

Senate Economics Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Budget Estimates

2017 - 2018

Division/Agency: Australian Taxation Office
Question No: 127
Topic: Breach of Code of Conduct & Whistleblowing
Reference: Hansard page 17 (30 May 2017)
Senator: Whish-Wilson, Peter

Question:

Senator WHISH-WILSON: What is the process that an ATO staff member would follow if they were asked to carry out a task that they may have suspicious about? Is there an independent person they can go to within the organisation?

Ms Curtis: There are lots of avenues for staff members to report wrongdoing, whether that be fraud or potential conflict of interest—there are all sorts of things that could constitute wrongdoing or misconduct. We have an email for our internal investigations unit, which people can email too. They can report anonymously using the ATO's anonymous fraud alert form. We have a 'leave a message' on a 24-hour hotline. These are all internal avenues. We were talking about the PID Act. You can report to an authorised officer under the PID Act and you can report to your manager. So there are lots and lots of avenues for progressing things, whether it be anonymously or directly.

Mr Jordan: One of the best ways, and what we would hope would often happen, is to tell the person asking, 'It is inappropriate for you to ask me to do that and I am not doing it.'—stop it there.

Senator WHISH-WILSON: I am sure that is the common sense approach but, as you know Mr Jordan, in an environment where you are working with other people—

Mr Jordan: My boss asked me to do something so I thought I should.

Senator WHISH-WILSON: You are worried about potential repercussions and those kinds of things. The committee has been dealing with it, across the board, for whistleblowers. If you did have an internal independent integrity adviser, would that be a role that someone could go to in terms of a first point of contact?

Ms Curtis: Yes, if we did have that role someone could go there but, as I said, there are so many avenues. I think you hit the nail on the head; it is whether people feel comfortable, which is why we do have lots of different ways in which you can raise these issues and why many of them are anonymous.

Senator WHISH-WILSON: Do you have a record you could provide to the committee as to how often those kinds of processes have been used internally, in terms of whistleblowing and issues been raised?

Ms Curtis: I do not have that with me but I can take that on notice.

Senator WHISH-WILSON: It would be useful to know if it is actually being used.

Mr Jordan: Absolutely.

Answer:

Channel	June 2016 – May 2017		June 2015 – May 2016		June 2014 – May 2015	
	Internal	PID#	Internal	PID	Internal	PID
Email	244	19	336	20	199	20
Anonymous Fraud Alert Form	9	4	6	0	5	0
Other*	1	3	4	0	3	9
Phone**	7	4	4	1	5	1
Letter	0	2	5	2	2	4
Total	261	32	355	23	214	34

#Public Interest Disclosure

*Other includes verbal referrals, referrals and requests from other agencies

**Only includes phone referrals not followed up in writing