

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates 19-23 October 2015

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Outcome/Program: Outcome 1: Prime Minister and Cabinet
Topic: FOI/2015/074

Senator: Senator the Hon Penny Wong

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Question:

Senator WONG: To whom did you speak?

Ms Spence: I am sorry, Senator, but there is nothing—I made sure that I was confident with the information that I had to enable me to make that decision.

Senator WONG: Chair, this is just blatant and patent refusal, frankly, to answer reasonable questions. Leaving aside FOI, senators are entitled to pursue questions about public expenditure. You are not making a claim for public interest immunity.

CHAIR: Senator Wong, you may ask the questions. You may not like the responses that the officers provide to you but they are responses.

Senator WONG: If the standard is that the officers will not even answer who they spoke to, that is an extraordinary proposition.

CHAIR: It is not for me to say what the responses will be.

Senator WONG: Is that really what PM&C's standard now is—you will not even answer questions from the Senate about who you spoke to? Is that right?

Ms Cross: I think Ms Spence has answered the question—

Senator WONG: No, she has not.

Ms Cross: but if it helps we are happy to—

Senator WONG: In 10 years this is one of the worst standards I have seen.

Ms Cross: I think she is—

...

CHAIR: Just one moment, Ms Cross.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: Even the chair is giving you an opportunity to—

CHAIR: We will just take our time, because honestly the interjections are not helpful. I think the officers are trying to be as helpful as they possibly can be. Ms Cross, you had something to add.

Ms Cross: I think the officer has answered the question but we are happy to see if there is any further information we can provide.

Answer:

Please refer to PM17, PM18, PM90 and PM91.