

**Senate Standing Committee on Economics**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**Treasury Portfolio**

**Supplementary Budget Estimates**

20 – 21 October 2010

**Question: SBT 218**

**Topic: MMRT Revenue forecasts**

**Senator Abetz asked:**

**Senator ABETZ**—Thank you, Chair. Has the government agreed to release the minerals price and volume assumptions on which its MRRT revenue forecasts are based?

**Mr Parker**—Senator, no, it has not released the assumptions.

**Senator ABETZ**—Right. Why not?

**Mr Parker**—No, it has not released the assumptions regarding prices, volumes, the market value of the starting base, expected investment in the sector. All of those numbers were provided to the Commonwealth on a commercial-in-confidence basis by the group of companies which were involved in the final heads of agreement arrangement. I am happy to tell you the story around that if you wish. There are two elements to the commercial-in-confidence matter.

Those issues are very sensitive to the companies involved. I am sure I do not need to rehearse before this committee the importance of the protection of commercial-in-confidence information. We have asked the companies if they would object to us providing that information. That question was put to them in the context of the freedom of information requests which have been talked about, and the companies objected to the release of that information. So on that basis those assumptions have not been released.

I might add contextually that this issue has come up in discussions at the Policy Transition Group. In order to fill in the details of the tax, that group is consulting with companies. The group has asked the companies—not just the three companies related with the heads of agreement but more broadly—to provide to the Policy Transition Group information relating to the activities, prices and so forth of the companies. The Policy Transition Group has put out a model for companies to use to input the data to send back to the Policy Transition Group. The reason that that has been done is that, the more information we have, the better we can design the relevant detail. It has been a matter which companies have been particularly wont to emphasise that the information is commercial-in-confidence. They have sought assurances to that effect and they have been given.

**Senator ABETZ**—Mr Parker, thank you for that. Minister, I draw your attention to procedural order 9 of continuing effect, which requires that the Senate or a Senate committee shall not entertain any claim to withhold information from the Senate or a committee on the grounds that it is commercial-in-confidence unless the claim is made by a minister and is accompanied by a statement setting out the basis for the claim. Clearly you do not have a statement with you, but if you could take that on notice—

**Senator Wong**—I will take that on notice.

**Senator ABETZ**—and get back to the committee, with respect, as a matter of urgency in relation to the statement in relation to the commercial-in-confidence claim.

**Senator Wong**—I suspect, Senator, the statement that I would provide on behalf of the Treasurer would bear some similarity to the reasons which have just been outlined, but if you feel a need for me to take it on notice and get someone to write it down and provide it, I will do so.

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**Answer:**

The minerals price data underlying the MRRT estimates was provided to the Treasury on a commercial in confidence basis. Treasury has consulted the companies concerned and has been advised that the information is commercially sensitive and that its release would be considered a breach of confidence. Accordingly, the Treasurer confirms that this information is to be withheld on the basis that it is Commercial in Confidence information.