

Public Accounts and Audit

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications

Division/Agency: Assurance Taskforce

Inquiry: Governance in the stewardship of public resources: Inquiry into Auditor-General's Reports 11, 31, 39 (2019-20) and 2 and 9 (2020-21)

Topic: Meetings with Ms Waterhouse – text messages

Proof Hansard Page: 48 Written (14 April 2021)

Departmental Question number: IQ21-000041

Senator Julian Hill asked:

Mr HILL: There was at least one meeting with another landowner, Ms Louise Waterhouse; is that correct?

Mr Boyd: As to exactly how many meetings, we don't know. But there was certainly more than one.

Mr HILL: With Ms Waterhouse?

Mr Boyd: Are you talking about just in coffee shops? Of meetings generally, there were more than one. There was more engagement than just on one occasion. As to exactly how many more—

Mr HILL: I'm asking you about Ms Waterhouse. Was there engagement with Ms Waterhouse that was undocumented?

Mr Boyd: Yes, that's what I'm talking about.

Mr HILL: Do you know what the meeting was about?

Mr Boyd: This is part of the difficulty for us. We can see, in terms of some of the exchanges, particularly via emails, what was being discussed. They were going to talk about her proposals for land when she was wanting to have an intersection moved—those sorts of things. But in other ones, no, we don't have the insight that we need.

Mr HILL: They might just be friends having coffee.

Ms Spence: If it would help, I would refer you to the question on notice. Mr Boyd might have more, but we're aware of only two informal meetings between departmental officials and Ms Waterhouse. Just for clarity.

Mr HILL: How many officers were involved in those meetings with Ms Waterhouse?

Ms Spence: Just the one officer.

Mr HILL: The same officer both times?

Ms Spence: That's my understanding.

Mr HILL: And was that in the coffee shop?

Ms Spence: There were two meetings in coffee shops—

Mr HILL: With Ms Waterhouse?

Ms Spence: Two informal meetings that we are aware of.

Mr HILL: Given there are no records of what was discussed there, have you gone back subsequently and figured out what was discussed?

Ms Spence: We've gone through our records and, obviously, as part of the various investigations underway, whatever extra material we can find. But I think it's a clear issue that we are working through to improve the way in which we record outcomes of meetings, whether they're formal or informal.

Mr HILL: How were those two meetings you referred to arranged?

Ms Spence: It seems to be text messages and emails.

Mr HILL: Text messages as in a normal text message or an encrypted message?

Ms Spence: Just normal text messages or emails.

Mr HILL: Have you obtained those text messages?

Ms Spence: I've said text messages—I'll take that on notice. I've seen emails.

Answer:

The Department's records indicate these meetings were arranged by email.

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Topic: Officers involved in the Leppington Triangle transaction

Proof Hansard Page: 53 (14 April 2021)

Departmental Question number: IQ21-000046

Senator Julian Hill asked:

Mr HILL: I'll give it a crack. With regard to the Western Sydney unit, how many officers involved in the Leppington Triangle transaction are still working for the department?

Ms Spence: I'd have to take that on notice to be accurate.

Mr HILL: Please take that on notice and also let us know if any of them have been promoted. Have any of the officers involved in the Leppington Triangle transaction gone on to work for other Commonwealth agencies or ministerial offices?

Ms Spence: Again, I'd prefer to take that on notice, unless Mr Hallinan has an answer.

Mr Hallinan: Just for accuracy, I think we should take it on notice, but, yes, people have moved to other agencies.

Mr HILL: Ministerial offices?

Mr Hallinan: Not that I'm aware of.

Ms Spence: Not that I'm aware of.

Answer:

From November 2015 to the acquisition of the Leppington Triangle in July 2018, a total of 13 departmental officers were involved in briefing processes about the acquisition as contact officers, clearance officers and/or decision makers.

As at 14 April 2021, of those officers, five were still employed by the Department. The Department is aware of five officers who have gone on to work for other Commonwealth agencies, including permanent transfers and periods of secondment.

Subsequent to the acquisition in July 2018, as at 14 April 2021 two officers had received promotions within the Department.

The Department is not aware of any of the officers identified having gone on to work for a minister's office or landholders.

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Topic:

Proof Hansard Page: 51 (14 April 2021)

Departmental Question number: IQ21-000044

Senator Julian Hill asked:

Mr HILL: Have you sent any briefing material about the Leppington Triangle matter to Mr Fletcher or his office since his reappointment to the portfolio?

Ms Spence: I think there have been two briefs, one of which was to note the submission that we've provided, and the other one was in relation to a request for documents that had come through, just in his role as responsible minister. If I can take that on notice—

Mr HILL: Take on notice the dates and the subject matter. It would be great if you could confirm those two or anything else. Chair, there are a few other topics, but I'll hand over.

Answer:

The Department provided Minister Fletcher with an update on portfolio matters, including the Leppington Triangle audit, at the time of his appointment as Minister for Communications, Urban Infrastructure, Cities and the Arts (22 December 2020).

Since that time, the Department has provided the Minister with two noting briefs of an administrative nature related to:

1. on 29 January 2021, the Department's submission to the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit Inquiry into the Auditor General's Reports 11, 31, 39 (2019-20) and 2 and 9 (2020-21), and
2. on 12 February 2021, a Senate Motion seeking material associated with ANAO's performance audit of the Leppington Triangle purchase.