

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2015 - 2016, 10 February 2016

Ref No: SQ16-000033

OUTCOME: 1 - Population Health

Topic: Tobacco

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Leyonhjelm, David

Question:

a) In testimony to the Committee, Ms Davis of the Health Department stated that tobacco tax clearance rates “are one indication amongst many of whether plain packaging is working, including the ABS household expenditure data, which has, between September 2012 and September 2013, dropped by a total of 20 per cent.” The ABS’s seasonally adjusted, chain volume measure of household final consumption expenditure on cigarettes and tobacco fell 1.7 per cent between September 2012 and September 2013 — a smaller annual rate of decline than the average over the preceding decade, and a smaller annual rate of decline than the average over the period since. As such, to what was Ms Davis referring? Does the Department of Health consider that any ABS data indicate the effectiveness of plain packaging?

b) Had Professor Melanie Wakefield made public comments in support of plain packaging prior to the Department contracting her Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer to conduct a survey to assess the effectiveness of plain packaging? What were Professor Wakefield’s public comments on plain packaging prior to the awarding of this contract? What are the pros and cons of having a policy assessed by an advocate of that policy?

Answer:

a) Ms Davis stated “the ABS household expenditure data, which has, between September 2012 and September 2013, dropped by a total of 20 per cent.” On review of the Hansard, this should have been reported as “the ABS household expenditure data, which has, between September 2012 and September 2015, dropped by a total of 20 per cent”.

Ms Davis was referring to figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) on 2 December 2015.

ABS data released following the September quarter of 2015 showed that the chain volume measure (trend) for estimated household consumption expenditure on tobacco and cigarettes in the September quarter 2012 was \$4.227 billion (prior to the introduction of plain packaging) and \$3.366 billion in the September quarter 2015. This represents a reduction in household consumption expenditure of over 20 per cent.

The Department of Health is cautious in its use of ABS data as there are limitations to its ability to indicate the effectiveness of plain packaging. No ABS datasets isolate the impact of one particular tobacco control measure.

- b) Professor Wakefield's public comments in relation to plain packaging are publicly available.