

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
INQUIRY INTO CENTRELINK'S COMPLIANCE PROGRAM

Answers to Questions on Notice

Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman

Question 1

Senator Siewert asked the following question on 3 October 2019:

CHAIR: In terms of the end-of-financial-year factor, what percentage of the current complaints would you say are accounted for in terms of both collective FTB and tax? Could you then break that down for me in terms of tax versus FTB?

Mr Manthorpe: I think I'll have to take that on notice to see. We might have to start drilling down into the individual complaints in some detail to get to that. I'm not sure that we capture the data as neatly as your question would hope that we might. But I'm happy to take it on notice and see what we can find.

The response to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

Our process is to record the issues raised in a complaint based on what people tell us. People often tell us a debt is based on automated data matching, given the public awareness of this issue.

We have conducted further examination of individual complaints recorded in our system as automated data matching cases.

We were able to identify that in slightly less than 10 per cent of the automated data matching complaints we received during July and August 2019 (323 total), the person also told us that money had been garnished from an FTB payment (5) or a tax return (25) to recover the debt.

Question 2

Senator Siewert asked the following question on 3 October 2019:

CHAIR: I'll be following that up with the department as well this afternoon. Thank you. Going back to the issues around complaints and the EIC process versus the CUPi process, are you still getting complaints about the EIC process? Does that make sense?

Mr Manthorpe: Yes, it does. I suspect the answer is yes, because we know that there are still at least some people who are, for want of a better term, in the EIC process rather than the subsequent ones. But I don't think we would have data on that with us.

CHAIR: Could you take on notice to add it to the question I asked previously about complaints—whether they were related to the—

Ms Hinchcliffe: There might be an issue for us. We'll see what we can actually find out, but there might be an issue with our data: whether we've collected data about the system people are on or whether people even know the system they're on. We'll see what we can get.

CHAIR: Depending on the point in the process where someone's lodged a complaint, whether it's the initial notice or the debt notice—

Ms Hinchcliffe: We'll see what we can do.

The response to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

In October 2018, the Department released the Check and Update Past Information (CUPi) system to replace the Employment Income Confirmation (EIC) system. CUPi is running concurrently with the EIC system until EIC is phased out completely.

The Office can still receive complaints about the EIC online system. However, as foreshadowed at the hearing, the way we record complaint information does not readily allow us to identify whether complaints received are about either the EIC or the CUPi system. As the person making the complaint will generally not know under which system their debt has been raised, they are unable to provide us with that information.