

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: COMMONWEALTH SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH ORGANISATION (CSIRO)

TOPIC: Workplace bullying

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard, 13 February 2013, page 17)

QUESTION No.: AI-5

Senator BUSHBY: Minister, the workplace relations minister said yesterday that Labor believes that bullying has no place in the Australian workplace. Is it true that Mr Williams separately approached and wrote to both his Labor MP, Mr Cheeseman, and the then science minister, Senator Carr, to tell them of the intimidation and bullying that he was experiencing—or says he was experiencing at the CSIRO—and make a plea for help? But, in the end they merely referred him back to CSIRO?

Senator Lundy: I am sure you can appreciate that I cannot answer those questions. I can assure you, though, that the government's attitude toward bullying is that it has no place at all. I can only suggest that we take those questions on notice, but I do not know if we will be able to answer them.

Senator BUSHBY: You may also seek to take on notice that seven former CSIRO employees collectively wrote a letter last year to the then science minister, Senator Evans, in which they detailed a long series of incidences and concerns about workplace misconduct at CSIRO. He effectively told them there was nothing new in their letter and that he would not act upon their concerns unless they had something new to add.

Senator Lundy: No, I cannot. But, I can suggest to you—and I do not know the timing—that the investigations and the issue were taken very seriously by CSIRO at the time, and that the minister would have had confidence in that.

Senator BUSHBY: Will you take that question on notice, though? Just to—

Senator Lundy: I do so on the basis that I do not know if it can be answered, but of course, we will take the question on notice.

ANSWER

In a response to a letter from a former CSIRO officer, purportedly sent on behalf of six other former CSIRO staff, former Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research advised the correspondent that he could not comment on the allegations made with respect to the other people referenced in the letter without their written consent, which had not been provided. In his reply the former Minister further noted that the matters raised with respect to the author's experience had all been investigated to some degree already and that if any new information was available to support the concerns being raised that these should be provided in order to enable appropriate investigation.