



Australian Government

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

CABINET HANDBOOK

16th Edition

Cabinet Handbook – 16th Edition

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Foreword

As a nation, we take pride in the strength, stability and effectiveness of our democracy.

The institution of the Cabinet is a core feature of Australia's democratic system.

Cabinet government is underpinned by the principles of collective decision making and collective responsibility.

These principles reflect an enduring idea that has informed the practice of government across cultures and societies overtime: that when we work together and take decisions collectively, we produce better and more durable outcomes.

Much like our democracy, the Cabinet is not a static institution.

This 16th Cabinet Handbook continues the core conventions and principles that underpin Cabinet government, while evolving Cabinet processes to ensure they best support Ministers to respond to the challenges of the modern world and continue to make decisions in our national interest.

In a time of global uncertainty, it is the responsibility of government to prove that our democracy is capable of dealing with the urgent demands of the moment, in a way that builds and delivers for the future.

The Cabinet is committed to working in the interests of all Australians and delivering the best outcomes for our nation. The principles and processes set out in this Handbook will support the Government in that endeavour.

We encourage all those involved in Cabinet process to adhere to the Handbook.



Anthony Albanese
PRIME MINISTER



Dr Andrew Charlton
CABINET SECRETARY

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Organisation of the Cabinet

The Cabinet system

1. The Cabinet is the apex of executive government decision-making. The Cabinet comprises senior ministers, who are part of a broader ministry.
2. The Cabinet is established by convention. It is not mentioned in the Australian Constitution or in legislation. The Prime Minister determines the shape and structure of the Cabinet and how it operates.
3. The Cabinet meets regularly to set clear priorities for the government, take important decisions for the government and ensure implementation and delivery of the government's priorities. The outcomes of the Cabinet's deliberations may require action by the Governor-General, ministers, statutory office holders or departments to be put into effect.
4. The Prime Minister may establish standing committees of the Cabinet, referred to as Cabinet committees. Annex A sets out the terms of reference, membership and chairing arrangements for these committees.
5. The Prime Minister may also establish time-limited committees or ministerial taskforces to address specific issues. The Prime Minister determines membership, chairing arrangements and terms of reference of these bodies, with deliberations reported to the Cabinet for consideration.

The Prime Minister

6. The Prime Minister is the head of the Australian Government. The role and office are established by convention. The Prime Minister advises the Governor-General on the appointment of ministers and determines which ministers will form the Cabinet. The size of the Cabinet is a matter for the Prime Minister. The [Ministers of State Act 1952](#) provides for no more than 30 ministers and no more than 12 parliamentary secretaries (known as assistant ministers). Ministers who are not appointed to the Cabinet are known as the outer ministry.
7. 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 in the Cabinet to achieve collective decisions. In exceptional circumstances where a collective decision of the Cabinet is not possible, the Prime Minister's view is authoritative.

The Cabinet Secretary

8. The Prime Minister may appoint a Cabinet Secretary who has delegated responsibility for the day-to-day procedural and operational matters of the Cabinet and committees.
9. The Cabinet Secretary supports the Prime Minister and ministers by ensuring that the Cabinet and its committees run smoothly, decisions are well prepared and government priorities are advanced efficiently.

10. Acting under the Prime Minister's delegation, the Cabinet Secretary works to:
 - a) Help ministers bring forward proposals at the right time for Cabinet or committee consideration.
 - b) Coordinate the forward work program so ministers' items are scheduled in a way that supports timely decision-making.
 - c) Set and confirm agendas, giving ministers clear visibility and certainty about Cabinet business.
 - d) Provide guidance on quality and timeliness of submissions, supporting ministers to meet Cabinet standards.
 - e) Offer advice on Cabinet documentation, ensuring proposals are presented clearly and effectively.
 - f) Record and authorise Cabinet deliberations, so that ministers' contributions are accurately reflected in Cabinet decisions.
 - g) Be present at Cabinet and committee meetings to provide procedural advice and practical assistance.
 - h) Manage ministerial absences, ensuring Cabinet business continues seamlessly.
 - i) Facilitate participation of non-Cabinet ministers, assistant ministers, officials and staff, so ministers have the right expertise and voices in the room.
11. The Cabinet Secretary attends all meetings of the Cabinet and is responsible for authorising Cabinet minutes, which record the decisions of the Cabinet and committees. The Cabinet Secretary may also attend committee meetings.

