

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates 2015 - 2016

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Outcome/Program: Outcome 1: Prime Minister and Cabinet
Topic: Secure communications system

Senator: Bilyk, Catryna

Question reference number: 208

Type of question: Written

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Number of pages: 3

Question:

1. Is there a secure telephone network available for the use of the Prime Minister and other Cabinet Ministers to make secure calls?
2. Can you explain the nature of this facility?
3. When was this facility established?
4. Is it still in use?
5. In what circumstances is it recommended that Ministers use such facilities?
6. Does the Prime Minister utilise this facility when making phone calls to discuss matters of a sensitive nature?
7. Does the Prime Minister exclusively use secure communications channels?
8. Are there occasions on which the Prime Minister has not utilised secure channels for sensitive communications?
9. What alternative types of communications channels does the Prime Minister use?
10. Have the security agencies been consulted about this behaviour?
11. Do they recommend against it?
12. Has the Prime Minister ever used non-secure channels to participate in meetings of the Cabinet or Cabinet Committees?
13. Has the Prime Minister ever used non-secure channels to carry out National Security

business, including meetings of the NSC?

14. Has the Prime Minister ever utilised non-secure wi-fi networks to carry out Government business, such as hotel wi-fi networks? For example, sending and receiving classified information?

15. What precautions are recommended by the security agencies when the Prime Minister and other Ministers are travelling overseas?

16. Does the Prime Minister adhere to these recommendations?

17. On how many occasions has he departed from them?

Answer:

1. Yes.

2. There are a range of secure communication options available to the Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers. The Parliament House Briefing Room (PHBR) links a range of the Government's secure communications networks including the Ministerial Communications Network (MCN) and the Australian Secure Network (ASNet). These networks allow the Prime Minister, Cabinet Ministers and Government committees to communicate securely.

3. The PHBR was established in 2010.

4. Yes.

5. These networks are recommended for classified telecommunications based discussions.

6. The Prime Minister uses this facility for classified discussions.

7. No. The Prime Minister uses a range of communications channels. All classified communications take place on appropriately secure channels.

8. Not to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's (PM&C) knowledge.

9. The Prime Minister uses a range of communications channels. All classified communications take place on appropriately secure channels.

10. It is not appropriate to comment on what security advice may or may not have been provided to the Prime Minister.

11. It is not appropriate to comment on what security advice may or may not have been provided to the Prime Minister.

12. Not to the Department's knowledge.

13. Not to the Department's knowledge.

14. Not to the Department's knowledge.

15. It is not appropriate to comment on what security advice may or may not have been provided to the Prime Minister.

16. To the Department's knowledge

17. PM&C is not aware of any occasions that the Prime Minister has departed from the communications or travel security policies.