

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 19 OCTOBER 2010

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(119) Program 6.1: Multicultural and Citizenship Services

Senator Barnett (L&CA 117) asked:

Is the department aware of any instructions from the department's Hobart office to the Clarence council that Bibles are not permitted at citizenship ceremonies?

Answer:

The Clarence City Council has been following the policy contained in the Australian Citizenship Ceremonies Code in relation to the use of holy books at citizenship ceremonies. The policy in relation to holy books contained in the current edition of the Code, printed in 2008, is the same as the policy articulated in the 2003 edition.

The Code states:

"It is not a requirement for candidates to use a holy book or scripture or hold up their hand/s when making the pledge, however candidates should be permitted to do so if they wish.

Candidates who wish to use a holy book or scripture when making the pledge, can bring the holy book or scripture of their choice to the citizenship ceremony. This approach should assist those conducting citizenship ceremonies, and in the context of a multicultural society, avoid impairing the sensibilities of candidates when the holy book or scripture of their choice is not available at the ceremony"

The Code was updated in July 2008. The then Minister wrote to all Councils to remind them of their obligations under the Code as well as to provide them with a copy of the updated version. The letter drew specific attention to a number of elements of the Code, including a reminder on the use of holy books during ceremonies.

There was no specific correspondence to the Clarence City Council regarding the use of holy books.