



Australian Government

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

**CABINET
HANDBOOK**

14th Edition

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PRIME MINISTER

FOREWORD

As the primary decision-making body of government, Cabinet plays a central role in shaping the future of Australia.

Strong Cabinet government is integral to our success. Cabinet decisions should be the result of robust policy analysis, healthy debate and collaborative decision-making. We must also be steadfast in our shared commitment to the core Cabinet principles of solidarity and collective responsibility. Ministers will hold themselves accountable for the decisions made by Cabinet and its committees. They will consult with their colleagues and follow the policies and procedures set out in this Handbook.

The 14th edition of the *Cabinet Handbook* also contains the policies and procedures which enable the National Cabinet to make decisions in the best interest of all Australians. The formation of the National Cabinet is changing the way the Commonwealth and the State and Territory Governments work together.

My Government is committed to building a strong future for all Australians. I look forward to working together with my Cabinet team and with my State and Territory counterparts through the National Cabinet to deliver effective and efficient executive government that supports this aim.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scott Morrison', written in a cursive style.

The Hon Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister

16 October 2020

CONTENTS

CABINET HANDBOOK	1
FOREWORD	3
CONTENTS	4
SECTION 1 Roles and Responsibilities.....	6
The Cabinet	6
The Prime Minister.....	6
The Ministry	7
The Cabinet Secretary	7
The Cabinet Division.....	8
SECTION 2 Cabinet Conventions and Principles.....	9
Guiding Principles	9
Collective Responsibility.....	9
Cabinet Solidarity.....	9
Operational Values	9
Consultation.....	9
Confidentiality.....	10
Primacy of the Cabinet	10
Ministerial responsibility.....	11
Implementation of Cabinet Decisions.....	11
SECTION 3 Cabinet Meetings.....	12
Ministerial Attendance.....	12
Attendance of Officials.....	13
Declarations of Private Interests	14
Meeting Timetable.....	14
Cabinet Minutes.....	14
SECTION 4 Cabinet Business	16

Matters for Cabinet Consideration.....	16
Authority for Matters to Come Forward.....	17
Cabinet and Cabinet Committee Agendas	17
The Budget Process	18
SECTION 5 Forms of Cabinet Business.....	19
Cabinet Submissions	19
Cabinet Memoranda	21
Short-Form Cabinet Paper	21
Cabinet Presentations	21
Attachments and Supporting Documents	22
Oral Items	22
Supporting Documents	22
Appointments	22
SECTION 6 Security and the Handling of Cabinet Documents	26
Custody of Cabinet Documents	27
SECTION 7 Caretaker Conventions and Cabinet	29
SECTION 8 THE NATIONAL CABINET	30
Guiding Principles	30
Committees of National Cabinet	30
Secretariat Support	30
Matters for National Cabinet Consideration.....	31
National Cabinet Papers	31
Minutes.....	31
Handling of National Cabinet Documents.....	31
Caretaker Conventions	32
Appendix A: Timeframes for the Lodgement of Cabinet Submissions	34

SECTION 1

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Cabinet

1. The Cabinet is the council of senior ministers who are empowered by the Government to take binding decisions on its behalf.
2. The Cabinet is a product of convention and practice. There is no reference to the Cabinet in the Commonwealth Constitution and its establishment and procedures are not the subject of any legislation. Provided the guiding principles of a Cabinet system are met—collective responsibility and solidarity—it is for the Prime Minister of the day to determine the shape, structure and operation of the Cabinet.
3. The Cabinet does not have specific terms of reference or powers laid down in statute. Therefore, the outcomes of its deliberations may require action by:
 - (a) the Governor-General
 - (b) individual ministers whose executive power is derived from Chapter II of the Constitution
 - (c) holders of statutory office, or
 - (d) the Parliament to be put into effect.

Cabinet committees

4. Cabinet committees are usually established either around a subject area, such as national security, or around a general function of Government, such as expenditure. Temporary or ad-hoc Cabinet committees may also be established by the Prime Minister to carry out particular tasks.
5. Cabinet committees derive their powers from the Cabinet. Generally, Cabinet committee decisions are brought forward to the Cabinet for endorsement, so the Cabinet retains the ultimate power of decision. While some Cabinet committees may make final decisions for security or practical reasons, most Cabinet committee decisions are not acted on until they have been endorsed by the Cabinet, or the Cabinet Secretary agrees that decisions can be implemented without the Cabinet's endorsement because they are urgent. In such cases, the Cabinet should be briefed on the Cabinet committee decision as soon as practicable. The Cabinet may alter a Cabinet committee decision or ask a Cabinet committee to consider a matter further.

The Prime Minister

6. The Prime Minister is responsible for the membership of the Cabinet and Cabinet committees, determines and regulates all Cabinet arrangements for the Government and is the final arbiter of Cabinet procedures.
7. The Prime Minister advises the Governor-General on the appointment of ministers (including the title and scope of each minister's portfolio) and determines which ministers will form the Cabinet.
8. As chair of the Cabinet, the Prime Minister sets the Cabinet's agenda and determines when

and where meetings take place. The Prime Minister leads and guides discussion to achieve a collective response and ensures the clarity of decisions. In exceptional circumstances where a collective decision is not possible the Prime Minister's view is authoritative.

The Ministry

9. The Ministry is comprised of the Ministers of State including Cabinet ministers, other ministers and assistant ministers. Together they form the Federal Executive Council – the body which formally advises the Governor-General on the administration of the Commonwealth of Australia.

10. The Cabinet principles and conventions apply to the whole Ministry, not simply those ministers in the Cabinet.

The Cabinet Secretary

11. The Cabinet Secretary is appointed by the Prime Minister to manage the day-to-day procedural and operational matters of the Cabinet and any Cabinet committees.

12. The Cabinet Secretary attends all meetings of the Cabinet and Cabinet committees.

13. Through delegations from the Prime Minister, the Cabinet Secretary has the authority to:

- (a) provide authority to ministers to bring items forward for consideration by the Cabinet or a Cabinet committee
- (b) finalise the Cabinet and Cabinet committee agendas
- (c) maintain and enforce the integrity of Cabinet rules and processes
- (d) working with Ministers and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) to uphold the quality and timeliness of documents coming forward for the Cabinet's consideration
- (e) recording deliberations of Cabinet and Cabinet committee meetings and authorising Cabinet minutes
- (f) approve absences of Cabinet ministers
- (g) deal with practical issues regarding the co-option of non-Cabinet ministers and assistant ministers, and the attendance of officials.

