

Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Additional Estimates

23 – 24 February 2011

Question No: AET 159
Topic: 2011 Census Residential Vacancy
Hansard Page: E 53
Senator Ludlam asked:

Senator LUDLAM—Thank you. I think the chair is correct in that it is a policy question. Can I just grab

the minister's attention for a split second. Can I put it to you, Minister, recognising that we have probably missed the boat for the 2011 census, that we do not appear to have an accurate idea at any given time of the degree of residential vacancy in Australian communities—that is, places where people could be living and, for whatever the reason might be, there is no-one there at the moment. Is this something that the government would consider might be a very handy indicator for us to have?

Senator Sherry—I do not know. I suppose it would be useful. You always have to weigh up the costs involved in collecting it and the challenges that have been mentioned. You might be able to do something in cooperation with local government because of their property based systems. I am happy to raise it with the Assistant Treasurer and see if something can be done.

Senator LUDLAM—I am raising it for non-trivial reasons. The last two census outcomes on unoccupied dwellings on the night of the census averages around seven per cent or eight per cent in the big metro areas. That is a reasonably constant figure from 2000 to 2006. We know there are structural issues in our tax system that actually provide perverse incentives for landlords to keep properties vacant to squeeze supply. So I think we do have quite legitimate public policy reasons for wanting to know what the actual vacancy rate is.

Senator Sherry—I accept that you are not wanting to be trivial. As to the reasons you have identified, there

may be other issues, so I am happy to raise it with the Assistant Treasurer.

Senator LUDLAM—Thank you very much.

Answer:

The ABS confirms that Census data is not an indicator of vacant dwellings. The Census provides data on residential properties believed to be unoccupied on Census night.

In late 2012, the ABS will call for submissions in preparation for the 2016 Census and invite public comment on changes to the Census form. An information paper with more details about the submission process will be available at that time from www.abs.gov.au