

Senate Finance and Public Administration Standing Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
BUDGET ESTIMATES – 29 MAY 2008

Human Services Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of Human Services
Outcome/Output Group: Outcome 1, Output 1
Topic: Charter Letter



Senator: Fifield

Question reference number: HS19

Type of question: Hansard F&PA 92

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 11 July 2008

Question:

Senator FIFIELD—You may have to take this question on notice, but what date did that discussion [with the Prime Minister about the charter letter] occur, and who holds a copy of that minute?

Senator Ludwig—I will have to take that on notice. I do have a recollection of the rough date, but I would be then searching my memory. Rather than get it wrong, I will provide that on notice.

Senator FIFIELD—Thank you; and who holds a copy of the minute of that discussion?

Senator Ludwig—Yes.

Answer:

Over January and early February 2008, the Prime Minister conducted a series of meetings with each senior portfolio Minister and the Cabinet Secretary. These meetings were arranged as an opportunity, early in the life of the new Government, to discuss the Prime Minister's and Ministers' views on each portfolio's key objectives, priorities and performance measurement and reporting arrangements.

At the conclusion of these meetings, draft charter letters summarising each portfolio's priorities were prepared by the relevant Department and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and provided to the Prime Minister's Office. Following the receipt of all the draft charter letters, the Prime Minister decided that their distribution was not necessary at that point in the Government's first term. As a result, the charter letters were not finalised or issued.

The manner in which successive governments have managed their priorities, including whether charter letters or other approaches are used, has changed from time to time. It is a longstanding convention before this Committee that the policy on how priorities are set by a Government, and the nature or content of those priorities, is not disclosed, to maintain Cabinet confidentiality.

The Prime Minister continues to discuss the Government's objectives including delivery of its election commitments with each Minister.

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