

## **Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee**

### **SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES - 20 OCTOBER 2011 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE**

#### **Department of Human Services**

**Topic:** Release of surveillance footage to the media - protocols

**Question reference number:** HS 14

**Senator:** Fifield

**Type of question:** Hansard page 96

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 9 December 2011

**Number of pages:** 4

#### **Question:**

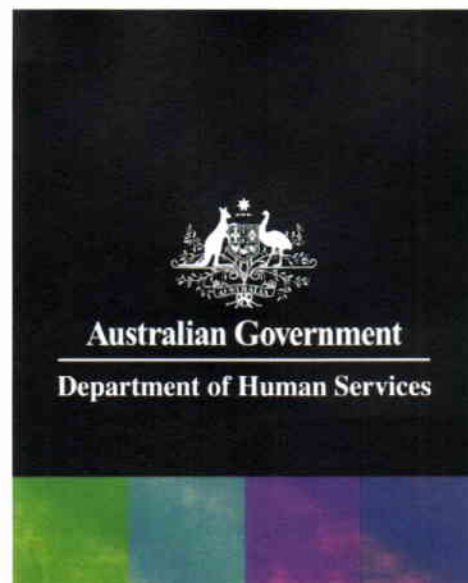
**Senator FIFIELD:** Are you able to provide the committee with the protocols that govern the release of that sort of material?

**Mr Jongen:** Yes.

#### **Answer:**

The media strategy detailing guiding principles for the release of surveillance footage to the media are contained in the attached document "Centrelink fraud and compliance media strategy 2010-11 overview".

# Centrelink fraud and compliance media strategy 2010-11 overview



## Purpose

The Department of Human Services Media Section and Business Integrity Division work together to raise public awareness of Centrelink's compliance initiatives, including cash economy operations, prosecution cases and voluntary compliance education campaigns.

One of Centrelink's key strategic themes is 'Building confidence in Centrelink'. The theme's purpose is to provide assurance to Government, clients and customers that services are fairly, effectively and efficiently delivered. This includes ensuring Centrelink is able to identify and take action against welfare fraud.

Creating public awareness about Centrelink's fraud and compliance activities is vital for educating people about their obligations, deterring people from deliberately breaking the law and enhancing community confidence in the integrity of the social security system.

## Background

Since its inception in 2003, this media strategy has achieved an increased level of exposure for Centrelink fraud and compliance activities. Media analysis shows compliance regulations are consistently among the top leading themes in Centrelink-related media reporting.

The primary focus of the strategy is to highlight the prosecution of serious fraud, inter-agency field operations and optical surveillance activities, as well as other areas of compliance and fraud detection activity with possible media interest.

## Processes

The Media Section coordinates the release of information to the media about fraud and compliance matters. This includes obtaining appropriate clearances through the Business Integrity Division and other key stakeholders.

## Prosecutions

The Business Integrity Division provides the Media Section with a regular summary of major court cases involving Centrelink. Not all cases are of interest to metropolitan media. However, many cases have some sort of appeal, particularly to rural and regional media outlets.

The Business Integrity Division provides case summaries to the Media Section.

The protocols for operation are:

- Media advisers liaise with the Business Integrity Division to get updates on confirmed sentencing hearing dates and background material or clarification on details contained in case summary.
- Media advisers may alert the media to notable prosecution cases. It is important to note no written information is provided to a journalist until after the completion of sentencing.
- Once a case has been determined in court, any information the Media Section releases to the media must reflect that which was tabled in court. Media advisers must seek clearance through the Business Integrity Division at all times to ensure the accuracy of the information it is releasing to the media.
- The Media Section only considers issuing formal media releases for cases that present substantial results, and in consultation with the Business Integrity Division.

**Important note:** In instances where the Media Section makes a tip-off to the media prior to a court appearance, it does not supply written material about the case. The Media Section only releases written material to the media after a court appearance and after obtaining clearance through the Business Integrity Division.

### Cash economy operations

The Media Section does not release any cash economy information to the media until it is cleared through the Business Integrity Division. Similarly, the Media Section does not release any information to any party not privy to the information or who does not hold the necessary security clearance of 'Protected', whether internal or external.

**Important note:** Media Advisers are to make sure 'Protected' material is stored in a safe and secured area to prevent information being viewed or accessed by other people not entitled to do so.

The process works as follows:

- Wherever possible, the Business Integrity Division will provide operational reports at least 24 hours in advance of activity to the Media Section.
- If the results are substantial or if a substantial outcome is anticipated, the Media Section is to prepare a draft media release or background dot points.
- Once the results of an operation are known, these are added to the dot points and forwarded to the Business Integrity Division for clearance.
- If the results are deemed substantial, the Media Section is to seek Ministerial advice on the course of action.
- The Minister's office has first option to release the information to the media. If the Minister does not wish to proceed with a Ministerial release, the Media Section is to advise on an appropriate course of action.
- If the media is aware that an operation is in progress and makes contact with Centrelink to request information, Media Advisers are authorised to confirm Centrelink's involvement or otherwise and inform the journalist Centrelink will be releasing comments after the results of the operation have been analysed, which may take some time subject to the number of customers involved.

### Spokespeople

Generally, Media Advisers should identify an appropriate spokesperson in the event media are interested in talking to someone about the operation/case. If a spokesperson is agreed upon, the process works as follows:

- Get as much information as possible, including questions to be asked, date and time of interview.
- Make sure the spokesperson agrees and is available to be interviewed.
- Prior to the interview, a Media Adviser is to prepare the spokesperson and carry out a mock interview.

## Use of statistics

In dealings with the media, Media Advisers are only to provide statistics the Business Integrity Division has approved. The use of statistics other than those already approved needs to be obtained and cleared through the Business Integrity Division. Media Advisers need to have a clear understanding on how the media will use the statistics before requesting the data.

**Important note:** The Business Integrity Division may need to gain approval for the release of data from Management Information or the relevant policy departments.

## Footage

Pictures applicable to compliance stories generally come from two sources:

- Covert surveillance footage.
- Vision obtained for cash economy operations (for example, pre-operation surveillance).

All vision the Media Section makes available to the media must be cleared through the Business Integrity Division and the Privacy and Information Access Section. The Digital Media Section edits all footage and pixilates according to privacy requirements.

When covert surveillance footage relating to a sentencing is available, the Business Integrity Division will ensure this vision is processed well in advance of the final date so it can be ready for media distribution to coincide with the announcement of the sentencing outcome.

Where there is surveillance footage available for a prosecution case, the Business Integrity Division will let the Media Section know as soon as possible. This gives both teams plenty of time to view the tape and to decide if the vision is suitable for release to the media.