

Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Australian Public Service Commission

Estimates 2005-06 – Budget Estimates, May 2005

Question: PM 103

Topic: APS Commission Certified Agreement

Senator Carr asked:

1. Why has the APSC refused to hold an all staff ballot to get input from employees on the type of their next agreement?
2. Doesn't this refusal fly in the face of the APS values, especially of consultation and cooperation?
3. If more than 50% of staff sign a petition requesting an all staff ballot on the type of agreement they would prefer what will the APSC's reaction be?
4. Will the APSC guarantee that of over 50% of staff vote for a ballot, that the APSC will hold one?

Answer to Questions 1 & 2.

There has been discussion of the approach to making the Commission's next Certified Agreement through its Workplace Relations Committee. The Committee comprises employee elected representatives, Community and Public Sector Union nominees and management nominated representatives. We understand that less than half the Commission's staff are members of the union.

The Commission has advised its Workplace Relations Committee and its staff of its clear preference to continue the practice of making agreements directly with its employees. Preference is to work directly with staff, rather than primarily through an external intermediary, and the Commission is fortunate in that it is small enough to be readily able to adopt this approach.

The Commission wants the focus of agreement making to be on the Commission working together on the Commission's working conditions and productivity. The Commission believes that this approach contributes to building a culture of engagement and that a fuller degree of cooperation and collaboration is achieved through an employee agreement, where management works directly with staff.

The negotiation of the last three agreements has included close consultation with the Community and Public Sector Union and the Commission welcomes the continuing involvement of the union in the development of the new agreement. It is anticipated that, as with each of previous agreements, that the CPSU will apply to be a party to the agreement when it is certified.

Answer to Questions 3 & 4.

The Community and Public Sector Union has written to the Commission indicating that a majority of staff have signed a petition seeking a vote on the nature of the next agreement. A copy of the petition has not been provided to the Commission.

The Commission has advised its staff and the union that it is not planning to conduct a ballot on the nature of the agreement. The important ballot that the Commission is working towards is the ballot to be conducted by the Australian Electoral Commission in 2006 to seek support for a proposed agreement and that ballot will only be conducted when the Commission believes it has developed an agreement that staff will support.