

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
AUSTRALIAN CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION SERVICE

Question No. 11

Senator Ronaldson asked the following question at the hearing on 12 February 2013:

Senator RONALDSON: I am asking you whether there were leaked internal e-mails or internal e-mails that you have seen in relation to matters such as 'warnings that customs lacked the power, resources and ability to detect corruption and that its anti-corruption framework was "outdated and requires revision"' and 'better anti-corruption intelligence gathering, drug and alcohol testing and "the mandatory reporting of fraud".' Have you had a look, since you came in, at what was said by the organisation prior to your getting there?

Mr Pezzullo: Yes, and I have reviewed internally documents that appear to be similar to or perhaps even identical to the ones that the journalists in question have got. I do not want to comment on the veracity of those particular documents—they might be drafts; they might be amended or adjusted documents.

Senator RONALDSON: But you have personally seen information that is similar to the matters raised—

Mr Pezzullo: Correspondence of that kind, dating from the latter part of 2007.

Senator RONALDSON: I assume that these were from senior people within the organisation.

Mr Pezzullo: ... Yes.

Senator RONALDSON: Thank you. I assume that Customs passed these concerns on to the relevant ministers at the time. I think it was Minister Debus from the 2007 election until June 2009, Minister O'Connor from June 2009 to December 2011, and then Minister Clare since then. So I am assuming that these issues were raised with various ministers.

Mr Pezzullo: I will answer your question directly from my personal knowledge, Senator. For the two years from mid- to late-2007 to mid-2009, I do not know the answer to your question. I can take that on notice. And if correspondence has gone forward to ministers I will look to what I can further advise you through the notice process. ...

Senator RONALDSON: Are you suggesting to me that between December 2007 and July 2009—is that what you are talking about?—

Mr Pezzullo: July 2009.

Senator RONALDSON: there was no correspondence or reports of meetings between Customs and these respective ministers in relation to the concerns that were raised in these emails, which you acknowledge are true and correct?

Mr Pezzullo: The answer is: I do not know.

Senator RONALDSON: Will you take that on notice, please.

Mr Pezzullo: As I indicated I earlier, I will see what I can make available through the notice process.

Senator RONALDSON: And will you provide me with details of any memos between Customs and those ministers and advise me when that information was given to the ministers and whether it was done verbally or in writing. Are you able to say whether—

Mr Pezzullo: Yes, Senator, I will take that on notice. ...

Senator RONALDSON: You are going to get me other memos and requests to government.

Mr Pezzullo: I think we agreed it was advice to government.

Senator RONALDSON: Yes, either written or oral.

Mr Pezzullo: I will see what I can do on notice.

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

The Australian Customs and Border Protection Service (ACBPS) provided a number of briefings to the previous Ministers for Home Affairs, Minister Debus and Minister O'Connor, on individual matters from 2007 to 2009 related to specific matters of integrity and corruption involving ACBPS

Officers. There were no formal briefings provided in relation to the matters raised by Senator Ronaldson during this period.