

Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Budget Estimates

1 June 2010

Question: BET 246

Topic: Complaints – clarification of statistics (ATO)

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Senator XENOPHON—I would be grateful for that. In terms of the number of complaints that the tax office has dealt with, with the implementation of the Change Program, and I appreciate that it is a massive

program, what complaints were there on a monthly basis, for instance, the first four months of this year compared—

Mr Butler—I can tell you the total number. We are now up to 17,000 complaints—

Senator XENOPHON—And they are complaints from tax agents?

Mr Butler—And taxpayers.

Senator XENOPHON—So some of those complaints represent a number of taxpayers who have a complaint.

Mr Butler—Yes, that is correct. And we put through 3.4 million returns, so out of 3.4 million returns we had 17,000 complaints.

Senator XENOPHON—So those 17,000 complaints might reflect the concerns of 100,000 taxpayers?

Mr Butler—No, if it is a taxpayer complaint it is about their own personal return. I would need to check how we count it. An agent could have checked on five returns, for example, and would count that as one or five. I believe we would count that as five. I will need to check.

Senator XENOPHON—Sorry, I could not hear you very well. In terms of the number of complaints, some of the 17,000 complaints would reflect multiple complaints. Is that correct?

Mr Butler—I would need to confirm that.

Senator XENOPHON—If you could.

Mr Butler—It would also be fair to say that people would have contacted us through our call centre and they might be going to put in a complaint and they talk that through. We might say, 'The assessment is scheduled to issue in two days time' and they might choose not to go ahead.

Answer:

From 1 July 2009 to 15 April 2010, complaints from tax practitioners were recorded as a single complaint without reference to the number of affected clients. In that period we received approximately 10,000 tax practitioner complaints.

For the period from 16 April 2010, complaints received from tax practitioners have been recorded as a complaint for each affected client. The change in the approach to reporting was adopted to more accurately reflect the number of individual taxpayers affected, and the fact that work is required to resolve each taxpayer's issue according to their particular circumstances. In situations where a tax practitioner lodges a complaint on behalf of say, five clients, the ATO now counts this as five complaints.

From 16 April to 30 June 2010, using the new approach for recording and reporting complaints, we received 13, 147 complaints from tax practitioners. Information from manual records indicates that this represents complaints from approximately 8,900 tax practitioners.