



Senator Katy Gallagher

Shadow Minister for Finance
Shadow Minister for the Public Service
Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate
Senator for the Australian Capital Territory

Ms Caroline Edwards
Secretary
Department of Health

By email only: s22

Dear Ms Edwards

I refer to an answer to a question on notice submitted by the Department of Health to the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 on 5 May 2020.

I regret it is necessary to remind you there are no areas in connection with the expenditure of public funds where any person has a discretion to withhold details or explanations from the Parliament or its committees unless the Parliament has expressly provided otherwise.

Before considering what, if any, steps should be taken, pursuant to resolutions of the Senate re-affirming this principle, I invite you to re-submit an answer to Question no.1 asked by me at the committee hearing on 23 April 2020 by close of business on Monday 11th May.

The question simply sought a date - it did not ask for any further information and it is not open to the Department of Health to refuse to answer the question or indeed to refer it to another department as a way of avoiding providing an answer.

I look forward to your timely response.

Yours sincerely

s22

Senator Katy Gallagher
11 May, 2020



Australian Government

Department of Health

Acting Secretary

Senator Katy Gallagher
Chair
Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Via email: senator.katy.gallagher@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator

Thank you for your letter of 11 May regarding a verbal question on notice taken at the 23 April 2020 Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 hearing.

I would like to reaffirm that the Department of Health is committed to supporting the Committee in its important work. We have demonstrated this through our attendance at several hearings, including the upcoming hearings on 13 and 26 May. In addition, we are also endeavouring to respond to verbal and written questions on notice as quickly as possible given the Department's responsibilities leading the health response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) has portfolio responsibilities for the National Security Committee. Following your letter I have sought advice from PM&C on the question. Please find enclosed a revised response to your question regarding the National Security Committee.

Yours sincerely

s22

Caroline Edwards

// May 2020

Encl (1)

cc: Mr Patrick Cronan, Chief of Staff, via email s22

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Thursday 23 April 2020

Question Number: 01

Question Subject: Briefing Cabinet

Type of Questions: Hansard, page 3, 23 April 2020

Questioner: Senator Gallagher

Question:

CHAIR: When were you first asked to brief the cabinet?

Prof. Murphy: Let me just have a look. I think I briefed the National Security Committee of cabinet that weekend. I'd have to go back and check that. I'd better take it on notice. We certainly raised the travel advisory, because we'd made recommendations through cabinet around 22 to 23 January. I don't have a record here of when I formally first briefed cabinet. Most of my briefings have actually been to the National Security Committee of cabinet. I've briefed the full cabinet on three or four occasions, but I've probably briefed the National Security Committee of cabinet two or three times a week since that pandemic situation evolved in late January.

Original answer:

Please refer questions regarding the National Security Committee to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C).

Revised answer:

In line with portfolio responsibilities, as noted in the previous response, PM&C advise that:

It is a longstanding practice not to disclose information about the operation and business of the Cabinet and its committees, including when a matter went to Cabinet, who attended, and what form of submission was provided, as to do so could potentially reveal the deliberations of the Cabinet, which are confidential.