

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Finance and Administration Portfolio

Department of Human Services and agencies

Additional Estimates 2005-2006, 14 February 2006

Question: HS2

Outcome 1, Output 1

Topic: Department of Human Services – Answers to Questions on Notice

Hansard Page/Written Question on Notice: F&PA 102

SENATOR WONG asked on 14/2/2006:

Senator WONG – I do not believe the issue of cost is relevant to my question, Senator Colbeck, despite your lengthy speech. It might have been relevant if Ms Scott, in response to my questions, had ‘We couldn’t answer your questions because it would have been too costly for us to go through that.’ But that is not the defence she has raised. You might throw up a whole range of issues about why Senate Estimates should not ask so many questions because that kind of transparency is simply too expensive for the government. But that is not what we are discussing. We are discussing the failure to answer some very specific questions. The department has not indicated that they are too costly. The only thing I can take from what you have indicated is that the minister simply does not want to indicate something that has generally been answered before at estimates committees, and that is the date on which answers were provided to the minister’s office by the department. Obviously the government is taking a different approach to estimates now it has the numbers in the Senate. It is quite happy to throw precedent out the window. These have been answered before. They are not being answered now – and the public, I suppose, Senator Colbeck, can draw their own conclusions as to why that is occurring.

CHAIR – Are you finished?

Senator WONG – I am, and I am happy to move on.

Senator Colbeck – As I said, Senator Wong, if you are not satisfied with the response, which is the one that the minister has signed off on I am more than happy to take a further question on notice and refer it to the Minister. If you would like to place that on the record, that is fine.

Senator WONG – I ask you take it on notice, thank you.

Answer:

Preparation of answers to questions on notice always commences as soon as questions are received. Some questions require extensive work which cannot be completed within the required timeframe. Answers are submitted for tabling as they become available.

All parliamentary matters are cleared by the Department of Human Services to ensure quality, clarity and consistency in answers. This is the case for all Human Services agencies. The answering of questions is always an iterative process, which is completed as quickly as possible within available resources. Questions may be delayed pending finalisation of consultation with policy departments or the answer being clarified, updated or corrected for errors. Typically any changes suggested by the Department to responses prepared by the agencies are made in the agency

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by the agency. Answers are provided to the Minister's Office as they are cleared however, on occasion, further clarification may be required.

Many questions asked of the Department of Human Services and its agencies require significant work in their preparation. As confirmed at the hearing on 14 February 2006, responses to questions on notice from the Department and its agencies will now include information on the amount of time and cost involved in preparing the response.

This answer required 1 hour 30 minutes at a cost of \$70 to prepare.