

Department of Defence

Senate Economics References Committee – Inquiry into the future of Australia's Naval Shipbuilding Industry - 30 September 2014

Question on Notice No. 2 - Minister's briefing on Japan visit

Senator Conroy asked on Tuesday, 30 September 2014, Hansard page 39:

CHAIR: I just want to clarify something. I want to get this quite correct, because I may have misunderstood this. You are saying that you went to Japan in January this year.

Mr King: February, I think it was. I will get the right date.

CHAIR: It was before the Prime Minister visited Japan—a few months earlier.

Mr King: Yes.

CHAIR: Not that the two were related. You started discussions about a relationship between the Australian shipbuilding program and the Japanese shipbuilding program without the minister knowing about it.

Mr King: I am pretty sure I did not specifically advise him of it.

CHAIR: Does that mean—

Senator CONROY: I specifically asked you whether or not the minister was involved and you said no.

Mr King: He was not involved—

Senator CONROY: Sorry, I asked whether he was informed, and you said no.

Mr King: I do not believe he was. (...)

Vice Adm. Barrett: I was not. I was the fleet commander. I do not know whether my predecessor was aware.

CHAIR: Mr King, was his predecessor aware?

Senator CONROY: Was anyone at the table aware of Mr King's freelancing?

Vice Adm. Jones: Mr King was not freelancing.

Senator EDWARDS: That is uncalled for, Senator Conroy.

Vice Adm. Jones: Senior leadership of Defence was certainly aware that Mr King was going to Japan.

CHAIR: So you are seeing this as a single leadership?

Vice Adm. Jones: Senior leadership.

CHAIR: Sorry, I thought you said 'single leadership'. (...)

CHAIR: So you are saying that the Navy knew but the minister did not.

Senator CONROY: I will come to that. Are you seriously saying that no-one in the Navy informed the minister that this was about to happen?

Vice Adm. Jones: I did not say that at all.

Senator CONROY: Could you confirm to us whether or not the Navy informed the minister?

Vice Adm. Jones: I cannot confirm that.

Senator CONROY: I appreciate that you cannot. Rear Admiral—I am sorry, I cannot see your name—were you aware and did anyone, to your knowledge, inform the minister?

Rear Adm. Sammut: I am not aware of anyone who informed the minister.

Senator EDWARDS: Could you take that on notice?

Vice Adm. Jones: We could certainly take that on notice.

Senator CONROY: It is not complicated. We are just trying to find out when you told—

Vice Adm. Jones: That is fine, but I am not in the Navy program and neither is Admiral Sammut, so we cannot speak for Navy, but we can certainly provide on notice information on whether the department provided advice to the minister.

Response:

The approval delegate for international travel to be undertaken by the Chief Executive Officer of the Defence Materiel Organisation (CEO DMO), is the Secretary of Defence. Intent to travel is not routinely advised by Departmental Officials to the Minister for Defence. The Minister was not formally advised of Mr King's intent to travel to Japan in February 2014. However, the visit was prompted by an informal discussion between the Minister and CEO in late 2013 regarding opportunities to explore broad materiel engagement between the two countries ahead of the Minister's visit to Japan in 2014.

As CEO DMO, Mr King has undertaken a number of overseas trips and hosted visits by foreign officials over recent years in relation to the Future Submarine Program. Other senior DMO officers, including; Deputy CEO DMO, General Manager Submarines, and Head Future Submarine Program have also undertaken similar activities. Countries visited and hosted include Sweden, Germany, France, and Spain in addition to Japan.

Navy did not provide advice to the Minister regarding Mr King's intent to travel to Japan in February 2014.