14. The Cabinet Secretary is also responsible for advising the Prime Minister on:

- (a) appointments made by the Cabinet, including Board appointments and appointments of Government, and other appointments as required; and
- (b) the forward programme of the Cabinet and Cabinet committee meeting dates.

The Cabinet Division

15. The Cabinet Division is a part of the Government that provides continuity and impartial support for operations at the centre of Government. It is located in PM&C and is staffed and managed by officers of PM&C. The Cabinet Division exists to support the Prime Minister, the Cabinet Secretary and the chairs of Cabinet committees in ensuring that Government business is conducted in an effective and timely way and that proper collective consideration takes place.

16. The Cabinet Division also maintains the collection of Cabinet documents for the current Government and preserves the Cabinet records of previous Governments.

SECTION 2

CABINET CONVENTIONS AND PRINCIPLES

Guiding Principles

17. A Westminster-style Cabinet is defined by adherence to the principles of collective responsibility and Cabinet solidarity. These principles are the binding devices that ensure the unity of purpose of the Government and underpin the formulation of consistent policy advice.

Collective Responsibility

18. Collective responsibility is a long standing and integral part of the Cabinet system. It requires that whatever the range of private views put forward by ministers in the Cabinet, once decisions are arrived at and announced they are supported by all ministers. It ensures that the Government is collectively accountable and responsible to the Parliament and to the people of Australia.

19. In practice, a decision of the Cabinet is binding on all members of the Government regardless of whether they were present when the decision was taken. Issues may, and should, be debated vigorously within the confidential setting of Cabinet meetings. The aim is to reach some form of consensus so that the Prime Minister, as chair of the Cabinet, can summarise what the collective decision is for recording in the Cabinet minute.

Cabinet Solidarity

20. Members of the Cabinet must publicly support all Government decisions made in the Cabinet, even if they do not agree with them. Cabinet ministers cannot dissociate themselves from, or repudiate the decisions of their Cabinet colleagues unless they resign from the Cabinet. It is the Prime Minister's role as Chair of the Cabinet, where necessary, to enforce Cabinet solidarity.

Operational Values

21. The proper implementation of these two guiding principles is entirely dependent on a commitment to three important operational values: consultation; confidentiality; and respect for the primacy of Cabinet decisions.

22. A strong and effective Cabinet system requires ministers, their staff and departments to respect and adhere to the guiding principles and operational values.

Consultation

23. The principle of collective responsibility can only operate effectively if all members of the Cabinet are well informed and well advised (including by their departmental officials) about the decisions they are being asked to make. Timely and thoughtful consultation is the only way to ensure that there are no surprises and each minister has the opportunity to inform the discussion, bringing to the table his or her portfolio knowledge and political judgement.

24. Ministers are responsible for ensuring their proposals have been subject to comprehensive consultation across Government, are of high quality and meet the required lodgement timeframes for the Cabinet or Cabinet committee meeting. A key purpose of early consultation in the

development of proposals is to ensure that differences between ministers are resolved in advance of the Cabinet's consideration or, if resolution is not possible, differences are identified and set out in such a way as to facilitate informed decision-making.

Confidentiality

25. The principle of collective responsibility requires the strict confidentiality of all Cabinet proceedings and documentation.

26. All attendees are responsible for ensuring that what is considered by the Cabinet, when and how it does so, and the decision the Cabinet reaches on particular matters remain confidential. Ministers, their staff and officials must not disclose proposals likely to be considered at forthcoming meetings outside Cabinet-approved consultation procedures. Nor can they disclose the nature or content of the discussions or the views of individual ministers expressed at the meeting itself.

27. Obviously general information about what has been decided by the Cabinet is, on occasions, released into the public domain by persons authorised to do so. But this does not detract from the importance of allowing the Prime Minister or the Cabinet itself to decide what is disclosed publicly about any decision they have reached.

28. Effective Cabinet confidentiality requires the protection of Cabinet deliberations not only at the time an issue was current but also in the future. Ministers in successive Governments have relied on the convention that their views, either written or spoken will remain confidential well into the future. It is only with the confidence in this convention that ministers can enjoy freedom to explore all policy options without the need to temper their comments or views.

29. This convention provides the Executive of Government with the opportunity to contest policy ideas in a highly confidential manner in order to ensure that the collective decision that ultimately arises from the Cabinet's deliberations is the best possible policy decision for the administration of the Government.

30. Ministers and assistant ministers and their staff should not seek from departments the Cabinet documents of the previous Government, or the advice provided to it. The disclosure of such documents would encroach upon the principle of Cabinet confidentiality and involve the disclosure of options, conversations, and other materials expressed or undertaken uninhibitedly in the expectation of their continuing confidentiality.

Primacy of the Cabinet

31. Ministers must carry out Cabinet-determined policies with respect to their own portfolios, whether or not they agree with such policies. Ministers (and portfolio agencies) must act on Cabinet decisions as recorded in Cabinet minutes.

Ministerial responsibility

32. In upholding the Cabinet guiding principles and operational values, ministers must:
- a. not talk publicly about matters that they propose to bring to the Cabinet nor announce a major new policy without previous Cabinet approval
 - b. not express private views on Government policies nor speak about or otherwise become involved in a ministerial colleague's portfolio without first consulting that colleague and possibly the Prime Minister
 - c. understand that absolute confidentiality of Cabinet discussions is essential
 - d. adopt a strict need to know approach to any briefing they give to their staff and departmental officers on the outcome of Cabinet decisions
 - e. enforce the strictest discipline in their offices and departments to avoid Cabinet agenda items or decisions being either knowingly or unknowingly disclosed
 - f. ensure that proposals prepared for Cabinet consideration have involved thorough consultation across Government, are timely and of high quality, and provide concise and robust advice on implementation challenges and risk mitigation strategies.
33. The Cabinet principles and values also apply to all members of the Ministry, not simply those ministers in Cabinet.

