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Analysing texts used to contribute to the discharge of public sector financial accountability

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Keywords

Analysing, texts, used, contribute, discharge, public, sector, financial, accountability

Disciplines

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Keywords: Critical discourse analysis; Critical investigative inquiry; Senate Legislation Committees;

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1. Introduction:

The Australian government operates under a three tier system of the (Boon et al, 2005) with the Federal Government which, under the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act, oversees a federation consisting of six States and two Territories (Burritt & Welch 1997) and within the States and Territories are local government councils. Australia is a constitutional monarchy where the head of state is not the head of government, and the ministers from the governing political party are from and accountable to the Parliament (Australian Parliament 2008).

This paper is based on one of the key processes of the Australian Federal Parliament currently used to contribute to the discharge of the financial accountabilities of the Australian Commonwealth government reporting entities, the budget estimates hearings of the Senate Legislation Committees. The purpose of this paper is to review and analyse the discourse of one of the Parliament's Senate Legislation Committees to determine if this accountability process contributes to the (re)production of dominance and inequality in the public sector.

This paper has been divided into a number of sections. The following section will set the scene by providing the background to the topic and research. This will be followed by a discussion on the theoretical and methodological framework used to undertake this study then an outline of the details of the data collected and analysed using the identified research methods. The second last section will include a discussion on the findings and the final section will provide a conclusion to the study and possible future research options.

2. Background

This paper is set around one of the key processes of the Australian Federal Parliament, Senate Legislation Committees, used to contribute to the discharge of the financial accountabilities of Australian Commonwealth government reporting entities. Twice each year the Senate refers the estimates of the proposed annual expenditure of government departments

and authorities, contained in the Appropriation Bills¹, to one of its Senate Legislation Committees for their examination and reporting (Senate Brief 5, 2005). These committees consist of six senators — three from the government (one of whom is the committee chair), two from the opposition and one representing the minority parties or independents (Senate Brief 5 2005). However it is also quite normal for other senators to attend the hearing and indeed participate in the hearing. Yet their participation during the hearings is limited, for example they cannot participate in specific functions of the committee such as voting on points of order raised during the hearing. Harry Evans (2004), then Clerk of the Senate, describes how the legislation committees' scrutiny of the estimates in appropriation bills allows the Senate to assess the performance of the public service and its administration of government policy and programs. One of the interesting points of these estimates hearings is that one of the rules of the committee, Standing Order 26, explains the committee must take all evidence in public. Indeed not only is it possible for members of the public to sit-in on the committee hearings, it is also possible to watch the proceeding live on the Parliament of Australia's website and obtain complete transcripts, Hansard, of the meeting via the same website. This level of access to the committees can be seen as a component of discharging the accountabilities of the government and parliament through an apparent high level of transparency.

Evans also explains that another key feature of the committee is that senators can directly question officers of the public service about a government organisation's proposed expenditure and the effectiveness and efficiency of various programs. However, public servants are not meant to comment on government policy. Indeed, at the beginning of each committee hearing the chair states: "The Senate has resolved that an officer of a department of the Commonwealth or of a state shall not be asked to give opinions on matters of policy" (Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee 2006). For example, they should not answer a question about whether an immigration detention policy is the correct measure to address problems identified with

¹ DOFA (2010) explains that Appropriation bills are the bills that "appropriate money from the Consolidated Revenue Fund to provide funds for government and parliamentary expenditure".

illegal immigrants. This directive by the chair does not preclude the senators asking (or baiting) officers; so, to assist the committee, the relevant government minister (or their representative) is present during the committee hearings. This often leads to the tone of the hearing moving from an enquiry into the proposed expenditure of public funds to a political brawl between senators from opposing sides of politics. This is particularly evident when a committee member, or participating senator, is the alternative Minister (ie opposition member) and uses the opportunity to directly challenge the current Minister on matters of policy. These discussions can detract from the objective of, and dominate, the legislation committee.

The function of the senate legislation committee whilst improving the level of transparency and in turn being a tool for discharging government and parliament accountability is not seen as the best process but rather as the current process. For example Australian Labor Party (ALP) Senator Kim Carr, an experienced government and opposition senator made the following comment about the effectiveness of estimates committees:

“I have over the years spent much time in Senate Estimates hearings, which I enjoy greatly. But I don’t believe that basic facts about the way the Commonwealth dollar is being spent, should have to be winkled out via this process” (Carr 2003, p. 10).

Senate Brief 10 (2005) states that “This process [senate estimates hearings] provides a vehicle for those committees to examine the performance of departments”. It also allows senators — especially non-government senators — to gather information on the operations of government (Senate Brief 5 2005). To assist the committee members there are several sources from which they can access information to review the estimates and to formulate questions for the government organisation’s officers. These include Portfolio Budget Statements (PBS), Portfolio Additional Estimates Statements (PAES), annual reports of agencies, the reports of the auditor-general, corporate plans and other budget statements (Evans, 2004; Senate Brief 5 2005).

The scrutiny of the estimates in the Appropriation Bills by the Legislation Committees’ allows the Senate to assess the performance of the public

service and its administration of government policy and programs (Evans, 2004). This scrutiny is possible as a key feature of the committee is that Senators can directly question officers of the public service about a government organisation's proposed expenditure and the effectiveness and efficiency of various programs that are implemented and delivered by the government organisation. The Senate Legislation Committees provide a channel for government organisations, through senior public servants and their respective Ministers, to be held to account for the decisions they have made in relation to the use of the funds their organisation has been appropriated through Parliament.

The following section presents the methodological framework upon which this study is based.

