

Question on notice no. 5

Portfolio question number: AE25-005

2024-25 Additional estimates

Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee, Home Affairs Portfolio

Senator David Shoebridge: asked the Department of Home Affairs on 24 February 2025—

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: Yes, thanks. It's nice to see you, Secretary. There have been some remarkable nonanswers to questions on notice. I am talking here not so much about the content where there is at least an effort to answer, but on some occasions it is genuinely like something from Utopia what we get from Home Affairs. I'll give you just one example. In November we asked questions about people of military age leaving to fight for Israel and Russia. The answer we got was: For the period 7 October 2023-10 November 2024, the number of departures on Israeli Travel Documents in age group 18- 35 = 3,943 ...Then we got: For additional context refer to SE24-096, SE24-034, SE24-035, SE24-092 and SE24-095. So I did. I went and had a look at all of those, as I was directed to. There is no answer provided to SE24-096. There's no answer provided to SE24-034. There's no answer provided to SE24-035 and no answer provided to

SE24-092. How is it that you provide answers to questions on notice referring to other unanswered questions? How do you do that?

Ms S Foster: Without the benefit of having those answers in front of me, it's not possible for me to answer that question.

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: Is there a system in place that at least checks, before you refer senators to other questions, that you've answered them?

Ms S Foster: When I am personally clearing an answer, I always have the answers to any question referred to in the pack so I can make sure that that makes sense. Certainly, at my level I do.

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: But you are responsible for the department, not just the narrow set of questions you look at. These questions have still not been answered. So I am asking you again: what system is in place before you provide an answer to a senator to questions on notice where you refer to other questions? Is there at least a basic system in place so that you check those other questions have been answered?

Ms S Foster: I expect there is. I will ask the relevant officials who manage that process in its entirety to come and assist us.

Ms Sharpe: We have a clearance process in place and also a quality assurance process. But, as the secretary just outlined, I will have to check the specifics on those exact QONs to see what happened there.