Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Budget Estimates

29 May – 31 May 2012

Question: BET 78

Topic: Delivery of Portfolio Budget Statements – 2012-13 Budget

Hansard Page: Wednesday 30 May 2012, page 6

Senator CORMANN asked:

Senator CORMANN: It was five o'clock by the time we ended up with all of the portfolio budget statements. We got some at 3.30 pm and some of them included portfolio additional estimates statements for 2011-12. They were not even the right ones. Why weren't we provided with any copies electronically if that was the issue?

Mr Ray: I think in the past we have experimented with electronic copies. A few years ago we experimented with electronic copies and that was not particularly successful. I think then we got feedback that people preferred hard copies.

Senator CORMANN: Sure, we prefer hard copies if we can get them. The first question is: why do you have a 2 pm deadline for printed delivery when the budget lockup starts at 1.30 pm? That seems to be the first problem, I would have thought.

Mr Ray: It is not our deadline, I should say.

Senator CORMANN: So whose deadline is that?

Mr Ray: I would need to take that on notice, but that is CanPrint's deadline.

Senator CORMANN: Well, the printer does whatever the person asking for the job tells them needs to be done. They do not give themselves a deadline. Presumably Treasury would give them some sort of deadline. I would have thought that, if there is a budget lockup at 1.30 pm, it would be preferable to have a deadline prior to that.

Mr Ray: I can understand where you are coming from, Senator. We are not responsible for portfolio budget statements other than our own.

Senator CORMANN: Who is responsible, then?

Mr Ray: Each individual portfolio.

Senator CORMANN: That's great, isn't it? That is very unsatisfactory.

Mr Ray: I understand that it was unsatisfactory. We are involved in discussions to find out what happened and why and to try to put something better in place for next year.

Senator CORMANN: I still do not understand. Presumably there is a central order to the same printer.

Mr Ray: No, there is not.

Senator CORMANN: So every different department orders their own portfolio budget statements and gives their own deadline to when it has to be done.

Mr Ray: Yes.

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Senator CORMANN: What?

Mr Ray: And they do not even go to the same printer.

Senator CORMANN: They do not go to the same printer. How do you expect to have the budget papers ready even for your own purposes in a timely fashion?

Mr Ray: So we are responsible for the budget papers—that is, the primary budget documents.

Senator CORMANN: Sure, I understand.

Mr Ray: Individual portfolios are responsible for their portfolio budget statements and they know when the lockup is. They are responsible for having them delivered to the Senate Table Office. Typically that is done via the printer, not via the portfolio. And I agree with you that it is unsatisfactory.

Senator CORMANN: I really appreciate that acknowledgement, but even for your own purposes—that is, for the government's own purposes—surely you have to have those portfolio budget statements ready to go before the opposition has to have access to them. I cannot understand why they would be available so late, even for your own purposes.

Mr Ray: As I said, I agree that it is unsatisfactory and we are looking at how we can improve it.

Answer:

Treasury is reviewing the process for delivery of hard copy Portfolio Budget Statements (PBSs) to the Budget Media Lock-up. Electronic download of PBSs will be available at the start of the 2013-14 Budget Lock-up.