

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS  
AUSTRALIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE ORGANISATION

**Question No. 25**

**Senator Abetz asked the following question at the hearing on 29 May 2013:**

**Senator ABETZ:** ... It has long been reported that Hezbollah operates in Australia and on 27 April the *Australian* reported comments by Sunni cleric Sheikh Bilal Radwan that there are at least three Hezbollah sleeper cells in Australia. Hezbollah has been involved in terrorist attacks around the world, and earlier this year the Bulgarian government found that an Australian citizen was involved in a Hezbollah terrorist attack that killed six people in Bulgaria on 18 July 2012. Meanwhile, Cyprus convicted another self-confessed Hezbollah operative of attempting to prepare terrorist attacks in that country. Do the Australian security authorities concur that Hezbollah has sleeper cells in this country and, if so, what can you reveal about what is being done to monitor their behaviour?

**Mr Wilkins:** I cannot really answer that question. You can appreciate that I run basically a policy shop. It is really a question for ASIO and the AFP.

**Senator ABETZ:** Albeit, the policy framework under which they operate will impact on what they do.

**Mr Wilkins:** Yes, but what I am saying is that I do not collect that sort of intelligence. I cannot really answer your question. I am not sure that ASIO would want to answer your question in an open session like this, either.

**Senator ABETZ:** I fully accept that.

**Mr Wilkins:** I can take it on notice—

**Senator ABETZ:** When somebody publicly boasts that there are such cells operating in Australia then it is a matter of concern for the citizenry of our country and—

**Mr Wilkins:** I hear what your say.

**Senator ABETZ:** if the authorities simply say, 'Oh, well, that's interesting, isn't it?' it might concern the citizenry that these boasts are not being taken seriously.

**Mr Wilkins:** Let me take it seriously. I will take it on board and discuss it with my colleague the director-general of intelligence and also the commissioner of police. Can I do that?

**Senator ABETZ:** Yes. Any questions that I am asking that you feel should be farmed out, if I could rely on your good offices to farm those out then to the relevant agencies, I would be most obliged to you, Mr Wilkins.

**Mr Wilkins:** I would also like to discuss with them the best way to handle your query, actually. I take your point.

**Senator ABETZ:** I accept that.

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

Consistent with longstanding practice it would not be appropriate to comment on operational or intelligence matters, such as those raised in the Senator's question.