

Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Budget Estimates

31 May – 2 June 2011

Question No: BET 50

Topic: Change Program system defects

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Senator Xenophon asked:

Senator XENOPHON: I accept that. Are there any severity 1 defects now in the system?

Mr Butler: There are no defects in the system. No, there is not. There are severity 2 defects, and we have workarounds and things like that.

Senator XENOPHON: On those, can you give me an idea of how many—you have already answered for severity 1—severity 2, 3 and 4 defects have been currently identified in the system? When will they be fixed, or what is the timeframe for that?

Mr Butler: It might be more useful, perhaps, that I give you a program of work that pulls together in four tranches things we want to improve with the system. But these are really improvements going forward.

Answer:

With any information technology system there are ongoing changes and improvements which are put in place. ATO staff may identify what they believe are errors in a system and as well, they may have suggestions for changes and improvements to a system. They can put forward these issues and they prescribe a severity rating. Given the complexity and comprehensive nature of the systems the ATO operates the number of issues put forward by staff may, at any time, be in the hundreds.

It is common for different staff to identify the same issue a number of times. Further, it is common for one change to a system to resolve a number of issues put forward by staff. A recent example of this is when one change to a system resolved 52 issues raised by staff. This involved service restoration activities for the ATO's Siebel system to recover from a service outage that lasted for 40 minutes. The 52 issues were raised quickly by staff at the start of the service interruption and ceased to be reported once staff were advised the ATO was on top of the issue. All of the 52 issues were closed once service was restored at the end of the 40 minutes.

All issues are examined at the time they are raised. Sometimes no change to the system is needed and this is communicated back to the staff member. If it is agreed

that a change to the system is needed, this is prioritised along with other information technology work.

Currently the ATO's is working on ongoing improvements to its information technology systems under four tranches covering the following key themes:

1. Enhancements to end user performance and useability. For example, improving accessibility to data to reduce the average time it takes to answer calls.
2. Review of manual processes with a view to increasing efficiency through automation or by improving manual processes. For example, increasing the number of returns which can be processed automatically.
3. Reducing delays in addressing issues that impact on taxpayer experience. For example, improving the data exchange and file transmission arrangements with agencies such as Centrelink and Child Support Agency.
4. Improvements to the management of workflow and reporting. For example, further extending the automation of reports to support streamlined support reconciliation activities.

This work will be carried out over the course of the 2011 and 2012 return processing period.