3. Methodological Framework

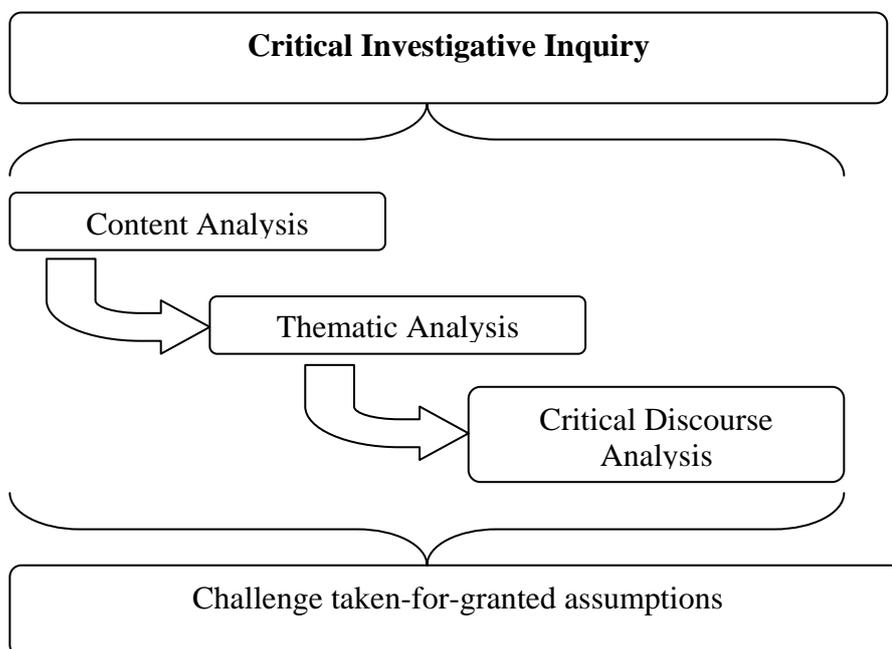
The framework of this study is founded on the ontological assumption that reality is a social construction created through the medium of language [discourse], actions and routines (Morgan and Smircich 1980). The acceptance that reality is based on social construction leads to the epistemological position of this study which focuses on analysing the process through which reality is created with the understanding that that process is the basis for knowledge (Morgan and Smircich 1980).

Based on the ontological and epistemological assumptions identified the methodological approach to be used in this research will be based on a more subjectivist position. This position relies primarily on qualitative techniques to allow the researcher to describe through subjective interpretation the events of the research subject (Dillard 1991; Gaffikin 2008).

While the design of this study is based primarily on qualitative research the research methods used will flow from content analysis, which is has been described as "a class of methods at the intersection of the qualitative and quantitative traditions" (Duriau, Reger, & Pfarrer 2007, p. 5) to thematic analysis which could be described as 'sitting on the methodological fence' to

critical discourse analysis which is based on qualitative methodological assumptions. While this mix of methods may initially appear to be inconsistent and possibly even contradictory to the ontological and epistemological assumptions identified above it is important to note the use of content analysis and thematic analysis in this paper is to inform and support the critical discourse analysis. This view is consistent with Harwood and Garry (2003) who suggest content analysis is more of a complimentary method instead of a solitary research method. This mix of methods is consistent with the corpus linguistics approach to critical discourse analysis where quantitative methods support as well as enhance the credibility of the analysis (Mautner 2009; Wodak & Meyer 2009). While content analysis is generally considered to be an appropriate method under the realist [more objective] ontological assumption, in this paper the use of content analysis as a method will be based on the ontological assumption that reality is socially constructed. This approach in using content analysis is considered consistent with the critical accounting research approach Critical Investigative Inquiry, which is based on the “examination of the underlying practices and institutions ... [and] may relate, for example, to ... financial reporting ... political and social institutions, and meanings attached to accounting information” (Cortese 2006, p. 63). The following figure represents the flow of these methods under the Critical Investigative Inquiry approach.

Critical Investigative Inquiry Approach



The following section will introduce and discuss the methods used in this research in more detail.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is a technique used to enable the analysis of text (Harwood & Garry 2003; Krippendorff 2004) and to draw valid inferences from the text in relation to the context in which the text is produced (Beck, Campbell & Shrives 2010; Krippendorff 2004). Content analysis is not a new technique used in the analysis of text. Rather, the literature discusses its use over 200 years ago in the analysis of materials including newspaper articles and political speeches (Harwood & Garry 2003; Krippendorff 2004). During the Second World War content analysis was used to analyse the propaganda distributed by Germany and Italy (Krippendorff 2004) and from there Krippendorff (2004) explains that “after World War II ... the use of content analysis spread to numerous disciplines” (p. 11).

The epistemological position of content analysis is relatively vague, particularly if you want to define it as either a quantitative or qualitative research methodological approach. George² (2009) explained there are two approaches to content analysis qualitative and quantitative while Duriau, Reger and Pfarrer (2007) suggest content analysis is based on overlaps of quantitative and qualitative analysis. The use of statistical techniques to collect and measure descriptive data from the selected text generally falls under the umbrella of quantitative content analysis (George 2009) and this was initially considered the approach of content analysis. As discussed by Krippendorff (2004) “Lasswell (1949/1965) continued to insist on the quantification of symbols as the sole basis of scientific insights” (p. 11). However, this view on the use and approach of content analysis has been evolving. In 1955 an academic conference was held from which the contributions to the “conference were published in 1959 in a book titled *Trends on Content Analysis*” (Krippendorff 2004). The contributions to the

² While the date for this reference is 2009, the actual article this reference relates to is based on an excerpt from George, A. L. (1959). Quantitative and qualitative approaches to content analysis. In I. De Sola Pool (Ed.), *Trends in content analysis* (pp. 7 – 32). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

conference indicated a major shift in the approach of content analysis, a move from analysing content quantitatively to more qualitative approaches based on drawing inferences from the text (Krippendorff 2004).

This broad scope of content analysis does seem to cause some confusion about the methodological position of content analysis however Krippendorff (2004) explains “ultimately all reading of texts is qualitative, even when certain characteristics of a text are later converted into numbers” (p. 16). It appears it is the focus on converting characteristics of text into numbers where the confusion is created. However, while the “identification and coding of characteristics ... of text are key components of content analysis” (Hackston & Milne 1996), it is the analysis applied to these characteristics which is the core of content analysis. This is consistent with Krippendorff’s (2004) suggestion that “documents never speak for themselves – interpretations are always made by intelligent readers. And texts inevitably have several meanings” (p. 342).

When reviewing suitable texts to address the stated research purpose the researcher is required to identify and define the categories to which extracts of the text are to be grouped and explicitly outline the instructions to be used to code the text in the categories (Hackston & Milne 1996; Krippendorff 2004). In doing this the researcher is able to improve the credibility of the findings from the analysis as the process is designed to be clear and understood (however not necessarily agreed with) and replicable. However this credibility is not to be confused with reliability as the interpretative of the data, based on a social constructionist ontological assumption, will vary from researcher to researcher. The notion of replicability is contentious as Krippendorff argues “[in] qualitative studies ... replicability is generally of little concern” (p. 88) however it must be of concern if external parties are to place any value to the outcomes of the content analysis. This view is consistent with Duriau, Reger and Pfarrer (2007) who suggest content analysis provides a replicable methodology to identify structures including values, intentions and attitudes.

