

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment portfolio

Question No: 18
Hearing: Budget Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 1
Programme: Director of National Parks (DNP)
Topic: Declarations of interests
Hansard Page: 59
Question Date: 25 May 2015
Question Type: Spoken

Senator Siewert asked:

Senator SIEWERT: Were declarations of interest made through the planning process? You said then there were provisions, and I ask whether they were in fact made. How many and when?

Mr Clark: I would have to take that on notice.

Senator SIEWERT: Could you take on notice for all the panels how many declarations of interest were made, if they were made during the public consultation process and when they were meeting as panels for each of them, please? I do not know whether it is appropriate to give them against the names, but certainly the expertise they were representing if you cannot give me the names.

Ms Barnes: For this information we would have to consult with the chairs of the review, because they are running the process. We will consult with them and see whether they were implementing the guidelines.

Senator SIEWERT: That would be much appreciated. I presume that there was a process, when the people were appointed—and I appreciate that you may not be able to answer this because you have told me already it was the minister and the parliamentary secretary—and I presume those potential conflicts of interest were considered at the time of appointment of the panel members?

Ms Barnes: We cannot answer that.

Senator SIEWERT: Could you perhaps take on notice the process and the time of appointment for considering the conflict of interest for those appointments? That would be appreciated, thank you.

Answer:

Committees and panels appointed by the Australian Government are required to establish and maintain an Interest Register and appropriately manage conflicts of interest.

All Panel Members provided private interest declarations that were considered by the Government prior to being appointed to the Panels. As part of the formal appointment process, each panel member was required to complete a declaration of interest. Members of the Panels were selected for their capacity to facilitate input from a broad range of stakeholders and were not selected to represent any particular sector(s).

At the commencement of the Review, procedures were established to capture and manage any actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest. Panel Members were required to review and, if necessary, update their declared interests considering any changes to their circumstances and the scope of the Panels work at the first meeting. The Interest Register was updated with this information.

The Chairs are responsible for managing any conflict of interests throughout the Review. In accordance with the conflict of interest guidance, we understand the Chairs requested Panel Members to update the Interest Register at the start of each meeting. Panel Members also had a responsibility to speak with each other if they perceived a conflict of interest which someone had not recognised and/or disclosed and advise the Panel Member of this perception. We are advised that the Chairs considered all declarations and decided on the appropriate course of action. Management of conflicts of interest may have included restriction or exclusion for the meeting at the discretion of the Chair when considered to be necessary and appropriate.

The Chairs advised there have been 66 declarations made which have been categorised as follows:

- Upon commencement —19;
- Change in circumstance —6;
- Panel meetings — 21; and
- Public consultation —20.