

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

Group: 2

Program: Other Agency

Question No. SBE14/014

Senator O'Sullivan asked the following question at the hearing on 20 November 2014:

Prof. Triggs: We have a 16 per cent increase in inquiries at the Australian Human Rights Commission this year, with a two per cent increase in formal complaints. But we have a decline in the number of inquiries or complaints in relation to the Racial Discrimination Act. As for recent statistics, I do not have them, but I can certainly ask my office to provide any evidence as to the numbers in the last few weeks. I do not have them to hand and, indeed, we probably have not compiled them. But I can certainly make a response to you on notice.

Senator WRIGHT: Is it possible that the Race Discrimination Commissioner may have different information available to him—certainly not in terms of the formal matters and inquiries that have been made and the formal complaints, but in terms of information that people have relayed to him in meetings or in meeting people publicly?

Prof. Triggs: Dr Soutphommasane may very well be able to provide you with a more, if I may use the word, anecdotal response. I will ask him, if I may, to give you direct evidence of that. He is very close to the public in the sense that he speaks very widely around Australia, and I am quite sure he has a view on this. But from our position in terms of the data we collect at the commission, they are as I have described.

Senator WRIGHT: Can you also clarify: the data that you keep—would be possible to have that broken down in terms of the nationality of the person who has made the complaint and the nature of the concern that has been raised?

Prof. Triggs: Yes, we can certainly do that. As you can imagine, we—I think the word is 'disaggregate'—that kind of information now, particularly in light of the discussion about amendments to the Racial Discrimination Act. We have been much more careful now in collecting data that might reflect differences across the race, but for the moment I think with the more recent issues it is too early for us to have any clear view as to those. But as soon as we do, I will make sure we get it to you.

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

Complaints received by Act in the period 1 July 2014 – 20 November 2014

	Received	Percentage
Racial Discrimination Act	184	18%
Sex Discrimination Act	204	21%
Disability Discrimination Act	286	29%
Age Discrimination Act	56	6%
Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act	257	26%
Total	987	100%

The Commission is unable to collate data on the nationality of complainants who lodge racial discrimination complaints as to do so would involve a substantial diversion of resources.