

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: 33

Program 1.1

Hansard Ref: Written, 31/10/2016

Topic: Reforms – Captioning regulation

Senator Urquhart, Anne asked:

Please provide an update on the potential reforms to captioning regulation for broadcasting services that the Department commenced in December of last year.

- (a) Please provide an update on the consultation process.
- (b) Beyond the submissions process on captioning reform have any further consultations been undertaken? If so, please provide details.
- (c) Has the Department provided advice to Government on the outcomes of the captioning reform consultation and the content of the submissions? If so, when was advice provided to Government?
- (d) Will a report or summary of the consultation process be made public?

Answer:

- (a) The Department of Communications and the Arts released a consultation paper on 1 December 2015 that discussed potential reforms to captioning regulation for free-to-air and subscription television services. The consultation closed on 29 January 2016. Eight submissions were received.

The consultation paper sought comment on a number of issues previously raised by stakeholders but not addressed in the *Broadcasting and Other Legislation Amendment (Deregulation) Act 2015* (which introduced various deregulation measures in respect of captioning regulation). Those issues included captioning quota arrangements, annual reporting requirements and the consistency in outcomes produced by captioning regulation.

Submissions received included calls for a more transparent and simplified captioning regime for subscription television services, an increase in captioning requirements on free-to-air multichannels and changes to annual reporting requirements.

Any changes to the captioning regime would require legislative amendments. The Government is currently considering whether legislative amendments are appropriate.

- (b) Departmental staff meet regularly with industry stakeholders to discuss developments in the industry. Most recently, Departmental staff met with representatives of the Australian Subscription Television and Radio Association, Foxtel, Fetch TV, Optus and the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) in August 2016. Matters discussed included

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progress of the consultation process and the relationship between the Department's consultation process and the ACMA's statutory review of captioning.

- (c) Yes. The Department provided advice to the Government on the captioning reform consultation on 2 August 2016.
- (d) Submissions received are available on the Department's website at <https://www.communications.gov.au/have-your-say/improving-captioning-regulation>. The form of any further announcement will depend on the Government's decision about whether changes to legislation are required.