

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: Statement of ministerial standards

Senator: Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Question reference number: 81

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 4 December 2015

Number of pages: 2

Question:

With reference to evidence by Ms Kelly on 19 October 2015 that advice provided by the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister about Mr Turnbull's statement of interests was "prepared for the purpose of cabinet deliberations and was submitted to the government's committee of cabinet".

1. When was Mr Turnbull's statement of interests submitted to the governance committee of cabinet.
2. Why is the Statement of Ministerial Standards silent on the process outlined by Ms Kelly.
3. Were all statements of interests made by Ministers to Mr Abbott subject to consideration by the governance committee of cabinet. If not, why were Mr Turnbull's interests subject to special consideration.
4. Was the reference of statements of interests to a Cabinet Committee designed to shield the contents of those statements, and related advice, from disclosure in response to questions from parliamentary committees and FOI requests.
5. How is part 7.5 of the statement of ministerial interests consistent with the maintenance of cabinet confidentiality.
6. Does the practice of referring all or some statements of interests to a Cabinet Committee continue under Mr Turnbull.

Answer:

1. The Department does not generally disclose the dates on which matters are considered by the Cabinet.

2. Paragraph 7.4 of the Statement of Ministerial Standards provides that the Prime Minister may seek advice from the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet on any matters within the Standard at any time.

The role of the Governance Committee is described on www.directory.gov.au being to 'provide advice and oversight of governance and integrity issues, which include, but are not limited to, the Statement of Ministerial Standards and issues arising from the Lobbyist Code'.

3. All initial returns of Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries following the appointment of the Ministry in September 2013 were the subject of a report considered by the Governance Committee.
4. No.
5. The Statement of Ministerial Standards covers a range of matters and paragraph 7.4 provides that the Prime Minister may seek advice from the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet on any of the matters within the Standards at any time. It is not limited to matters on which the Prime Minister may wish to consult the Governance Committee. The Statement notes that the Prime Minister may make advice public; it does not require the advice to be made public.
6. This will be a matter for the Prime Minister.