Senate Economics Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Supplementary Budget Estimates

2014 - 2015

Department/Agency: ABS
Question: SBT4248
Topic: Retail trade figures
Reference: written - 31 October 2014
Senator: Wong, Penny

Question:

4248. Has the ABS had any meeting with any retailer in relation to the reliability of its Retail Trade figures in the 2014 calendar year? If yes:
   a. Which specific Retail Trade statistics had their reliability questioned?
   b. To what quantitative extent was their reliability questioned?
   c. What action was taken within the ABS to address this reliability concern?
   d. What is the ABS's assessment of the reliability of its Retail Trade figures given the concerns raised?

Answer:

4248. The ABS has not been approached recently with any systematic concerns about the reliability of the Retail Trade statistics.

The Retail Trade collection area has a lot of telephone and email contact with survey respondents as the data are processed month by month. There is a high level of concentration in the industry and the large retailers have the resources and the data to maintain a sophisticated analytical capability. Within the last calendar year, the collection area has had email and telephone contact with large retailers attempting to reconcile their internal analysis with the published ABS data. All such queries have been resolved.

No systematic problems with the reliability of the Retail Trade data have been identified as a result of these queries.

(a-d)

The ABS Retail Trade statistics are robust, fit for purpose statistics. The ABS collects and compiles Retail Trade statistics monthly. Users are aware that monthly series are volatile. Retail Trade statistics are also very seasonal, for example, there is a very big peak at Christmas time. The production of useful data is dependent on the careful application of sophisticated seasonal adjustment techniques. Most users are aware of these limitations of the data and use them accordingly.