

**SENATE EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION
LEGISLATION COMMITTEE**

**2004-2005 ADDITIONAL SENATE ESTIMATES HEARING
17 FEBRUARY 2005**

EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS PORTFOLIO

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Outcome 3: Increased Workforce Participation

Output Group: Working Age Policy Group

Outputs: Working Age Policy and Legislation

Question Number: W256-05

Question:

Senator Wong asked at *Hansard* page 27:

In regard to a letter from Senator Vanstone to Senator Cherry concerning administrative measures to ensure consistent breach decision making, can the Department provide a current status on the issues raised in this matter?

Answer:

1. *Stricter requirements for documentation of decisions, including the introduction of a system based tool utilising mandatory fields*

Centrelink introduced a breach decision making tool for breaches linked to Participation Reports from July 2002. This has since been extended for use in all decisions relating to breaching, including Centrelink initiated breaches and Participation Agreement breaches. The tool assists staff to follow correct processes in investigating a breach and creates file documentation about the decision, including:

- outcomes of discussions with the job seeker about the reasons for non-compliance
- advice about clearing the breach or options to reduce the penalty;
- advice about review and appeal mechanisms;
- reconnection arrangements with Job Network or Community Work Coordinators, or where appropriate, referrals for other assistance;
- message prompts to indicate a pending third activity test breach and necessary specialist consultation; and
- the reasons for the decision.

2. Breaching Review Taskforce

The Taskforce completed its report to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations in December 2004.

The Government is considering the recommendations of the report in the context of measures to increase workforce participation.

3. Rolling quality assurance audit of breaching decisions

The proposed process is currently under review by DEWR following the October 2004 machinery of government changes.

4. Ongoing senior officer reviews

Core questions for breach decision making were developed under the Business Assurance Framework with FaCS. These questions were incorporated into the Quality on Line (QOL) system in Centrelink in December 2004.

The QOL system currently selects a minimum of 5% of all decisions for random checking. Less experienced staff may have 100% of decisions checked for accuracy.

5. Meeting the needs of vulnerable job seekers

Where job seekers are identified as being at risk - and in all cases where a job seeker is facing a non-payment period for a third breach penalty - Centrelink staff are required to consult with appropriate specialist staff including either Social Workers, Psychologists, Personal Advisers, Indigenous Customer Service Officers, Centrelink Disability Officers, Youth Servicing Officers or Multicultural Service Officers before making a decision to impose a breach penalty

Outsourcing support to at risk and vulnerable job seekers occurs in many communities through Centrelink Community Officers and Indigenous Community Service Officers.

6. Quarterly data to welfare sector organisations

Centrelink has released data to welfare sector organisations for the June 2004 quarter. Data for the September 2004 quarter is currently being finalised for release.