

**Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**Human Services Portfolio**

Additional Estimates 2006-2007, 13<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2007

**Question: HS17**

**Agency: Centrelink**

**Outcome 1, Output 1.1**

**Topic: Optical Surveillance – advice to customers**

**Hansard Page/Written Question on Notice: Hansard Page F&PA 32**

**SENATOR MOORE** asked on 16/02/2007:

**Senator MOORE**—Earlier, I used the term ‘hit rate’. I am concentrating on the age pension, because people receiving Newstart payments and those sorts of things are more aware of this form of compliance. In 2004-05, in relation to the age pension, 122 people were the subject of optical surveillance. Dr Browne, can you tell us the kind of risk that would identify someone to be selected for this process? It seems to me there would be some guidelines for selecting someone for it. Secondly, I know the department will try to find out how many people were found to be in breach, but if 122 people were selected for this form of intensive scrutiny—and I would think that would not be the first thing you would do—and some were found not to have been in breach, would they be made aware that they had been under surveillance and scrutinised?

**Dr Browne**—I will take your specific question on notice, but I make it clear that optical surveillance is very much a last resort.

**Senator MOORE**—That is what I thought.

**Dr Browne**—You do that when you are not able to get evidence by other means such as contacting third parties, talking to the customer and that sort of thing. I will take your question on notice.

**ANSWER:**

Centrelink optical surveillance guidelines state that it should only be used:

- Where there is a reasonable suspicion that an offence or an unlawful activity is being committed or has been committed;

and

- Where other forms of investigation have been considered and have been assessed to be unsuitable, or other forms of investigation have been tried and been found to be inconclusive or unsuitable.

Approval of surveillance must be on a case-by-case basis and in accordance with the guidelines.

It is normal practice not to advise people of an investigation if it is established that there is no case to answer.

To prepare this answer it has taken approximately 3 hours and 20 minutes at an estimated cost of \$189.