Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Additional Estimates – 25–26 February 2009

Question: aet 76

Topic: Retail Surveys

Hansard Page: E4 (26 February 2009)

Senator ABETZ asked:

Senator ABETZ—The surveys you do I find to be vitally important. I have always thought that but now in my role as shadow science and research minister it has been reinforced to me by a whole host of people that the work that the ABS does is absolutely vital, irrespective of what sector you are in. That raw data and information that you collect is fundamental to future planning no matter in what area or pursuit you are in. The information you collect is vitally important. There are two areas I would like to concentrate on today. First are retail surveys. I understand you used to do them monthly. It then went quarterly; is that right?

Mr Ewing—No. The survey is monthly and was always monthly. What we did do was reduce the size of the sample of small firms in the monthly collection.

Senator ABETZ—From what to what? Are you able to tell us?

Mr Ewing—I do not know the exact number; Bronwyn?

Ms Driscoll—It is about a 60 per cent reduction in the size.

Senator ABETZ—A 60 per cent reduction in anybody's language is a fairly significant reduction. When you say 60 per cent, what does that mean in actual numerical terms?

Ms Driscoll—I would have to take that question on notice—

Senator ABETZ—Are we talking reducing it from 100 down to 40 or 1,000 down to 400 or 100,000—

Ms Driscoll—We are talking about reducing it from something around 10,000 down to something—

Senator ABETZ—Like 4,000?

Ms Driscoll—But I will confirm those numbers.

Senator ABETZ—In rough terms, and I will not hold you to it, I accept it is being taken on notice, from 10,000 to 4,000?

Ms Driscoll—That would be the order of magnitude of what has occurred.

Answer:

The reduction in the monthly sample for the Retail Trade Survey is set out in the following table:

Comparison of pre and post June 2008 sample sizes				
	June 2008 sample		**July 2008 sample**	**September quarter 2008 sample**
	Total per month	**Reduced scope per month**	**Total per month**	**Total per quarter**
	No.	No.	No.	No.
Completely enumerated sector	730	640	500	(a) 500
Sample sector	3,214	2,775	901	(b) 2,702
Total	**3,944**	**3,415**	**1,401**	**3,202**
(a) Reporting each month in the quarter				
(b) Reporting for one month in the quarter				

It should be noted that all of the units with a significant contribution to retail sales continued to be included in the survey in the completely enumerated sector. Therefore, the 59% cut to the sample does not indicate a commensurate cut in the coverage of retail sales.

The article included in the July 2008 release of *Retail Trade Trends*, 8501.0 (copy attached) provides more information, including the impact on relative standard errors.