

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S PORTFOLIO

Program: Australian Human Rights Commission

Question No. SBE16/105

Senator Macdonald asked the following question at the hearing on 12 December 2016:

CHAIR: Professor Triggs, you indicated in your comments:

I think it would be fair to say that there are comments from me or about me in the newspaper virtually daily.

You said you had a lot of interviews. When I asked you if you had rung the journalist to correct the record, do you recall what you said then and do you stand by that answer?

Prof. Triggs: I would have to look at what I said then and check the record.

CHAIR: Well, you said you give lots of public interviews to journalists and if you had to ring them and correct every error they made—suggesting they always make errors when referring to you—I think you said it would take all of your time or words to that effect. Do you recall saying something like that?

Prof. Triggs: I would have to check the record.

...

CHAIR: But you indicated that you are misquoted often. I am just trying to find your actual words, but they were along the lines that if you did that it would take up all of your time. So, you are often misquoted, but you never bother to correct that?

Prof. Triggs: I would not say that I am often misquoted. I am saying that I do a very high number of lectures and interviews and people will often sit in an audience and take down what I have said or what they think I have said and that is then reproduced in another context. It can often be weeks later that it appears in a journal article or in another form. I really cannot track all of that and challenge everything that is said in the media about me. In fact, the media reporting about the commission has been extraordinary in the past few months, and I think were I to do that I would be dealing with two or three items a day. It is simply not a realistic course of action.

CHAIR: This interview was in April. And I now have your actual words, which, in fairness, I will quote to you: 'It is, I'm afraid, a phenomenon that a great deal of work that we do is misrepresented.' You said that back in April to Ramona Koval. What I am just clarifying is, all the misreporting of the commission's work: you and your media team do not bother to correct it?

Prof. Triggs: I did not say that at all. I just said that I do not always go back to the media to correct an item. But certainly I think there would be occasions when commissioners, for example, might ask a member of the commission—the communications team—to correct something; that may very well happen. But I would have to take that question on notice and find out how often, if at all, we question or ask for matters to be corrected.

CHAIR: That would be fine. Thank you.

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

The Communications team have checked their records, and during the six months prior to December 2016 there were five occasions on which media advisors contacted journalists to correct stories.