

Senate Economics Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Budget Estimates

2017 - 2018

Division/Agency: Structural Reform Group
Question No: 292
Topic: SRG Functions and Projects
Reference: Hansard page 99-101 (29 May 2017)
Senator: Gallagher, Katy

Question:

Senator GALLAGHER: If there are 42 people, do you not have an energy team, a communications team?

Ms Quinn: We have a group of people working on energy now but we do not necessarily have a fixed number that will stay in perpetuity no matter what is happening with government policy. We move them around.

Senator GALLAGHER: Yes, but do you develop expertise and stability in that policy area?

Ms Quinn: Yes. We put together project teams based on the expertise and the necessary capabilities.

Senator GALLAGHER: Could we get a list of the projects that you are working on.

Ms Quinn: I can take that on notice and provide additional information.

Senator GALLAGHER: You have covered them in bits and pieces but if we could get a comprehensive list, we could get an understanding of your new group. That would be excellent. That would cover all of those areas that you outlined like infrastructure, communications, workplace relations, regulatory reform, all of it.

Ms Quinn: That is right. Some are shared. Infrastructure is a classic one which is shared with our budget policy colleagues.

Senator GALLAGHER: In terms of communications, were you involved in any way in developing the regional broadband levy or did you have input into that measure?

Ms Quinn: As a central policy agency, we are involved in cabinet processes regarding a large number of agencies.

Senator GALLAGHER: But I mean your group in particular.

Ms Quinn: Our group in particular does look after the communications portfolio so matters that appear before cabinet we would be involved in providing advice on to the ministers that we support. In some projects, we work cooperatively on developing policy but that is not the case in this situation.

Senator GALLAGHER: On the NBN tax or the regional broadband levy, what was the structural reform group's role? Perhaps that is a better way of asking the question.

Mr McDonald: I think that we would have provided advice as part of the cabinet process.

Senator GALLAGHER: So you were not involved in the formulation of the measure, how it would work, the structure, the scope or anything like that?

Mr McDonald: I would have to take on notice just how detailed our involvement was, I am afraid.

[...]

Senator GALLAGHER: How are matters referred to you? Are you own-initiative developing? Is it, recommending to government, 'These are the areas we think we need to be involved in,' or is it coming the other way—or both?

Ms Quinn: A bit of both. Under the heading of any one of these, what role we take varies as well depending on what our capability is and what we can provide to the process versus other

colleagues or other people in the system.

Senator GALLAGHER: On notice—where you have already agreed to take on notice and do the list of projects that you are currently working on—can you identify the ones in which you have the lead?

Ms Quinn: Certainly.

Senator GALLAGHER: If you do not have the lead, could it be another area within Treasury or could it be another department?

Ms Quinn: It could be either of those. It could be the private sector, depending on the particular issue.

Senator GALLAGHER: If that can be provided easily, that would be useful. If not, don't worry—just whatever you are responsible for.

Ms Quinn: I would be happy to take it on notice.

Answer:

1. As at 30 June 2017 SRG worked on a number of projects, falling into the following categories:
 - 1.1. Energy and Climate Change
 - 1.2. Infrastructure
 - 1.3. Communications
 - 1.4. Workplace Relations
 - 1.5. Industry
 - 1.6. Innovation
 - 1.7. Regional Development
 - 1.8. Regulatory Reform
 - 1.9. Competition.
2. Treasury will typically lead on any project for which the Treasurer is the Minister responsible for the policy instrument being considered, or where the Treasurer leads a ministerial taskforce,
3. The policy development process for the Regional Broadband Scheme was led by the Department of Communications and the Arts (Communications). Treasury worked with officials at Communications and other relevant agencies to develop and recommend to Government appropriate policy parameters and estimate the impacts, including agreeing revenue estimates, of the scheme. The structure, scope and other parameters relating to the application of the scheme were a decision of Government.
4. The specific involvement of the Structural Reform Group in develop the Regional Broadband Scheme was quite limited as much of that was completed prior to the establishment of the Group.