

**Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee**  
**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**  
**Additional Estimates Hearing – February 2011**

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

**Department/Agency:** Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor-General

**Program 1:** Support for the Governor-General and Official Activities

**Outcome 1:** The performance of the Governor-General's role is facilitated through the organisation and management of official duties, management and maintenance of the official household and property and administration of the Australian Honours and Awards system.

**Topic:** Council for the Order of Australia

**Senator:** B. Brown

**Question reference number:** PM43

**Type of Question:** Written

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 15 April 2011

**Number of Pages:** 2

**Question:**

1. What are the criteria the Council for the Order of Australia uses to assess nominees against the desired attributes of demonstrated achievement, a contribution over and above what might be reasonably expected, and voluntary contribution that stands out from others?
2. The membership of the council is heavily weighted towards academics and government representatives, what attempts are made to invite community and NGO representatives to join the council?
3. Are nominations for voluntary work given extra weight over people who are nominated for work in their paid employment?
4. Is there a cap on the number of awards that are allocated in each category? Does the council have this in mind when approving or rejecting nominations?
5. Please provide figures for the past five years of the number of awards issued for contributions to the environmental and disabilities sectors.

**Answer:**

1. The Constitution of the Order of Australia states that:
  - Appointments as Companions or honorary Companions in the General Division shall be made for eminent achievement and merit of the highest degree in service to Australia or to humanity at large.
  - Appointments as Officers or honorary Officers in the General Division shall be made for distinguished service of a high degree to Australia or to humanity at large.
  - Appointments as Members or honorary Members in the General Division may be made for service in a particular locality or field of activity or to a particular group.
  - Awards of the Medal of the Order in the General Division may be made for service worthy of particular recognition.

Although consideration of nominations is merit-based, recommendation of appointment to the Order is necessarily a subjective decision based on broad criteria. Based on information provided by the nominator and referees, Council members must be satisfied that awardees have

contributed to a level above others in a similar position and use their collective experience and judgement in recommending the appropriate level of award.

2. In response to this question the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet has advised:

The Council for the Order of Australia consists of 19 persons:

- three ex officio members – Vice-President of the Federal Executive Council, the Chief of the Defence Force and an Associate Secretary from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet;
- eight persons, one nominated by each Australian state and territory government; and
- eight persons from the Australian community who are appointed by the Governor-General on the Australian Government's recommendation.

When considering recommendations for appointment of members, the Australian Government takes into account several factors including experience and knowledge in a broad range of endeavours, gender balance and geographic distribution.

3. The Council recognises the value and commitment of people who serve the community through unpaid service. In general, service that is recognised can be a mix of contributions of a voluntary nature and paid employment - all aspects of a nominee's service are given consideration by the Council of the Order of Australia.

Council members must be satisfied that the nominee has contributed to a level above others in a similar position – whether that is voluntary or paid services.

4. There are quotas for the levels of Companion, Officer and Member of the Order of Australia. There is no quota for the Medal of the Order of Australia.

The Constitution of the Order of Australia states that the Governor-General may appoint in the General Division, in any calendar year, not more than:

- 30 persons as Companions (other than honorary Companions)
- 125 persons as Officers (other than honorary Officers)
- 300 persons as Members (other than honorary Members)

The Council recommends the level of awards during the meeting without reference to the quotas. The final total of each level of awards is advised at the end of the meeting.

5. Over the past 5 years (from Queen's Birthday 2006 to Australia Day 2011), 98 awards have been made in the category of Disabilities and 118 awards in the category of Environment and Conservation. Additionally, some awards made in the category of Community may have included service in these areas.