

Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace Relations

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE Budget Estimates 2011-2012

Outcome 4 - Employment & Participation Policy

DEEWR Question No.EW0315_12

Senator Abetz asked on 31/05/2011, Hansard page 7.

Question

Enterprise Migration Agreement Projects

Senator ABETZ: As I understand it was not DIAC itself that determined—as the lead agency I am sure they accepted somebody's advice, but I doubt it would have come from DIAC—that these agreements should be limited (1) to the resource sector, (2) to projects above \$2 billion and (3) to projects that were employing 1,500 or more people because one would assume that those considerations are not necessarily within the expertise of DIAC. I am wondering whether this department had some input into that or whether it was all resources. Ms Paul: My suspicion would be we would need to take on notice the nature of our involvement but, from what you have described I would guess at least that those things were decisions of government. I suspect they were not particularly on the basis of our advice but I am happy to take on notice what our involvement was. Senator Chris Evans: This is very clearly a DIAC and Minister Bowen-led initiative and there are cabinet processes and budget processes which you understand, but the initiative came from Immigration and we would have provided input and comment and, as you are probably aware, this issue arose from industry requests et cetera, and I just point out that there are a suite of options available—457s, labour agreements—and this was designed to fill that larger end of the market. It was very much a policy proposition out of the Immigration portfolio and our responsibilities are far less than they used to be in regard to these matters, other than providing labour market advice and more general policy input. Senator ABETZ: As I understand it, it was not driven out of Immigration as such; it has been given the responsibility. Your now ministerial colleague, Gary Gray, who was Parliamentary Secretary for Western and Northern Australia, chaired what was called the National Resource Sector Employment Taskforce. It was out of that that the concept developed, as I understand, and I dare say for good reasons DIAC has been given the run of it. Somebody had to be given the run of it but I am wondering now having established where it arose from—namely, through Mr Gray's committee— Senator Chris Evans: That came from industry consultation that that committee had. Senator ABETZ: That is right and that is why I would assume the Department of Resources would have had a heavy input. I think they are meeting this morning as we speak so I will not be able to find out from them but I am trying to understand from the three departments, DIAC—been there—now this one, and hopefully a colleague at Resources to tell us exactly how this has been put together. I accept ultimately it is a cabinet decision, taking into account advice from the various departments, but I think it would be fair to assume that DIAC was not the agency that told us about the \$2 billion and 1,500 worker threshold and that it should only be for the resources sector. Senator Chris Evans: I do not think that is right. I am careful about going to cabinet matters but I do not think that proposition is right. Policy responsibility lay with DIAC. Sure, they would have consulted with industry and other departments. Senator ABETZ: That is right. Senator Chris Evans: If you are asking me who drove it, it is DIAC. Senator ABETZ: We know that but I am wondering whether this department provided any advice. I would be surprised if you provided much input into how the migration side of things should work but it would not surprise me if you gave some advice as to, let us say, whether it was projects that had 1,500 or more workers involved. Ms Paul: Yes, so I think what we have got here is the work that we did in the department to support Mr Gray. The people who literally supported that are actually here tomorrow. Ms Kidd and her area do offer labour market advice and so

on but what I will do for you is go to the people who are not here now but will be here either tomorrow or today, if we can feed it in later on, and ask for some clarification about our involvement. My feeling would be our involvement, as you are saying, in a way, has come out of supporting the task force but, in terms of the measure that has come out of DIAC, I think that is as the minister says, of course, DIAC's responsibility. Nonetheless I think we can probably help clarify a bit more than we are able to now and I do not have those people here who support the task force. I will either piece that together for you today or tomorrow, if I may, if you are here tomorrow. Senator ABETZ: If it is tomorrow can you assist me, what outcome? Ms Paul: Yes, good question. Once again, of course, it is a DIAC measure so it is not going to be easy to pick. Senator Chris Evans: Why don't we do it in overview at the start tomorrow, Senator? Ms Paul: After the agencies? I would say 3.4, which is the first one after the agencies. Senator ABETZ: What, Vocational Education and Training? Ms Paul: You have got Skills Australia and then you have got ALTC. Senator ABETZ: Yes, and then VET. Ms Paul: Yes, I think it would be fine to do it straight after that, if that suits you. Senator Chris Evans: Are you going to be here tomorrow Senator? Senator ABETZ: I hope to be. Whether I will be in this committee or not, I do not know. Senator Chris Evans: What I was going to do was, with the concurrence of the Chairman, we could fix first up after lunch or something if you want to deal with it. Ms Paul: Or we could take it on notice, yes. Senator ABETZ: Yes, take it on notice because, by the time it all gets worked out et cetera, chances are we will be into the October estimates anyway.

Answer

Please refer to EW0314_12.