

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS  
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

**Group: 2**

**Program: 1.1**

**Question: BE14/032**

**Senator Wright asked the following question at the hearing on 26-29 May 2014:**

Senator WRIGHT: I am interested in the status of the action plan, notwithstanding what you have already said about the vociferous debate that is going on at the moment. Will it continue to form part of the current government's policy?

Senator Brandis: The document, in the form we inherited from the previous government, may not necessarily. But can I add another element to this, please. I have discussed this with Professor Triggs, and you may well wish to ask about this tomorrow. The government proposes to reform the Human Rights Commission, and that will require amendments to its act. Professor Triggs is very eager that that be done, and she has some views about ways in which the constitution of the commission, and the way in which it operates, can be improved. She and I have spoken about this a couple of times, including briefly this afternoon in fact. The point I am trying to make to you is that I do not want to let the cart get before the horse here. In the second half of this year we will be announcing significant reforms to the Human Rights Commission, and I think it is in the context of those reforms that we will be revisiting the human rights agenda.

Senator WRIGHT: Having listened to what you have said there, would I be correct in thinking that the department probably is not at the moment continuing to deliver initiatives under the plan?

Senator Brandis: That is a matter for them.

Senator WRIGHT: Or are there ongoing initiatives that are being delivered currently?

Mr Bouwhuis: As the Attorney-General has articulated, the new government has a new agenda for human rights. So we would not be continuing with the action plan as formerly set out by the previous government. The new government would make its own decisions about what it wishes to commit to in the lead-up to the universal periodic review in 2015.

Senator WRIGHT: I am using the term 'initiatives contained in the plan'—they are not continuing to be delivered? Are there ongoing initiatives that will not have any further work done on them until that further planning is done?

Mr Bouwhuis: Each initiative would be a question for the government to decide separately, but that framework of a national action plan was one of the previous government's initiatives that would not continue. But as issues come up, the new government will consider them and make a decision on them as it sees fit.

Senator Brandis: That is right. The new government has a much broader and richer human rights agenda than the old government, and I think the official reflects that in his answer.

Senator WRIGHT: Has there been any change in the funding allocated to the initiatives contained in the plan?

Mr Bouwhuis: The initiatives span across the whole of government—everything from multicultural affairs to immigration to other matters—so that is a very difficult question for me to answer.

Senator WRIGHT: The initiatives administered by your department is my clarifying point there—you can take that on notice.

**The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:**

The National Human Rights Action Plan included a series of initiatives to which the former Government had committed. The Action Plan does not form part of the current Government's policy. Accordingly, the Department is not monitoring its continued implementation.