

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Budget Estimates Hearings May 2015

Communications Portfolio

Australia Post

Question No: 74

Program No. Australia Post

Hansard Ref: Page 76-77, 27/5/2015

Topic: Digital Mailbox

Senator Urquhart, Anne asked:

Senator URQUHART: I just want to talk about the digital mail box. At the May 2014 budget estimates, you indicated that you had launched the MyPost digital mail box. What is the cost of that mail box development in total?

Mr Fahour: As in previous questions on notice, we have not given that because we have competitors in that category, and we do not wish to give that public information.

Senator URQUHART: So that is commercial-in-confidence?

Mr Fahour: Correct.

Senator URQUHART: Can you provide that under that basis?

Mr Fahour: I would like to provide it under section 25(2) if the chair wishes, because this is a very, very serious matter where we have banks and various other competitors around the world who compete with us with their BPAY systems. In the past the Senate has been conscious that we do not want to reveal Australia Post to alternatives and make us in a difficult position.

Senator URQUHART: What is the sign-up rate for the digital mail box?

Mr Fahour: Again, we have not given this data publicly.

Senator URQUHART: Is it meeting your projections?

Mr Fahour: It is exceeding our projections.

Senator URQUHART: Again, are you able to provide that figure to the committee?

Mr Fahour: Given how competitive this business is—it is not part of our CSO; it is not part of our regulated business—I am happy to do that but I really would ask—

CHAIR: Mr Fahour, you probably would be well aware that estimates does not allow in camera, so you cannot provide a document confidentially. What you need to do is to cite the reason for the public interest immunity and obviously there is an appropriate process by which that has to be undertaken. I just draw that to your attention because you cannot provide something to this committee in camera.

Mr Fahour: Thank you, Chair.

Senator URQUHART: In terms of that information that I have asked for, is that what you are citing?

Mr Fahour: Yes, I am.

Senator URQUHART: What proportion of subscribers have used the digital mail box more than three times?

Mr Fahour: Again, anything to do with the digital mail box I would like to—

Senator URQUHART: Really? You cannot even tell me if people have used it more than three times?

Mr Fahour: As I mentioned, I am very happy to follow up on an in-camera process.

Senator URQUHART: We cannot do it in camera; you just heard that we do not have that ability in estimates.

Senator Fifield: Other parliamentary committees can go in camera, but estimates committees cannot.

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Senator URQUHART: We just heard that explanation.

Mr Fahour: I am citing this is commercial-in-confidence.

Senator URQUHART: If you are citing public immunity, that you cannot tell me what proportion of subscribers have used your digital mail box more than three times, on the grounds of public immunity, is that what you are doing?

Mr Fahour: I am saying this is commercial-in-confidence information.

Senator URQUHART: I am asking you what proportion; is it 2 per cent, is it 5 per cent that have used it more than three times?

Mr Fahour: I am saying back to you that I am not sure it is in Australia Post's and the community's interest to expose us to our—

CHAIR: Can I maybe assist you a little bit here? If you wish to address this under public interest immunity, you would be better to take the questions from Senator Urquhart on notice and then you can determine for yourself as to whether you wish to seek that public interest immunity, and if you choose to, there is a process to go through. If you choose not to, you can provide Senator Urquhart with the information that she is requesting.

Mr Fahour: In a commercial-in-confidence way like the others?

CHAIR: No, you cannot provide it in a commercial-in-confidence way. You can provide it to Senator Urquhart publicly, but you can choose to—

Senator Fifield: So we will take the question on notice, chair, which will give Australia Post the opportunity of forming a public interest immunity claim which can then be conveyed to the committee.

Answer:

As noted at the hearing, the information will be provided separately to the committee under standing order 25(2).

For information standing order 25(2) reads:

- (a) The legislation committees shall inquire into and report upon estimates of expenditure in accordance with standing order 26, bills or draft bills referred to them by the Senate, annual reports in accordance with paragraph (20), and the performance of departments and agencies allocated to them.