

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications**

**Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice**

**Budget Estimates May 2017**

**Communications Portfolio**

**Department of Communications and the Arts**

**Question No: 1**

**Program 1.1**

**Hansard Ref: Pages 4-5, 24/05/2017**

**Topic: Late QoNs – Cause of delay**

**Senator Urquhart, Anne asked:**

**Senator URQUHART:** Okay. What I wanted to know is what really is causing the delay. You said that you talked to each agency, or you sent them a reminder on 6 April. In terms of your tracking, can you provide us with the details of when you sent NBN Co—because that is where most of the problems lie. Can you send us details around when you reminded NBN, on how many occasions, whether you got a response or not and when the department actually received those responses back.

**Ms Talbot:** I will have to take that on notice.

**Senator URQUHART:** I am sure. That would be great. If we can have all the details around that, that would be appreciated, so that at least we can then try to work out what is causing the delay and who is ultimately responsible for that delay. Who is ultimately responsible for the delay? Is it the department, is it the minister's office, is it NBN—who is it?

**Ms Talbot:** As someone mentioned before, there is a complexity in some of the questions that are being asked and that is taking a longer time. With the spill-over, too, we had four fewer weeks to get those questions through. I think that also probably contributed to some of them coming in late, although I am not suggesting that as an excuse. We try to work cooperatively with the portfolio agencies from the department to try to get things through, as possible. As for where the actual blockage is, I could not say exactly where it is, because we are trying to follow up regularly to try to get the QONs through as quickly as we possibly can.

**Senator URQUHART:** Who is ultimately accountable for timely delivery?

**Ms Talbot:** Obviously the department is responsible for getting the QONs to the minister's office to enable the clearance and then subsequently the tabling of those.

**Senator URQUHART:** I think I have made my point, but if we can have that information that would be useful. I just note that the spillover estimates has its own due date for QONs, so that is a separate date from what it is for the other estimates.

...

**CHAIR:** To conclude on that, in addition to Senator Urquhart's comments, I do want to work with the department to find a way forward, but in addition to the information that Senator Urquhart has asked for I think it would be very helpful if you could also go back and give us an idea of whether you are still dealing with the same number and the same complexity of questions, timeframes and things like that. If you could provide that context as well, that might give us a better understanding—taking the political rhetoric and flourish out of it, having a look at what the situation is, and then we can make some assessments from there.

**Senator Fifield:** I was just advised there were 295 questions on notice from the first hearing and 117 from the spillover, so it was 412 questions in total.

**CHAIR:** Could we put that in—I know one of them had 36 different parts to it. I think you have got the point, Secretary. If you could come back to us on that, that would be appreciated. I will now invite general questions of the department.

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**Answer:**

The Department of Communications and the Arts liaises with all portfolio agencies periodically to relay timelines, indexes and Hansard corrections to support the functions of the Committee.

The Department liaised with NBN Co Limited on a number of occasions, with officials at varying levels, between 14 March 2017 and 17 May 2017 concerning the status of responses to questions on notice and received a response on each occasion including:

- Draft index circulated on 14 March 2017
- Final index circulated on 17 March 2017
- Spill-over index (Hansard questions) circulated on 30 March 2017
- Final approved QoN index provided to nbn on 7 April 2017
- Reminder email on 10 April 2017
- Reminder email on 17 May 2017

The Communications and the Arts Portfolio question breakdown since the Machinery of Government changes in 2015 are below:

<b>Hearing</b>	<b>Number of Questions</b>
Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2015	227 (includes 3 whole of portfolio questions)*
Additional Estimates February 2016	960 (includes 66 whole of portfolio questions)*
Budget Estimates May 2016 (prior to caretaker)	16
Supplementary Budget Estimates October 2016	252 (includes 5 whole of portfolio questions)*
Additional Estimates February/March 2017	412 (includes 3 whole of portfolio questions)*
Budget Estimates May 2017 (this does not include the spill-over held 15 June 2017)	334 (includes 5 whole of portfolio questions)*

*\*The Communications and Arts Portfolio has 17 individual agencies.*