

Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Budget Estimates

1 June – 3 June 2010

Question: BET 52

Topic: Population Policies

Hansard Page: E53-54 (02/06/2010)

Senator BERNARDI asked:

Senator BERNARDI—That is fine. What is the process of the consultation that you intend to undertake?

Mr R Murray—The minister and we are having discussions around all of that, so that has not been settled as yet. Certainly between the minister and us, we are making significant planning at least for the first stage of consultation. Prime Minister has in his press release made a commitment to an open consultation process, and that is our terms of reference on that.

Senator BERNARDI—Can you detail what the first round of consultations will be?

Mr R Murray—I cannot because that would be pre-empting decisions that the minister needs to make around that.

Senator BERNARDI—The minister has repeatedly said that 12 months is a very tight time frame to do this major task and that there was going to be a broad range of consultation two months into it. There has still been nothing decided. Is that what you are telling me?

Mr R Murray—No. I am not saying that the minister has not made decisions. He clearly has in his own mind and we have assisted him in coming to some of those decisions about what the first phase of consultation would be between now and, say, over the next six months, because we do need a significant amount of time in the first phase of actually getting across all the issues. You can hear from Senator Brown one side of all of these issues, and they are pretty complicated. There are a lot of trade-offs between a lot of the issues. So we want to have a reasonable amount of time over this first consultation period so that we can get all the issues on the table and all the issues discussed.

Senator BERNARDI—My concern is that there are a huge number of issues to be considered; it crosses over an enormous number of portfolio areas. There was clearly very little consultation before the announcement. There has been nothing concrete announced since the announcement by the minister. I am looking at his website. He has not put out one press release about it or anything else.

Senator Sherry—Your questions are going to the role of the minister. In terms of the minister, I know firsthand that, in gathering briefs, material and information in his own responsibilities, he sought—by way of example—a very significant set of data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics on population issues as well as face-to-face briefings. I know this because I have responsibility for the Australian Bureau of Statistics, so I signed off on the briefs and the documents. So that is an example of

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preparatory work. Just because a minister does not issue a press release does not mean that he is not focused on the job at hand.

Mr R Murray—I add to that that it is not as if we or the minister have been sitting around twiddling our thumbs. The minister has been trying to absorb as much information he can around this whole topic and having discussions and multiple meetings with a whole range of people. I am not quite sure how many, but it certainly must—

Senator BERNARDI—You would be able to take it on notice, wouldn't you—

Senator Sherry—I will take that on notice.

Senator BERNARDI—Who he has met with and the times he has met with them?

Senator Sherry—I do not necessarily believe we will be disclosing who he has met with. That is up to the minister. As you very well know, no ministers current or past in this place have disclosed their diaries. That has not been the practice. But I will take it on notice, and I am sure we can give you an indication of the—

Senator EGGLESTON—Posthumously!

Senator Sherry—Pardon?

Senator BERNARDI—The *Latham Diaries*. He helped us out!

Mr R Murray—We want to get to a position where we have a more structured program of consultations, and that is where the minister is moving. You are asking me to answer questions on the minister's behalf, and I just cannot pre-empt what he is going to say.

Senator BERNARDI—Time is short. Would you be to take on notice to undertake to provide me with the times and dates of briefings that your department has provided to the minister in regard to population policies?

Senator Sherry—Will take it on notice.

Mr R Murray—We will certainly do that.

Answer:

Please refer to the answer to BET 53.