

Senate Economics Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Supplementary Budget Estimates

2014 - 2015

Department/Agency: Treasury

Question: SBT4273

Topic: Appointment process for Australian Statistician

Reference: Hansard page no. 31-34 - 22 October 2014

Senator: Ketter, Chris Dastyari, Sam; Wong, Penny

Question:

Senator KETTER: Mr Palmer, have you any news—perhaps it is a question best directed to the minister—in terms of a permanent appointment for your position?

Mr Palmer: I think that is a question best directed to the government.

Senator KETTER: I would ask Senator Cormann if he has any news he can share with us in respect of that.

Senator Cormann: Not particularly, no. I think the officer at the table is answering the questions appropriately.

Senator DASTYARI: You did not listen. The question was: what is the process for filling the vacancy? He said it is a matter for the minister.

Senator Cormann: It is not a matter for me to fill the position in relation to the ABS. I think the officer has provided a full and complete answer. If the Treasurer wants to add to that answer, I will take that on notice.

Senator DASTYARI: To follow on from that, I want to understand the process. The process is that it is an appointment by the Treasurer through cabinet?

Senator Cormann: It is an appointment that would be made based on a recommendation of the Treasurer, I would envisage. It ultimately goes to the Governor-General. It is a statutory appointment.

Senator DASTYARI: A statutory appointment?

Senator Cormann: Yes. The point is that this is not a matter for me as minister representing the Treasurer. This is ultimately a matter for the official government processes.

Senator DASTYARI: I am just asking what is the process to fill the vacancy. I do not think that is an unreasonable question.

Senator Cormann: The process of filling the vacancy is that there will be a recommendation to the Governor-General.

Senator DASTYARI: The recommendation comes from?

Senator Cormann: The government.

Senator DASTYARI: No, my question is: different appointments have different processes, as we are all aware. Different appointments through agencies have different structures in which appointments are made. My question is: for the ABS is it a different process than obviously it would be if it was a DG of a department or not?

Senator Cormann: It is a statutory appointment. It is an appointment that is made, on the recommendation of the government, by the Governor-General.

Senator DASTYARI: The short list would go to cabinet. Cabinet would make a decision?

Senator Cormann: It is a position that is appointed by the Governor-General on the recommendation of the government.

Senator DASTYARI: Sure.

Senator Cormann: If the Treasurer wants to add any more to this, I have already taken that on

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Senator DASTYARI: Minister, we are not asking for state secrets here.

Senator Cormann: Sure. And I have been as helpful as I can be. If the Treasurer wants to add anything else to that answer he will do so on notice.

CHAIR: Senator, he has taken it notice. He has answered it twice now.

Senator DASTYARI: He has not answered it. That is not answering it.

CHAIR: He has the right to take it on notice.

Senator DASTYARI: Sure. I am just asking a question around that.

Senator Cormann: I have answered to the extent that I can answer, and to the extent you are looking for other information I have already taken that on notice. If the Treasurer, who I represent here in relation to these matters, has anything else that he can add to the answer that I have given to assist the committee, I am sure he will do so.

Senator DASTYARI: Can we be clear about what we are taking on notice then? Senator Cormann, the two questions you are taking on notice are, firstly, what is the process—the process question—for filling the vacancy still created—

Senator Cormann: I have given you that answer.

Senator DASTYARI: No. The answer you have given me is that the Governor-General makes the appointment advice to the government.

Senator Cormann: That is right. That is the process.

Senator DASTYARI: Exactly. I know. It is just embarrassing.

Senator Cormann: There is nothing embarrassing about that at all. That is actually the process.

Senator DASTYARI: No, the question we are asking is: what is the process that leads to this? This is what I want to clarify you are taking on notice. What is the process prior to that in terms of how a recommendation is given to the Treasurer?

Senator Cormann: My answer to that is that the process prior to that is going to be consistent with the process prior to that when you were in government, which is not that long ago.

Senator WONG: If I could ask a question on this, I will be very brief. Is it a cabinet appointment?

Senator Cormann: It is an appointment by the Governor-General.

Senator DASTYARI: He does not know. Let's not beat around the bush.

Senator Cormann: No, it is an appointment—

CHAIR: The minister has agreed to—

Senator WONG: It is a statutory appointment; it is a statutory office.

Senator Cormann: It is an appointment by the Governor-General on a recommendation of government. The internal processes of government are consistent with the internal processes of government that were followed by the previous government. If the Treasurer wants to add anything further to that question—

Senator WONG: Minister, you know what the chair read out earlier. I am not asking who or even timing questions. But these are reasonable questions that the Senate would expect an answer to first. This is a statutory position, isn't it?

Senator Cormann: I already said that before you joined the conversation.

Senator WONG: It is a statutory position. It is at a level that would generally require cabinet consideration?

Senator Cormann: I have already said that too.

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CHAIR: I have heard that you have taken the question on notice to provide the Treasurer with the opportunity, if he wants, to provide some more information. We will move on.

Senator KETTER: I would also like to explore the process leading up to that point and what steps have been taken to fill the position—calling for expressions of interest, advertising? What steps have been taken?

Senator Cormann: Again, I have said that I have taken that part of the question in relation to the internal processes of government—

Senator DASTYARI: We had not asked that question yet.

Senator Cormann: My taking on notice covered the internal processes of government other than the government providing advice to the Governor-General about the appointment.

Answer:

In relation to question SBT4273:

The Australian Statistician is a statutory officer, appointed by the Governor-General under the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*.

The appointment of Mr David Kalisch as the Australian Statistician was made by the Governor-General on 11 December 2014. The Treasurer and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer announced the appointment on 12 December 2014. Further details are available in the press release: <http://jbh.ministers.treasury.gov.au/media-release/065-2014/>.