

Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Additional Budget Estimates Hearing – February 2009

Department of Finance and Deregulation

Finance and Deregulation Portfolio

Outcome 3, Output 3.1

Topic: COMCAR casualised workforce

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Senator CAMERON asked:

Could you provide the analysis as to why the department would go to a fully casualised workforce. I just do not know of it happening anywhere else. Can you give me the managerial analysis that determined that this was the way to go?

Answer:

The recruitment of casual drivers to the COMCAR workforce dates back to the commercialisation process in the then Department of Administrative Services (DAS) in the late 1980s. The imperatives to be cost effective were posing problems for COMCAR with its permanent workforce and some inefficient work practices. The question of using casual drivers arose as a number of business reviews were conducted and large numbers of drivers were separating from employment through voluntary redundancy exercises.

DAS reached an agreement with the Transport Workers' Union to introduce casual drivers and this agreement was endorsed in the Industrial Relations Commission in October 1991. The first casual drivers commenced in 1992. The last permanent drivers were recruited in 1991 and since that time only casual drivers have been recruited to COMCAR.

By having access to a large pool of casual, trained drivers COMCAR is able to best meet client needs and the peaks and troughs of Parliamentary activity. The most obvious example is the operation of the Parliamentary shuttle in Canberra with full demand for the 18 or so sitting weeks of the year and the contrasting very marked reductions in demand for driver services between these sitting weeks. A casual workforce has enabled COMCAR the flexibility to service this fluctuating demand without the inefficiency and the costs of an under-used driving workforce. That higher cost would be passed on as an increased need for budget funding and higher charge out costs for Senators and Members.

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The experience of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in 2007 was another example of how a casual workforce has enhanced COMCAR's capability to deliver services. By having a large number of trained drivers, COMCAR was able to meet the extreme demands imposed by APEC, particularly during Leaders' Week in Sydney in September 2007 where 200 trained drivers were required in one location. This would not have been possible with a smaller, permanent workforce.