SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
BUDGET ESTIMATES 2009-10

Outcome **5**

DEEWR Question No. **EW0241_10**

Senator Cash asked on 2 June 2009, EEWR Hansard page 10.

Question

What is the meaning of consensus?

My question is: what is actually meant by ‘consensus’? Is it total agreement or is it the two-thirds rule?

Answer

The Inter-Governmental Agreement for Regulatory and Operational Reform in Occupational Health and Safety (IGA) does not define 'consensus'.

The *Macquarie Dictionary* defines consensus as ‘general agreement or concord’ or ‘majority of opinion’. Consensus can also describe an iterative process for negotiating an accord or agreement.

In the Department’s view, it is arguable, based on the dictionary definition and on the fact that the IGA uses both consensus and unanimous, that consensus is a lower threshold than unanimous. In the context of the IGA, consensus could mean more than a two-thirds majority but less than unanimous agreement (that is, seven or eight out of the nine WRMC votes).

However, this is a matter for the WRMC or COAG to consider when appropriate.