

Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Resources, Energy and Tourism Portfolio

Additional Estimates

14 February 2013

Question: AR16

Topic: Minister's comment from 2007 on 'added expense of a carbon tax'

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Senator Ronaldson asked:

Senator RONALDSON: Are you aware of a comment that the minister made at a transport forum leaders summit in 2007, which said:

Australia relies almost exclusively on air travel. That is why I implore the industry to take hold of the debate before the debate takes hold of you and you are left dealing with the added expense of a carbon tax.

I would suggest to you, Mr McEvoy-

Senator Ludwig: Before we go into suggesting something to Mr McEvoy, one of the things that I do think is fair to a person who is appearing at estimates is that, if a quote is going to be taken out of a document, they should be provided with the whole document so that they can see the quote; they can answer the question once they have seen the particular quote first. It is so that people do not selectively quote from a document. People will find that this is a view I have taken in many estimates hearings, in order to be fair to the witnesses that appear.

CHAIR: Senator Ronaldson, you are being invited by the minister to table the document you are quoting from.

Senator RONALDSON: I am sure there is someone listening to this who might have the full transcript. I presume you are not accusing me of misquoting the comment-

Senator Ludwig: I would not know. I have not seen the document.

Senator RONALDSON: You are suggesting I might come along to estimates, knowing the rules and regulations of this place, and give you a false quote?

Senator Ludwig: I have not seen the document. I think, to be fair to witnesses-

Senator RONALDSON: I very, very much hope that that is not what you are suggesting.

CHAIR: No. He was not suggesting it. He has invited you to table the document, and on the basis that you have not, I take it that you decline. On that basis, neither the witnesses nor the minister will probably be able to give you a comprehensive response. But ask your question anyway.

Senator Ludwig: You could probably ask the question in a different way.

Senator RONALDSON: The words "added expense of a carbon tax" would indicate, quite clearly, that a carbon tax imposes added expense, would it not?

Senator Ludwig: Is that a rhetorical question?

Senator RONALDSON: I am asking you, or Mr McEvoy, or Mr Clarke, or anyone else who wants to proffer an opinion, if the obvious take out of those words is that a carbon tax will add expense?

Senator Ludwig: They do not proffer opinions; they answer questions. Again, Chair, I am not trying to be difficult here. People are prepared to answer questions at estimates about their portfolio responsibilities, and, given that I represent Mr Ferguson, I will also take anything on notice that I do not have any direct knowledge of, but in this instance I do object to what is a circular question being put about an unseen document. The witnesses cannot then comment or provide an opinion on it in any event, but they could answer a question in respect of it. I ask that the question either be reformulated or withdrawn.

CHAIR: Senator Ronaldson, the minister is taking a point. He is asking that the question be withdrawn.

Senator RONALDSON: You have got to be joking.

CHAIR: Let me finish, please. Minister, you have advised that you do not have knowledge of this, and hence you are unable to answer the question. If officials do not have knowledge, by definition, they cannot answer the question. Both of you may take it on notice. Senator Ronaldson is entitled to ask that question. If officials and ministers are unable to answer it, then that is the end of it.

Senator RONALDSON: Thank you.

Senator Ludwig: I am happy to take that on notice. I am always happy to take questions on notice. I will seek whether Minister Ferguson has anything to say in respect to that matter.

CHAIR: In that case, minister, unless the officials have something to add, you have responded to the question by advising that you will take it on notice.

Answer:

The Department is aware of the comments.