

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications**

**Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice**

**Budget Estimates Hearings May 2015**

**Communications Portfolio**

**Australian Broadcasting Corporation**

**Question No: 41**

**Program No. Australian Broadcasting Corporation**

**Hansard Ref: Page 30-31, 27/05/2015**

**Topic: Comments by Steve Austin**

**Senator McGrath, James asked:**

**Senator McGrath:** In that regard do you agree with the comments of Steve Austin, the 612-4QR presenter, who said in relation to Osama bin Laden that he was responsible for killing thousands of people but that he was an honoured and respected person? Is that something you would agree with?

**Mr Scott:** I saw a reference to that in *The Courier-Mail* today. It was a somewhat colourful coverage on page 3 after their somewhat colourful coverage of the State of Origin on page 1, which also generated comment. But I have not been able to go back to reference Mr Austin's comments. I am not sure of the context in which he said it; so I am not going to comment on that until I have had a chance to read the transcript. I am happy to respond to that on notice, if you want to put that question on notice. Can I say that I think Mr Austin does a great job. I think in my experience of his broadcasts there is always a full range of viewpoints and perspectives on air.

**Senator McGrath:** This will disappoint some of my friends but I think Steve Austin does do a good job also. I think these quotes are probably a bit out of character for him.

**Mr Scott:** Out of character, out of context. I suspect it may have been an attempt to be more nuanced around matters than *The Courier-Mail* was receptive to or perhaps the audience was receptive to. I do not know. I am not in a position to judge.

**Senator McGrath:** I look forward to you coming back on notice because I think to call Osama bin Laden 'honoured and respected' is certainly disrespectful, at best, to the many thousands of people who lost their lives under his leadership.

**Answer:**

On 26 May, ABC 612 presenter Steve Austin made a comment during a panel discussion that Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was "honoured and respected" [by his supporters]. On that day, various Australian media outlets had reported on the discovery of Osama bin Laden's "secret porn stash", and there was speculation that the "discovery" might have been anti-bin Laden public relations spin, attempting to undermine bin Laden's image as a respectable and noble leader to his people.

On 27 May, The Courier Mail reported Mr Austin's comment without providing the contextual reference to Bin Laden's supporters and discussion topics including the release of recently declassified documents that purported to expose the mindset of Osama bin Laden and his fixation with Al Qaeda's media image. ABC Radio considers that Steve Austin's comment was editorially consistent with the context of the panel discussion.