

House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia

Division: Social Policy Division
Topic: Payment of the CRA
Reference: Spoken

Question:

CHAIR: Thank you. I'm not expecting you or them to get into any sort of policy discussions, but perhaps you could take on notice a matter that was raised in evidence this morning by the Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia. They talked about there being several ways that we can make investment in housing more attractive. One is to boost the level of return to the investor, and the suggestion was that payment of the CRA could be made directly to the investor. I won't go into the other things that they suggested, but that was a suggestion that was made. Has there been any work done by the department on how that would work? Has it ever been considered? If you can't answer that question, I'm happy for you to take it on notice.

Ms Wilkinson : This is not an issue that I am aware that we have considered—certainly not in the time that I've been in this role—but I am very happy to take on notice whether work occurred prior to me taking up this role.

Answer:

The Department of Treasury has not undertaken substantive consideration of this proposal recently.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia

Division: Social Policy Division
Topic: Overcrowding and boarder housing
Reference: Spoken

Question:

CHAIR: We'll see how we go for time. Ms Wilkinson, Australia is the only country in the OECD that includes severe overcrowding and boarder housing when estimating homelessness. How do we compare our performance internationally when we are the only country that includes those particular categories?

Ms Wilkinson: Again, that is something that we'd probably need to take on notice. The data collection is the responsibility of the Bureau of Statistics, and, yes, we do include severe overcrowding when estimating homelessness, and countries such as the UK and Canada don't. In terms of that, are you seeking a breakdown of our homelessness with overcrowding subtracted versus other jurisdictions, or are you posing a question as to why we pursue that methodology?

CHAIR: I don't need the breakdown, because we can have a breakdown, but I'm just wondering: aside from the fact that the ABS have decided that this is what they want to do, it just strikes me as odd that we're the only country that does it and I'm keen to know why we do it, other than the fact that the ABS thinks it's a good thing.

Ms Wilkinson: Again, I'm very happy to take that question on notice and come back with a response to that, including the history of how we got to where we have.

Answer:

The following National Statistical Organisations (NSOs) include boarding houses in their definition of homelessness: New Zealand, Canada, USA, Korea and several European Union countries.

Of the NSOs listed above, New Zealand is the only one to also include severe overcrowding within the definition of homelessness.

The methodology the Australian Bureau of Statistics uses for defining and estimating homelessness is described in the Explanatory Notes of Australian Bureau of Statistics cat. no. 2049.0 - Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia

Division: Social Policy Division
Topic: Commonwealth rent assistance
Reference: Spoken

Question:

Ms MURPHY: I appreciate that, thank you. I have some questions for Ms Wilkinson from Treasury. You were asked some brief questions about the Commonwealth rent assistance. I think I understand your evidence was that you have not done any work on it specifically in the context of COVID. Is that right?

Ms Wilkinson: I think that was a different question I was asked about COVID. I can't comment much on what we do or don't provide to government. We provide ongoing advice on housing across the spectrum to government.

Ms MURPHY: Are you able to say whether Treasury has been looking at the Commonwealth rent assistance and the level that it's at? We've had evidence to suggest that in many circumstances it would only cover a quarter of an individual's rent. It's been suggested that is insufficient. Has Treasury done any work looking at that?

Ms Wilkinson: We haven't recently been looking at the rates of Commonwealth rental assistance.

Ms MURPHY: I don't mean to push too hard, but what do you mean by 'recently'?

Ms Wilkinson: We certainly haven't this year, in the COVID period. I'm not sure if that's what you're asking.

Ms MURPHY: Well, yes, and perhaps when it was last looked at as to its sufficiency.

Ms Wilkinson: I'd have to take that on notice.

Answer:

This year during the COVID period Treasury has provided advice to Government on a broad range of housing and welfare assistance issues.

Further, the Department regularly reviews evidence and research relating to the effectiveness of income support payments.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia

Division: Social Policy Division
Topic: Proposal for the federal government to get involved in social housing
Reference: Spoken

Question:

Ms MURPHY: Certainly. That's fine. We've also heard from the lord mayors of Sydney and Melbourne today. As I'm sure you are well aware, they've put forward a proposal for the federal government to get involved in social housing, in a \$200 million commitment that they said would lead to some 2,000 housing units. I take it that Treasury is aware of that proposal from the lord mayors.

Ms Wilkinson : No, I personally haven't seen that proposal. No, I haven't.

Ms MURPHY: We heard some evidence that it's been a significant period of time that these lord mayors have been putting this proposal forward and having conversations with governments. I accept that you haven't heard it. Is it something that has gone to the Department of Treasury at any point in time?

Ms Wilkinson: Again, I'd have to take that on notice.

Ms MURPHY: Would it be likely to go to some section other than you and your section?

Ms Wilkinson: Not if it came to Treasury; it would most likely come to my area. It may have gone to the Department of Social Services, or it may be have been provided to ministers. So there are a range of different entry points, I suppose.

Ms MURPHY: But if it has gone to either Department of Social Services or ministers, it hasn't made its way to the Department of Treasury to be analysed and considered and for advice to be provided on it?

Ms Wilkinson: I haven't seen it. As I said, I'm happy to take that on notice.

Answer:

The Department of Treasury was not aware of this proposal prior to 29 July 2020.