

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Additional Estimates Hearings 2002-2003, 10-11 February 2003

Question: PM 69

Topic: terminations because of unauthorised disclosure of information; reported in State of the Service Report 2001-02 (page 29)

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Senator Forshaw asked:

Senator Forshaw requested the following information in respect of nine cases of termination of employment as a result of unauthorised disclosure of information, reported in the State of the Service Report 2001-02:

- in which agencies the nine cases of termination occurred
- in which state or states the terminations occurred
- if the employees accessed their own files or the files of other people
- if the employees accessed the files for other individuals
- how the employees were caught.

Answer:

In the Public Service Commissioner's State of the Service Report 2001-02, it was reported that, during 2001-02, agencies reported a total of 129 incidents of apparent unauthorised disclosure of information and in 20 cases an investigation identified an employee as the source of the leak. The outcome in nine of the cases was reported as termination of employment.

Eight of the reported cases were in the Child Support Agency (CSA). In these cases information was actually accessed without authorisation, rather than disclosed or 'leaked', as stated in the report. This was due to some confusion in how the information provided by the CSA was interpreted for the Report.

CSA have now provided the following details about the cases:

Two of the employees whose employment was terminated were from Victoria, two were from Queensland, three were from New South Wales and one was from South Australia.

All nine cases related to unauthorised access to records of family, ex-family or other staff. The CSA were unable to advise whether the files were accessed on behalf of other people, however they were satisfied that access was not for the purpose of financial gain.

Three of the cases were identified due to the agency's Fraud Prevention and Control safeguards, one was identified due to its Restricted Access system, and four came to light through clients contacting the CSA.

The remaining case reported was in the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. The Department has provided the following information about the case:

The termination occurred in South Australia. The employee concerned accessed the files of other people. The employee accessed the file on behalf of himself and another person with whom he was involved in an attempted fraud. The employee was identified after a third person, after being approached by the employee's accomplice, complained to the Australian Federal Police (AFP). The AFP referred the matter to the Department, who then identified the employee by linking them with the case processing and with the person who approached the third party.