

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee—Budget Estimates May 2006

Parliament Portfolio, Department of Parliamentary Services

Answers to Questions on Notice

Topic: Spam quarantine facility

Question P5

Senator Carr asked:

- 1 How does the Quarantine facility currently protect MPs and Senators' inboxes from SPAM?
- 2 Does it have any other benefits?
- 3 How much does it cost to protect MPs and Senators inboxes?
- 4 Is this facility funded by DPS (PM&C) or MPS (DOFA) or both?
- 5 Please provide details of funding arrangements given the quarantine facility is operable in both Parliamentary and Electorate Offices.
- 6 Why is this facility not extended to parliamentary electorate and personal staff?
- 7 Do any Ministerial staff have access to this protection?
- 8 Do any staff working for Government members and senators have such protection?
- 9 Do staff of the Government Communications Unit have access to this quarantine service?
- 10 Do staff of the Government Members Secretariat have access to this quarantine facility?
- 11 Do any other DPS or Parliamentary staff have access to the quarantine facility?
- 12 If so, please nominate numbers of staff, their work locations and classification levels?
- 13 Does the Secretary of the Department of Parliamentary Services or staff of her office have access to this facility?
- 14 What prevents DPS from offering the quarantine facility to MPs' and Senators' staff? Is the issue simply one of cost, or are there other factors involved?
- 15 If there are other factors, please provide a detailed explanation of these?

16 What analysis of work efficiency versus cost was undertaken at the time the decision not to extend quarantine protection was made?

17 Please provide a copy of this evaluation.

18 How much would it cost to protect the inboxes of MPs' and Senators' staff with the quarantine facility?

Answer

The costs mentioned in the answers below exclude GST.

1 DPS uses a product called iHateSpam. It operates in two ways.

Firstly, it filters messages for particular words or phrases and assigns a resultant score to the message. If this score is over a set threshold then the message is defined as spam and quarantined. Quarantined emails are sent to a separate Outlook folder. Users can still access this folder to see what has been placed there. The quarantined emails are deleted automatically after a period of time defined by the System Administrator. The current setting is 30 days, and this is applied to all iHateSpam users.

Secondly, users can create 2 lists of senders:

- (a) one which indicates those senders' emails that should never be treated as spam or quarantined; and
- (b) one which indicates those senders' emails that should always be treated as spam—these emails are automatically deleted from the inbox and are not quarantined.

2 iHateSpam places management of emails with the addressees, who are best placed to make the final decisions on what they consider is spam, rather than with system administrators.

3 To date 550 licences have been purchased at a cost of \$14,240.60, allowing 550 mailboxes to be protected. An additional 2,000 licences will be purchased in July 2006 at a cost of \$27,867.70. Once this purchase is completed, the average cost to protect one mail inbox will be \$16.51.

4 The Department of Parliamentary Services has funded the software licences. The Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) is not a part of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C).

5 The quarantine facility operates on mailboxes which are held on Parliament House computer servers, irrespective of whether they are accessed from Parliament House offices, electorate offices, mobile laptops or other locations. DPS has funded the software licences.

6 The facility was initially provided as a trial. For the trial the rollout of iHateSpam was limited to Senators and Members and other mailboxes that were at high risk of spam such as the publicly published mail addresses of committees. Some initial problems with the first trial resulted in the trial period being extended. An upgraded version of the software has proved reliable and has been

well received by those trialling the product. This version of the software will soon be made available to all owners of a mailbox on the parliamentary email system.

7 Yes, there are 4 ministerial staff members currently using iHateSpam.

8 Yes. In addition to the 4 ministerial staff members mentioned above there are 7 staff of other government Senators or Members, 6 staff of ALP Senators or Members, 11 staff of Democrats Senators, 1 staff of a Greens Senator and 2 staff of former Prime Ministers currently using iHateSpam.

9 No.

10 No.

11 Yes. In some cases this is because the mailbox has a publicly published address which attracts spam, and in other cases for IT support staff training purposes.

12 Yes, as follows:

- (a) DPS: 97 staff (varying from PSL3 to Secretary) and generic mailboxes;
- (b) Senate: 6 staff (SES) and 7 committee mailboxes;
- (c) Reps: 2 staff (PSL6, PEL2) and 5 committee mailboxes.

13 Yes. The Secretary is using iHateSpam. The Secretary's support staff do not use iHateSpam.

14 The facility can be applied to any mailbox on the parliamentary email system. The initial roll out was limited during the trial but it will soon be available to all mailbox owners.

15 During the trial a number of people who were offered the facility indicated that spam was not a problem to them and they chose not to take up the offer. When the iHateSpam software is rolled out to all users it will be offered as an option. It will not be automatically applied.

16 There was no decision made to not extend quarantine protection.

1 Not applicable—see answer to question 16.

2 The cost to protect a mailbox on the Parliamentary computer system is \$16.51 which includes three years of ongoing maintenance and support.