

Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE Budget Estimates 2014-2015

Agency - Comcare

Department of Employment Question No. EM0886_15

Senator Tillem asked on 3 June 2014 on proof Hansard page 123

Question

Health and safety monitoring

Senator TILLEM: The next question is whether Comcare provides little or, in some regions, no health and safety monitoring. Ms Parker: My understanding is that, in Tasmania, they have an agreement with the office in Victoria to cover Tasmania from Victoria. Ms Emery: That is correct. They can have arrangements with states and territories in terms of undertaking inspections. But in a recent example, I think, talking about Tasmania, they actually had inspectors on site within half a day of an incident. So they can get people there very quickly. Senator TILLEM: In Mount Isa, for instance? Ms Parker: The scheme covers Commonwealth public servants and the 29 self-insurers. So they may. We can check. Ms Leon: They may not have anyone in Mount Isa. Ms Parker: Every area is covered where we have employees. It is not the whole of Australia. Senator TILLEM: Are Australian Electoral Commission officials covered by Comcare? Ms Emery: Yes, so long as they are employees. If they are contractors, they would not be. Senator TILLEM: But the Australian Electoral Commission has employees in regional Australia, and Mount Isa is an example, because we met some of them. The health and safety monitoring out there is done on an agreement basis with the states. Is that correct? Ms Parker: We do not know. We would have to take that on notice. It is Comcare that runs this, not us. Senator TILLEM: But it falls within the jurisdiction of the department? Ms Parker: No; it is independent. Senator Abetz: No. The Comcare agency was before us yesterday with all their officials. Senator TILLEM: Take it on notice then. I appreciate that.

Answer

Regional Australia Work Health and Safety Monitoring

The Australian Electoral Commission owes a duty under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* to its workers which include contractors, sub-contractors and volunteers.

Comcare, like every work health and safety regulator, undertakes a range of activities including education, monitoring, compliance and enforcement activities to ensure the work health and safety of all workers covered by the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Cth).

Comcare adopts a national approach to undertaking its functions. Comcare has an active program of site visits to regional and remote work places which allows it to identify regional trends in addition to responding to incident notifications.

Should there be an incident at a Mt Isa work site involving a person conducting a business or undertaking in Comcare's jurisdiction, an investigation would be undertaken by the Comcare inspectorate based in Brisbane. Under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (Cth) the person conducting a business or undertaking is required to preserve the site until the inspector arrives.

Comcare has an agreement with state and territory heads of workplace safety authorities to share information and inspectorate resources where necessary. This enables Comcare to draw on the expertise of other regulators and share its own expertise and assistance when required.