

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: Super Trawler - Compensation

Senator: Senator the Hon Ronaldson

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Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 30 November 2012

Number of pages: 1

Question:

Senator RONALDSON: What discussions did PM&C have with Minister Burke's department in relation to the handling of this matter in a public sense?

Ms Taylor: Obviously that was an issue that developed over some time, so we were informed as that issue developed.

Senator RONALDSON: When were you first involved in the discussions?

Ms Taylor: I would have to take that on notice.

Senator RONALDSON: You said it was "some time". Was it prior to 3 September?

Ms Taylor: I just cannot recall the specific date. I would have to take that on notice.

Senator RONALDSON: Would you take that on notice. Were the discussions about legal advice? Were the discussions about the media management of the issue? Were the discussions involving cabinet? Was there a cabinet submission in relation to this matter?

Ms Taylor: The discussions covered a range of issues.

Senator RONALDSON: Just give me a couple of examples of the range of issues.

Ms Taylor: For instance, sustainable fisheries management; management of matters of national environmental significance, which were matters of most concern to Mr Burke; and, obviously, legal advice and the operation of the EPBC Act came into some of those discussions.

Senator RONALDSON: Sorry, what did you say was the big issue for Minister Burke?

Ms Taylor: Matters of national environmental significance.

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Senator RONALDSON: You do not know why this matter became of national environmental significance at this stage, whereas Minister Burke had authorised this trawler to operate in Australian waters before?

Ms Taylor: I cannot comment on that.

Senator RONALDSON: You see, a cynic would think that it became of national environmental significance when it became a political issue—that it certainly was not in the period before, when Minister Burke authorised it and the government authorised it. It suddenly became a matter of national environmental significance at some stage. Do you know when it became a matter of national environmental significance?

Ms Taylor: I cannot speak for at what point something became more important to Minister Burke.

Senator RONALDSON: You will take on notice, will you, when those discussions around that occurred?

Ms Taylor: When those discussions first occurred, yes.

Senator RONALDSON: Has PMO had any indication about the amount of compensation that may need to be provided to the operators of the Abel Tasman?

Ms Taylor: Not to my knowledge.

Senator RONALDSON: Has there been no discussion between the PMO and Minister Burke's department about that?

Ms Taylor: Not to my knowledge.

Senator RONALDSON: Would it be to the knowledge of anyone else? Are you going to take that on notice?

Dr de Brouwer: We would not know the conversation between the PMO and Minister Burke's department.

Senator RONALDSON: PM&C, I should say.

Ms Leon: It would be unusual for the Prime Minister's office to talk directly to another department.

Senator RONALDSON: PM&C, not PMO, sorry. What discussions did PM&C have in relation to that issue?

Dr de Brouwer: I am not aware. It is an issue really for SEWPaC.

Senator RONALDSON: So PM&C did not have any discussions, was not in discussions, with Minister Burke's department about the compensation issue; is that what you are saying?

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Dr de Brouwer: I will take that one on notice.

Answer:

1. Officers from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) first met representatives from the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (DSEWPaC) on 24 August 2012.
2. PM&C officers did not have any discussions with the DSEWPaC about compensation issues.