

INQUIRY QUESTION

(Question No. 1)

Senator David Shoebridge asked the Department of Defence the following question, upon notice, on 01 March 2024:

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: Are you intending to put a subjective element into the definition of 'fundamental research'? You said that you've been working on the definition that was expressed then. Are you intending to have that subjective element?

Mr Nockels: I'll pass to Ms Wright, who's been working closely with that sector around the definition.

Mr Jeffrey: Senator, could you explain what you mean by subjective? I wasn't quite sure what you were getting at.

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: Probably because you didn't hear the evidence earlier, Mr Jeffrey. So we might go to Mrs Wright.

Mr Jeffrey: Could you explain the definition? How are you explaining 'subjective'?

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: The inclusion of the intent. Mrs Wright.

Ms Wright: We have released a couple of papers out since September last year consulting with the sector. We've had a number of meetings throughout these last six months. The working group has finally got to an agreed definition now for fundamental research. It's just out for a final level of confirmation to make sure that we have a unanimous agreement to that. A number of the people who appeared this morning read out that definition to you, which is what we have workshopped and agreed in that working group. We're just waiting for each of those representatives to come back and confirm.

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: That's the definition which includes a subjective element to it. How is that subjective element going to work in practise?

Mrs Wright: The subjective element is removed because they have proposed 'is ordinarily published' is what they have proposed, so we're waiting for that and that covers all of it.

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: Sorry, that isn't what they read out. They read out 'intended to be published'. They read it out repeatedly.

Mrs Wright: That's the latest one that's gone out in this last 24 hours. That's the proposal from them which they're all saying they agree with, which changes from 'intended to be published' to 'ordinarily would be published'.

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: They gave evidence only a few hours ago. Has it changed in the last few hours?

Mrs Wright: I can only talk to the emails that are going through.

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: Can you read on to the record what the current working definition is if it's changed in the last 24 hours?

Mrs Wright: I would have to take that on notice. I don't have that in front of me right now because I don't have my email account up.

The Department of Defence has provided the following answer to the above question:

The most recent draft definition of 'Fundamental Research' was circulated to members of the higher education and research working group for comment on Tuesday, 27 February 2024. The definition provided was as follows:

"Fundamental Research is defined to mean basic or applied research that is intended for public disclosure or shared broadly within the research community and not research whose results are restricted for national security reasons."

Defence is working with the working group to finalise the definition.