

Senate Standing Committee on Economics
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Portfolio
Budget Estimates Hearing 2011-12
30 May 2011

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: INNOVATION, INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND RESEARCH

TOPIC: Chief Scientist meetings with Minister

REFERENCE: Written Question – Senator Colbeck

QUESTION No.: BI - 78

Senator Colbeck

At the Estimates hearing in May 2011, Minister Carr provided detail of meetings he had held with the former Chief Scientist, Penny Sackett. But those details were significantly at odds with information (showing records of all of Professor Sackett's meetings) that was provided to the Opposition in April 2011 in answer to a Freedom of Information request. Please clarify why the versions of these events are not only different but contain such glaring discrepancies? Whose version of events is correct – the Office of Chief Scientist's or the Minister's? And, if the documents provided by the Office of Chief Scientist do not provide a true and accurate record, what level of credence and trust can the Opposition and the Australian public attach to all of the other documents that have been provided as part of the answer to the FoI request? Is there any other information in answer to the request that does not provide an accurate record?

ANSWER

There is no discrepancy between the material provided by the Office of the Chief Scientist through Freedom of Information (FOI) and the information provided by Minister Carr at the Senate Estimates hearing of 30 May 2011. Monthly reports by Professor Sackett to Minister Carr provided in response to the FOI request did not record every meeting between Professor Sackett and Minister Carr as they focused only on those considered relevant to the reports themselves. Assumptions in the media that these reports represented a complete list of all the meetings that took place are misplaced. Senator Carr's response is more comprehensive.