

Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Budget Estimates Hearings 2007-2008, 21-22 May 2007



Question: PM 100 – numbers will be advised when available from the Committee Secretariat.

Topic: Refugee Swap Agreement with the United States

Direct on Notice: PM 100

Senator Evans asked: In relation to the Immigration Minister's media release on 17 April 2007, where he says 'The Australian Government has also signed an agreement with the United States of America to provide mutual assistance for the resettlement of people in need of international protection':

1. What was the nature of the Department's involvement in the process which resulted in this agreement?
2. Was there an IDC? If so, was the Department represented on the IDC? Who represented the Department on the IDC? How many meetings did they attend, and when were those meetings?
3. Is the Department aware of comments by a US embassy spokeswoman that the 'swap' plan is an 'informal arrangement', without legal obligations? Given these comments, does the Department know what the current status of the agreement is?
4. Which area of the Department has ongoing responsibility for briefing the Prime Minister about the agreement?
5. Where did the idea for the agreement originate? Australia or the United States? Immigration, DFAT or PM&C?
6. When did the idea originate/how long did it take to gain US agreement?
7. On what dates were briefings provided to the Prime Minister and/or his office about the agreement?
8. Were briefs prepared on the idea for any of the Prime Minister's US visits or for meetings with US President Bush at APEC 2006 in Vietnam? Please indicate each occasion on which briefs were provided for such meetings.
9. Does the Department know whether similar arrangements with other nations are being contemplated or being negotiated? Is the Department involved in any IDCs or other inter-department forums to discuss such arrangements with other countries? Please specify each such IDC/forum in which the Department is a participant.

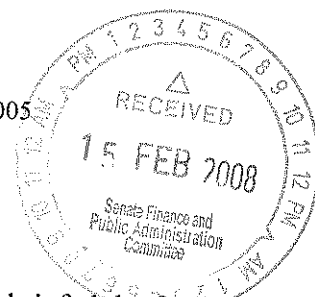
Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

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Additional Estimates Hearings 2004-2005, 14 February 2005



Answer:

- 1) The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) briefed the former Prime Minister about the agreement before it was finalised.
- 2) There was no formal IDC on the Mutual Assistance Agreement.
- 3) PM&C was not aware of the comments attributed to a US embassy spokeswoman. Questions about the status of the agreement should be referred to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC).
- 4) The Social Policy Division has primary responsibility for briefing the Prime Minister on the immigration portfolio.
- 5) These questions should be referred to DIAC.
- 6) These questions should be referred to DIAC.
- 7) A brief on the agreement was provided to the former Prime Minister on 29 March 2007.
- 8) No.
- 9) PM&C is aware of discussions regarding the possibility of similar arrangements with foreign governments. PM&C is not involved in any IDCs or other inter-department forums to discuss such arrangements with other countries. Questions about specific country negotiations should be referred to DIAC as the lead agency.