Thematic Analysis

The identification of appropriate categories for coding the text may lead to the identification of key themes within the text. There is a basic assumption that “content analysis ... groups words to reveal underlying themes” (Duriau, Reger & Pfarrer 2007, p. 6). The analysis of these themes is sometimes considered a part of the content analysis, however in this paper thematic analysis is separated out from the content analysis component of the study. This will allow for a clearer and more focused examination and discussion on the key themes identified in the selected texts.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA), is a method researchers can use to examine text, in its various forms including conversation and written, and how through text power is exerted by individuals or groups of individuals over others whom they directly or indirectly dominate (van Dijk 1993; van Dijk 2001). Researchers using CDA need to “look beyond the text proper in order to unearth socially meaningful interpretations” (Mautner 2009, p. 124). This is consistent with Cortese (2006) who explained “the purpose of CDA is to determine the social effects of discourse which arise as a result of the meanings and interpretations derived from the discourse (p. 68). Van Dijk (1993) explains that CDA “is specially interested in power abuse ... by those who wield power” (p. 255) and the focus is on the production and reproduction of dominance and social inequality as well as the resistance of those dominated (Leitch & Palmer 2010; van Dijk 1993; van Dijk 2001). This focus on dominance and social inequality implies then that researchers using CDA “take an explicit socio-political stance: they spell out their point of view, perspective, principles and aims, both within their discipline and within society at large” (van Dijk 1993, p. 252). The nature of this study which is based on the analysis of Hansard transcripts of a Senate Legislation Committee estimates hearings makes CDA both a suitable and relevant method to conduct this research.

Leitch and Palmer (2010) suggest there are three key methodological decisions CDA researchers should address when undertaking CDA. The first

decision is about defining the core concepts such as context. The second decision to be made is about the selection of the text upon which the CDA will be undertaken. The third methodological decision Leitch and Palmer (2010) suggest CDA researchers need to consider is about data analysis, that is, “what you have found” (page 1209). The following sections will discuss how each of these three methodological decisions is addressed in this study.

Core concepts of CDA

CDA is based on the examination of how power is exerted (and resisted) through discourse to dominate. The two key notions in this brief definition of CDA are power and dominance, both of which need to be defined so as to provide a firm footing on the CDA undertaken. Power in CDA is generally considered to mean social power which is based on “privileged access to socially valued resources, such as wealth, income, position, status, force, group membership, education or knowledge (van Dijk 1993, p. 254). It is through the (mis)use of social power that individuals or groups of individuals are able to control others, primarily these days cognitively, to “change the minds of others in one’s own interests” (van Dijk 1993, p. 254). The concern with social power in CDA is not to critique legitimate control “and acceptable forms of power” rather the focus is to examine the (re)production of social inequality through discourse by elites which is categorised as dominance (van Dijk 1993).

Identifying and defining the context(s) in which the text was produced is a key requirement of a study being undertaken using CDA as it is through the analysis of discourse in context “rather than as isolated objects” (Leitch & Palmer 2010, p. 1195) which is the core of CDA. This view of CDA is consistent with van Dijk (2001) who explained that CDA “is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (van Dijk 2001, p. 352). However the identification of context is not necessarily a straight forward process and indeed there are many different contexts in which text is produced. For example context could refer to the “physical setting or location in which the

text occurs” (Leitch & Palmer, 2010, p. 1200) or when the text was created in “relation to other texts or events” (Leitch & Palmer, 2010, p. 1202). In the field of critical accounting, context could refer to the location of text in the ideologies of the actors (creators/participants) in the text being analysed as the ideologies “reflect the basic aims, interests and values” (van Dijk 1993, p. 258) of the actors and the ideologies of the researchers conducting the analysis of the text. This view of the researcher ideology being a part of the context is supported by van Dijk (2001) who explains that researchers, in trying to understand social inequality, need to state their ideological position as this is also part of the context of the analysis. The following is a brief outline of the context of the text used in this study.

The context of the text in this study could be defined based on ‘the physical setting’ of the Senate Estimates Committee room in the Australian Federal Parliament building, and the text is in relation to the delivery of the Australian Government’s financial year budgets and the performance of government organisations in relation to the delivery government funded policy initiatives. Another property of context which is relevant to this study is the access (van Dijk 1993) individuals have to participate in text of this study. The context is further defined through the ideological stances of the Government, Opposition and Minor Party Senators who participate in the committee hearings. In relation to the researcher’s ideological stance the context of the analysis is based on the ontological assumption broadly categorised as ‘social constructionist’ and as such this research is consistent with one of the tenets of CDA which is that it “is unabashedly normative” (van Dijk 1993, p. 253). The text in this study comes from the publicly available Hansard transcripts of the Senate Estimates Committee hearings for the Australian Antarctic Division and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority for the financial years 2001-02 through to and including 2007-08. During this period of time the Government of Australia was held by a Coalition of the Liberal and National parties. In 2007 there was a change of government with the Australian Labor Party forming government and it was due to this change in government that the research only includes the Hansard of the committee hearings up until the change of government.

The following section will outline and discuss the research data of this study which is based on an extracts from Hansard transcripts of the Senate Estimates Committee hearings for the Australian Antarctic Division for the financial year 2006-07.

4. Research Data

The data upon which this paper is based is the Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications estimates hearings for a Commonwealth Government reporting entity, the Australian Antarctic Division over a period of seven financial years 2001-02 to 2007-08. The period of 2001-02 to 2007-08 was selected as this was a period of government stability with the Liberal Party of Australia, in Coalition with the National Party of Australia, in government (Liberal Party of Australia 2010). While the Coalition initially came to power after the 1996 Federal election 2001-02 was chosen as the start of the period to be reviewed as the 2001 Federal election was the first election held after the Commonwealth moved to a “full accrual budgeting and reporting framework” (Fahey 2000, p. 2). The last year in the period, 2007-08, was chosen as the Coalition lost the 2007 Federal election to the Australian Labor Party and as such the budget measurements and focus would have changed in 2008-09 with the new government. The change in government would also have resulted in a change in membership of the Senate Legislation Committees as would political control of these committees. The period of 2001-02 to 2007-08 was a period of consistency and was a manageable period to review for this paper.

