

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice
Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearings October 2016
Communications Portfolio
Department of Communications and the Arts

Question No: 19

Program 1.1

Hansard Ref: Page 118, 18/10/2016

Topic: HFC decision– written correspondence

Senator O'Neill, Deborah asked:

Senator O'NEILL: When people interact with the department, everything has to go in writing. How can a decision of this scale be made with no written communication? Is that what you are telling me? Or is there written communication of some form?

Mr Robinson: I will have to take that on notice. I would not think it is exceptional, because in the course of the corporate plan process we were very well briefed on what was happening with HFC deployment and what the options may be there, and it was publicly indicated that the HFC numbers were within a range. We knew that NBN Co were working towards a decision about what would occur.

Senator O'NEILL: Are those briefs that you are talking about always verbal or are they accompanied by documentation?

Mr Robinson: They are sometimes accompanied by documentation.

Senator O'NEILL: I would be very interested in that documentation and the points at which you were aware in the lead-up. You talked about multiple points along the journey. I would very much like seeing the journey that you are describing and certainly the documents, if there are any, with regard to that decision of the NBN Co board. Did Mr Morrow write to you, as minister?

Senator Fifield: I will have to check the form of advice. We talk a lot and obviously there is a lot of briefing which transpires. But in order to be as accurate as I can I will take that on notice.

Answer:

In December 2014, nbn amended its agreement with Optus to give nbn complete discretion to acquire the HFC infrastructure.

In preparing the draft 2017 Corporate Plan, nbn indicated to the Department of Communications that the proportion of premises served by each of the fixed line technologies would be expressed as a range to account for some uncertainty in determining the proportion of HFC and FTTB/N/C ahead of completing final designs.

On 26 August 2016, nbn released its 2017 Corporate Plan, which shows on page 40 a range for the number of premises to be served by HFC. This range reflects the flexibility afforded to nbn and that the design and planning of the network is a matter for nbn consistent with the multi-technology mix approach.

On 19 September 2016, nbn formally informed the Government of its decision to not proceed with the roll out of HFC to premises in the Optus HFC footprint.

The Department provided a range of advice to the Minister on HFC footprint planning. At various times the Minister was provided with advice either verbally or in writing.