

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S PORTFOLIO

Program: Australian Human Rights Commission

Question No. AE17/006

Senator Macdonald asked the following question at the hearing on 28 February 2017:

CHAIR: Actually there is no need for you—these are really questions for another committee. I was just trying to get your feel. This report, which may or may not be correct, says a total of 62 government and semigovernment agencies made submissions against the change. I am assuming that most of the other 400 will have been in favour of change.

Dr Soutphommasane: No. As I noted, submissions would have also been made by civil society organisations, professional bodies and multicultural and Indigenous representative community organisations.

CHAIR: They are statistics which we can get. I was just after your feel for that newspaper report I thought you might have studied this morning. Can we just go to the Leak case again—if I can call it that—and your account of your procedures, process and own actions in complaints that were made. I am conscious that one of your colleagues has previously indicated that it is not the role of the commission to encourage or advocate for complaints. That is my understanding of the commission's role, too. In that context, I am interested if you might be able to just walk us through your actions which have been reported, certainly, in a contrary way. As we all know, what you read and hear in the media is not always accurate, as Professor Triggs found out to her dismay. So I will give you the opportunity to walk us through that.

Dr Soutphommasane: We made extensive submissions on this, including in our submissions to the parliamentary joint committee's inquiry. I am happy to provide you with a copy of that, as it may take you through the matter and the detail you are after.

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

The Commission's submission (9 December 2016) and supplementary submission (15 February 2017) to the 'Freedom of speech in Australia' inquiry are both available on the Commission website: <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/subject-index-submissions-commonwealth-parliament>