The selection of the Australian Antarctic Division was influenced by a number of factors. The first, as a Division of a Federal government agency, the estimates hearings of the AAD would include a range of budget measures and topics of political interest over the period ensured a broad diversity of material for discussion in the estimates hearings. The final key factor was the level of media interest and coverage of some of the topics raised, for example the issue of mining minerals in the Antarctic which was raised in one of hearings

of the Australian Antarctic Division budget estimates had been covered in the mainstream media shortly after the hearings.

The Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) is a division of the Australian Commonwealth Government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. The AAD is responsible for the delivery of the Department's Outcome 3 – "Advancement of Australia's strategic, scientific, environmental and economic interests in the Antarctic by protecting, administering and researching the region" (DEWHA 2010). Associated with this outcome are four primary goals which contribute to the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities Outcome 3. The first goal is to "maintain the Antarctic Treaty System and enhance Australia's influence in it", the second goal is to "protect the Antarctic environment", the third goal is "understand the role of Antarctica in the global climate system" and the fourth and final goal is to "undertake scientific work of practical, economic and national significance" (AAD 2010). The following sections will outline the application of the research methods content analysis, thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis on the Hansard hearings of the Australian Antarctic Division over the period 2001-02 to 2007-08.

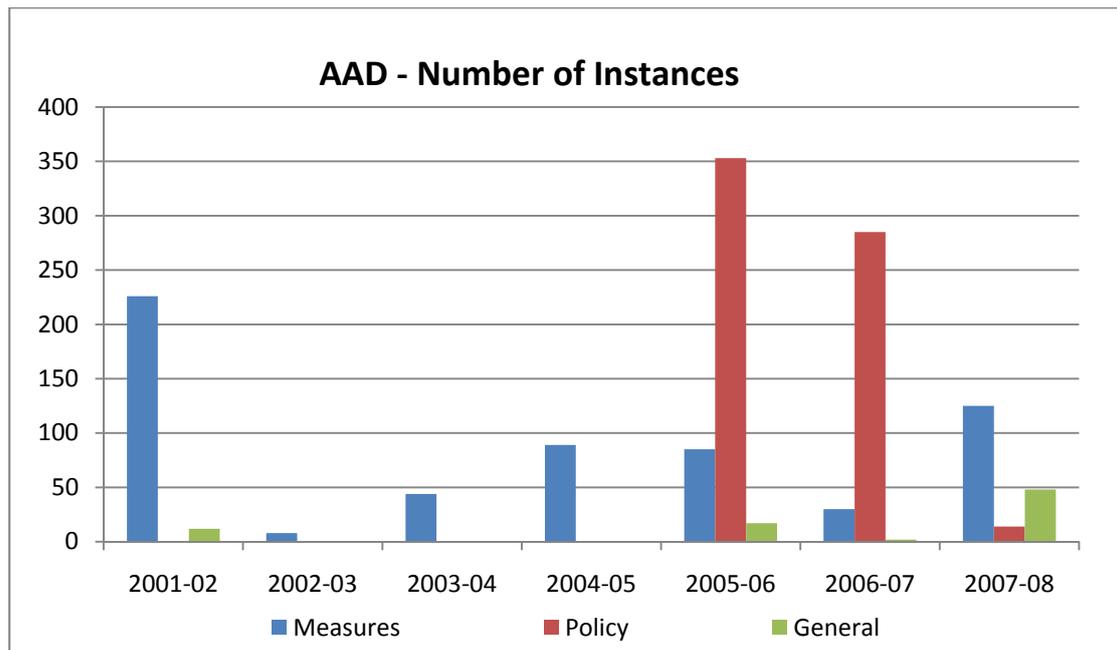
Content Analysis

Content analysis was used to examine the Senate Estimates Committee hearings for the Australian Antarctic Division over the period 2001-02 to 2007-08. The text was coded and grouped into three distinct categories *Measures and Budget*, *Policy*, and *General*. The category *Measures and Budget* includes all discussion on the operations of and funding (both departmental and administrative) for the AAD as well as discussion on service delivery and government agreed programmes. This category is generally expected to include the largest component of the Hansard as the primary objective of the Senate Estimates hearings is to review the budget estimates of government organisations, including government departments, agencies and statutory authorities, and report back to the Senate on the findings of the review. The second category, *Policy*, includes all discussion and debate based on policy issues. This category is quite discrete from the *Measures*

and Budget category in that the discussions are based on the development and assessment of policy and political ideology. These discussions are generally considered to be outside the authority and responsibility of the public servants and involvement in these discussions are contrary to their apolitical roles. The third category, *General*, includes all discussions which do not fit into the categories *Measures and Budgets* and *Policy*. The instances of discussions categorised as *General* were relatively infrequent as they did not contribute, generally, to the discussions upon which the estimates hearings are based.

The data in each of these categories, *Measures and Budget*, *Policy*, and *General*, was then analysed using the quantitative measurements of the *number of instances*; *number of words*; and *average number of words per instance*. The data grouping *Instances* is based on the number of occurrences which happen during the Senate Estimates process. This data grouping is similar to that used by many studies using Content Analysis, where the data coded are the actual sentences in a piece of text (for example see Hackston & Milne 1996). The basic assumption for the text to be coded as an *instance* is for each piece of text in the Hansard which can be attributed to one individual at one point in time. The data grouping *Number of Words* is based on the number of words spoken in each *Instance* during the estimates hearings. The data grouping *Average Number of Words per instance* is based on the calculated average number of number of words spoken in each *Instance* during the estimates hearings. These groupings allow the opportunity to review the extent of the discussion on issues raised during the estimates hearings. The following diagram presents the initial results of the measurement of the number of instances in this rudimentary content analysis.

Diagram 1



From this analysis the estimates hearings from 2006-07 was chosen for more detailed analysis as it appeared to provide more relevant data to examining the (re)production of dominance and inequality through Senate Legislative Committees due to the focus of the text on the *Policy* category.

Thematic Analysis

The 2006-07 estimates hearings was then reviewed to identify specific topics under the categories *Measures and Budget*, *Policy*, and *General*. These categories, in this part of the study were reclassified as themes. The following table presents the themes and topics identified in the review of the AAD 2006-07 estimates hearings.

