



Australian Government

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet



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Mr Alastair Sands
Secretary
Finance and Public Administration Legislative Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Sands

During the hearings on 14 February 2005 PM&C officers were asked whether this department had ever looked into the question of the estimated number of civilian casualties in the Iraq conflict.

I am writing to advise that a subsequent check of our records indicates that this department examined during the second half of 2003 the question of whether a reliable estimate existed for civilian casualties in Iraq. The context for this exercise was the provision of advice to the Prime Minister on Question on Notice No. 1978 in the House of Representatives. The Prime Minister's response to that question was printed in the Hansard of 4 November 2003, and advised that "Australian agencies are not in a position where they can provide an accurate estimate of civilian casualties". As part of this process PM&C consulted both the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and ONA, and also examined available open sources, but did not specifically task ONA to produce an assessment on this question.

As you will recall, the focus of questions on this subject on 14 February was the estimate published by the British medical publication *The Lancet* in October-November 2004. I can add nothing further to the advice providing during the hearings on that estimate.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Metcalfe
Deputy Secretary

11 March 2005