

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearings November 2014

Communications Portfolio

Department of Communications

Question No: 8

Program No. 1.1

Hansard Ref: Page 17-19 (25/11/2014)

Topic: Lewis Review

Senator Xenophon asked:

Senator XENOPHON: Following on from the chair's line of questioning, firstly, can we go back to the Lewis review. Is that something the department has a copy of?...

Senator XENOPHON: Thank you. In terms of those documents, are you in a position to release those if requested by the committee? Would you release those documents to the committee?

Mr Clarke: That is a matter for the government. I cannot respond...

Senator XENOPHON: It is a big deal in the Northern Territory, Tasmania, WA and Queensland. So the short question is: given the secretary's response, which I am grateful for, can we see those documents as a matter of some urgency? I think that would be very important and very illuminating for this committee.

Mr Clarke: The short answer to your question, of course, is that it is a matter for government, but what I will clarify—and, in doing so, I will repeat evidence that I gave to the committee earlier—is that those iterations and documents, particularly since April, did not go to content and programming matters. They referred to so-called back-of-office savings.

Senator XENOPHON: That is even more significant, then, because if there were alternatives—you have alluded to a series of savings measures that do not impact on programming: so-called back-office and presumably other measures—that do not affect programming then I would have thought that would be very relevant.

Senator Birmingham: Of course, the nature of the Lewis review was to look at efficiencies without an impact on programming and content. I will let Mr Clarke correct me if I get it wrong here, but much of that iterative process since April was feedback between the broadcasters and the department in relation to firming up what was in the Lewis review.

Senator XENOPHON: Yes, and the minister—

Senator Birmingham: So it was a draft review in April that, of course, became a final review based in part on that feedback from the broadcasters. I think the substantive issue really is: can we get a version of that review out that does not undermine the commercial confidentiality of the broadcasters? That is something that I have undertaken and that Minister Turnbull has already acted on to try to get the broadcasters' position on that in light of the announcements that have now been made.

I would have to, I guess, reflect with Minister Turnbull in relation to iterations along the way, because obviously the notion of that process, going from a draft report to a final report, is that issues were considered in that process and it may be that incorrect assumptions were there in the draft but were corrected by the time of the final.

Senator XENOPHON: Or sometimes a draft can be very revealing of what an organisation is thinking before it goes down another path. If the draft is based on inaccurate information then obviously that would be taken into account.

Senator Birmingham: In any event, I am happy to take on notice that aspect of your question.

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Answer:

The ABC and SBS Efficiency Study report contains financial information provided by the national broadcasters on the basis that it would remain strictly confidential.

On 1 December 2014, the Government released a redacted version of the ABC and SBS Efficiency Study report. The report is available at
www.communications.gov.au/television/abc_and_sbs_television/abc_and_sbs_efficiency_study

All of the redactions in the report are at the request of the ABC and SBS to protect commercially sensitive information.