

Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Supplementary Budget Estimates

19 – 20 October 2011

Question No: SBT 837

Topic: Census

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Senator Abetz asked:

Senator ABETZ: It necessitates a bit of extra work, no doubt, to get that extra information out of the census. Could you please take on notice the groups that made representations to the Australian Bureau of Statistics? That clearly must have convinced you that this was a good idea. The Australian Bureau of Statistics, I assume—and I should know this—is an independent statutory authority.

Mr Pink: It certainly is, and I think—

Senator ABETZ: You take it upon yourselves, then, to make those sorts of judgments?

Mr Pink: It is the responsibility of the statistician, under the Statistics Act, to determine what is published from the data that is collected under the act. For instance, in the question on religion, which is the only voluntary question on the census form, we put out data on religion for 180-odd religions. Is that right, Paul?

Mr Lowe: Yes.

Mr Pink: Take the question on religion, which is the only question on the census form that is a voluntary question. We publish responses to the religious question for more than 180 different religions, and, by the time you are getting down to the 150-plus religions, you get into small numbers. But there is a demand for that information, and we think quite genuinely that it is our responsibility to make the data available as it has been reported.

Senator ABETZ: But I do not know of any public policy position by either of the major parties that would seek to ban a religion or to say it is against public policy to be involved in one of those particular religions. I can understand where you are coming from, but I am concerned about the area that you are traversing.

Mr Pink: We will take it on board and come back.

Answer:

The ABS publishes information from the religion question that not only includes official religious organisations but also other religious beliefs (e.g. wiccan/witchcraft, nature religions etc).