

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
AUSTRALIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Question No. SBE15/003

Senator Lindgren asked the following question at the hearing on 20 October 2015:

Senator LINDGREN: Professor Triggs, Commissioner Ryan is well placed in her dual role as an age and disability discrimination commissioner to drive the important work to protect the rights of people with disabilities and older persons. Could you please update me on the progress of the Willing to Work inquiry?

I understand that you are embarking on a national consultation process as well. If you could have a chat about those, please, that would be fabulous.

Prof. Triggs: If I may, because I am really pleased that you have asked this question, perhaps if I could take an element of your question on notice to make sure we get the information to you. Commissioner Ryan is well underway with this inquiry; as you may know, it was requested by the attorney. We had already been well advanced through Commissioner Ryan's work on age-and-employment discrimination, just trying to map and understand the prevalence of discrimination on the basis of age. They have been, at least at the preliminary level, rather disturbing prevalence statistics.

At the request of the attorney we are now conducting a fuller inquiry, which includes employment discrimination in relation to the disabled, where employment statistics are quite poor. One reason Commissioner Ryan is not here today is that she is conducting a focus-and-community-group meeting, and she is doing that across the country. She has an advisory group. She is conducting quantitative research as well so that we have proper survey and statistical data that we can use along with the softer qualitative material through the focus groups. She is also receiving submissions.

Commissioner Ryan intends to report by about June next year when she completes her joint appointment on both of those portfolios. What I can say is that this is really, in a sense, hitting an important issue for the public. People are coming forward to talk about their experiences of age discrimination and discrimination on the basis of disability. Any further detail, if I may, I would like to provide to you on notice.

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

The Commission has established a submissions process, a timeline for national consultations and the governance framework for the Inquiry. Two issues papers, one focusing on older people and the other on people with disability, were released shortly after the Inquiry was launched.

Consultations commenced on 6 July 2015. Public consultations and roundtable discussions have been held across Australia to give people an opportunity to provide their views.

Individuals can register their interest in attending a consultation via the Commission's website. To date over 970 people have registered their interest in the Inquiry.

To date more than 800 people have attended consultations, including older people, people with disability, carers and family members, small business, advocacy groups and peak bodies, representatives from both private and public sector, and policy experts.

Peak bodies and key stakeholders including the Business Council of Australia, Australian Industry Group, Council on the Ageing, Australian Network on Disability, People with

Disability Australia and other business groups and organisations have supported the Commission in organising and hosting certain consultations.

Targeted consultations will continue to be held this year and early 2016 including with business, peak bodies and specific demographic groups.

In addition to the option of attending a consultation in person the Commission is also accepting verbal and written submissions to the Inquiry. Individuals and organisations can make submissions in a variety of ways including online, in writing, by telephone.

Submissions opened on 26 June 2015 and will be close on 4 December 2015. Over 150 submissions have been received to date. Public submissions are made available on the Commission's website.