

Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Budget Estimates 3-5 June 2008

Question: bet 86

Topic: Fuel Watch Bill - Timing

Hansard Page: E83

Senator Abetz asked:

Senator ABETZ—I have no criticism in any way, shape or form of the way the officers have conducted themselves in this matter, the way that they have met the requests of the minister. The question was: why did the minister make this quite—if I might suggest—unreasonable demand on the officers when there does not seem to have been a genuine reason as to the urgency? What would have happened if this bill had been introduced a week or a fortnight later?

Senator Sherry—I am sure there have been previous occasions—I do not know about under this government—under your government where there were very tight time lines. I do not know the precise reason—

Senator ABETZ—Of course there have been. I am asking about this particular one—

Senator Sherry—And you keep interrupting—

CHAIR—The minister was attempting to answer.

Senator Sherry—You just cannot resist it. I am sure there were previous occasions when you were in government where there were tight time lines set and there were officials who worked in a very dedicated and committed way. I am sure that there were similar requests made when you were in government. As to the reasons for Mr Bowen, the Assistant Treasurer, setting that deadline and the precise terms in which he set the deadline, I will take it on notice and ask for his response.

...

Senator ABETZ—Can I commend you, Ms Holdaway and other staff, Mr French and Mr Murphy. I have no criticism of the way you worked and performed. Indeed, I am sort of tempted to make a job offer and say you have only got to work 18 hours a day, but can I ask the minister or Dr Henry: when does Fuelwatch kick in? Isn't it 30 November 2008?

Mr Murphy—There are a lot of administrative arrangements but the ACCC has got to set up—

Senator ABETZ—But a week was neither here nor there in the scheme of things, was it? You could possibly take that on notice when you ask the minister what the urgency was to require these excellent, dedicated staff to work around the clock.

Answer:

The Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs has advised that, at times, the Government is required to prioritise its legislative programme and the timing of the introduction of the National Fuelwatch Scheme legislation reflected its importance to the Government.