

Economics Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education Portfolio
Budget Estimates Hearing 2013-14
3 and 4 June 2013

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: AUSTRALIAN NUCLEAR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ORGANISATION (ANSTO)

TOPIC: Staff Engagement Survey

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard, 3 June 2013, pages 8 and 9)

QUESTION No.: BI-5

Senator LUDLAM: Thank you. You recall reviews that we have been following for a while, which were conducted in 2011 and 2012, into health and safety culture at ANSTO, and related incidents, accidents, sacking of whistleblowers, and so on. Several of these documents do report improvements at ANSTO and have made recommendations for further improvements. Can you tell us how you are tracking implementation of further improvements of health and safety culture at ANSTO?

Dr Paterson: There are a number of initiatives that we have taken over the last two years. At the request of Comcare we improved our investigation procedure, and qualified all of our investigators against the Australian standard. That is now in place and has been recognised by Comcare. We were asked to pilot, on behalf of Comcare, their questionnaire in relation to bullying. We did that in our last staff engagement survey. We were, I believe, the first Commonwealth organisation to do so.

Senator LUDLAM: That is interesting.

Dr Paterson: We shared the results of using the Comcare questions with Comcare. They were very satisfied with the answers that were given by ANSTO staff to those questions and applauded us for being proactive in addressing the issue, which is very prominent in discussions around Australia at the moment, as you would know, Senator.

Senator LUDLAM: We only have you for a brief period of time. Are you able to provide us with a de-identified summary of the findings of your survey?

Dr Paterson: Yes, I believe it would be useful to provide that.

ANSWER

In July 2012, ANSTO launched their Engagement Survey. Seventy per cent of ANSTO staff completed the survey, which provided ANSTO with strong data in respect of current employee perceptions of ANSTO. The format of the survey was different to that of a public opinion survey, in that as an engagement survey, staff who “slightly agreed” to a particular statement were not counted as agreeing to the statement.

The survey included questions which Comcare proposed during meetings with ANSTO as part of the Cooperative Compliance Plan. Those questions sought the level of understanding of what constituted bullying and harassment behaviours, the attitude of management towards preventing harassment issues, and so forth. The survey also asked a question as to employees’ view of the importance of workplace safety and security.

The overall results in respect of the specific questions were encouraging, with 90 per cent of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement that they would recognise bullying behaviour, and 88 per cent agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement that they would be able to distinguish between what was and what was not bullying.

At the time of the survey, 61 per cent of the staff agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that bullying was not tolerated at ANSTO, 58 per cent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that instances of alleged bullying were taken seriously by management and 54 per cent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that managers took responsibility for preventing such behaviours in the workplace.

In terms of workplace safety and security, 87 per cent of staff at ANSTO agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that workplace safety and security were considered important, and 82 per cent of staff agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that that if a safety issue was raised their manager would act on it.

Following the survey, ANSTO has taken a number of steps to further improve employee engagement.