

**Senate Standing Committee on Economics**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**Treasury Portfolio**

Additional Estimates 14 – 15 February 2007

**Question:** aet 60 (ABS)

**Topic:** Employment and Reporting of Interviewers

**Hansard Page:** Written

**Senator WONG asked:**

- (1) Every year in the ABS annual report, the ABS provides details of staff employed under the Public Service Act, including tables and graphs.

Why does the ABS not include the details of the 652 interviewers who constitute nearly 20% of the ABS staff and are employed under the Australian Bureau of Statistics Act?

- (2) Can the Minister provide reasons why the ABS not employ the 652 interviewers under the Public Service Act?
- (3) How long has the ABS been employing interviewer under the ABS Act?
- (4) Are there any legal reasons that disallow the interviewers from being employed under the Public Service Act?
- (5) Who else, apart from the interviewers, are on-going employee and employed under the ABS Act?

**Answer:**

- (1) Requirements for annual reports are specified in guidelines issued by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (last issued in June 2006). These guidelines state that the discussion on management of human resources in annual reports must be supported by specific categories of statistics relating to employees employed under the *Public Service Act 1999* (Public Service Act). ABS interviewers are not employed under the Public Service Act.
- (2) Interviewers are employed under Regulation 3 of the Statistics Regulations, and appointed under Section 16 of the *Census and Statistics Act 1905* (Census and Statistics Act) as authorised officers for the purpose of the Census and Statistics Act. The employment of interviewers under this regulation is a historical one, based on the difference between interviewing and office-based work, and the irregular and intermittent hours worked by interviewers. In line with the commitment in clause 36 of the ABS Interviewers Certified Agreement 2003-2005, an investigation was undertaken by the ABS into the advantages and disadvantages associated with engaging interviewers under the Public Service Act. This review concluded that there was not a strong business case to move the interviewers to coverage under the Public Service Act. This

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conclusion was largely reached as a move would be unlikely to generate significant productivity savings to balance the costs of actioning the move. In addition, many of the identified benefits of coverage under the Public Service Act are already routinely provided to interviewers through other means. For example, the ABS has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Merit Protection Commission which gives interviewers access to appeal rights through the Commission.

- (3) Interviewers are not employed under the *Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975*. This is an error in the 2005-06 ABS annual report, which the ABS regrets. The ABS has been employing interviewers under Regulation 3 of the Statistics Regulations since 1964.
- (4) The ABS has not identified any legal reasons that disallow interviewers from being employed under the Public Service Act.
- (5) Apart from the interviewers, all ongoing staff in the ABS are employed under the Public Service Act.