

Senate Economics Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Supplementary Budget Estimates

2014 - 2015

Department/Agency: Treasury

Question: SBT 4265-4268

Topic: Attendance at ERC meetings

Reference: Hansard page no. 21-22 - 22 October 2014

Senator: Wong, Penny

Question:

Senator WONG: Can I go to the ERC process. Does the Prime Minister technically chair ERC?

Mr Ray: Yes.

Senator Fifield: I am not sure that it is necessarily a technical point. It is a fact that he is the chair of ERC.

Senator WONG: Thank you for that answer. I will follow that up. How many ERC meetings has the Prime Minister actually attended?

Mr Ray: That would be a question for PM&C.

Senator WONG: Oh, come on!

Senator Fifield: ERC is a subcommittee of the cabinet.

Senator WONG: Really? I didn't know that!

Senator Fifield: Which is why I think you would ask the question of PM&C and not here.

Senator WONG: Goodness; hold the press!

Senator Fifield: Senator Wong, I thought you would know some of these things. If you did, you would not be asking here; you would be asking in PM&C.

Senator WONG: I am asking you, Mr Ray, because I know that Treasury attends ERC. Who chairs in his absence? The Treasurer?

Mr Ray: I think that is public information and I think that is correct.

Senator WONG: Well, why don't we do it that way around?—because it is your minister. How many ERC meetings since the Budget has the Treasurer chaired? You will probably have to take it on notice.

Mr Ray: I do have to take it on notice. (4265)

Senator WONG: I will be fair.

Mr Ray: As you know, the arrangements for Cabinet and Cabinet committees are matters for the Prime Minister's portfolio.

Senator WONG: Does Ms Credlin attend ERC meetings?

Mr Ray: Consistent with longstanding practice, senior members of ministers' offices attend Cabinet committee meetings at the discretion of ministers.

Senator WONG: How many of those meetings where the Prime Minister was not present were attended by the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff or his office?

Senator Fifield: Chair, these are matters for the Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio.

Senator WONG: Okay. I am asking it; you can take it on notice—refer it, if that is what you want. (4266)

Mr Ray: Yes.

Senator WONG: I presume ERC is meeting regularly at the moment—although the Treasurer is away, G20.

Mr Ray: He is not at G20. He was at APEC this week.

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Senator WONG: I am saying that he is away currently and there is the G20 in the offing.

Mr Ray: In November, yes. I think the best answer is that ERC meets as necessary.

Senator Fifield: It never stops meeting.

Senator WONG: Is that the answer—that it never stops meeting?

Mr Ray: No it is not.

Senator Fifield: It is never suspended.

Mr Ray: I think it meets as necessary.

Senator WONG: How many meetings of ERC have there been in the last two months that you have attended? I am asking about your attendance, Mr Ray.

Mr Ray: I would need to check my diary—honestly. (4267)

Senator WONG: Are we talking 20 or three?

Mr Ray: I was on leave, so I was away. So it is not that many.

Senator WONG: Who was acting for you—Ms Harris?

Mr Ray: No. Ms McCulloch was acting for me.

Senator WONG: Can Ms McCulloch tell me how many she attended while you were away?

Mr Ray: You can ask her when she comes later. Normally we do not go to how many meetings we attend, as you know. (4268)

Answer:

It is longstanding practice not to disclose the names of those staff or officials who may attend Cabinet and Cabinet sub-committee meetings. It is a decision for the Prime Minister as to who attends Cabinet and associated meetings.