

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearings November 2014

Communications Portfolio

NBN Co Limited

Question No: 198

Program No. NBN Co

Hansard Ref: In Writing

Topic: SSCNBN QoN 47 – July 2014

Senator Urquhart asked:

In its answer to, NBN Co states: “The design information requested is commercially sensitive as between NBN Co and its relevant contractual partners. As has been noted publicly, this sensitive information may be subject to change and designs have been held or re-released on occasions. If made publicly available, the information could be misapplied in the market and this may cause harm to NBN Co’s commercial arrangements.”

FSAMs for which design contract instructions had been issued were made publicly available under previous management, both as areas coded “construction commenced” on NBN Co’s rollout map and as discrete entries in NBN Co’s publicly available “Monthly Ready for Service” spreadsheet.

- (a) Under the heading “Corporate Planning and **Transparency**,” the Government’s Statement of Expectations states that “the Government requires a high degree of transparency from NBN Co in its communication with the public and Parliament.” Why is NBN Co refusing to provide information that was previously in the public domain?
- (b) Does NBN Co consider that its answer to this question on notice accords with the Government’s shareholder direction that there be “a high degree of transparency from NBN Co in its communication with the public and the Parliament?”
- (c) Has the Government expressed to NBN Co any concerns that it is failing to adhere to its shareholder direction that NBN Co exhibit “a high degree of transparency from NBN Co in its communication with the public and the Parliament?”

Answer:

- a) It is important to note that much of the information previously considered “publicly available” was actually made available to NBN Co’s customers, the Retail Service Providers (RSPs) to assist with their planning and marketing activities. For example, the Monthly Ready for Service document mentioned in the question was a lengthy Excel spreadsheet designed to assist RSPs with go-to-market activities. This, in conjunction with other documents, could provide information to potential contractors that could undermine negotiations on volume and price. That is why virtually all of the subset of detailed Access Seeker data was progressively removed from the public web site from mid to late 2013, placing it instead within a secured web portal. NBN Co is committed to providing as much information as it can; however, it must also ensure the best outcome for taxpayers in contracts and other negotiations.
- b) Yes. NBN Co continues to provide a high level of detail on the rollout on its website and to various Parliamentary Committees.
- c) No.