

## Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment

### QUESTIONS ON NOTICE Additional Estimates 2013-2014

#### Agency - Comcare

Department of Employment Question No. EM0152\_14

Senator Tillem asked on 27 February 2014, Hansard page 40

#### Question

##### Comcare - Number of inspectors

Senator TILLEM: When was the last time the workforce grew? Mr O'Connor: In the number of inspectors, I believe it was with the advent of the model work health and safety law in 2012, where we increased the number of inspectors in alignment with the new accountabilities and responsibilities on Comcare as the federal work health and safety regulator. Senator TILLEM: Then they were reduced? Mr O'Connor: They were reduced. Senator TILLEM: Within 12 months? Mr O'Connor: Yes. There was a period where we did not increase, and I would have to take on notice the small number of adjustment to the number of inspectors that we had, because it was our workforce planning model that the regulation of self-insured licensees, from a work health and safety perspective, the original intention was that they were going to transfer back to states and territories. That did not come to pass, and as a result we have now adjusted again our workforce to make sure that we have got appropriate coverage. We are confident, and I can give you assurance, that our inspectorate has appropriate resources to provide excellent levels of coverage across the workplaces in Australia, and overseas, that we regulate.

#### Answer

- The number of inspectors last grew in 2008–09 from 47 to 60. This was in response to a large number of new licensed self-insurers entering the Comcare scheme in 2007–08 and 2008–09 requiring Comcare to increase its regulatory workforce to effectively respond to the increased workload.
- In 2009–10 the number of inspectors reduced to 55. The reduction from 60 to 55 inspectors was due to a change in which positions Comcare counted as inspectors and was not due to changes in FTE.
- In 2010–11 the number of inspectors reduced to 44 and has remained at 44 to the current period. During this period, the Government decided to transfer the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (WHS Act) regulation of self-insured companies in the scheme to state and territory regulators. In addition, reductions in inspector numbers were required to meet Government efficiency dividends and return value for money to businesses being regulated. Improved process and procedures (introduction of a case management system) and increased maturity of employers meant the inspectorate has been able to do more cases with less staff. There has been no substantial change in the make-up of employers/employees in the Comcare scheme over the past three years, leading to stability in inspector numbers. New regulatory responsibilities in the WHS Act were absorbed in Comcare's existing staffing.

<b>Year</b>	<b>2007-08</b>	<b>2008-09</b>	<b>2009-10</b>	<b>2010-11</b>	<b>2011-12</b>	<b>2012-13</b>	<b>2013-14</b>
Number of field active inspectors	47	60	55	44	44	44	44*

\* 42 actual inspectors as at 18 March 2014 with two current vacancies.

Comcare has had a direct appropriation from Government to fund additional inspectors for a verification program related to asbestos remediation of Telstra telecommunications pits. From August 2013 to now, Comcare grew this additional inspector capability from zero to seven inspectors. These are temporary, task specific inspectors and hence they are not included in the 44 inspector numbers reported above.