

Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Human Services Portfolio

Additional Estimates 2006-2007, 13th and 16th February, 2007

Question: HS69

Agency: Centrelink

Outcome 1, Output 1.1

Topic: Centrelink and Surveillance

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SENATOR MOORE asked on 16/02/2007:

1. How many joint Centrelink/Police operations such as the one conducted on 8 February at Ravenswood Victoria occurred in 2006?
2. When was the first of these operations?
3. What was the individual and total cost of these operations?
4. How many Centrelink officials were involved during each of these operations?
5. Can the department confirm that these operations did not contravene state or federal privacy legislation?
6. What other states or territories have contacted Centrelink to perform future operations of this kind? What state or territory unit contacted the Department of Human Services and what was the date?
7. Please explain in detail what Centrelink officials do during these operations.
8. What was the total cost of the department's 'specialist fraud investigation' throughout 2006 and 2005? Does this include the joint police/Centrelink roadside operations?

ANSWER:

Please note: data for the 2006 calendar year is not readily available – data provided below is for the 2005-06 financial year.

1. Seventy-four joint Centrelink and Police operations were conducted nationally in 2005-06.
2. In 2005-06, the first joint Centrelink and Police operation was conducted on 4 July 2005.
3. The total cost for Centrelink's Cash Economy operations for financial year 2005-06 was an estimated \$5.6 million. To break this down to the cost of individual operations would be extremely resource intensive.
4. The detailed information required to answer the question is not readily available.
5. No state or federal privacy law has been contravened during a Cash Economy fraud operation.

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6. Since the inception of Centrelink Cash Economy operations, Centrelink fraud investigators have been contacted by all States and Territories to discuss operations. No State or Territory unit has contacted the Department of Human Services.
7. Operations vary from industry to industry. Centrelink fraud investigators collect information in order to identify and investigate individual and industry-based cash economy activities. During roadside operations, it is the Police or an agency empowered under that specific state's motor traffic or transport legislation who stop vehicles and request identification information, not Centrelink fraud investigators. Under section 195 of the *Social Security (Administration) Act 1999*, Centrelink then requests the identification information from the agency stopping the vehicles. Centrelink then checks this information against Centrelink customer records at the operation or on return to the office.
8. The detailed information required to answer the question is not readily available.

To prepare this answer it has taken approximately 2 hours and 26 minutes at an estimated cost of \$144.