

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates 2015 - 2016

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Outcome/Program: Outcome 1: Prime Minister and Cabinet
Topic: Resignation of the former Prime Minister

Senator: Wong, Penny

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Number of pages: 2

Question:

Senator WONG: Leaving aside Mr Turnbull's recent reshuffle and, as has been written about publicly, Mr Crean, what are the other variations to the practice of ministers resigning in such circumstances?

Ms Kelly: My understanding is that ministers may submit a letter of resignation to the Prime Minister, to the Governor-General or to both, or in other instances ministers can resign and take no further action, and the Prime Minister then advises the Governor-General to revoke the appointment.

Senator WONG: Who can answer questions rather than you just saying what you have been advised?

Ms Kelly: We have examined recent practice. There are times when letters of resignation are provided. There are times when letters of resignation may be provided to the Prime Minister and not be forwarded to the department—we cannot eliminate that possibility, as well— and there are other times when no letter is provided and the appointment is revoked.

Senator WONG: When you say 'recent practice', what is your definition of 'recent practice'?

Ms Kelly: We have looked for the periods of the Rudd-Gillard government and the Abbott-Turnbull government.

Senator WONG: Leaving aside the most recent reshuffle—when Mr Turnbull became Prime Minister—on how many occasions do you say over that period that no resignation letter was received by the Prime Minister?

Ms Kelly: I will have to take that on notice. We have examined it since you have raised the issue this afternoon and that was what our assessment of the practice is, but in terms of the exact numbers—

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Senator WONG: Can we just be clear then: when you say 'a number of instances', you have not done a full check of all the ministerial changes over a period of time, you have just picked a few—is that correct?

Ms Kelly: That is correct. That was what we were able to do in the time available and to assist the committee.

Senator WONG: I am sure it was not your intention but the way you made the assertion did

not make it clear that that evidence was based on an incomplete assessment of the history.

Ms Kelly: If that was the case, I apologise, and I correct that evidence. It was done on the basis of a sample in order to assist the committee.

Senator WONG: Sure, that is fine. If you had said that then I would have said, 'What is the sample' et cetera, but if you want to take it on notice then I would appreciate that.

Answer:

As at 8 February 2016, and leaving aside the September 2015 reshuffle and Mr Crean, a resignation letter was not received by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) on four occasions.

This information is based on a review of records between December 2007 and September 2015 held by PM&C. This figure does not take account changes to the ministry following elections.