

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates 18-21 November 2013

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Outcome/Program: 1.1 Prime Minister and Cabinet

Topic: PM&C capability review

Senator: Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Question reference number: 132

Type of Question: Written

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Question:

With reference to the capability review of the department published by the Australian Public Service Commission:

Is the Secretary of PM&C concerned the review found the “overwhelming view of those outside and inside PM&C” is that PM&C’s approach to policy development “has eroded trust across government and does not lead to the best outcome for the Prime Minister or the government”? If so, has he taken any action to address concerns about the erosion of trust and poor outcomes for the Prime Minister and the government?

Is the Secretary of PM&C concerned the review found “there is a consistent view that authority to make a decision has decreased significantly over the years and that too many layers of approval are required”? If so, has he taken any action to address concerns about the ability of departmental officers to make a decision and increasing layers of approval?

Answer:

The Secretary requested that PM&C be the first department to complete a capability review following the finalisation of three pilot reviews. The PM&C Review was commenced in March 2012 and completed in June 2012.

Amongst other things it did state that “The overwhelming view of those outside and inside PM&C is that this competitive approach has eroded trust across government and does not lead to the best outcome for the Prime Minister or the government.”

However, it is misleading to consider this statement in isolation from the Review’s full comments on this issue. The Review went on to say, in the same paragraph, that:

“However, this does not mean that PM&C will always have the same point of view as another department; nor should it. What it does mean is that the policy task is worked on in a respectful and collaborative way and that any

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differences, if identified, are identified openly. The review team considers that there is a decreasing reliance on the competitive approach within PM&C, which is a positive move.”

Since his commencement in PM&C the Secretary has emphasised his commitment to “leadership through collaboration” in discussions with Secretaries and Agency Heads, the Executive and staff, and in numerous speeches. He has expressed very clearly to all PM&C staff, and to staff across the APS more broadly, his view that the APS as a whole works most effectively through real collaboration.

The Department took areas identified for improvement seriously. A Plan to address the four areas of improvement was developed, senior officers were identified to progress initiatives, and actions were reviewed by the committee of senior staff.

The Department reports to the APSC on progress of the Capability Action Plan on a quarterly basis.

The second half of the question is dealt with in response to PM 133.