

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
AUSTRALIAN CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION SERVICE

Question No. 66

Senator Barnett asked the following question at the hearing on 26 May 2011:

Senator BARNETT: Since November 2007 on how many occasions has the relevant minister's office instructed Customs spokespersons to make public comments? You might need to take that on notice.

Mr Pezzullo: I might seek some clarification as to what you mean by 'instructed'. There certainly is a discussion, as there is in every portfolio that I have ever been involved in, between media units, senior management and ministerial staff. I cannot recall an incident in the last two years that I have been in charge of the function where there has been an instruction as such. Consultation, engagement, discussions—lots. It would happen fairly frequently. But the term that you used was 'instruction', so I would seek some clarification on that?

Senator BARNETT: A directive, an instruction, an intention via paper, verbally or otherwise from the minister's office to a Customs officer to make a public comment. If you could take that on notice.

Mr Pezzullo: I will take it on notice.

Senator BARNETT: I am interested specifically in exactly what the occasion was; who was instructed and where the instruction came from; what were the topics of the instructions and/or advice from the minister's office and when that occurred?

Mr Pezzullo: I will take it on notice and I will look at it carefully. I am not sure that ministerial staff have got any authority to do those things. Just to be clear about your question, your question goes to the making of a comment or to not making a comment.

Senator BARNETT: To the making of a comment.

Mr Pezzullo: I will look at your question in detail.

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

There have been no instances since November 2007 where the Minister for Home Affairs Office has instructed a Customs and Border Protection spokesperson to make a public comment.