

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates 15-18 October 2012

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Outcome/Program: 1.1.1 Domestic Policy

Topic: White Paper on Asian Century

Senator: Senator Ryan

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Question:

Senator RYAN: Earlier I flagged the white paper about the Asian century. What is the cause of the delay in its release?

Ms Quinn: The white paper was announced in September last year and we have been developing the white paper through a consultation process, through drafting and policy analysis and through working with our external advisory panel. The government indicated in its terms of reference that, in mid-2012-

Dr de Brouwer: During the middle of the year.

Ms Quinn: They have also indicated recently that it will be released shortly.

Senator RYAN: Mid-2012 is not October, though. There is a delay here. The terms of reference here say that a white paper on Australia and the Asian century will be released in mid-2012. October cannot be considered "mid", even by the most ambitious.

Ms Quinn: We have been working through the drafting and the process and the consultation. The government has indicated they intend to release it shortly.

Senator RYAN: So the cause of the delay is what-iterative exchanges of drafts or it took longer to get a first draft than anticipated?

Senator Chris Evans: In the end, when to release it is a decision of the government.

Senator RYAN: But we have just heard that it is not complete yet. So we know that it was not complete. If I had been told that it was complete but that the government had determined not to release it, then you would be quite right-the government can change its mind. But it is not complete.

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Ms Quinn: We have been working through the process of consultation and drafting and analysis-

Senator RYAN: I made all the same excuses when I was seeking extensions at university too, Ms Quinn.

Ms Quinn: The reality is that it is a matter for the government when they release the white paper.

Senator RYAN: But it is not complete now.

Ms Quinn: In the usual process of these things, things are not completed until they are released.

Senator RYAN: But it is not complete now?

Ms Quinn: Any government document is not completed until it is released.

Senator RYAN: No, it is completed before it released-by definition.

Senator Chris Evans: I think the answer is that the government determines when it is released. The government has indicated that it will be released shortly and it will be finalised in time for that, obviously.

Senator RYAN: But the earlier discussion-if we go back to the Hansard-

CHAIR: Senator Ryan, the minister had the call. He was responding to your question. Please allow him to complete the answer.

Senator RYAN: I did not ask him a question.

CHAIR: As you well know, the minister can make comment on any question placed before the witnesses. So please allow the minister to respond.

Senator Chris Evans: I was just trying to be helpful. The government has made it clear it will be released shortly and that will be the case.

Senator RYAN: Has the delay in its release-and, I assert, completion, given the earlier discussion-led to any change in the financial arrangements for the project? Have people working on it-outside people, whether it is the Prime Minister's Special Adviser or others-been paid more than was originally budgeted for? Are they working more days than you would have said if we had been having this discussion after the release of the terms of reference in September last year?

Ms Quinn: The budget for the task force has increased as the project has gone on.

Senator RYAN: By how much?

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Ms Quinn: I would have to take that on notice to give you an exact figure. Given that we did not have a precise end date in mind, there was always uncertainty about the exact financial cost of the process.

Ms Leon: I should say that, at the time of the release, the department had its budget for that financial year-2011-12-but we had not broken down and allocated our budget for what is now the current financial year.

Senator RYAN: I appreciate that.

Answer:

The Terms of Reference for the Australia in the Asian Century White Paper did not contain a specific date or deadline for the release of the White Paper. It is not possible to quantify the financial implications of the White Paper being released on 28 October 2012 rather than an earlier unspecified date.

All expenses associated with the development of the White Paper were absorbed by the various Departments or agencies that were involved in its development, including through seconding specialist staff.

Supplier expenses were absorbed by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Fixed costs (such as printing, translation and editorial services) were unaffected by the timing of the White Paper's release.