

Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Resources, Energy and Tourism Portfolio

Budget Estimates

4 June 2013

Question: BR8

Topic: Transfer of a Second Deputy Secretary to the Portfolio

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Senator Ronaldson asked:

Senator RONALDSON: Given there was a direct report to the secretary from the tourism division before, why was it viewed as necessary to put an extra deputy secretary on?

Mr Comley: In fact, the former secretary had been considering for some time whether there should be a second deputy secretary within the department. The advent of the machinery-of-government change, which brought in a little over another 200 staff into the department, really triggered the threshold where it was sensible to operate the department with two deputy secretaries rather than one deputy secretary.

Senator RONALDSON: But you had a transfer of one deputy. You have effectively taken the transfer of one depsec across to the resources area, haven't you? It was previously a deputy secretary. You say there has been nothing taken out, but you have had the energy put in. Why would you have not just taken that person across with the energy and left the direct report as it was?

Mr Comley: My discussions with the former secretary, Drew Clarke, and my observations in the early period is that it was actually not probably a long-term, sustainable arrangement to have the direct report from the division through to the secretary. Once the department increased in size by another 200 people that exacerbated the issue of needing to have a second deputy secretary. In fact, as is common practice, divisions typically report through a deputy secretary.

Senator RONALDSON: How far had Drew Clarke's discussions gone in relation to the need for another depsec?

Mr Comley: My understanding is that Drew Clarke had had conversations with the Public Service Commissioner about what was the right number of deputy secretaries in the department.

Senator RONALDSON: When was that discussion?

Mr Comley: You would have to ask Mr Clarke.

Senator RONALDSON: You were speaking to him. Did he indicate to you when he had had those discussions? Was it after there was going to be the change or before?

Mr Comley: My understanding is that Mr Clarke had been considering whether there should be a second deputy within the department for some time. When I say some time, I suspect more than a year. This had been an ongoing issue about the right balance of senior resources are.

Senator RONALDSON: Had that been put to the minister?

Mr Comley: I would have to take that on notice. I do not have a recollection of whether Mr Clarke had spoken to the minister. Immediately that it was announced that I was moving into the portfolio I had a discussion with Mr Clarke around what the appropriate senior resourcing structure was. At that time he indicated that there had always been a question in his mind whether it was sustainable to have one deputy.

Answer:

Mr Clarke kept the Minister informed of SES arrangements as they evolved.