as opposed to a point that is proposed?

Senator Ronaldson: Now that you have finished the question, this is advice to government. This officer is not in a position to provide details of advice to government, which is exactly what you are asking.

Senator WONG: Fair enough. I will rephrase the question. When you generate the appropriate base case assumption, do you generate a range of assumptions that Treasury would still regard as reasonable appropriate assumptions?

Senator Ronaldson: Again, I think that forms part of the advice to government.

Senator WONG: How is that advice to government?

Senator Ronaldson: You are asking what range of advice—

Senator WONG: No. You see, you are so stupid you can't understand the question. With respect, Minister, I am not asking him what the range is. I am not asking anything quantitative. I am just asking in terms of the structure of how they generate these options.

Senator Ronaldson: You know as well as I do what the outcome of your question is.

Senator WONG: No, it is not.

Senator Ronaldson: Of course you do. You would not be asking this. I know exactly where you want to go with this. This is part of advice to government. Whether there are ranges or not—

Senator WONG: Is this a public interest—

CHAIR: The minister has the call.

Senator WONG: Point of order—advice to government is not accepted by the Senate as a basis for not answering the question. If you take advice, Chair, that is what the secretary will tell you. If the minister wants to make a public interest immunity claim, there are procedures for him to do that and he should do so.

Senator Ronaldson: On the point of order—

Senator WONG: Did you take advice?

CHAIR: Yes.

Senator Ronaldson: Senator Wong has sat on this side of the table on numerous occasions and said that the officers at the table would not be commenting on advice to government. That is a nonsense intervention.

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CHAIR: In the interest of goodwill, I will just halt proceedings there.

Senator WONG: Can we proceed?

CHAIR: I am taking advice. You asked me to take advice. It is now with the minister to

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explain what damage might be caused under the accepted—

Senator WONG: On this advice. On the question—

Senator Ronaldson: This is the second time you have smiled in the last 20 seconds. The first time you smiled was when the Chair said he was going to take some advice when you decided to move on on the basis of the fact that you knew that it was not information.

CHAIR: Order! Minister, you can always take the question on notice.

Senator Ronaldson: I am quite happy to say that the matter that the senator is asking, as she well knows, is asking for a range of options that might have gone to the Treasurer.

Senator WONG: I did not ask that.

Senator Ronaldson: That clearly forms part of the advice to government. Certainly, the officer cannot answer that. If there is any further information in relation to this that the Treasurer is happy to provide then I will take it on notice and he can deal with it.

Senator WONG: I did not ask for the range of options.

CHAIR: The minister is in a position where he can take it on notice—

Senator WONG: I did not ask for the range of options. If the minister actually listened to the question rather than jumping in.

Senator Ronaldson: I listened to the question. I have asked—

Senator WONG: I did not ask—

Senator Ronaldson: You asked the Chair a question, and he has asked. I have answered that and I have said if there is anything else that can be added I will take it on notice.

CHAIR: You can confer with the Treasurer about public interest.

Answer:

A decision was taken to use a central assumption of net overseas migration of 215,000 per annum from 2018-19, consistent with the assumption used in the 2014-15 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO).

In the Intergenerational Report, the impact of two alternative net overseas migration assumptions (that is, 180,000 and 250,000) is presented in the sensitivity analysis at Appendix B.