




Parliament of Australia
Parliamentary Budget Office

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Parliamentary Budget Officer

Ms Susan Cardell
Committee Secretary
Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Cardell 

During the public hearing on 28 August 2014, the Committee asked for the number of PBO requests for information that have been declined and the reasons given by agencies for not providing the requested information.

To date there have been 11 instances where the PBO has not received the information that it has sought from government agencies.

On five occasions the PBO chose not to proceed to obtain the requested information because it would have faced substantial fees from third parties, such as the Australian Government Actuary, for access to their modelling. The PBO is not funded for such costs. The agencies from whom the information was requested were the Department of Defence and the then Department of Finance and Deregulation. The information sought related to government-funded military and civilian superannuation schemes.

On three occasions the PBO was declined information on the basis that the requested information was confidential because it was contained in the Contingency Reserve or related to a decision taken but not yet announced. Specific requests were made to the then Departments of Immigration and Citizenship, and Infrastructure and Transport in relation to the costs of operating immigration detention facilities on Nauru and estimated spending on the then Liveable Cities program. A general request to the then Department of Finance and Deregulation for access to all individual line items in the Contingency Reserve was also declined.

On one occasion the PBO was declined information on the basis of legislative provisions not permitting the release of information. The information was sought from the then Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education and related to the Higher Education Loan Program. The legislation which does not permit provision of the requested information to the Parliamentary Budget Officer is the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*.

On one occasion the Department of Industry declined to provide the PBO with information on the grounds that it was Commercial-In-Confidence. This information related to the Petroleum Resource Rent Tax.

Finally, the Treasury declined to provide its revenue forecasting models to the PBO but did not provide reasons in writing for declining to do so. Treasury did, however, provide the PBO with useful information on the methodology used to forecast revenue. While not a complete substitute for the revenue models, this information was of assistance to the research project that the PBO was working on at the time.

Please let me know if the Committee requires any additional information.

Yours sincerely



Phil Bowen

15 September 2014