

Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Budget Estimates, 2 June – 4 June 2009

Question: bet 105

Topic: OzCar – Representations #2

Hansard Page: E43,44

Senators Pratt & Abetz asked:

Senator PRATT—My question is brief. I note that Mr Grech has confirmed that we have had both opposition and government members of the parliament make contact on behalf of local car dealers. I note that, at this stage, he has declined to name them, but I would like to place that request on notice.

Senator Sherry—I will go further. I will ask the officer to name all those members of parliament who have put in requests or referred correspondence.

Senator PRATT—Thank you.

Mr Grech—I am happy to take it on notice.

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Senator Sherry—Further to that, in taking it on notice we will provide a list of all individuals and organisations who have made requests on behalf of any car dealer in the land, including the Catholic priest, and we will release publicly the names of those individuals and organisations, including all MPs.

Senator ABETZ—Could you include in that list which of those MPs that have made representations have been provided with an electorate vehicle, including registration, insurance and RACQ or similar membership, by the company on whose behalf they have made those representations? That is where the line of professionalism and conflict of interest is clearly overstepped, unless there was a complete disclosure of that conflict of interest. It will be very interesting to see how many car dealerships had representations made by two members of parliament who just happen to have been the two that announced the OzCar facility, namely the Prime Minister and the Treasurer. Put that on your list as well and I would be much obliged.

Senator Sherry—I reject your claim and assertions.

Senator ABETZ—Are you taking it on notice or not?

Senator Sherry—I am taking that element of it on notice. It would be perfectly natural that any member of the public, including the car dealers who saw the Treasurer and Prime Minister, particularly as the Treasurer and Prime Minister have announced that particular facility, to contact those particular officers no matter where they are from in the country.

Senator ABETZ—In all of Australia the only car dealership is the one that has given the Prime Minister a personal car.

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Senator Sherry—Be reasonable, Senator Abetz. Can I finish my answer without interruption?

CHAIR—Yes.

Senator Sherry—Just as it is perfectly reasonable for people to write to the Prime Minister about many things that are then referred on, including in my own area where people write to the Prime Minister about executive pay, short selling, which is a government area where we have direct policy responsibility, it is perfectly reasonable for people to write to the Treasurer of the day and the Prime Minister about particular policy issues and for them to refer them on. It is perfectly reasonable. I reject your claims and your assertions about a conflict of interest. I totally reject them.

CHAIR—You will take it on notice?

Senator Sherry—I will take on notice the specific question.

Senator ABETZ—Thank you very much, and I think you have made a very good point that undoubtedly the Prime Minister who announced this facility may well have received a huge number of representations. Can you then take on notice how many representations the Prime Minister received and which one—because we know it is only one—did he deem appropriate to make representations for? I think you will find surprisingly it might just be John Grant Motors, the same one that gave the Prime Minister a car—

Senator Sherry—The officer has already indicated—

Senator ABETZ—Everybody else who did not give the Prime Minister a car did not have representations made on their behalf—

Senator Sherry—Can I now answer? The officer has indicated there was only one reference from the Prime Minister's office—one. I have taken on notice as to who that is from and we have explained the reasons. The officer has explained the perfectly valid and reasonable commercial considerations as to why no request or reference has been made public, but I will take it on notice.

Senator ABETZ—I think you took on notice the issue as to how many car dealers had two representations made on their behalf and especially how many had representations made on their behalf by both the Prime Minister and the Treasurer, the two top people, or possibly within the top three people of the government's—

CHAIR—We have dealt with that.

(further information can be located on page E54-55 of Hansard)

Answer:

The Australian National Audit Office released its report, *Representations to the Department of the Treasury in relation to motor dealer financing assistance*, on 4 August 2009. Table 2.1 from this report lists all representations made to the Treasury on behalf of car dealers or directly by car dealers.