

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice
Budget Estimates Spill-over June 2017
Communications Portfolio
Department of Communications and the Arts,

Question No: 280

Program 1.1

Hansard Ref: Page 7, 15/06/2017

Topic: Electorate Briefs – Sensitive/Commercial information

Senator Urquhart, Anne asked:

I will move on to the response to question 314, where I asked what information contained in the electorate briefs was considered sensitive or commercial and why it was considered sensitive or commercial. You will recall that this followed from a previous response I received on a freedom of information request. The department's response to question on notice 314 says:

The Senator's initial request captured a more detailed version of the electorate brief which contains more detailed data. As advised in the hearing on 24 March 2017, some of those briefings include very granular detail on matters commercially sensitive to nbn relating to take-up rates in particular.

The response goes on to say:

The documents released under A106-2017 are a summary version of briefing material prepared by the Department.

Do you have those briefs containing the granular detail, the non-summary version here with you today?

Mr Madsen: No, we do not.

Senator URQUHART: Right, but you can get them?

Mr Madsen: Yes, they are available.

Senator URQUHART: Why don't you have them given that you knew that we were coming back to deal with the questions on notice?

Mr Madsen: We understood that, through that FOI process, our FOI officer had engaged with your office to refine the nature of that search. As a result of that discussion, the more summary version of the briefs was provided.

Senator URQUHART: Okay, so you have not got them here, but you can provide them?

Mr Madsen: As was identified in the FOI process, the larger version of the briefs is likely to include commercial-in-confidence information. It was that process of having to go back through several thousand pages of documents to identify and potentially extract that commercial-in-confidence information that led us to identify that that would have been an extensive process to undertake.

Senator URQUHART: I know that you said that you have not got them here today, but can you tell me what date it was created—the nonsummary version—does it cover all electorates and what the title of the brief was?

Mr Madsen: I will have to take that on notice.

Senator URQUHART: So you do not know what date it was created?

Mr Madsen: No, I do not have that information.

Senator URQUHART: What is the granular detail referred to in that response that you talked about?

Mr Madsen: It is information that relates to that level of take-up in different service area modules as part of the NBN, which can include information down to individual buildings and the

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level of take-up in those buildings.

Senator URQUHART: What information does the summary version not include?

Mr Madsen: Particularly it would not go down to that level of detail of the in-building information.

Senator URQUHART: Is that the only difference?

Mr Madsen: No, there could be other differences as well.

Senator URQUHART: What would they be?

Mr Madsen: They could relate to a more detailed breakdown across different technologies. If you are looking for an extensive list, I would need to take that on notice.

Senator URQUHART: If you could, that would be good. Can you also provide a more elaborate explanation about what types of take-up rates were included in those briefs?

Mr Madsen: Yes

Answer:

The non-summary version of the briefs released under A106-2017 was also prepared on 30 November 2016 for all electorates. These briefs are titled 'Rollout progress in the electorate of [electorate name]'.

The briefs contain a list of Brownfields Services available including SAM (Service Area Module) identifier (unique letter and number combination that identifies the SAM), Region name, Rollout Area Identifier (unique letter and number combination that identifies the rollout area within the SAM), Ready for Service Date, Disconnection Date, Premises Serviceable, Premises Active, Activation Take Up Rate (%) and Activation + Pending Take Up Rate (%).

Where NBN Co Ltd (nbn) has rolled out services to specific areas within a SAM, such as with its fibre to basement rollout where it is often competing with other companies, these tables contain information about individual buildings including take up rates by customers in those buildings. nbn has confirmed that this information is likely to be commercially sensitive. The company has also confirmed that as rollout progresses and begins to focus more on metropolitan areas, there may be information about SAMs in the CBDs and business areas of Australia's larger cities where take-up information relating to the entire SAM is commercially sensitive (as nbn has direct competitors in these areas).

The Senator also asked about information in these briefs that is not in the summary version. Where relevant, the briefs also contain a detailed list of brownfields areas under construction and a list of fixed wireless towers also listing a range of information including their identifier, location, number of premises covered, activations and take up rates.