Implementation of Cabinet Decisions

34. Portfolio ministers are ultimately responsible for ensuring their proposals can be implemented and that the Cabinet is sufficiently informed of any implementation challenges or risks. Delivery failure and success has implications for all Cabinet ministers and collectively they have an interest in ensuring that policy design and implementation planning, for major initiatives in particular, is robust.
35. The planning, processes and advice leading up to Cabinet decisions are critical in setting the pathway for effective program implementation. To ensure that their Cabinet colleagues are fully informed when making decisions, sponsoring ministers must ensure their proposals provide enough detail on risk and implementation challenges to ensure that the Cabinet can make an informed decision on the efficacy of the proposal.
36. Ministers are accountable for the successful delivery of their proposals and for ensuring action is taken on Cabinet's decisions that affect their portfolios; their responsibility extends to all bodies within their portfolio (statutory and other authorities as well as departments).
37. The Cabinet's role does not end with a decision. Ministerial oversight and regular tracking of progress for complex programs is essential to ensure policies are implemented properly and any problems can be addressed as soon as possible. Ministers and secretaries will agree and implement appropriate reporting regimes for delivery of programs, services and new policy work designed around the Government's priorities for the portfolio.

38. The Cabinet Secretary is responsible for managing and tracking the implementation progress of Cabinet decisions and providing detailed and regular feedback to the Cabinet. Ministers and their departments must support this process by providing the required information when requested.

SECTION 3

CABINET MEETINGS

Ministerial Attendance

39. Cabinet and Cabinet committee meetings take precedence over all other ministerial business with the exception of attendance at the Federal Executive Council.

40. Ministers must seek to ensure that the routine business of the Parliament does not interrupt their Cabinet attendance. Ministers are responsible for making appropriate pairing arrangements and for organising their routine chamber duty to be performed by other ministers where there is a conflict with Cabinet or Cabinet committee meetings.

41. Ministers should ensure that they do not commit to engagements that might conflict with scheduled Cabinet and Cabinet committee meetings.

42. If a minister does not expect to be available to attend a Cabinet or a Cabinet committee meeting, that minister must seek permission for his or her absence from the Cabinet Secretary, and give the reasons for the absence.

43. Ministers, when absent, should be represented in Cabinet meetings only by other ministers acting in their position and only where agreed by the Cabinet Secretary.

44. Ministers should attend Cabinet and National Security Committee of Cabinet meetings in person unless there are exceptional circumstances that prevent this, in which case telepresence or dial-in may be possible if agreed by the Cabinet Secretary in consultation with the Prime Minister. Ministers should attend other Cabinet committees in person, with telepresence or dial-ins with the prior agreement of the Cabinet Secretary having regard to the needs of the meeting.

Co-opting ministers who are not members of the Cabinet

45. Ministers not in the Cabinet (including assistant ministers) with a portfolio interest in an item listed for Cabinet (or Cabinet committee) consideration may seek to be co-opted for that item by having the relevant portfolio Cabinet minister make a request to the Cabinet Secretary. If co-opted, that minister will be sent the relevant papers and will participate fully in the discussion of that item, withdrawing once his or her item has been considered. The Cabinet Secretary may co-opt a minister to a meeting even if the minister has not made a request to be co-opted.

46. The Cabinet Division will inform co-opted ministers when the meeting is likely to consider their item and call them when required.

Quorum

47. There is no quorum for Cabinet or Cabinet committees. The decision to proceed with a Cabinet or Cabinet committee meeting is made by the chair taking into account the:

- (a) importance of the items under consideration
- (b) presence of relevant ministers
- (c) advisability of taking decisions if few ministers are present.

Attendance of Officials

48. In order to ensure the proper emphasis on the role of ministers in the Cabinet, ministerial advisers do not attend Cabinet meetings. Officials can be co-opted by the Cabinet Secretary to attend Cabinet for a specific item if necessary.

49. The Prime Minister or Cabinet Secretary will write to ministers as required with guidance as to when officials and ministerial advisers can attend Cabinet committee meetings.

50. As Cabinet committees are a forum for considering specialised issues, invited officials and ministerial staff may attend Cabinet committee meetings, with the agreement of the Cabinet Secretary. Attendance is generally limited to the most senior levels of the Public Service (secretaries, agency heads and senior executive service band 3) and ministerial staff (chiefs of staff).

51. Requests for attendance by other advisers and officials require the specific agreement of the Cabinet Secretary. Co-option of officials will only be considered in cases where the proposed co-optee has information or expertise that is not already in the room that is likely to be needed for effective, well informed deliberations. An official may also be co-opted if it is critical for them to fulfil their role effectively to understand the deliberations that underpin a committee's decision.

52. Officials and ministerial staff attending Cabinet committee meetings must adhere to the strict confidentiality conventions of all Cabinet proceedings and documentation. This includes adhering to a need to know approach with their colleagues, and not taking any personal notes during the meeting as only the official note takers are to record the discussion.

Official Note Takers

53. Generally, there are three official note takers in the room during Cabinet discussions. Together they are responsible for drafting Cabinet minutes that properly reflect the Cabinet's decisions and provide ministers with clear direction and authority to implement the decisions.

54. Note taker 1 is the Secretary of PM&C or a delegate. Note Taker 2 is generally the First Assistant Secretary or Assistant Secretary of PM&C's Cabinet Division. Note Taker 3 is a senior officer of PM&C who has subject matter expertise on the item under discussion. Note Taker 3 will change throughout the meeting according to the item under discussion.

55. Note takers use the Cabinet notebooks issued by the Cabinet Division and must not make any other record of the discussion. Note takers do not take a verbatim record but their

notes may from time to time record the individual views of ministers and as such these notebooks are highly sensitive documents.

56. The notebooks remain the property of the Secretary of PM&C and are protected from early public release under the *Archives Act 1983* and cannot be sought under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act). Cabinet notebooks are publicly released once they enter the open access period.

Declarations of Private Interests

57. Ministers and officials attending Cabinet or Cabinet committee meetings must declare any private interests of which they are aware. This can include pecuniary interests, held by them or by members of their immediate family, which may give rise to a conflict with their public duties. Any such declarations will be recorded by the Cabinet note takers.

58. It is then open to the Chair of the meeting to excuse a minister from the discussion or to agree expressly to his or her taking part. Generally, a minister would withdraw from discussion of any proposal to appoint a person to a Government body who is a relative of that minister.

