

Senate Economics Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Supplementary Budget Estimates

2016 - 2017

Division/Agency: Australian Bureau of Statistics

Question No: 30

Topic: 2016 Census – FOI

Reference: Written *or* Hansard page (19 October 2016)

Senator: Ketter, Chris

Question:

1) Some responses to Freedom of Information requests to the ABS have returned estimates of 95 hours to find the web server logs for Census night, 9 August. Why did it take 95 hours to find the web server logs?

Answer:

The initial FOI request in question sought all ‘raw server log files for the Census and ABS websites for 9 August 2016.’ The ABS interpreted this request to include logs across any servers that supported the ABS, Census and eCensus websites.

At the time of the request, a third party was the custodian of much of the information sought, necessitating liaison with that party. ABS IT staff provided a careful estimate of the time required to collate and assess the information, which considered the significant number of visits to the website on the specified date and the highly technical and sensitive nature of the log data.

Consistent with relevant legislation and guidelines issued by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner, the ABS estimated that it would require approximately 95 hours of staff time to retrieve the relevant information, which is held across a number of databases, in an acceptable format for release under FOI. Additionally, based on an expectation that such a search would produce approximately 1,900 pages of content, it was estimated that up to 159 hours of additional time would be required to adequately review and assess the content of each log file prior to releasing any information under FOI.

While the ABS was entitled to refuse the FOI request based on the effort required, it entered into negotiations with the applicant to enable the applicant to receive the most sought-after information in a manner that did not substantially divert resources from the operations of the ABS. The applicant and the ABS reached an agreement on scope on 31 August 2016, narrowing the focus to “the final 100 raw server log rows made by successful visitor requests to the Census (not ABS) website on 9 August 2016”.