

Economics Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education Portfolio
Additional Estimates Hearing 2012-13
13 February 2013

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY, INNOVATION, SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

TOPIC: Access to information in the vehicle industry

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard, 13 February 2013, pages 36-37)

QUESTION No.: AI-186

Senator CAMERON: But let us just go to that question of openness in government. The Howard government had similar restrictions on the access to information on any schemes they had in the vehicle industry. Is that correct?

Mr Durrant: Yes, as I mentioned earlier, when we drew up the ATS legislation we drew on parts of the act for the Automotive Competitiveness Investment Scheme, including the publication element of that. In fact, basically the same clause with some additions included.

Senator CAMERON: So, basically, nothing has changed to guide your determination on freedom of information from the Howard approach to the approach under the Gillard government?

Mr Durrant: A significant change is the decision of the parliament, through the legislation, to publish the aggregate numbers of assistance provided to the motor vehicle producers, the component producers, the service providers and the toolers. That is a change that was introduced to the ATS that was not part of the previous scheme.

Senator CAMERON: So the aggregate assistance was not publicised, or was not available, under the Howard government?

Mr Durrant: I will just check with my—

Mr Lawson: I think it was that the breakdown of the aggregate assistance was not published. The aggregate assistance, of course, was published. What happened in the 2009 compared to the 2003 legislation—if I get my dates right—was that previously the total was published; it was in the budget papers. Now, in addition to that the annual report publishes a breakdown between the motor vehicle producers and three other categories.

Senator CAMERON: So there is more information on the public record now than there was under the Howard government?

Mr Lawson: We like to make comparisons on dates, rather than perhaps make political judgements.

Senator CAMERON: You should not play those games. It is a simple question and you should answer the question.

Mr Durrant: I have just racked my mind and clarified with my colleague from AusIndustry: in the later years of the ACIS scheme the department did start to publicise those totals by category in its annual report.

Senator CAMERON: So that did come in towards the end of the Howard government?

Mr Durrant: Correct.

Senator CAMERON: But it was not for the bulk—how long?

Mr Durrant: We would have to check on this—

Mr Sexton: In the last few years of the ACIS scheme we did start to publish in the department's annual report figures on assistance going to the various groupings within the automotive sector.

That was a result of a recommendation from the Auditor-General, who thought that information should be made available.

ANSWER

The value of ACIS assistance provided to the various groupings within the automotive sector was first published in the Department's 2007-08 annual report.