59. Once the Cabinet has been made aware of a particular private interest, it will not normally be necessary to repeat that declaration in subsequent Cabinet discussions unless a significant time has elapsed since a declaration and the interest is one that might not be well known to colleagues.

Meeting Timetable

60. The Cabinet meets in the Cabinet room at Parliament House, Canberra, in most weeks of the year. Special Cabinet meetings may be held at other times and other places as necessary. Cabinet committee meetings are scheduled as required.

61. The Parliamentary Business Committee of Cabinet (PBC) meets weekly during each Parliamentary sitting period and at other times, as necessary.

62. The Cabinet Division provides information about the Cabinet and Cabinet committee meeting times to ministers' offices and the Australian Public Service.

Cabinet Minutes

63. The Cabinet Division produces minutes of decisions as soon as possible after each Cabinet or Cabinet committee meeting. The Cabinet minutes record the decisions of the Cabinet in a form that enables the necessary action to be taken; they do not record the detail of discussions at the meeting.

64. Cabinet committee minutes that require endorsement by the Cabinet are marked accordingly. When they have been endorsed by the Cabinet, a superseding minute is issued.

65. Where the Federal Executive Council's approval is required, action on Cabinet minutes must be held over until that approval has been obtained.

Circulation

66. Once the Cabinet Secretary has approved and signed the Cabinet minutes, the Cabinet Division is responsible for their circulation.

67. The Cabinet and Cabinet committee minutes are normally circulated to all Cabinet ministers or to the relevant committee members, any non-Cabinet ministers co-opted to a meeting for that item or to non-Cabinet ministers who have a direct portfolio interest in the matter. Cabinet minutes are only circulated to departments that are specifically required to take action or that have a need to know. Departmental secretaries are expected to have procedures in place to ensure that Cabinet minutes are circulated internally with the strict application of the ‘need-to-know’ principle and that a proper record is kept of anyone who has access to a Cabinet minute.

68. If ministers consider that any minutes are essential for their department’s operations, they may make a request to the Cabinet Secretary to make the minutes available to their department for information and any necessary action.

69. Expenditure Review Committee of Cabinet (ERC) minutes recording Budget decisions are circulated to ERC ministers and the relevant portfolio ministers only, but are provided in the Cabinet room to other Cabinet ministers just prior to the Budget Cabinet meeting.

Amendments

70. A minister may disagree with the wording of a Cabinet minute and request that it be amended. Such a request is made to the Cabinet Secretary. If it is agreed that the Cabinet minute does not accurately reflect the Cabinet outcome, an amended Cabinet minute may be issued. If there is a more fundamental dispute over the content of the Cabinet minute, the matter may need to be brought forward to the Cabinet for consideration.

SECTION 4

CABINET BUSINESS

Matters for Cabinet Consideration

71. As a general rule, the Cabinet considers significant, complex or controversial matters which benefit from collective and collaborative discussion and decision making. Ministers should put before their colleagues the sorts of issues on which they themselves would wish to be consulted—matters of public interest, importance, or controversy. It is ultimately for the Prime Minister, on the advice of the Cabinet Secretary, to decide what matters require Cabinet consideration.

72. The following is an indication of the kind of issues that would normally require consideration by the Cabinet:

- (a) proposals relating to the delivery of the Government's priorities
- (b) significant or controversial policy issues
- (c) proposals affecting the Government's financial position, or important financial commitments
- (d) proposals that are challenging to implement due to their complexity or timeline for delivery
- (e) significant matters affecting state and territory government relations
- (f) the most significant international business, including international treaties and agreements
- (g) national emergencies, including any decision to take military action
- (h) proposals that affect Australia's constitutional arrangements
- (i) proposals requiring significant new or amendments to legislation or regulations
- (j) any significant or controversial exercise of a minister's statutory power
- (k) significant Government appointments.

73. Ministers should give serious consideration as to whether a matter could be dealt with by correspondence, for example, minor policy matters that are non-controversial.

74. Where there is uncertainty about the level and type of consideration needed, ministers should seek advice from the Cabinet Secretary. Similarly, departments should seek advice from the Cabinet Division.

75. Matters coming forward to the Cabinet need to comply with the Cabinet rules and procedures. These are outlined in this Handbook and Cabinet Circulars issued by the Cabinet Division and include strict page limits and deadlines for circulation and the agreement of costs.

Authority for Matters to Come Forward

76. Only matters with authority can be considered by the Cabinet. There are three ways in which this can occur: through agreement in writing from the Prime Minister or Cabinet Secretary, a Cabinet minute, or being listed on a Cabinet agenda.

77. Ministers should write to the Prime Minister to seek authority for all matters they wish to have considered by the Cabinet. The minister's letter should clearly outline the purpose and scope of the proposal and indicate how the proposal relates to the delivery of the Government's priorities. If there are any financial implications, this must be outlined. If there is a critical date by which a decision is required, this should also be identified and supported by explanation.

78. Following consultation with the Prime Minister, the Cabinet Secretary may respond in writing advising whether authority has been granted for the matter to be brought forward to the Cabinet, the agreed scope of the proposal, the manner in which it is to be brought forward and any other conditions.

79. If there is a change in circumstances which requires alteration to the scope of the proposal or a significant delay in the timing for consideration, ministers must seek additional or varied authority from the Prime Minister or the Cabinet Secretary.

80. If it is no longer appropriate to bring a matter to the Cabinet, the relevant minister must write to the Prime Minister or Cabinet Secretary seeking agreement to directly conclude the matter without Cabinet consideration.

81. Matters which the Cabinet has requested come forward do not require any further authority, provided the request is recorded in a Cabinet minute. Similarly, the Prime Minister or the Cabinet Secretary may contact a minister requesting an item be brought forward for Cabinet consideration.

Cabinet and Cabinet Committee Agendas

82. The Cabinet Secretary, in consultation with the Prime Minister, approves the agenda for each Cabinet or Cabinet committee meeting. The Cabinet Division issues agendas to ministers as early as possible and at least one week in advance of a meeting. The agenda advises the matters to be considered, the minister responsible for each item and any co-opting arrangements.

83. If ministers wish to have an item removed from an agenda, they must contact the Cabinet Secretary as soon as possible to seek agreement that the item be removed, outlining the reasons for removal and proposing a new date for consideration if necessary.

