

Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates Hearing – May 2009

Department of Finance and Deregulation

Finance and Deregulation Portfolio

Outcome 3, Program 3.1

Topic: 1300 Numbers

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Senator Abetz asked:

There are two brief areas that I have questions about. First of all, the 1300 numbers that are allocated to MP's offices are a great facility—especially for senators, who cover a whole state—people can ring for the one charge. It has been brought to my attention in recent times that the 1300 numbers only operate from a landline and not a mobile phone. It was brought to my attention because in the state of Tasmania, that I seek to represent, the state government also has 1300 numbers; but they allow mobile phone calls to connect with a 1300 number, whereas the Commonwealth does not. I just hope officials do not tell me that whilst I was Special Minister of State I imposed such a condition.

Answer:

To help meet the needs of constituents, Senators and those Members whose electorates encompass more than one STD area may choose to have a 1300 local call fee number to allow all constituents to call the electorate office for the cost of a local call.

A Senator can be contacted through a 1300 number for the cost of a local call from within the State of that Senator, from most fixed lines. A Member whose division extends beyond one STD area can be contacted through a 1300 number, for the cost of a local call, from within any designated STD area that is part of that Member's division. It is possible that the 1300 number may be used by a person outside of a Member's division if they reside in an area with the same STD code that falls within the Member's division. The balance of the cost of a call to a 1300 number is paid by the holder of the 1300 number, in this case the Commonwealth.

Mobile phones do not have 'local call fees', as all pricing is structured through user plans determined by the carrier. If a 1300 number is mobile phone enabled, the telecommunications provider charge the holder of the 1300 number, in this case the Commonwealth, the charge that the mobile phone user would incur by calling any fixed number, under the applicable pricing plan. A mobile phone user calling a 1300 number would be charged the connection fee according to their plan. Currently, the 1300 number lines provided to Senators and Members are not enabled to allow a mobile phone calls at reduced rates.

The Department is examining the issues raised by Senator Abetz and will provide the Special Minister of State with further advice in relation to this matter.