

## Senate Standing Committee on Economics

### ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

#### Treasury Portfolio

#### Budget Estimates

31 May – 2 June 2011

**Question No:** BET 68

**Topic:** ATO workplace absences – reasons

**Hansard Page:** 125

#### Senator Cormann asked:

**Senator CORMANN:** Did you have a review recently into the issue of workplace absences across the ATO?

**Ms Granger:** We have an ongoing focus on it—it is not a specific review—to see what we can do to reduce those and come into line with the public sector figures.

**Senator CORMANN:** If you are having an ongoing review, if you are monitoring on an ongoing basis—

**Ms Granger:** An ongoing strategy.

**Senator CORMANN:** Are there any identified reasons as to why there is, on the face of it, such a large discrepancy between workplace absences in the ATO compared to the APS more generally?

**Ms Granger:** As I said, I am happy to take those questions on notice and get you a better answer.

#### Answer:

The ATO has an ongoing strategy to address the issue of workplace absence. This strategy includes targeted projects to address specific issues and biannual surveys to assess employee engagement. In accordance with good management practices, aspects of the strategy are reviewed at appropriate times to ensure that it remains effective, targeted and achieving results. This strategy is summarised as follows:

- Focused attention on workplace absence commenced in 2008, at which time an Attendance and Productivity Improvement project was implemented. The project was responsible for the implementation of a number of ongoing initiatives to foster an attendance culture and address workplace absence.

These initiatives included improved reporting to better understand absence patterns, and strengthening manager capability in this area. The rate of workplace absence has reduced since the commencement of this project.

- More recently, the focus on workplace absence has shifted towards improving employee engagement. In 2009, some areas were reviewed to

identify the drivers of workplace absence and allow for better targeting of strategies to address those drivers.

- The first ATO employee engagement survey (conducted in 2009) included questions in relation to the drivers of workplace absence including:
  - the employee/manager relationship, and
  - flexibility for employees and their sense of control over their working life.
- The ATO is currently negotiating its next enterprise agreement which will include provisions for attendance management and wellbeing programs. This will ramp up the ATO's efforts in the area of manager and employee education in relation to leave entitlements, leave use, and wellbeing initiatives.

To compare workplace absences of the ATO as a whole against another government department or with the Australian Public Service more generally is difficult as the ATO undertakes a range of diverse functions, has a large geographically dispersed workforce and wide spread age demographics.

ATO analysis has identified some of the drivers for workplace absences and shows that there is a higher rate of absence among:

- employees 50 years of age and over
- employees with 10 years and more ATO tenure, and
- female employees.

The ATO continues to undertake activities to identify drivers for workplaces absences, as well as the relative importance and effect of these drivers.