84. The Cabinet Division does not circulate Cabinet agendas to departments but does notify the relevant Cabinet Liaison Officer if their minister has an item on an agenda. Ministers' offices are also responsible for advising their departments and seeking any required briefing.

85. As meeting times and agendas are subject to change and new meetings may be called from time to time, revised business lists may be issued. While the Cabinet Division will always endeavour to keep ministers advised, ministers' staff and departments must be alert for any late changes and should check that they have obtained the relevant information.

Cabinet consideration of non-contentious matters

86. The Cabinet Secretary may determine that proposals with a high level of agreement which are unlikely to require detailed discussion by the Cabinet be listed for consideration in a way that reflects the level of consensus for the item.

The Budget Process

87. The annual Budget process typically begins in September when the Prime Minister writes to Cabinet ministers to establish Budget priorities and commission new work. The ERC considers proposals for inclusion in the Budget in line with the Government's priorities. At the end of this process a Budget Cabinet meeting is scheduled where the Cabinet provides final consideration and endorsement of decisions made by other Cabinet committees in the finalisation of the Budget.

88. Cabinet agrees the timing and operations rules for the Budget process.

89. Ministers and their departments must ensure they adhere to the relevant lodgement timelines when preparing proposals for the Budget, so that all matters are considered in the context of broader Government priorities.

SECTION 5

FORMS OF CABINET BUSINESS

90. Any documents conveying substantive material to the Cabinet must be covered by a Submission, Memorandum, Short-Form Cabinet Paper or a Cabinet Presentation. These documents are subject to a number of rules and procedures, which support the principles and operational values underpinning a strong and effective Cabinet system. The rules include strict timeframes for lodgement of documents, page limits, consultation requirements, the agreement of costs and implementation arrangements.

91. The Cabinet Secretary will advise ministers on the appropriate form of document to bring a matter forward based on the type of deliberation - the general principle being that the form needs to be fit for purpose to support the type of consideration necessary. For instance, first pass discussions unpacking a complex portfolio issue might best be supported by a presentation which could lead to a second pass consideration at a later meeting supported by a Cabinet submission with detailed costed New Policy Proposals for decision. Cabinet Division can provide advice and guidance to ministers and their departments to ensure documents are drafted effectively to support the Cabinet.

92. All documents proposing decisions to Cabinet must include a clear recommended course of action supported by concise arguments that establish the rationale for the recommended option. Any significant points of contention that arise during consultation should be represented in the proposal to give the Cabinet an appreciation of all of the issues. The Cabinet Division can provide advice and guidance to ministers and their departments to ensure documents are written effectively to support decision-making.

Cabinet Submissions

93. Cabinet Submissions are proposals that seek agreement from the Cabinet to take a particular course of action. Submissions must be sponsored by the Cabinet minister with portfolio responsibility. Proposals may be sponsored jointly by more than one minister, though it is generally preferable for responsibility to be allocated to one or two key ministers and for the other ministers to be thoroughly consulted during the preparation of the Submission, including those who may have some implementation responsibility.

94. Ministers are expected to take full responsibility for the content, quality and accuracy of advice provided to the Cabinet under their name. Ministers bringing forward Submissions are also responsible for ensuring that the necessary consultation takes place at ministerial and officials levels, to enable a fully informed decision. It is particularly important that there is adequate detail on the approach to implementation and agreement on factual matters, including costs.

95. Proposals that are complex and challenging should have implementation plans developed to ensure all the risks are identified and mitigation strategies are in place, with key details to be included or attached to the Submission to support decision-making. Cabinet Division can advise on options for how to present this information to ministers.

96. Some proposals may be so complex that they require multiple passes of Cabinet or Cabinet committee consideration. In these cases, an initial proposal may provide first pass quality information, including estimated costs and preliminary advice on impacts and implementation. This would be followed by a further Submission that should contain final costs and implementation details.

97. Ministers should provide early details of the communication and stakeholder engagement strategy for their proposal, either within the body of their Submission or as an attachment, except where the Cabinet Secretary has agreed that it is not required. The Cabinet Division will advise when an attachment is appropriate.

98. To support the Cabinet principles and values, there are circulation and lodgement requirements that ensure proposals presented to the Cabinet reflect whole-of-government consideration, and ministers are provided adequate time before the Cabinet or Cabinet committee meeting to consider and receive briefing on the proposals. There are two mandatory consultation processes that apply to Submissions: the Exposure Draft and Coordination stages:

- (a) whole-of-government consultation on a Submission should occur through the Exposure Draft process. An Exposure Draft (or pre-Exposure Draft) is a working draft of the Submission which is circulated to other departments for substantive policy comment and drafting suggestions. Ministers and departments must be prepared to amend the text of a draft in response to suggestions that are made in the consultation process. Ministers and departments should allow sufficient time for consultation with their colleagues, and are strongly encouraged to commence consultation as early as possible through interdepartmental committee meetings and the circulation of a pre-Exposure Draft. The Cabinet Secretary and the Cabinet Division can provide further guidance on the appropriate timeframes for clearance and circulation.
- (b) the Co-ordination final version is the final version of the document that must be circulated to central agencies and affected departments for co-ordination comment. At this stage, the content of the Submission is considered final with departments and agencies to now provide a formal comment on their support for the proposal. Coordination comments are the impartial advice of the Australian Public Service to the Cabinet and form part of the final Submission that is circulated to ministers. Departmental secretaries are responsible for ensuring that coordination comments provide useful and targeted advice to assist the Cabinet. Coordination comments are not cleared by ministers or their staff.

99. Final Submissions, which include the co-ordination comments provided by agencies, must be circulated to ministers at least three working days before the relevant Cabinet or Cabinet committee meeting. Breaching this three-day rule requires the approval of the Cabinet Secretary and will only be given where there is a need for urgent consideration.

100. Details of the timeframes for the lodgement and circulation of Submissions is at Appendix A.

Cabinet Memoranda

101. Cabinet Memoranda are documents which are submitted by departments rather than ministers. Memoranda ask the Cabinet to consider possible approaches, rather than making recommendations that seek Cabinet agreement, such as funding decisions.

102. Memoranda are to contain the same information as Submissions and require the same authority, circulation and consultation.