Table 1

	Theme	Topics	Instances #	%	Words #	%
2006-07	Measure	Aurora Australis	16	5%	447	4%
	Measure	Casey Station	2	1%	190	2%
	Measure	Macquarie Island	4	1%	328	3%
	Measure	Scientific research data	4	1%	379	3%
	Measure	Wilkes Base cleanup	4	1%	261	2%
	Policy	Antarctic Treaty	16	5%	807	7%
	Policy	Mineral mining	117	37%	2,767	25%
	Policy	Politicians travel to Antarctica	7	2%	294	3%
	Policy	World heritage listing	50	16%	1,296	12%
	Policy	Whaling	95	30%	4,275	38%
	General	Machinery shelter	2	1%	98	1%
		Total	317		11,142	

After this basic thematic analysis on the discussion during the estimates hearing the topic *Mineral Mining* was selected as the discourse on which CDA would be conducted. This topic was chosen as the discussion on this topic during the estimates hearing included a broad variety of actors as well as providing examples of authority (power) being reinforced, resisted and questioned. The following provides some background on this topic.

Theme (Policy) – Topic (Mineral Mining)

Signatories of the Antarctic Treaty, which includes Australia, adopted the Madrid Protocol in 1991 which sets out to provide “comprehensive protection of Antarctica” (AAD 2010). The Madrid Protocol was developed “in response to proposals that the wide range of provisions relating to protection of the Antarctic environment should be harmonised in a comprehensive and legally binding form” (AAD 2010). One of the key foci of the Madrid Protocol is the banning of mining in the Antarctic.

“The Madrid Protocol prohibits mining. The ban is of indefinite duration and strict rules for modifying the ban are provided. In brief, the prohibition can be modified at any time if all parties agree. If requested, after 50 years a review conference may decide to modify the mining prohibition, provided that at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of the current Consultative Parties agree, a legal regime for controlling mining is in force, and the sovereign interests of parties are safeguarded. Consistent with the Antarctic Treaty, a party may choose to withdraw from the Protocol if a modification so agreed does not subsequently enter into force” (AAD 2010).

Irrespective of the Madrid Protocol the prospect and potential of mining minerals in the Antarctic was raised in the AAD estimates hearings for 2006-07 as a result of a public comment made by one of the Government Senators, Barnaby Joyce after his trip in 2006 to the Antarctic

“There’s minerals there, there’s gold, there’s iron ore, there’s coal, there’s huge fish resources and what you have to ask is: ‘Do I turn my head and allow another country to exploit my resource ... or do I position myself in such a way as I’m going to exploit it myself before they get there” (Hansard 2006-07).

This issue sparked some very lively and interesting discussion particularly when examining the theme of *Policy*. The extract of the Hansard texts analysed, in relation to the topic *Mineral Mining* may be found in Appendix 1. The following section will discuss the application of CDA on this discussion of the *Mineral Mining* topic in the AAD estimates hearings.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Context

The context, one of the core concepts to be identified in CDA, of the text in this study is defined by ‘the physical setting’ of the Senate Legislation Committee room in the Australian Parliament House, the access of actors to participate in the discourse (van Dijk, 1993), the timing of the hearing and the ideological stances of the Government, Opposition and Minor Party Senators who participated in the committee hearings. The text on which CDA was conducted was based on the discussion during the estimates hearing on the prospect of mining minerals in Antarctica. The discourse associated with this topic provided a very enlightening view of the (re)production of power and how it is asserted and resisted in the accountability process of the Senate Legislation Committee hearings.

In line with van Dijk’s (1993) outline of the general structure of CDA this analysis will cover: access (who has(n’t) access to participate), communicative acts and social meanings; participant positions and roles,

speech acts (Including grandstanding, negative, positive and neutral speech acts), argumentation and rhetoric.

Participants, positions and roles

The following table outlines the various participants who contributed to the discourse on the topic *Mineral Mining*, their role in relation to the committee hearings, their position and the institution which they are representing. This table shows a broad spread of those involved in the discussion on *Mineral Mining* including the Minister, Government senators, Opposition senators, Minor Party senators (both Committee members and Participating senators) and a senior public servant.

Table 2. AAD – Actors (Mineral Mining)

Actors: 2006-07

Name:	Role	Position	Institution
Senator Campbell	Minister	Government Senator	Lib
Senator Eggleston	Chair	Government Senator	Lib WA
Senator Joyce	Participating Senator	Government Senator	Nat Qld
Senator Ronaldson	Committee Member	Government Senator	Lib Vic
Senator Patterson	Committee Member	Government Senator	Lib Vic
Senator Wortley	Committee Member	Opposition Senator	ALP Sth Aust
Senator McLucas	Participating Senator	Opposition Senator	ALP Qld
Senator Bob Brown	Participating Senator	Minor Party Senator	Greens Tas
Dr Press	Public Servant	Director	AAD

Speech and Communication Acts

The topic of *Mineral Mining* has been classified as part of the theme *Policy* and, unlike the topics under the theme *Measures*, it is expected the speech and communication acts will be more heated as the discussion on the topic relates to the differing ideology of the various participants.

The speech acts in this extract of the Hansard hearings were primarily negative speech acts (those responses that are generally negative in nature) and grandstanding speech acts (text where an individual uses the opportunity to self promote their achievements of the past and/or their plans (visions) for

the future. There was little evidence of speech acts to seek clarification or information on the delivery of government policy rather the focus was on government policy. The discussion could be summarised as a political argument (certainly not a debate) with one side doggedly pursuing a line of questions on a topic the other side considered a non-event. In short it comes across as a political exercise to damage the credibility of the other side.

The communication acts used in the production of this discourse ranged from argumentative, to rhetoric, humour, sarcasm and in some instances insulting. The communication acts used in particular *instances* were often determined by to who the question, comment or response was being addressed and by whom. For example early in the discussion the Minister tried to shut down the discussion on the topic

Senator Ian Campbell—To be quite frank, I would be deeply troubled if we had to take a question like that on notice. The Australian government supports the Madrid protocol, and there will not be any mining in Antarctica.

The Minister continued with his view this topic was really a non-issue and again tried to extend his authority to shut down the discussion:

Senator Ian Campbell—No, I am saying that we will not take that on notice.

Senator Ian Campbell—I will direct my division, through the secretary, not to waste its time on this sort of—

However one of the Minor Party Senators challenged his authority to make this directive.

Senator BOB BROWN—Chair, just a point of clarification: is it up to the minister to not take a question on notice?

