



## AUSTRALIAN SENATE

CLERK OF THE SENATE

PARLIAMENT HOUSE  
CANBERRA A.C.T. 2600  
TEL: (02) 6277 3350  
FAX: (02) 6277 3199  
E-mail: clerk.sen@aph.gov.au

hl.jel15203

26 October 2006

Mr Robert Cornall  
Secretary  
Attorney-General's Department  
Robert Garran Offices  
National Circuit  
BARTON ACT 2600

Fax: 6250 5909

Dear Mr Cornall

Senate Legal & Constitutional Affairs Committee  
Supplementary Budget Estimates 2006-2007  
30-31 October 2006Tabled Document No 6

By: Senator Ellison - Minister

Date: ~~30~~ 31 October 2006**ESTIMATES HEARINGS – QUESTIONS ABOUT PROVISIONS OF BILLS**

It might be useful to set down the substance of the advice I gave yesterday on whether questions could be asked at estimates hearings about the provisions of a bill which is before a Senate committee.

Under a resolution passed by the Senate in 1999 (adopting a report of the Procedure Committee), the Senate delineated the scope of questions at estimates hearings as "any questions going to the operations or financial positions of departments and agencies". While this is a very wide ambit, I do not think that it extends to questions about provisions of bills, for example, questions about the meaning, purpose, intention or effect of clauses in bills. Questions about departmental operations connected with bills would be relevant, for example, whether a department engaged consultants to assist in the preparation of a bill, at what cost it was prepared, and how it is to be administered.

Where a bill is before a Senate committee, this means that the Senate has given that committee the task of conducting an inquiry specifically into that bill. This indicates an intention that any inquiry into the provisions of the bill be conducted at hearings and meetings of the committee specifically designated for that inquiry, and not pursued at estimates hearings which interested senators might not be able to attend and for which there is usually no notification of such specific subject matters of inquiries.

I will advise senators accordingly if requested.

Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance in relation to this matter.

Yours sincerely

(Harry Evans)