Short-Form Cabinet Paper

103. A Short-Form Cabinet Paper (Paper) supports Cabinet consideration of simple or urgent, unforeseen and unavoidable items that cannot practically meet the longer timeframes of the full Submission process.

104. A matter may only be brought forward in the form of a Paper for Cabinet or Cabinet committee consideration when authority is provided by the Prime Minister, the Cabinet (through a Cabinet minute) or the Cabinet Secretary. Examples where this may occur include for:

- (a) urgent, unforeseen and unavoidable matters
- (b) simple items such as progress reports or supplementary considerations
- (c) comebacks commissioned by the ERC in the Budget process.

105. A Paper should provide a concise summary of the matter with clear recommendations and a supporting argument including information about the associated risks. Papers are to be submitted at least four working days before the meeting. Unless agreed by the Cabinet Secretary, Papers will be circulated to central agencies for short coordination comments. In addition, when approved by the Cabinet Secretary, Papers will be circulated to relevant agencies for co-ordination comments.

Cabinet Presentations

106. Cabinet Presentations (PowerPoint presentations, slide decks, infographics, etc.) explain complex issues and support Cabinet's discussion on a policy matter. Presentations should:

- (a) aim to inform an in-depth discussion
- (b) where possible use graphs and data to illustrate key messages
- (c) comprise no more than 15 pages
- (d) be clearly marked 'PROTECTED Cabinet', or higher as applicable.

107. Presentations can be brought forward to the Cabinet as standalone items or accompany formal submissions where agreed by the Cabinet Secretary. Presentations are to be factual and should not seek agreement to decisions or have any fiscal impact.

108. An electronic copy of the presentation must be provided to Cabinet Division on the Thursday before the relevant meeting and becomes part of the formal Cabinet record. Presentations are circulated to central agencies for short coordination comments.

Attachments and Supporting Documents

109. Cabinet Submissions, Memoranda and Short-Form Papers may include or be informed by attachments and supporting documents that provide additional information on the proposal. If an attachment or supporting document has been brought into existence for the dominant purpose of submission for consideration by the Cabinet, then the attachment or supporting document must clearly state this. This ensures each document is appropriately identified as a Cabinet document and handled in line with the security requirements for Cabinet material.

Oral Items

110. In cases of particular urgency or confidentiality, or to test preliminary support for a proposal, a minister may wish to raise an oral item at a Cabinet meeting. Oral items for the Cabinet will be accepted only with the prior approval of the Cabinet Secretary.

Supporting Documents

111. On the rare occasions that the Cabinet Secretary approves the circulation of papers in the Cabinet room, all documents must be limited to a single page in length and approved by the Cabinet Secretary 24 hours in advance of the meeting.

Amending and Withdrawing Cabinet Documents

112. Once a Cabinet document has been finalised, amendments will not be made by the Cabinet Division unless the change is of a minor editorial nature. If a minister wishes to make substantive amendments to a document they have already submitted, the usual practice is to withdraw the original document and submit a corrigendum.

113. If a sponsoring minister wishes to withdraw his or her document from consideration after the agenda has been issued, that minister should provide notice of withdrawal, including a reason for the withdrawal, in writing to the Cabinet Secretary as soon as practicable.

Appointments

114. Where a significant Government appointment is proposed, the responsible minister must write to the Prime Minister seeking approval of the appointment before any appointment action is finalised. While most significant appointments will require Cabinet approval, the Prime Minister may determine that Cabinet consideration is not required and authorise the appointment.

115. In preparing appointment proposals for the Prime Minister's consideration, ministers must ensure that proposals reach the Prime Minister's office 15 working days before the Cabinet meeting at which the appointment may be raised for consideration, unless otherwise agreed by the Cabinet Secretary. As a general rule, proposals should be submitted for consideration well in advance of the time the position is to be filled, but usually no more than three months in advance. For appointments that require Federal Executive Council consideration, calculation of the lead time must take into account the cut-off dates for submission of Federal Executive Council agenda items.

116. The appointments to be brought to the Prime Minister's attention include:

- (a) significant full-time or part-time appointments (including interim appointments) to boards, commissions or statutory offices
- (b) full-time chief executive officer (CEO) positions in such agencies (where the board selects the CEO, the Government should be consulted and the minister should not signify agreement without the approval of the Prime Minister)
- (c) acting appointments in the above categories where the appointment is for a period of more than three months
 - i. an acting appointment for a period of up to three months may be made by the minister in consultation with the Prime Minister
 - ii. the minister may extend the term of an appointee once for a period of up to three months without consulting the Prime Minister
- (d) appointments to significant non-statutory tribunals, advisory bodies and commissions of inquiry
- (e) appointments as heads of mission other than Austrade managed posts.

117. For other proposed appointments, it is for ministers, in consultation with the Prime Minister prior to the making of the appointment, to judge whether the proposal should be brought to the Prime Minister or the Cabinet for consideration.

118. To avoid pre-empting any decisions, potential appointees are to be approached initially only to ascertain:

- (a) a willingness for their name to be put forward for consideration along with other candidates
- (b) whether, if selected, there would be any conflict of interest, in accordance with the Government's requirements.

Proposals for appointments

119. In submitting proposals to the Prime Minister, ministers must ensure that an account is given of the selection process. Where the minister recommends re-appointment, particular justification for doing so is to be included. Any urgency or sensitivity relating to the position or the proposed appointment must be explained.

120. In proposing appointments to a Government Business Enterprise ministers are to follow the procedures set out in the Department of Finance guidelines: Resource Management Guide – Commonwealth Government Business Enterprise Governance and Oversight Guidelines.

121. The minister's proposal should also confirm that:

- (a) the person being proposed is appropriately qualified and has experience relevant to the vacancy
- (b) the appointment would conform with any applicable legislation

- (c) due regard has been paid to gender balance in appointments
- (d) attention has been paid to the need to have an appropriate geographical balance in appointments
- (e) any real or perceived conflict of interest with the proposed nominee has been considered and addressed
- (f) any necessary consultation with other ministerial colleagues or state or territory counterparts has occurred (nominating ministers should consult relevant ministerial colleagues when proposing to appoint officers employed in another portfolio to an advisory committee in their own portfolio; where a state or territory public servant is being considered for appointment to a part-time position, the relevant premier, chief minister or state or territory minister should also be consulted).

