

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates Hearing 21-24 May 2012

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Outcome/Program: 1.1.4 Support Services for Government Operations

Topic: Whistleblower Bill - progress

Senator: Senator Rhiannon

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Question:

Senator RHIANNON: I will move on to the whistleblower scheme. The government promised a bill to reform whistleblower laws, to bring in best practice legislation to protect public interest disclosures. A commitment was made to have this before parliament by June last year. As we know, however, it did not happen and there is no publicly available copy of the bill. A report released this month by the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, Kicking against the cornerstone of democracy, says that the government has failed to deliver on its 2007 pledge to reform the law to protect whistleblowers. Could you share with us your understanding of where this is up to? Has the bill hit a roadblock?

Dr Thom: The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet have policy responsibility for the bill, so they are best placed to advise you on that.

Senator RHIANNON: Is there somebody here who can help us?

Ms Noble: Yes, but I will have to take that on notice.

Senator RHIANNON: Can you tell us if the bill has been drafted?

Ms Noble: No, I am sorry, I will have to take that on notice. I do not know.

Senator RHIANNON: Hopefully, Ms Noble, you can share with us, or otherwise take on notice, the timeline for getting the new bill to a vote in parliament.

Ms Noble: We will take that on notice as well.

Senator RHIANNON: Will there be a consultation on the draft of the bill?

Ms Noble: Again, we will have to take that on notice.

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Answer:

Legislative drafting is an iterative process: drafting is underway, but there is not yet a settled Bill.

The legislation is expected to be finalised before the next election.

Whether there will be consultation outside government on a draft of the bill prior to its introduction into Parliament will be a matter for decision by the Government at an appropriate time.