

**Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
—Additional Estimates Hearing—February 2017**

Answers to Questions on Notice

Parliamentary departments, Department of Parliamentary Services

Topic: **Inadvertent disclosure of mobile telephone numbers**

Question: **97**

Written **Senator Farrell**

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 13 April 2017

With reference to the inadvertent disclosure of mobile telephone numbers of many parliamentarians and their staff published in the Parliamentarians' Mobile and Telecommunications and Data Services Expenditure reports:

Can the Department of Parliamentary Services confirm the cause of the breach?

Answer

The issue is technically classified as a "data spill" as information that should have remained private was released into the public domain. A "breach" would be classified as an event where cyber defences or controls were defeated by an adversary.

The data spill was caused by human error by the external vendor Telco Management. The Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) is required to report on the mobile phone usage of parliamentarians and their staff for each 6 month period. The report, which was published to the APH website, should have contained anonymised data. This anonymisation occurs by removing names and phone number details through deleting those details from the reports. For the most recent six month period, the vendor did not delete the information but changed the information to be redacted to white text on a white background. This allowed an interested user to copy the information from the APH website, paste it into another document and through changing the font colour the private information could be revealed.

These reports have been published since 2014 with no personal data disclosures. DPS staff checked the reports for any factual or computational errors, but as the reports appeared visually identical to reports provided in previous periods there was no reason to believe the information which was not visible on the report had not be completely removed as had occurred in previous periods. On this basis the reports were published to the APH website.