122. Every appointment proposal to the Prime Minister must be accompanied by the following attachments (templates are available from the Cabinet Division and should be completed in accordance with instructions on each template):

- (a) an Appointment Details form, whether or not the particular appointment is a candidate for Cabinet consideration. All questions on the form, including accurate remuneration details, must be answered
- (b) an up-to-date curriculum vitae (one to two pages)
- (c) a completed and signed Private Interests Declaration, signed no more than six months prior
- (d) a current membership list of the relevant organisation, including the proposed appointments and the resulting gender and geographical balance.

123. Departments are responsible for ensuring that appropriate due diligence is undertaken prior to appointments being proposed to the Prime Minister.

Circulation and announcement

124. Circulation of appointment minutes is limited on the understanding that no information concerning an appointment is to be divulged until all necessary processes have been completed (for example, the Governor-General has made the appointment) and an announcement made by the minister.

125. No public announcement is to be made prior to approval of the appointment by the Governor-General, the Prime Minister or the Cabinet (as relevant).

126. In exceptional circumstances, where the appointment is to be made by the Governor-General following the Prime Minister's consideration, it may be possible to obtain approval from the Governor-General for the early announcement of a proposed appointment before the processes have been completed. The Federal Executive Council Secretariat (located in the Cabinet Division) will assist with advice and make any necessary arrangements in such cases.

127. Following the formal appointment process, ministers and their departments are responsible for ensuring the whole-of-government appointments database is updated to support accurate reporting.

Re-appointments

128. The procedures for re-appointments are the same as those for appointments.

Appointments of close relatives

129. Additional procedures apply to appointments concerning close relatives of ministers, members of Parliament, ministerial staff or departmental secretaries and agency heads. Any such relationship should be noted in appointment proposals.

130. To avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest, those involved in the appointments process should have no family relationship with the person under consideration and any ministers concerned should absent themselves from all discussion on that matter.

SECTION 6

SECURITY AND THE HANDLING OF CABINET DOCUMENTS

131. The security of Cabinet documents is critical to maintaining the integrity of the Cabinet process as it upholds the convention of Cabinet confidentiality. It is essential that the confidentiality of Cabinet documents, including draft Cabinet documents, is maintained to enable full and frank discussions prior to the Cabinet making its decision.

132. Cabinet documents are any material that:

- (a) is prepared for the purpose of informing the Cabinet, for example:
 - i. Cabinet Submissions, Memoranda, Short-form Cabinet Papers and the attachments, supporting documents and co-ordination comments that are associated with these items;
 - ii. Powerpoint or other presentations made in the Cabinet Room;
 - iii. Any other papers prepared for the consideration by or for the information of ministers in a Cabinet or committee meeting, such as letters or reports, regardless of whether these documents are circulated in advance of the meeting or provided in the Cabinet Room; and
 - iv. Briefs for the Cabinet and Cabinet Committees.
- (b) reveal the decision and/or deliberations of the Cabinet (including agendas, Cabinet minutes, notes taken by Cabinet note takers or Cabinet and Cabinet committee meeting dates)
- (c) are prepared by departments to brief their ministers on matters proposed for Cabinet consideration
- (d) have been created for the purpose of informing a proposal to be considered by the Cabinet (such as drafting comments or departmental cost analysis); and
- (e) include, but not limited to, Pre-Exposure Drafts, Exposure Drafts, and Coordination and Final versions of Cabinet submissions.

133. The preparation, handling and storage of Cabinet documents are subject to detailed security requirements determined by the Cabinet Division, which seek to promote the 'need to know' principle and prevent unauthorised disclosure. The requirements apply equally to ministerial offices and their staff as to public servants. All Cabinet documents and associated records are to be protectively marked 'PROTECTED Cabinet' and carry a security classification of at least PROTECTED or higher. Please refer to Section 8 of this Handbook for specific security and handling information relating to the National Cabinet.

134. Cabinet documents (including final Submissions, Memoranda, Papers or Cabinet Minutes) must not be copied, and this rule includes transcribing or copying of text of Cabinet documents (particularly Cabinet minutes) into departmental IT systems.

135. The production and circulation of Cabinet minutes are strictly controlled by the Cabinet Division and, if copies of these are required, a request must be submitted to the Cabinet Division

including information on why access is being sought. This information will assist the Cabinet Division assess whether the department has a 'need-to-know' the contents of the Cabinet minute.

136. Hard-copy Cabinet documents must be kept in Cabinet-specific files that are appropriately classified. Cabinet documents and files must be held in suitably classified storage containers. Departments and ministers' offices are required to maintain a record of who has had access to each Cabinet document.

137. Cabinet documents must only be circulated between departments via the systems designated by Cabinet Division.

138. Where agencies and ministers' offices access Cabinet documents electronically via the CabNet+ system, the same requirements for appropriate clearances and 'need to know' apply. Access to Cabinet material should only be provided to officers with a clear need to know and a security clearance that allows them access to the information. Officers should not allow others to view the material to which they have access. Users must comply with the terms and conditions associated with the use of the CabNet+ system.

139. The unauthorised disclosure of Cabinet documents undermines collective ministerial responsibility. It also undermines the convention of Cabinet confidentiality. It is essential that the confidentiality of Cabinet documents, including draft Cabinet documents, is maintained to enable full and frank discussions prior to the Cabinet making its decision. The vital importance of confidentiality in relation to the deliberations of Cabinet is recognised in legislation and under the common law. The FOI Act recognises the special nature of Cabinet deliberations in the exemption it provides for certain Cabinet documents from disclosure.

140. Requests for access to Cabinet documents (including National Cabinet documents) and Cabinet-related material under the FOI Act must be handled in consultation with the Freedom of Information Coordinator of PM&C.

Custody of Cabinet Documents

141. Cabinet documents are considered to be the property of the Government of the day. They are not departmental records. The convention is that Cabinet documents are confidential to the Government which created them and are not the property of the sponsoring minister or department. Access to them by succeeding Governments is not granted without the approval of the current parliamentary leader of the appropriate political party.

142. Official Cabinet records are held on behalf of the Government in the care and control of the Secretary of PM&C and are issued to ministers and departments on a need to know basis. Once a minister or department no longer has any immediate need for them, and, in any event, when the minister vacates office or a change of Government occurs, any copies of Cabinet documents must be returned to the Cabinet Division or destroyed.

