

**Senate Economics Legislation Committee**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**Treasury Portfolio**

Additional Estimates

2015 - 2016

**Department/Agency:** Treasury

**Question:** AET 26

**Topic:** Tax White Paper timing

**Reference:** Hansard page no. 23 - 10 February 2016

**Senator:** Wong, Penny

**Question:**

**Senator WONG:** Is that work continuing? Let's start again. Who was working on the tax green paper and tax white paper in Treasury? Was there a unit set up? Was it done in Revenue Group? Was there an IDC? Can you just tell me the personnel structure that was set up for the tax green and white papers, for which, as late as October 2015, Senator Cormann was still outlining a timetable of an early-new-year release of the green paper and a white paper release?

**Mr Fraser:** Preparatory work was done, as I said, drawing off the work in the Re:think document, by Rob Heferen and his tax policy group during the course of 2015.

**Senator WONG:** 2015. So Mr Heferen's group did the work for that. Whatever obfuscation the government wishes to engage in now about what the process actually is, it is unarguable that at least until the end of last year the articulated position of the government was clearly a green paper in the new year and white paper thereafter.

**Senator Cormann:** It is a matter of public record.

**Senator WONG:** Correct. So I am asking: who was responsible for that process?

**Mr Fraser:** Rob Heferen in the tax policy division.

**Senator WONG:** Right. Were you involved in that, Mr Fraser?

**Mr Fraser:** Yes.

**Senator WONG:** What is Treasury's current understanding of the development of the white paper?

**Mr Fraser:** It is a matter for a decision by the government. We will take guidance, obviously, from them.

**Senator WONG:** Right. I assume, because Treasury is a very professional outfit, that you were previously working to the timetable Senator Cormann set out in the previous estimates hearing. Correct?

**Mr Fraser:** We were working on the basis that there might be an option for a green paper and a white paper to be released during the course of 2016.

**Senator WONG:** Are you still working on that basis?

**Mr Fraser:** We are waiting for direction from the government.

**Senator WONG:** When did you move from working on that basis to waiting for direction?

**Senator Cormann:** That is—

**Senator WONG:** That is a perfectly legitimate question.

**Senator Cormann:** Let me just make this point—

**Senator WONG:** That is a process and timing question.

**Senator Cormann:** I want to answer the process question. The government, at all times, is at liberty to change its mind on the best way forward. The government, at all times, is at liberty to make decisions that impact on policy content and on policy development process, subject to the government's assessment of what is in the public interest. Obviously Treasury, and any

other department of government, works at the direction of the government of the day.

**Senator WONG:** Thank you for that. I repeat my question: When did Treasury move from working to the timetable that the government had make public—which Senator Cormann reiterated in October 2015: Green paper new year, white paper thereafter—to the position that Mr Fraser now advises which is 'we are waiting for direction'?

**Senator Cormann:** We might have to take that on notice in terms of whether there is a specific date that we may be able to assist you with.

**Senator WONG:** Approximately?

**Senator Cormann:** We will take that on notice.

**Senator WONG:** How long after the last estimates when you—

**Senator Cormann:** We will take that on notice.

**Senator WONG:** Before or after the change of government?

**Senator Cormann:** We will take that on notice.

**Answer:**

Early in 2016, the Government indicated that tax reforms would be announced at or before this year's Budget.