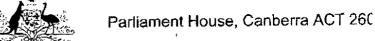
Sen the Hon Amanda Vanstone

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2-3 JAN 2004

Senator Joe Ludwig
Chair
Select Committee on Ministerial Discretion in
Migration Matters
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Ludwig

I have been informed that your Committee has been seeking to obtain copies of the notebooks maintained by the Departmental Liaison Officers (DLOs) who worked in my predecessor's office and currently work in my office, that contain records of some of the phone calls made to the Minister's office over past years.

I am concerned at the broad nature of the request, which I am advised is unprecedented. In my own experience I cannot recall the Senate making such a request. It has implications going well beyond this particular inquiry.

In considering your request, it may be helpful if I outline what is actually recorded in the notebooks. I am advised that, just as occurred in my predecessor's office, there are hundreds of phone calls made to my office each week. These phone calls from the public, Members of Parliament and electorate offices, are extremely diverse, covering a myriad of topics across all areas of the portfolio. Many callers seek information, others seek advice, others might phone to offer views or criticism. The majority of the phone calls coming into the office are handled by the DLOs. Comparatively, only a few are phone calls related to requests for Ministerial intervention.

In responding to phone calls, DLOs may be able to deal with the queries 'on the spot' without making any record. On other occasions, where some follow up is necessary, the phone number may be recorded in the notebooks as an aide memoire, but in many cases they do not provide details about the context of the calls, or information, even on the subject matter of the calls. Without such contextual information, the notebooks would not in my view be helpful to your Committee and could in fact give quite misleading impressions.

Further, given that the vast majority of calls received and noted by DLOs in the notebooks have not been about Ministerial intervention issues, but instead have related to people whose affairs are right outside the scope of the inquiry, it is therefore completely inappropriate to pass on this information in this fashion. In addition, even in matters that may touch on Ministerial intervention, I do not believe it is consistent with normal privacy principles to pass on information in relation to specific individuals without first seeking their approval.



For these reasons, I have decided to not accede to your request to obtain the notebooks. If, however, the Committee has a particular point or question that may be clarified by checking whether there is a specific entry in the notebooks, I could facilitate the checking of such a specific request.

Yours sincerely

AMANDA VANSTONE