In spite of the Minister's comments and statements, other senators, both committee members and participating senators, from the Opposition and Minor Parties continued asking questions and making comments about the prospect of mining in the Antarctic.

Occasionally the discussion degenerated into senators being quite rude by interrupting other members as well as using insulting analogies.

Senator WORTLEY—No, I am talking about—

Senator Ian Campbell—There was a tremendous movie back in the 1970s—when the Labor Party wrote the policies that it has today on a whole range of issues—called *Tommy*, with a ‘deaf, dumb and blind kid’. We did respond. I have responded again today, and I have said that—

Senator WORTLEY—Excuse me, Chair, if I could finish—

The use of metaphors by the Minister was also common to construct and/or support his attack on the discussion of the topic including “You are like a broken record. You are sawing sawdust”.

The use and selection of particular words and phrases were used to either resist or exert control of the discussion. The Minister on a number of occasions suggested senators asking questions about the topic of mineral mining were wasting time (both the committee's and the department's) by asking “stupid” and “idiotic” questions with “tedious repetition” which were nothing more than an “inane political hunt to humour a couple of Labor Party politicians”. The formal politeness of this committee hearing was indeed missing.

Macrosemantics

The topic *Mineral Mining* was raised during the estimates hearings, in 2006-07, by an Opposition senator who was also a committee member. This topic raised much discussion involving eight senators all of whom had relatively strong views on the topic. In line with van Dijk's (1993, 2001) and Leitch and Palmer's (2010) views that the control of a topic is a key component in the (re)production of dominance over others or the resistance of dominance this extract very vividly demonstrates this notion. The participating Government senators, in particular the Minister, repeatedly tried to change the topic by explaining there really wasn't anything to discuss and that the topic was a non-event not worth spending his, the public service officers nor the

committee’s time in discussing. The concern over changing the topic was evidenced by the Chair of the committee, also a Government senator, who concluded the discussion on the topic of *Mineral Mining* with “It is not a matter of development of policy. We have covered this matter. Again, it is simply looking for a political issue. So let us move on to more productive things”. However despite the Government senators trying to shut down the discussion on this topic the non-Government senators continually brought the discussion back to the topic through their questions.

The extract of the estimates hearings on the topic *Mineral Mining* (refer Appendix 1) indicates there were eight senators, five from the government (including the Chair), two from the Opposition and one Minor Party senator, and one public servant who participated in the discussion on *Mineral Mining*. The following table indicates the level of participation of the senators and public servants in the discussion on the topic of *Mineral Mining*.

Table 3: AAD – Summary of Actors/Instances (Mineral Mining)

Role	Position	Instances
Minister	Government Senator	27
Chair	Government Senator	20
Participating Senator	Government Senator	4
Committee Member	Government Senator	2
Committee Member	Government Senator	2
Committee Member	Opposition Senator	26
Participating Senator	Opposition Senator	13
Participating Senator	Minor Party Senator	10
Public Servant	Director	12

The above table indicates the discussion on the topic *Mineral Mining* was not based on seeking information or clarification on the delivery of government policy, as evidenced by the limited input from the public servant, rather the discussion was based more on policy and ideology.

5. Conclusions

This paper explored the contribution of one of the parliamentary accountability processes, Senate Legislation Committees, makes towards the (re)production of dominance and inequality in the public sector through the analysis of the Hansard transcripts, discourse, of the estimates hearings of the Australian Antarctic Division for the period 2001-02 to 2007-08. The analysis was undertaken through the Critical Investigative Inquiry approach based on the application of Content Analysis, Thematic Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis. The Content Analysis was applied to the Hansard transcripts of the estimates hearings where the discourse was coded under three separate classifications: *Measures and Budget*, *Policy*, and *General*. From this analysis the discourse classified under *Policy* in 2006-07 was selected to apply Thematic analysis as the majority of the discussion in 2006-07 hearings focused on *Policy*. The Thematic analysis identified eleven specific topics raised in the 2006-07 Hansard hearings and from this analysis the topic *Mineral Mining* was selected for further analysis using Critical Discourse Analysis. The Critical Discourse Analysis was based on van Dijk's (1993) framework where the analysis examined access to the discourse, the communication and speech acts, and the positions and roles of the actors.

The Critical Discourse Analysis of the extract of the Australian Antarctic Division 2006-07 Hansard demonstrated the Senate Legislation Committee provides the opportunity for dominant members of parliament, namely Senators from the government, to reproduce their dominance in the accountability processes. The analysis also showed that the non-government senators, both Opposition senators and Minor Party senators, attempt to resist the dominance of the government senators as well as assert their own dominance of the public servants. However this (re)production of dominance and the inequality between the various actors in the Senate Legislation Committee can be considered appropriate as the Government Senators are acting in their roles due the democratic processes which installed them in their positions.

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Appendix 1 - AAD Hansard extracts – Mineral Mining

Hansard 2006-2007

Senator WORTLEY—You would be familiar with Senator Joyce’s comments—and just to refresh your memory, I will read them—when he said: There’s minerals there, there’s gold, there’s iron ore, there’s coal, there’s huge fish resources and what you have to ask is: ‘Do I turn my head and allow another country to exploit my resource ... or do I position myself in such a way as I’m going to exploit it myself before they get there’. Perhaps Senator Joyce was not aware of the Madrid protocol at the time he said that.

Senator JOYCE—I was fully aware of the Madrid protocol.

Senator WORTLEY—Would you be able to explain to the committee the quality of the minerals of commercial value in the Antarctic?

Dr Press—I would have to take that on notice. That is a bit of a movable feast. As a matter of fact, I was reading the 1978 Central Intelligence Agency atlas of Antarctica just last week, and it goes into—

Senator Ian Campbell—As you do.

Dr Press—As one does.

Senator WORTLEY—Bed-time reading?

Dr Press—Look, it is absolutely fascinating. It has a whole chapter on the mineral resources of Antarctica. I would have to refer specifically to the information that Geoscience Australia has. I could get that for you, but, to make a point that I made before, exploitation of minerals in Antarctica is prohibited under the Madrid protocol. I can certainly take that on notice and give you a summary of what the mineral resources may be. Most of Antarctica is, of course, under metres of ice—an average of three kilometres of ice—across the entire continent, and only one per cent of Antarctica is ice-free. It is an extrapolation to try to define the minerals that may occur under the ice sheet.

