

**Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace
Relations**

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates 2011-2012**

Outcome 5 - Workplace Relations & Economic Strategy

DEEWR Question No. EW1158_12

Senator Abetz asked on 15 February 2012 , Hansard page 129

Refers to previous DEEWR Parliamentary Question No 1328

Question

Parliamentary question on notice 1328

Senator ABETZ: In parliamentary question on notice 1327 I asked a whole list of questions, including questions (6), (7) and (8). This relates to the Qantas dispute: (6) At what time was a teleconference with ministers convened. (7) At what time did the teleconference with ministers take place and which ministers were involved. (8) Were any other people who were not Ministers involved in the teleconference; if so, who. We are told in answer to (6), (7) and (8) that the issue has been addressed in public statements made by Minister Evans and Minister Albanese. Can you please draw to my attention anywhere where, in public statements by Minister Evans and Albanese, they told us who else was involved in the teleconference? Mr Kovacic: I would have to take that on notice.

Answer

On 31 October 2011, Minister Evans in an answer to a question without notice (*Senate Hansard* 31 October 2011, page 7542) responded (emphasis added):

‘I did not take the advice of Peter Reith about not interfering in the dispute, but clearly his contribution to the debate was interesting. We intervened and sought orders from Fair Work Australia when the dispute between Qantas and the three unions significantly escalated, escalated to a point at which the airline was effectively shut down. We received no warning of that decision by Qantas until the afternoon that they took that action. They rang us to advise us that that was what they were doing. That obviously completely changed the circumstances of the industrial dispute. **We immediately had a telephone meeting of ministers.** I was authorised to seek Fair Work Australia orders to cease the industrial action. Fair Work Australia met immediately that evening to begin that process. The result is the appropriate one in the circumstances’.

On 31 October 2011, Minister Albanese in an answer to a question without notice (*House of Representatives Hansard* 31 October 2011, page 12031) responded (emphasis added):

‘The government's priority has absolutely been to get Qantas back in the air, and overnight we have achieved just that. Upon receiving notification from Qantas after 2pm on Saturday, this government acted. Firstly, we engaged with CASA. Given the safety issues that had been raised by Qantas, we confirmed with CASA

that there were no grounds as far as they were concerned for the grounding of the airline at five o'clock that afternoon. There were no grounds whatsoever from the air safety regulator for the action that Qantas unilaterally took at their board meeting on Saturday morning. Unlike the Patrick dispute—where you had a collaboration and a conspiracy with the government, with people being trained in Dubai—this was a unilateral action by an employer to lock out its workforce on Monday at 8pm, in spite of the fact that the only industrial action which was pending was pilots wearing red ties and making announcements to passengers on aircraft. We confirmed that that was the case. We applied for an urgent hearing before Fair Work Australia. **I had a discussion with the Prime Minister and we had discussions between ministers**'.

On 31 October 2011, the Treasurer in an answer to a question without notice (*House of Representatives Hansard* 31 October 2011, page 12035) responded (emphasis added):

'The most important thing you must do when you are handling an industrial dispute is put the national interest first, and that is what this government has done. **When the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport was informed of their decision, which they said was non-negotiable, he rang me—he rang the Treasurer—and I then spoke to him. I subsequently spoke to the Prime Minister and to a number of other ministers** to bring them together and to put in place the swiftest possible action that we could, given the threat to our national economy. So we acted as soon as we possibly could, we acted within the law of the land and we acted with a genuine desire to resolve this dispute. I know that those opposite want to take sides in a dispute. We know that they always take one side when they are talking about industrial relations, and we know they never take the side of the workers. But what we will do on this side of the House is work in an even-handed way within the industrial relations system to make sure that both the employers and the employees are heard, and we will do that in the national interest'.