



15 February 2007

Senator Brett Mason  
Chairman  
Senate Standing Committee on Finance and  
Public Administration  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Mason

At the public hearing of the Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration held on Monday 12 February 2007, Senator Bob Brown asked me a number of questions relating to the general administrative processes surrounding the consideration of nominations by the Council for the Order of Australia.

In particular, Senator Brown asked me several times whether State Governments (and/or their representatives on the Council) could exercise veto powers over nominations.

On the basis of my experience as Secretary to the Council, I responded that this was not the case.

By way of background, and in short form, the process for the consideration of nominations by the Council is as follows:

Nominations are received, thoroughly researched, and put to the Council for consideration.

In its considerations, the Council has operated, and continues to operate, on the basis of consensus. Not surprisingly, nominations will often attract considerable discussion, but in all cases, a collective decision is reached.

I therefore repeat my assurance that no one person on the Council, and that includes any State Government representative, can, or does, exercise veto powers over any nomination. This is a matter of fact and counters any suggestion or assertion that there is political interference in awards recommended by the Council for the Order of Australia.

Senator Brown also asked me to provide statistics about the number of nominations received and the number of successful nominations. I am compiling this information but I draw the Committee's attention to the fact that this information is already publicly available as an Appendix to my Office's Annual Reports.

As to discussions during the Council meeting relating to the nominations, no record of such discussions is kept.

Immediately following the hearing on Monday 12 February 2007, Senator Brown issued a press release (dated 12 February 2007) headed "*Political Veto Cloud Over Order of Australia*". In that statement Senator Brown attributes to me the following statement: "*Mr Hazell said he had never known a nomination to succeed where a state government delegate objected*".

Having carefully checked the draft Hansard, I did not say the words attributed to me. In fact, quite the contrary.

It is a matter of some concern that evidence I gave before the Committee has been misconstrued in this way, and aspersions cast on the way in which the Council for the Order of Australia operates.

The Council is an independent body of eminent people. Its decisions are independent of Government. In fact, Australia's system has a well deserved reputation overseas for its integrity and impartiality.

In his media release, Senator Brown also referred to the nomination of Ms Christine Milne (now Senator Christine Milne) and endeavoured to link the misconstruction of my evidence with the fact that her nomination was earlier rejected by the Council.

I reiterate here the longstanding practice that I and others before me have taken, that I have not, and will not, comment on an individual nomination that may be made to the Council for the Order of Australia.

I should be grateful if you would circulate my letter to other members of the Committee so that they are aware not only of my concerns but also the facts of the case. I would also hope that the public record can now be corrected to reflect the facts of the situation and to maintain confidence in the integrity of the Australian honours and awards system.

Yours sincerely



**Malcolm Hazell**  
Official Secretary to the Governor-General

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## Political veto cloud over Order of Australia

**12th Feb 07**

There is a cloud of political interference over the awarding of the Order of Australia, Greens Leader Bob Brown said today.

In the Senate Committee on Finance and Administration, Senator Brown asked the Secretary of the Governor-General, Mr Hazell, who is also the secretary to the council which decides who gets the Order of Australia, whether state governments could veto nominees from their state.

Mr Hazell said he had never known a nomination to succeed where a state government delegate objected.

"My concern was raised by the rejection of the nomination of Christine Milne in 2000," Senator Brown said.

"Christine had been the first female leader of a parliamentary political party in Tasmania, had spearheaded gay law reform, gun control laws and Aboriginal reconciliation in the Parliament and, in 1987-9, led the successful campaign to save the Wesley Vale farmlands from a polluting pulp mill proposal."

With calls for more female nominees for the Order, her rejection was incongruous. She was no longer in parliament. The question arose whether Tasmania's Labor government had been able to veto the nomination. Appeals were unsuccessful.

Today, Senator Brown asked Mr Hazell to produce

figures on how many nominations were unsuccessful and, of them, how many had failed following state government objections.

Further information: Ebony Bennett 0409 164 603

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