

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

**ADDITIONAL BUDGET ESTIMATES – 9 FEBRUARY 2010
ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE**

Human Services Portfolio

Topic: Centrelink Client Mailouts

Question reference number: HS 31(b)

Senators: FIFIELD and MOORE

Type of question: Hansard F&PA page 113, 9 February 2010

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 26 March 2010

Number of pages: 4

Question:

Senator FIFIELD - I am just wondering—and, again, this is probably one you would need to take on notice—on how many occasions ministers have sought and been successful in having a letter from themselves included in correspondence as part of a Centrelink client mailout?

Ms Hogg—Yes, we will take that on notice.

Senator FIFIELD - That is: how many separate mail-outs and what occasion that was, but also the number of individuals to whom letters went to in each of those mail-outs, over the last two years?

Senator MOORE - If we could get that over, say, five years it might be useful.

Answer:

The following table provides the information requested.

Date sent	Purpose of Letters	Signatories	Customer Volumes (estimates)
January 2006 – October 2007	Minister's Grant Letters were issued to all Centrelink customers when their Centrelink payments were granted. The letter provided additional information to the legislatively required grant letter.	<p>The Hon Joe Hockey MP, then Minister for Human Services, initiated Minister-signed letters to provide all customers with advice about the payment they had been granted.</p> <p>The previous Government's Ministers for Human Services, Senator the Hon Ian Campbell and Senator the Hon Chris Ellison, continued this practice until the Caretaker Period in 2007.</p> <p>The production of 'Minister's Grant Letters' was suspended during the Caretaker Period in the lead up to the 2007 election and has not been resumed.</p>	3.5 million customers
June 2007	<p>Letter advising of changes to the Assets Test Taper Rate. This letter advised customers that they may now be eligible to claim the Age Pension after changes to the Assets Test Taper Rate.</p> <p>Letter providing information about the Seniors' and Carers' Bonus Payments.</p>	<p>Senator the Hon Chris Ellison</p> <p>The Hon Mal Brough MP</p>	340,000 customers
November 2007	A reminder letter was sent to customers who had not claimed the Age Pension under the new assets test, following the initial advise letter sent in June 2007.	<p>Senator the Hon Chris Ellison</p> <p>The Hon Mal Brough MP</p> <p>The Hon Mal Brough MP</p>	<p>2.5 million Seniors customers</p> <p>600,000 Carer customers</p> <p>20,000 Centrelink customers</p>

Date sent	Purpose of Letters	Signatories	Customer Volumes (estimates)
From March 2008	Letter advising of an increase in the Utilities Allowance.	Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig, then Minister for Human Services	2.2 million Utilities Allowance customers
	Letter advising of an increase in the Seniors Concession Allowance.	The Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	300,000 Seniors Concession Allowance customers
From June 2008	Letter providing information about the Seniors' and Carers' Bonus Payments.	Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig, then Minister for Human Services	2.5 million Seniors customers
	Letter advising of an increase in the length of time eligible parents can receive Jobs, Education and Training (JET) Child Care Fee Assistance.	The Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	660,000 Carers customers
From December 2008	Economic Security Strategy letters advising eligible customers when they received a payment.	Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig, then Minister for Human Services The Hon Julia Gillard MP, Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations	14,000 JET customers
	These letters were signed jointly by the Minister for Human Services and the Minister for the relevant portfolio of the payment: - Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig, then Minister for Human Services ; - the Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; or - the Hon Julia Gillard MP, Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.		Six million letters – (includes nominees)

Date sent	Purpose of Letters	Signatories	Customer Volumes (estimates)
From March 2009	Household Stimulus Package letters advising eligible customers when they received a payment.	<p>These letters were signed jointly by the then Minister for Human Services and the Minister for the relevant portfolio of the payment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig, then Minister for Human Services; - the Hon Tony Burke MP, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; - the Hon Julia Gillard MP, Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; or - the Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. 	350,000 customers
September 2009	In the 2009-10 Federal Budget, the Australian Government announced a number of changes to Australian pensions, including increased and simplified payments, new indexation arrangements and changes to the income test. These changes form part of the Secure and Sustainable Pension Reform package.	<p>These letters were signed jointly by the Hon Chris Bowen MP, Minister for Human Services, and the Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.</p>	Four million customers