143. Cabinet records and notebooks are accessible to the public through the National Archives of Australia after the expiration of the statutory closed period. The closed period, which for Cabinet documents currently ranges between 20 to 30 years, seeks to provide the best balance between the need to safeguard privacy, security and confidentiality of the Cabinet, and to use available resources to best effect and maximise public access to records.

144. The Secretary of PM&C may authorise requests for access by former Prime Ministers, former ministers, former secretaries and some other specified Government office holders who seek access to Cabinet documents with which they dealt personally while in office. Access will not be granted without the approval of the current parliamentary leader of the political party in Government at the time the requested record was created.

SECTION 7

CARETAKER CONVENTIONS AND CABINET

145. The caretaker period begins at the time the House of Representatives is dissolved and continues until the election result is clear or, if there is a change of Government, until the new Government is appointed. By convention, the Government ensures that important decisions are not taken in the caretaker period that would bind an incoming Government and limit its freedom of action. The basic caretaker conventions require Government to avoid implementing major policy initiatives, making appointments of significance or entering major contracts or undertakings during the caretaker period and to not involve departmental officers in election activities.

146. The Ministry, the Cabinet or Cabinet committees may meet in the caretaker period if this is necessary for the continuance of the normal business of Government, but the range of matters that may be considered is constrained by the conventions. Normally, efforts are made to clear necessary business prior to the caretaker period, thereby avoiding the necessity for meetings during the caretaker period.

147. The basic conventions are directed to the taking of decisions, and not to their announcement. Accordingly, the conventions are not infringed where decisions taken before the caretaker period are announced during the caretaker period. However, it is desirable, if the decisions concern significant initiatives, that they be announced in advance of the caretaker period in order to avoid controversy.

SECTION 8

THE NATIONAL CABINET

Guiding Principles

148. The National Cabinet comprises the Prime Minister (Chair), the State Premiers and the Territory Chief Ministers.

149. The National Cabinet operates according to the longstanding Westminster principles of collective responsibility and solidarity.

150. The precise structure, shape and operation of the National Cabinet are matters for its members.

151. The National Cabinet does not derogate from the sovereign authority and powers of the Commonwealth or any State or Territory. The Commonwealth and the States and Territories, as appropriate, remain responsible for implementing outcomes agreed by the National Cabinet.

152. Expert advisers may be co-opted to inform National Cabinet deliberations as appropriate.

153. The National Cabinet meeting schedule is determined by agreement between members.

154. Members, when absent, should be represented in the National Cabinet meetings only by other Ministers acting in their position and only where agreed by the Cabinet Secretary.

155. All proceedings and documentation of the National Cabinet remain strictly confidential.

Committees of National Cabinet

156. The Council on Federal Financial Relations (CFFR) reports to the National Cabinet, is constituted as a Cabinet body and operates under Cabinet rules. It is responsible for managing all Federal-State funding agreements including National Partnership Agreements.

157. The National Cabinet can establish additional Committees as required. These Committees may be temporary or ad-hoc in nature, or standing forums to inform the deliberations of the National Cabinet.

158. National Cabinet Reform Committees (NCRCs) reporting directly to the National Cabinet are convened to progress priority issues. NCRCs are chaired by a Commonwealth representative and their membership is tailored to the relevant subject area.

159. NCRCs are constituted as committees of Cabinet and are bound by the principles of collective responsibility and solidarity. Documents and advice prepared by NCRCs are Cabinet material.

Secretariat Support

160. The Commonwealth Cabinet Office provides secretariat support to the National Cabinet, in collaboration with State and Territory support areas.

161. Note takers will be the Commonwealth Cabinet Secretary, a senior official from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and a senior official nominated by the States and Territories.

162. The notebooks remain the property of the Secretary of PM&C and are protected from early public release under the Archives Act 1983 and cannot be sought under the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (FOI Act).

Matters for National Cabinet Consideration

163. The National Cabinet determines its priorities and the matters it considers.

164. Any member can ask for a matter to be considered by the National Cabinet by request to the Chair or the secretariat.

National Cabinet Papers

165. Matters being brought forward to the National Cabinet should be covered by a National Cabinet Paper or Presentation.

166. Drafting of Papers and Presentations can be undertaken by the Commonwealth or State and Territory governments or by other experts or advisory groups.

167. To allow adequate time for members to be properly briefed on and consider the matters being brought forward:

- (a) National Cabinet Papers and Presentations should be lodged as final with the Secretariat four business days before consideration
- (b) Papers and Presentations should be circulated to all members of the National Cabinet at least two business days before a meeting.

168. The Secretariat may vary these arrangements by exception if unforeseen matters arise or currency of information is a priority.

Minutes

169. National Cabinet minutes are circulated to all members of the National Cabinet by the secretariat.

Handling of National Cabinet Documents

170. Maintaining the confidentiality of all National Cabinet documents, including draft National Cabinet documents, is essential to enable full and frank discussions.

171. All National Cabinet documents and associated records are to be marked NATIONAL CABINET and carry a sensitivity classification of OFFICIAL: SENSITIVE or a security classification of PROTECTED or higher.

172. All jurisdictions must have clearly established protocols for ensuring confidentiality and security of documents that are to be considered by the National Cabinet and/or its Committees, as well as agendas and minutes.

173. National Cabinet documents will be subject to different information management legislation in each jurisdiction and must be managed appropriately under this legislation.

174. The Secretary of PM&C is the formal custodian of National Cabinet records.

175. In the event there is a change of Commonwealth, State or Territory government, requests for access to National Cabinet records can be made by the successor governments to the Secretary of PM&C. Before making a decision on access, the Secretary of PM&C will consult the present leader of the political party in government in that jurisdiction at the time the relevant records were created.

Caretaker Conventions

176. The National Cabinet continues to meet through caretaker periods for State and Territories. The Premiers or Chief Ministers of a jurisdiction operating under caretaker arrangements should continue to attend National Cabinet meetings, with their participation informed by the relevant jurisdiction's caretaker conventions.

177. The National Cabinet may meet in the Commonwealth caretaker period if this is necessary for the continuance of the normal business of Government, but the range of matters that may be considered is constrained by the conventions.

APPENDIX A: TIMEFRAMES FOR THE LODGEMENT OF CABINET SUBMISSIONS

