

**Senate Economics Legislation Committee**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**Treasury Portfolio**

Supplementary Budget Estimates

2014 - 2015

**Department/Agency: ABS**

**Question: SBT4272**

**Topic: ABS Senior Management Positions**

**Reference: Hansard page no. 30-31 - 22 October 2014**

**Senator: Ketter, Chris**

**Question:**

Senator KETTER: If I could just go back to Mr Palmer, I firstly preface my question by making the comment that a number of people have commented on the difficulties that are being experienced by ABS at the moment. The Treasurer has indicated there are some issues and there is a review going on. You have identified your own issues. You are conducting a review into the labour force statistics in particular. I am interested in the fact that there seems to be something of a state of flux in the senior management positions in the ABS at the moment, including yours, Mr Palmer. You are in an acting Australian statistician role at the moment. I had a look at the annual report for 2013-14 and I note there are quite a few positions in that senior management level of the ABS that are acting positions. Is that unusual?

Mr Palmer: Do you mean 'quite a few' in that there are a number of people acting at the SES level?

Senator KETTER: Yes.

Mr Palmer: I do not think that is unusual. We often have a number of people acting at the SES level. I would have to take it on notice. I suspect there are slightly more than there has been in the past.

Senator DASTYARI: A statistical anomaly?

Mr Palmer: I would have to check.

Senator KETTER: I am not good at maths but I counted 16 acting positions.

CHAIR: You sound very confident.

Mr Palmer: In the 16, there is a bit of a cascading effect. I act and someone acts up. That number must be right.

Senator KETTER: I compared that number to the annual report for 2012-13 and I found no positions were acting at that point in time.

Mr Palmer: I find that really strange. I find that very strange actually because at any point in time we have a few people acting.

Senator WONG: It is your annual report, I suspect.

Mr Palmer: I am not arguing the number. I am just saying I find it strange. But it is the case that without the Australian statistician I am loath to permanently appoint people or to make significant structural changes. I do not think that would be appropriate as an acting statistician. Also remember, in the public service there has been a period of downsizing and uncertainty. It is good to have a bit of a buffer by acting people.

Senator KETTER: But 16 positions in an acting capacity out of about 44 in that band that we are looking at in your annual report is quite a significant proportion, would you agree?

Mr Palmer: Yes, I would. I agree.

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**Answer:**

4272. The 2013-2014 ABS Annual Report shows that 16 SES staff members in the organisation chart were acting in their roles as at 30 June 2014. The difference in the published numbers over the reporting years is largely due to a change in our reporting approach. This year the ABS listed people on temporary higher duties and transfer. Eight of those shown as acting were filling in for someone on annual leave, and four were substantive SES but temporarily in a different SES role.