

Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Budget Estimates

1 June – 3 June 2010

Question: BET 304

Topic: Small business related investigations

Hansard Page: Written

Senator Eggleston asked:

1. Can the Commission indicate the average time taken by the Commission to complete small business-related investigations?
2. Has the Commission undertaken any benchmarking exercises regarding the nature and type of small business related complaints?

Answer:

1. It is difficult for the ACCC to advise of the average length of investigations that relate to small businesses, given that a large number of investigations relate to small business issues, whether or not they arise from small business complaints. Beyond the characterisation difficulty, the length of each investigation varies significantly depending on a range of factors including, for example, the complexity of the matter, extent of information provided, approach of trader in assisting the investigation, and the accessibility of complainants and witnesses. Some matters can be concluded very quickly, within a month, whereas other matters may take many months, and in some cases over 12 months.
2. Where possible, the ACCC's Infocentre and on the Small Business Helpline identify those contacts directly related to small business – either callers complaining about a small business, or small businesses contacting the ACCC to make a complaint or inquiry. The ACCC also collects demographic information about small business callers. Analysis of this information can assist the ACCC to identify particular areas of the *Trade Practices Act 1974* that are of concern to small businesses (for example, a large number of recent small business inquiries were about component pricing) and to tailor its educative or compliance activities toward addressing those concerns. Similarly, this analysis can help to identify potential patterns of conduct or market behaviour impacting small business and areas requiring ACCC intervention.