

FINANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION LEGISLATION COMMITTEE
ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES HEARING, 13 FEBRUARY 2012
QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
ANSWERS BY THE DEPARTMENT OF THE SENATE

Question 4 Department of the Senate – Senator Ryan

I refer to the recent incidents 27 January of flag burning at Parliament House by those involved with the Aboriginal Tent Embassy.

The Usher of Black Rod wrote to the Secretary of the Committee on 14 February to provide his account of the events associated with the protest and flag-burning on the Forecourt of Parliament House on 27 January 2012. This letter was received and published by the Committee on 14 February 2012.

In addition, responses to the specific questions are as follows:

(a) Can you confirm your office granted permission to the protestors for the fire they burnt on the Forecourt of Parliament House on January 27?

The Usher of the Black Rod agreed to a request from the Australian Federal Police (AFP) commander at the protest for a ceremonial fire to be brought onto the Forecourt of Parliament House by a small group of protestors on 27 January.

(b) Did the protestors provide a reason for this fire? If so, what was it?

No, the protestors did not provide a reason for this fire.

(c) What process (checklist) does your office have for granting permission to these requests?

Requests of this nature are normally received by the AFP and passed to the Black Rod and Serjeant's offices for consideration before a recommendation is put to the Presiding Officers. As explained in the Black Rod's account, as the Presiding Officers were unavailable and events were moving quickly, the Black Rod agreed to this request. The Usher of the Black Rod and the Serjeant are authorised to respond to AFP requests relating to persons of interest on the parliamentary precincts when the Presiding Officers are not available.

(d) Who did you consult with before granting permission to this group for the fire?

After responding to the AFP request, the Usher of the Black Rod contacted the Serjeant-at-Arms and the Senior Adviser to the President.

(e) What consultation did you have with the AFP and other Parliament House security staff before you granted permission for this fire?

Before permission was granted, the Usher of the Black Rod was advised by DPS Security that protestors from the Aboriginal tent Embassy were walking towards Parliament House. Following this, the Usher contacted the President's Office.

(f) What consultation with the AFP and other Parliament House security staff did you have during the fire and in the period after?

During the fire and in the period after that, the Usher of the Black Rod was in regular contact with senior DPS security staff, the AFP commander at the protest, the Serjeant-at-Arms and the President's office. The Usher also spoke to the President by telephone after the incident.

(g) Do you have recorded any instances of Parliament House staff feeling threatened, bullied, endangered during these events?

Advice from the three parliamentary departments indicates that there are no recorded instances of Parliament House staff feeling threatened, bullied or endangered during these events.

(h) When the protestors set the Australian Flag on fire the forecourt was there any damage done to Parliament House?

DPS advise that no damage was done to Parliament House.

(i) Have assessments been done on any damage to all parts of the grounds? Who conducted these?

DPS advise that as part of routine maintenance activities, staff look for damage to the building and grounds, and that the department is not aware of any additional reports being raised that can be linked to this event.