

**Senate Economics Legislation Committee**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**Treasury Portfolio**

Budget Estimates, 1 to 4 June 2004

**Question: Bud 80**

**Topic: Publishing of Information - Government Decision**

**Hansard Page: E73/74**

Senator Collins asked:

You are not aware that, for the last six years, FaCS has delivered four year forward estimates to our estimates committee?

**Mr Tune**—No, I am not.

**Senator JACINTA COLLINS**—You are not aware of the fact that DEST released four-year forward estimates in the last round of answers to questions on notice?

**Mr Tune**—No, I am not.

**Senator JACINTA COLLINS**—But you are aware that you advised a FaCS officer that the underlying assumptions, in some cases, may be confidential—

**Mr Tune**—Are confidential. The government has decided not to release them; therefore, they are Confidential.

**Senator JACINTA COLLINS**—When did the government decide not to release them?

...

**Senator JACINTA COLLINS**—Chair, the question was: when was the decision made that Treasury should not answer any question other than where the information is printed in the budget papers?

**CHAIR**—Does the witness accept the premise that that was the decision?

**Mr Tune**—That the government decided that?

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Mr Tune**—All I know is what is published now.

**Mr McCullough**—After we had our discussion last night, I went back to look at this very issue that was raised about a year ago. Mr Smith, of course, is not with us anymore, but he addressed this issue directly and I believe that you, as chair, ruled on

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his position. Mr Smith had referred to a longstanding practice not to disaggregate figures that had been included in budgets. I think that is the principle that Mr Tune is referring to: the government chooses the information to publish in its budget papers. If it is a question of wanting additional information that is not published, then it has been—in Mr Smith's assertion—a convention for quite some time that the question is taken on notice in order that it be referred to the minister for the minister to then decide whether a greater level of disaggregation or a further amount of information is to be published.

**CHAIR**—I will review that ruling. But, for the time being, what I understand Senator Collins to be asking is the date on which a decision was made and she has, in putting that question, characterised the decision. If it is a fair characterisation of the decision or if it is accepted that a decision to that effect was made, it would be a fair question to ask on what date such a decision was made. But if you do not accept the characterisation of the decision or you do not accept that such a decision was ever made, then it is not a fair question because it is based on a false premise. Whichever of those two propositions obtains, you can take the question on notice.

**Mr Tune**—I do not know the answer, regardless of which premise I accept, so I would have to take it on notice.

Answer:

Under the *Charter of Budget Honesty Act (1998)* the Government is required to publish a budget economic and fiscal outlook report that provides information to allow the assessment of the Government's fiscal performance.

The provision of more detailed information than is provided in the Budget papers is a matter for individual Ministers to decide on a case-by-case basis.