

**Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Budget Estimates 26 May-6 June 2014

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

**Department/Agency:** Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

**Outcome/Program:** 1.1 Prime Minister and Cabinet

**Topic:** Subclass 600 visitor visa - consultation

**Senator:** Senator Cory Bernardi

**Question reference number:** 72

**Type of Question:** FPA, Tuesday 27 May 2014, page 73

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 11 July 2014

**Number of pages:** 2

**Question:**

CHAIR: Specifically, was PM&C consulted over the government's decision in early 2013 to roll out the new subclass 600 visitor visa category, which extended to a further 21 countries online applications for visitor visas to Australia?

Dr McCarthy: I would have to take that on notice.

CHAIR: Would it be a matter of course that PM&C would be consulted on changes such as this?

Ms Cross: I would expect that we had been, but I would need to check that for you.

CHAIR: You may want to check whether you were aware that the countries which gained access to this visa category included a set of countries in the Middle East but did not include Israel. Were you aware of that?

Ms Cross: No, I am not aware of the details.

CHAIR: I put to you that this was a very important decision concerning Australia's relations with an important bilateral partner—Israel. It beggars belief that the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet was not aware of it and not included in such an important change.

Ms Cross: We may well have been aware of it. I just need to take that on notice.

...

CHAIR: If Prime Minister and Cabinet were not consulted I am seeking an explanation as to why they were not, given that under normal circumstances they would.

Ms Cross: As I said, we will take that on notice. There are some matters that are within ministers' remits to make decisions; there are others that go to Cabinet; there are some that are agreed through an exchange of letters. There is a whole range of different circumstances. We need to find out what the situation was.

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Ms Cross: It depends on whether we were consulted and how we were consulted. We will take it on notice to see if we can ascertain that from our files.

CHAIR: Indeed, it was a contingent question. If you were not consulted there must be an explanation as to why you were not.

**Answer:**

The Department was not consulted. There was no requirement to consult the Department because it was a routine administrative decision as part of implementing a visa simplification and deregulation project.