

Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Finance and Deregulation Portfolio

Department of Finance and Deregulation

Supplementary Estimates Hearing – October 2010

Outcome General, Program General

Topic: Social Media

Question reference number: F75

Type of Question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 3 December 2010

Number of Pages: 2

Senator Bernardi asked:

- a) How do these social media policies comply with the APS Code of Conduct?
- b) How do these social media policies comply with the APS Values?
- c) A core APS Value is to be apolitical. What could be classified as apolitical? How is this monitored in relation to employees of the Department useage of social media? Please give examples.
- d) Using twitter as an example, could one of the following be viewed as apolitical:
 - i. Criticism or praise of the Government or Government Ministers
 - ii. Criticism or praise of other Members of Parliament or Senators
 - iii. Following or being a fan of the Government or Government Ministers
 - iv. Following or being a fan other Members of Parliament or Senators
 - v. Commenting on activities of the Government or Government Ministers
 - vi. Commenting on activities of other Members of Parliament or Senators
 - vii. Criticism, praise or commenting on Government policy
- e) Part of the APS Code of Conduct is to avoid any real or apparent conflict of interest. What could be classified as a real or apparent conflict of interest? How is this monitored in relation to employees of the Department useage of social media? Please give examples.
- f) Using twitter as an example, could following one be viewed as a real or apparent conflict of interest:
 - i. Criticism or praise of the Government or Government Ministers
 - ii. Criticism or praise of other Members of Parliament or Senators
 - iii. Following or being a fan of the Government or Government Ministers
 - iv. Following or being a fan other Members of Parliament or Senators
 - v. Commenting on activities of the Government or Government Ministers
 - vi. Commenting on activities of other Members of Parliament or Senators
 - vii. Criticism, praise or commenting on Government policy

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Answer:

- a) & b) The Australian Public Service Commission has published guidance on the use of social media consistent with the APS Code of Conduct. Finance policy is consistent with that guidance.
- c) Finance does not differentiate between the use of social media and other activities when pursuing its responsibility to be apolitical.
- d) Whether answers to any of these questions were considered apolitical would depend on whether commenting in an official or personal capacity and on the content, purpose and nature of each.
- e) Managing conflicts of interest on social media is not materially different to managing those conflicts in other communication channels such as public fora and letters to the editor.
- f) Like any other communication channel, an apparent conflict of interest would depend on whether an employee was acting in an official capacity.