Senator Ian Campbell—To be quite frank, I would be deeply troubled if we had to take a question like that on notice. The Australian government supports the Madrid protocol, and there will not be any mining in Antarctica. The division has a lot of responsibilities to protect the environment and to help me in the lead up to the International Whaling Commission meeting at St Kitts. I really do not want my departmental people and senior officers of Dr Press’s calibre to be hunting around on this. I do not think we really need it, do we? We could give you a reference to the book, or something. It is probably a bit of fun, but it is a waste of time for my staff and we just do not need it.

Senator WORTLEY—It was one of your government senators who suggested that mining in the Antarctic was the way to go.

Senator JOYCE—No, I do not think that is correct. Whaling is also prohibited in the Antarctic and our territories, but they are doing it nonetheless. I was suggesting we deal with the realities of where the world is going, and I refer you again to the James Mulvenon report on territorial and resource ambitions of countries such as China. If you have a read of that, you might want to change your opinion.

CHAIR—I suppose the internet would have some reference, which might give you some indication.

Senator WORTLEY—There is an Australian Antarctic Division web site, but I was interested in the department's position on that.

Senator Ian Campbell—I inform the committee that the question will not be taken on notice.

Senator WORTLEY—So you do not authorise the department to—

Senator Ian Campbell—No, I am saying that we will not take that on notice.

Senator WORTLEY—Okay, then. Let us move on. What would be the impact of mining in the Antarctic?

Senator BOB BROWN—Chair, just a point of clarification: is it up to the minister to not take a question on notice?

CHAIR—The senator can seek to put the question on notice. Whether or not the minister feels that it is—

Senator Ian Campbell—I will direct my division, through the secretary, not to waste its time on this sort of—

CHAIR—a proper matter for his department to engage in research into that is a matter for the minister and the department.

Senator BOB BROWN—Indeed, that is right.

Senator WORTLEY—Thank you, Minister, but can I just say that one of your government senators who has been on a trip to the Antarctic has come back. He has made comments, and I will go back to those: “There’s minerals there, there’s gold, there’s iron ore, there’s coal, there’s huge fish ... “... do I turn my head and allow another country exploit my resource or do I position myself in such a way as I’m going to exploit it myself before they get there?” That was a government senator. So I am just concerned that I have not heard the government come up and say anything in response to Senator Joyce’s comments.

Senator Ian Campbell—Well, you must be—

Senator JOYCE—I have them. I have the response!

Senator WORTLEY—No, I am talking about—

Senator Ian Campbell—There was a tremendous movie back in the 1970s—when the Labor Party wrote the policies that it has today on a whole range of issues—called *Tommy*, with a ‘deaf, dumb and blind kid’. We did respond. I have responded again today, and I have said that—

Senator WORTLEY—Excuse me, Chair, if I could finish—

CHAIR—Through the Chair, everybody.

Senator WORTLEY—I was saying that I have not heard the minister here today respond to Senator Joyce’s comments.

CHAIR—But what you have heard from the minister and the department saying there will not be mining.

Senator Ian Campbell—The minister has made statements today and on other occasions to say that we were leaders in putting together the Madrid protocol. In fact, it was one John Winston

Howard as Leader of the Opposition who stood up in the parliament and moved a motion, with the support of one young Christopher Puplick, opposing the Hawke government's proposal to enter into discussions about an Antarctic mining treaty. The Hawke government was negotiating a mining treaty—

Senator JOYCE—Oh!

Senator Ian Campbell—and one younger John Winston Howard got up and said, 'No, we shouldn't do this; we should ban mining in Antarctica.'

Senator Ian Campbell—And as a result the Labor Party then changed its policy, came to its senses—

Senator McLUCAS—I think we might be rewriting history, Minister.

Senator WORTLEY—Thank you! I would like to move on to the next question. Has any staff time been dedicated to investigating—

Senator Ian Campbell—Being asked by a senator whose name Mr Beazley could not even remember.

Senator WORTLEY—the feasibility of the exploration of Antarctica for the retrieval of minerals?

Dr Press—Could you ask that question again, Senator?

Senator WORTLEY—Has any staff time been dedicated to investigating the feasibility of the exploration of Antarctica for the mining of minerals?

Dr Press—From my department, in the history of my involvement in the Australian Antarctic Division, zero.

Senator WORTLEY—And how long has that been?

Dr Press—Seven years. But I would say that that would apply all the way back to our time—

Senator Ian Campbell—As a division.

Dr Press—negotiating the Madrid protocol.

Senator WORTLEY—Is the department aware of any other countries investigating the possibilities of mining in the Antarctic?

Dr Press—I am also the chairman of the Committee for Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty. As far as I know, there are no countries investigating Antarctica for mining. The reason is that all of the countries that are signatories to the Antarctic Treaty and the Madrid protocol accept the provisions of the Madrid protocol.

Senator McLUCAS—It has been put to me that the quality of the mineralisation and the potentiality of mining in Antarctica are very low. I think Senator Wortley's request is quite reasonable in that context. If Senator Joyce is suggesting that we should stand in line to make sure we mine something, surely it is useful for this committee to understand whether or not there is in fact anything there that can legitimately be mined and what the barriers are to it. Is it because the stuff is not of any quality or because it is so far away? I think that is reasonable for this committee to understand.

Senator Ian Campbell—I think you are totally wrong. I think it would be quite stupid for a committee of the parliament to get some officials from the Australian Antarctic Division— whose central remit is to protect Antarctica for the benefit of science and peace—when the head of the Antarctic Division has told the committee that we have not spent any resource minutes on this issue over the last seven years, except the time that we are now wasting before the committee, who have other duties to protect the Antarctica environment, to go off on what is a quite stupid and inane political hunt to humour a couple of Labor Party politicians, who should probably go and spend their own time trying to develop some policies, to get out of the 1970s, to get into the new millennium and to get on with business.

Senator McLUCAS—Mr Press, does the CIA document—beautifully named—you referred to earlier talk about the extent of prospectivity in Antarctica?

Dr Press—It just has a chapter on mineralisation.

Senator McLUCAS—Is that a public document?

Dr Press—Yes.

Senator McLUCAS—Could you provide us with the name of that document and how we can locate it?

Senator Ian Campbell—Senator Wortley has a taxpayer funded computer sitting in front of her. I suggest she go to Google, AltaVista or somewhere else and just look it up. Do some work. Do not waste this department's time with this stupid political game. Mr Chairman, could we try to move to some serious questions now?

