

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Finance and Administration Portfolio

Department of Human Services and agencies

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2005-2006, 1 November 2005

Question: HS41

Outcome 1, Output 1.1

Topic: Centrelink - Naming and Shaming of Welfare Cheats

Hansard Page/Written Question on Notice: Written

SENATOR EVANS asked the Minister for Human Services, upon written notice:

"Naming and shaming' of 'welfare cheats'

1. Is it normal practice for Centrelink or other Government agencies to release the names of individuals who are deemed to be 'welfare cheats'?
2. How does Centrelink work out the names of people that are released? Are names just randomly selected?
3. What sort of checks are done before releasing names in this way (does Centrelink check to ensure that individuals don't have special circumstances – eg a brain injury)?
4. Have all of the individuals named in the Herald Sun article of 30 September 2005 had their cases completely finalised? Or are some of the cases still ongoing?
5. Are there any Privacy Act implications of the decision to publicly release these names? Please provide an explanation of any issues.
6. Have any of the individuals named in the Herald Sun article indicated that they will take legal action against the Commonwealth for the release of their name?
7. Is any compensation being sought for this action? Please provide details.
8. Is it now Centrelink policy that the names of so-called 'welfare cheats' should be released in this way? Why? Is this a change in policy? If so, why did the change in policy occur?
9. Was the change in policy directed by the Minister's office?
10. Was the Minister's office advised that Centrelink was going to release the names? Why?
11. When was the Minister's office advised that this was going to occur?

Answer:

1. Centrelink has an ongoing strategy of working with the media to publicise prosecution activity to act as a deterrent to fraudulent behaviour.
2. Cases mentioned in the media are examples of different types of cases that have been before the courts that the government has an interest in deterring.
3. These individuals and their court cases are well known to Centrelink. The court system takes account of mitigating factors in its deliberations.
4. These individuals have all been found guilty of fraud by the judicial system.
5. No. Court decisions are in the public domain.
6. No.
7. No.

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8. See response to Question 1. It is not a change in policy.
9. See response to Question 1. It is not a change in policy.
10. Yes. The Minister's Office is routinely advised when Centrelink cases may feature in the national media.
11. The Minister's office was advised of the relevant cases on 26 September 2005.