

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Additional Estimates Spill-over hearing March 2017

Communications Portfolio

Department of Communications and the Arts

Question No: 300

Program 1.1

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Topic: Requested Electorate briefs updates - Minister

Senator Urquhart, Anne asked:

Senator URQUHART: I have a number of other questions that I am going to ask, because I want that information as well. What were the exact dates that the minister requested electorate and state and territory briefs between 2 July 2016 and the last briefs on the 25th or the 30th—because I am not sure what that date was—2016?

Mr Robinson: I will have to take that on notice.

Senator URQUHART: Has the minister requested further electorate and state and territory brief updates since 25 or 30 November 2016?

Mr Robinson: I will take it on notice.

Senator URQUHART: That is not 12 months ago.

Mr Robinson: I can only say that requests come in different forms in to different people, and I would just need to check the record and we would need to check with a number of staff and the whole lot. I will just have to do that.

Senator URQUHART: Is there a reason, Minister, that you requested briefs in late November, given that we requested the last published briefs in estimates in October, but you requested further briefs to be created on the same day as the estimates spillover? I think it was 18 October, from memory. Is there something that you do not want us to see in the pre-election briefs? It is less than a month apart, really.

Senator Fifield: I will take that on notice, because my office, on my behalf, puts hundreds of information requests to the department over any given period of months. I would have to take that on notice.

Senator URQUHART: So you do not know—

Senator Fifield: I do not just—

Senator URQUHART: You do not know why you requested briefs last November, when there were some provided in October?

Senator Fifield: It is not the case that I just do one thing a day, such as, 'Today, I am going to ask the department for a brief on X.' That is not the way it works.

Senator URQUHART: I am just trying to understand why—

Senator Fifield: I am not being difficult; it is just that I do not think you have an appreciation of the paper flows, the requests, the volume and how they are transmitted. I do not have a complete knowledge in my head of every one of the hundreds of requests across my portfolio agencies that are made on a particular day or month.

Senator URQUHART: I understand yours—I do not understand the department's position of not bringing something here—

CHAIR: They just need the recipients of them—

Senator Fifield: Whatever request we might make is received by the department.

Senator URQUHART: No, I am sorry; I am saying that I can understand your position in not knowing the hundreds of briefs, but I am disappointed and I think I have made that point twice—I

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am not going to go over it again—but I am just interested in—

Senator Fifield: Okay, but if you are asking about particular briefs on particular dates, I can understand why the department would need to check their records on those things. It would not matter if it was this subject, or if it was the number of briefs that the department has provided me on fibre-to-the-node rollout. The department would not be able to tell you, off the top of their heads, how often that happened or the dates that it occurred. You can pick almost any area and, when you are getting to that level of granularity, the department would need to check its records.

Answer:

Electorate briefs have been provided by the Department to the Minister's Office on request. For the period 2 July to 30 November 2016 electorate briefs were prepared for the Minister's Office on the following dates:

- 20 July 2016
- 4 August 2016
- 22 August 2016
- 13 September 2016
- 23 September 2016
- 12 October 2016
- 3 November 2016
- 30 November 2016

State and Territory briefs were provided to the Minister's Office on 3 November 2016 and 30 November 2016.

The Minister's Office has requested electorate briefs between 1 January 2017 and 24 March 2017 on four occasions.