Senator WORTLEY—Chair, I would like to respond to that.

Senator Ian Campbell—I am not going to allow my division's time to be wasted by this political game.

CHAIR—Senator Wortley, from the chair, I do think the minister and his officials have covered the government's position on this very clearly.

Senator Ian Campbell—They have got a serious job of protecting the environment and saving whales, and this senator wants to divert resources to this political idiocy.

Senator WORTLEY—No, I was trying to make a point.

CHAIR—You may do so, but just let me finish.

Senator Ian Campbell—You have made your point. You have had your fun. Let us get some serious questions on the environment. Maybe Senator Brown could ask a question.

CHAIR—The position of the government on mining Antarctica and mineralisation has been made quite clear. I do not think there is much in productive activity in pursuing this avenue any further. So I would suggest we move on.

Senator WORTLEY—I would like to respond to the minister's comment. We have got a government senator who went to the Antarctic, spent time there, came out—

CHAIR—This is the game, isn't it, but it is not really to do with estimates.

Senator WORTLEY—No, it is not about that.

Senator Ian Campbell—You are like a broken record. You are sawing sawdust.

Senator WORTLEY—Minister, my understanding is—

Senator Ian Campbell—Mr Chairman, I take a point of order. This is tedious repetition.

Senator WORTLEY—It is not.

Senator Ian Campbell—It is against Senate standing orders. This is the third time you have said the same thing. It is sawing sawdust. It is like a broken record. Could you rule on my point of order, Mr Chairman? Tedious repetition is against Senate standing orders. Could you please make a ruling.

CHAIR—I have to say that I agree with that point. This issue has been covered very clearly by the minister and his officials, and I think we should move on.

Senator McLUCAS—Mr Chair, on the point of order, the reason Senator Wortley has had to repeat the question is that she has not—

Senator IAN CAMPBELL—Mr Chairman, you have ruled on a point of order. The only thing that a senator can now do is move a motion to basically take a—

Senator McLUCAS—Chair, I have the point of order.

Senator Ian Campbell—It is not a classroom; you do not have to stand up.

CHAIR—Please, you do not have to stand up.

Senator Ian Campbell—The chairman has made a ruling.

Senator McLUCAS—To get some attention, I am sorry, I had to stand up.

CHAIR—I saw you.

Senator McLUCAS—But you did not stop the interjector.

Senator Ian Campbell—Mr Chairman, the senator will now have to move a motion of—

CHAIR—Senator Campbell is making the point that a point of order was accepted.

Senator WORTLEY—I have a question for the department. Can we move on?

Senator McLUCAS—I was speaking on the point of order which you had not ruled on.

CHAIR—I did. I said I accepted the minister's point. That was quite clear, I thought.

Senator Ian Campbell—The senator will need to move dissent if she does not agree with your ruling.

Senator BOB BROWN—What a shemozzle.

Senator McLUCAS—This is not a good way to start the Senate estimates in environment, I am afraid.

CHAIR—It is not. I agree with that. But let us move on to something more productive.

Senator McLUCAS—It is a simple question.

CHAIR—We have covered it, though—

Senator RONALDSON—Chair, you have ruled on the point of order; let us just move on.

CHAIR—and you are digging around looking for extra little points, basically to try to embarrass the government because of the comments that Senator Joyce made after his visits to the Antarctic. The government's position has been made crystal clear. There is no point in pursuing this any more, so let us move on. We only have a limited amount of time, I remind you, and a very long agenda.

Senator WORTLEY—I would like to comment on the minister's accusations on taxpayers' money in research. My question was on minerals of commercial value in Antarctica.

CHAIR—We have covered this, Senator Wortley.

Senator WORTLEY—And the reason I put the question was that I have done some research—and I am sure that Senator Joyce could have done the same research, prior to or during his trip to the Antarctic—and found that the position, for mining purposes, is that it would not be viable. So I was trying to place where a government senator was going in relation to this, and I wanted to hear from Dr Press what research or information the department had in relation to that comment.

Senator IAN CAMPBELL—You have heard three times now that the department has no interest in mining.

Senator WORTLEY—Minister, it was to the department; it was to Dr Press.

Senator IAN CAMPBELL—We have no interest in this area. We have signed the Madrid protocol. We are leaders in the Madrid protocol. We head the conservation committee. You are digging yourself deeper—to draw a mining analogy—into this hole you have dug yourself. I suggest we move on to other questions. You have a roomful of some of the best environmental experts anywhere in the world; I am sure there are questions you could ask them that would add to the sum total of human knowledge of environmental and heritage issues. You have highly-paid officers here from one of the most effective departments of the environment anywhere in the world and you are asking idiotic questions that are irrelevant because we support the Madrid protocol.

CHAIR—Thank you, Minister. I think everything the minister said is very relevant. I do think we should move on. This issue has been covered. It is purely a political game in respect of Senator Joyce's comments on mining. Let us move on. The government's position is quite clear.

Senator McLUCAS—Defensive.

Senator BOB BROWN—Dr Press, on the matter of Senator Joyce's visit and his comments about the prospect of mining in Antarctica, my information is that that sent a ripple of very deep concern indeed through the Antarctic Division. Did you pick up any of that concern?

Dr Press—I would not have said that there was a deep ripple of concern.

Senator BOB BROWN—There wasn't?

Dr Press—No. I think the staff understood the comment that was made. But our mandate is entirely clear.

Senator BOB BROWN—Yes, I know that. But a senator made comments about Australia proceeding to look at mining in Antarctica—

CHAIR—We have actually ruled on this, Senator Brown, and the government's position is pretty clear.

Senator BOB BROWN—and the feedback to me has been that there was very deep concern within the division. Are you telling me that there was not?

Senator PATTERSON—With all due respect, Chair, that is not an estimates question, you have ruled on it, and the minister has made very clear the government's position on this issue. I think we should move on to the next question.

Senator BOB BROWN—I am asking about concern in the department. That is a new question—

Senator PATTERSON—It is not an estimates question.

Senator BOB BROWN—and I want to hear the answer.

Senator RONALDSON—Chair, I think the minister needs to be aware of Senator Brown's line of—

Senator BOB BROWN—He should be at the table, if that is the case.

CHAIR—I do not see that this relates to a policy issue, Senator Brown. It is not a matter of development of policy. We have covered this matter. Again, it is simply looking for a political issue. So let us move on to more productive things.