

Senate Economics Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Budget Estimates

2014 - 2015

Department/Agency: IGT

Question: BET 491-496

Topic: Complaints

Reference: written - 19 June 2015

Senator: Wong, Penny

Question:

491. Last year the Commonwealth Ombudsman reported handling 1,369 complaints about the ATO or about 115 complaints per month – is the IGT expecting a similar workload in complaints directed to this agency? How many complaints has the IGT office received since it assumed this function?
492. What new resources has the IGT been given to manage this increased workload (dollars and people)?
493. Does the IGT believe those resources are sufficient to manage your increased workload effectively?
494. What proportion of complaints made to the Commonwealth Ombudsman were resolved in the complainant's favour in the year preceding transfer of this function to the IGT office?
495. What benchmarks or targets does the IGT office have for the handling of individual complaints? In particular, are there set targets for the timeframe within which complaints will be processed and resolved? If so, have any of these targets changed as a result of the transfer of responsibility from the Commonwealth Ombudsmen to the IGT office?
496. The IGT does not have the power to compel the ATO to take any particular course of action in dealing with complaints – can the IGT step through the role the office will play in resolving these? Does this differ in any way from the role or powers available to the Commonwealth Ombudsman?

Answer:

491. From 1 May 2015 to 19 June 2015, the IGT received 284 complaints (i.e. an average of approximately 8 complaints per business day). This is approximately one and a half times the average number received by the Commonwealth Ombudsman during May and June of last year.

492. The IGT has received two tranches of departmental allocations to manage this increased workload. Please refer to the agency portfolio budget statements at the website links as outlined below:

- <http://www.treasury.gov.au/~media/Treasury/Publications%20and%20Media/Publications/2014/PBS%202014-15/Downloads/PDF/11%20IGT.ashx> at pages 278-281; and
- http://www.treasury.gov.au/~media/Treasury/Publications%20and%20Media/Publications/2015/PBS%202015/Downloads/PDF/10_IGT.ashx at pages 280-283.

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493. Based on current projections, the new resources should be sufficient once new staff are recruited and settled into their new roles.

494. The Commonwealth Ombudsman is best placed to answer this question.

495. The IGT has established a working agreement with the ATO in relation to the processes and timeframes for handling complaints.

The current working arrangements incorporate the ATO's service standards for complaint case resolution. This arrangement involves the designated ATO complaints resolution officer contacting the complainant within 3 business days to acknowledge the complaint and resolving the complaint within 15 business days in 80 percent of cases or as otherwise negotiated. The ATO has advised the IGT that it will use its "best endeavours" to meet these timeframes.

The above working arrangement will be reviewed after 6 – 12 months of operation. Based on that review, the IGT and ATO will then enter into a more formal protocol and will incorporate any necessary fine-tuning.

Relying on its tax-specialist staff, the IGT is operating under a new model which seeks to handle complaints efficiently and in an expedited manner. As a result it is difficult to make direct comparisons with the timeframes that were employed by the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

496. The IGT's underlying powers are substantially the same as the Commonwealth Ombudsman's. As the IGT's focus is on tax administration and has tax-specialist staff, the IGT is well placed to assist taxpayers in resolving their complaints and in seeking to ensure due process is followed and procedural fairness is achieved.