

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: 20

Program 1.1

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Topic: HFC announcement trigger

Senator O'Neill, Deborah asked:

Senator O'NEILL: What was the mechanism that was used to trigger this announcement?

Senator Fifield: The mechanism was a decision by NBN.

Senator O'NEILL: So they make the decisions. They ring you and say, 'Nice talking to you again today, Mitch. We are just going to change our plan. We have been talking about it in the media. It's a pretty big plan but, trust me, on this conversation it's okay for you to go out now. We're going to make a change.' Is that how they do business with you?

Senator Fifield: No. Ultimately a decision point is reached. NBN took the decision and that was subsequently announced. This really is just part of the outworking of the multitechnology mix mandate that NBN has, which is that they have the flexibility to change the technologies that will see the NBN rolled out. The mandate is to choose the technology that will see NBN rolled out fastest and at lowest cost. So NBN has significant operational flexibility.

Senator O'NEILL: In the interests of time, Minister—we hear these answers at question time all the time—can we just get to the specific answers. Did the department brief the minister on the NBN proposal to switch from the HFC to a different access network technology?

Mr Robinson: Yes, I believe we did.

Senator O'NEILL: In what form was that briefing?

Mr Robinson: It included written briefing.

Senator O'NEILL: Could you take on notice to provide a time line of every interaction, verbal or in writing, with the NBN and the minister about the HFC network and a potential switch to a different technology mix, on notice?

Mr Robinson: I am happy to take it on notice, but there would have been many interactions.

Senator O'NEILL: Could you undertake that back to September 2015? It would be very helpful to see the style of communication about things of this scale. We are hearing that there seem to be casual conversations. So you did brief the minister in that period?

Mr Robinson: I believe so, yes.

Answer:

Refer answer to question 19.