



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

BILLS

Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2013-2014

Consideration in Detail

SPEECH

Tuesday, 4 June 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Tuesday, 4 June 2013
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Questioner
Speaker O'Connor, Brendan, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Immigration and Citizenship) (19:36): I thank the honourable member for his questions, and important questions they are too. Can I go to the question that was asked in relation to a letter written to me as Acting Minister for Immigration and Citizenship by the member for Stirling insofar as issues that go to the assessment or otherwise of three individuals. In relation to this particular matter, the letter to the member for Stirling indicated that progress by the department is being made in accordance with 'the particular circumstances of the three individuals'.

The matter raised in parliament today referred to a particular individual, who is one of the three, who has not yet lodged a valid application for protection and therefore, as I said in the parliament today, has not been assessed. He has not been assessed and there has not been a valid application. To that extent, of course, it is still possible for an individual to make such an application. On the wider question of security, the first thing I note, as I have said before, is that the person in question has been in detention. I was not here for the responses by the Attorney-General or by the Minister for Home Affairs on questions asked of them in relation to this, but there has been, of course, engagement by my department with the Australian Federal Police and with ASIO on this matter for some considerable time.

What I want to do, and I am happy to do so here by way of response to the letter that was written to me sometime this afternoon, is make clear to the honourable member that I am more than willing for the department to brief the honourable member on these matters in relation to the individual in question. They are sensitive issues. The briefing, I think, should be afforded to the shadow minister, the member for Cook, and indeed to the member for Stirling, if that is required. I am advised that the shadow Attorney-General has been briefed twice by ASIO in respect of this matter, but the agencies, that is the department and the Australian Federal Police, have not, until today, been formally requested to brief the opposition. I think it is entirely proper that that occur and I am happy to put that in train in response to the request.

Some questions raised by the member for the Cook should not be answered in full detail. It is for that reason that the shadow Attorney-General asked for a briefing and received two briefings on the matter. I think, for that reason, consistent with the opposition's approach to this matter conducted by the shadow Attorney-General, it would be wise for the honourable member to have a briefing and then, if there are further questions he would ask of me or of agencies, we would certainly assist.

The only caveat I put on any briefing, of course, is that the convention applies that the opposition not disclose sensitive matters. But I do believe that it is entirely proper that the opposition and, indeed, the honourable member who has asked these questions, be afforded the opportunity for such a briefing.

We take national security very seriously. This is an important matter, and it should be dealt with appropriately. I want to assist the opposition. I know—I am sure—that it is the case that the honourable member has a high regard for these agencies, and is not seeking to reflect on them. I would be very happy for him, as I said, to have that briefing to as quickly as practicable in order for him to be across all of these matters.