

Senate Finance and Public Administration Standing Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Budget Estimates 2009 (May 2009)

Prime Minister and Cabinet

Department/Agency: Australian National Audit Office

Outcome/Output Group:

Topic: Government Advertising

Senator: Ronaldson

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Question:

I have just referred to Audit report No. 24, pages 147 and 173, which say that websites are explicitly counted as part of campaign advertising. Do you think it might be appropriate, given the example of your highly politicised website in relation to the stimulus package, that websites should not now form part of any of the ANAO review process in order to maintain the openness and transparency that you have been so often quoted on over the last two days? Indeed, would you acknowledge that the rules, as they exist, have really become quite irrelevant given the fact that technology is moving campaigning into an entirely different area.

Answer:

Audit Report No. 24, at page 147, notes that in regard to proposed National Security advertising:

The Attorney-General proposed an approach that would involve low key advertising centred on print media and posters in public transport and would refer people to the national security website and the original campaign booklet.

At page 173, the report notes that, in respect of DEEWR's proposed workplace relations reform advertising:

Communication tools proposed included printed information kits, containing facts sheets and question and answers, and a dedicated website for obtaining information and submitting comments.

The report did not draw the conclusion that all websites were campaign advertising, but rather noted that websites at times formed part of the range of tools used by departments to achieve specific advertising and communication goals.

The website www.economicstimulusplan.gov.au has not been referred to the ANAO for review as part of any advertising campaign. The ANAO notes that PM&C advised the Senate on 26 May 2009 that this website:

“...forms part of our program administration, so its establishment and content have not required clearance from the ANAO... It does not fall within that definition of campaign advertising.”

Reviews for compliance with the Government’s *Guidelines on Campaign Advertising by Australian Government Departments and Agencies* (the Guidelines) are conducted by arrangement between the Auditor-General and the relevant Secretary, pursuant to s.20 of the *Auditor-General Act 1997*. Under these arrangements, the ANAO is responsible for reviewing matters referred to it by Departments. The ANAO notes that the Australian Government Information Management Office is responsible for the Government’s *Guidelines for Ministerial and Departmental Websites*.

Where departments have advised the ANAO that a particular website forms part of an advertising campaign and have provided that website for review, the ANAO has reviewed the website for its compliance with the Guidelines. This has occurred recently: for example the Auditor-General’s *Independent Report on the National Sexually Transmissible Infections Prevention Program: Sexual Health Campaign (May 2009 – June 2010) Digital Materials and Street Posters*, issued on 28 May 2009, included the campaign website www.australia.gov.au/sti within the scope of the campaign materials reviewed.