

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

Question No: 32
Hearing: Budget Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 1.1
Programme: Biodiversity Conservation Division
Topic: Correspondence from Zoos Victoria
Hansard Page: 119
Question Date: 26 May 2015
Question Type: Spoken

Senator Rice asked:

Question

Senator Rice: Do you know of briefings or correspondence between Zoos Victoria and VicForests about Leadbeater's possum?

Mr Andrews: Yes, Zoos Victoria gave me a copy of a letter that the CEO of Zoos Victoria wrote to the acting CEO of VicForests.

Senator Rice: Can you tell me what was in the correspondence?

Mr Andrews: I am not sure whether it is appropriate for me to reveal third-party advice.

Senator Rice: Perhaps in general.

Mr Sullivan: I think, just as a general principle, if that were, for example, a freedom of information request, we would have to seek approval of the third party even if it were in our gift or we were sent a copy of that letter. I think it is unfair to Mr Andrews, who is continuing to operate in good faith where he is given access to a whole range of information, to then ask him to talk about the content of that correspondence, which is between Zoos Victoria and VicForests.

Senator Rice: Certainly. It seems to be of relevance, though, in terms of his role in advising on the conservation of Leadbeater's possum. Does the information from Zoos Victoria concern the impact of logging activities by VicForests on Leadbeater's possum?

Dr de Brouwer: I think that is straying into the subject matter of the letter.

Senator Waters: Can we not ask about that? Is this not estimates?

Dr de Brouwer: It is someone else's correspondence. It is not our correspondence or someone corresponding with us.

Senator Rice: But it was correspondence that was given to the commissioner in his role as the Threatened Species Commissioner for critically endangered species.

Senator Birmingham: But not necessarily given to the commissioner to reveal the contents to the whole world.

Senator Waters: Can we seek some advice on whether we can ask that?

Senator Birmingham: We can take it on notice, but I think Mr Sullivan's point is correct. If the request was done as a FOI request, the law would require us to ask permission.

Answer:

Please contact Zoos Victoria for a copy of the correspondence.