

Ms Amanda Bresnan

Chair Select Committee on Privileges 2011

ACT Legislative Assembly

Dear Ms Bresnan

I am responding to your letter requesting information pertinent to your inquiry. While this letter was addressed to me as Chair of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), i would like to clearly state that I am NOT replying as Chair of PAC. This letter has not been seen by other members of PAC and represents my memory of events only.

I think it is probably easiest if I try and go through what happened in chronological order. I did not of course expect the appointment of the Auditor General to become a privileges matter and so I did not take notes on the various conversations I had. I did share all these meetings with my colleagues in PAC at the next possible PAC meeting because I felt that we were making a group decision and we all needed to all have the same information available to us.

On Tuesday 31 May I visited Megalo at Watson first thing and I rode back to the Assembly arriving back between 11:30 and 12. When I got into my office I was greeted with 'Have you heard Maxine Cooper is the new Auditor General?' My staff went on to say that they had heard it on the radio, and that Shane Rattenbury had been asked about it earlier that day on radio. They then said Dr Cullen (the PAC secretary) had rung and asked them to open any mail for PAC that had been delivered to my office. They had done so and found a letter addressed to me as Chair of PAC informing PAC of the government's nomination for the Auditor General.

The normal procedure for mail that is delivered to my office address to me in my role as PAC chair is that it is not opened in my office. The address is changed to the PAC secretary, Dr Cullen, and put in the out tray. I was told that the letter was hand delivered to my office sometime that morning while I was out. I don't know at what time the press release was put out but there is no possibility that PAC members would have been told about the Auditor General nominee before the press release went out even if i had been in the office when the letter arrived.

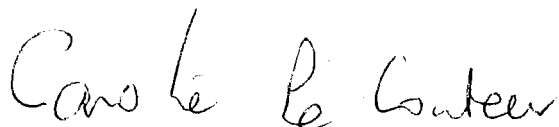
As soon as I could work out what was going on, I contacted Dr Cullen. I think she may have had a copy of the press release by then. I felt that PAC needed to meet about the issue as soon as possible and Dr Cullen organised a meeting for 4:45 that afternoon. We discussed the Press release and wrote to the Chief Minister about it. As that letter was authorised for publication I assume that the Privileges committee has a copy of it.

That evening I attended a meeting held by Canberra Conversations. Dr Cooper was also at that meeting. I have meet Dr Cooper at many events and would normally greet her. However that night as I felt the situation was awkward I tried to avoid her. She, seeing what I was doing, came over and talked to me. I explained that it was an awkward situation for me to talk to her which was why I was avoiding her.

The next day Wednesday Ms Gallagher requested a meeting and I met with her around lunchtime. It unfortunately is not in my diary so I am not sure of the exact time. I did not make notes about the meeting at the time so this is my recollection. She said that she had come to talk about the Auditor General appointment. I repeated what the letter from PAC said and repeatedly used the word 'discourteous' as the PAC's letter did. I explained to her how committee correspondence is dealt with and how doing what her office did with the media release meant that PAC members found out about the proposed appointment from the media not her letter.

I suggested to her many times that possibly her office had made a mistake in putting out the media release when it did. My memory is that Ms Gallagher did not agree to that suggestion. My memory is that she said she wanted the information out in the public arena so that it could not be leaked. I responded by saying that I did not think that PAC would leak any information about the Auditor-General appointment. My memory is that Ms Gallagher also stated that Dr Cooper was the Government's nominee and that she (Dr Cooper) would be the new Auditor-General. I do not remember us discussing the merits of the appointment or the candidate.

In addition to these informal conversations, PAC of course met as a committee on a number of occasions and discussed the appointment at length. We also had a private meeting with Ms Gallagher and Mr Cappie-Wood about the issue.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Caroline Le Couteur". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Caroline Le Couteur

11 October 2011