Cabinet Division

12. Cabinet Division in the [Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet](#) provides continuity and impartial support to the Prime Minister, Cabinet Secretary and committee Chairs.
13. Cabinet Division's responsibilities include:
 - a) Providing advice to the Prime Minister and Cabinet Secretary about Cabinet and committee matters.
 - b) Coordinating the triannual bid process for the Cabinet forward work program.
 - c) Advising the Prime Minister and Cabinet Secretary about the forward work program and the scheduling of items to Cabinet and committee agendas.
 - d) Providing advice to departments on Cabinet and committee matters.
 - e) Coordinating and distributing Cabinet agendas, submissions and other documentation to ministers and departments.
 - f) Managing logistical arrangements for the Cabinet and committee meetings, including venues, attendance and record-keeping.

- g) Supporting ministers during meetings, including distribution of documents in the Cabinet room where required.
- h) Finalising Cabinet minutes and managing their distribution.

Cabinet conventions and principles

Collective decision-making and responsibility

14. The Cabinet system of government is founded on the principle of collective responsibility. It reflects the democratic principle that the Parliament expresses its confidence in the collective whole-of-government rather than in individual ministers. Similarly, the Governor-General, in acting on ministerial advice, needs to be confident that individual ministers represent official government policy. In all areas of their work, ministers represent and implement government policy; policy which has often been considered and set by the Cabinet.
15. In practice this means that a decision of the Cabinet is binding on all members of the government, regardless of whether they were present when the decision was taken or their personal views.
16. All members of the Ministry are understood to have participated in the decision-making process that underpins government policy and therefore share responsibility for those policies. Cabinet principles and conventions apply to the whole Ministry, not simply those ministers in Cabinet.

Cabinet solidarity

17. Cabinet collective responsibility is most obviously expressed in the principle of Cabinet solidarity. Cabinet ministers must publicly support all decisions made by 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.

Cabinet confidentiality

18. The principle of collective responsibility requires that ministers should be able to express their views frankly in Cabinet meetings, in the expectation that they can argue freely in private while maintaining a united front in public when decisions have been reached. This in turn requires that opinions expressed in meetings of the Cabinet and committees, including in related documents and any correspondence, are treated as confidential.
19. All attendees are responsible for ensuring that discussions at Cabinet and committee meetings remain confidential. Ministers, staff and officials must not disclose the nature or content of the discussions or the views of individual ministers or officials expressed at meetings.
20. The express approval of the Prime Minister or the Cabinet is required for disclosure of Cabinet decisions or deliberations.

21. Ministers, their staff and officials must also not disclose proposals likely to be considered at forthcoming meetings outside Cabinet-approved consultation procedures. The express approval of the Prime Minister or the Cabinet is required for disclosure of Cabinet decisions or deliberations. Cabinet confidentiality must be maintained over any documents which reveal proposals, options or positions to be put forward in Cabinet.

Ministerial responsibility for proposals

22. Submissions coming before the Cabinet and committees must have a sponsoring minister. This is usually the Cabinet minister with portfolio responsibility.
23. Sponsoring ministers are expected to take full responsibility for the proposals they bring forward, even where detailed development or drafting may have been done on their behalf by officials.
24. More detail on ministerial responsibility is under the *Sponsorship, co-sponsorship and development of submissions in consultation with other ministers* section.

The Cabinet program

Program of meetings

25. The Cabinet generally meets weekly in the Cabinet Room at Parliament House, Canberra. Meetings may be held at other times and places at the discretion of the Prime Minister.
26. Committees generally meet monthly with additional meetings called as needed. For example, the Expenditure Review Committee of the Cabinet (ERC) will meet more frequently during the annual Budget and Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) processes, and the National Security Committee of the Cabinet (NSC) may meet more frequently in response to emerging domestic or international events.

Acknowledgement of Country

27. All Cabinet and committee meetings commence with an Acknowledgement of Country.

Declaration of Private Interests

28. In addition to their obligations to declare conflicts of interest under [the Code of Conduct for Ministers](#), Ministers (including assistant ministers) attending Cabinet or Cabinet Committee meetings must, in relation to the matters under discussion, declare any private interests which will or could give rise to a conflict with their public duties. Generally, declarations should be made in all cases where an interest exists which could not be said to be shared with the rest of the community.
29. Officials attending committee meetings must declare any private interests they are aware of in relation to the matters under discussion.
30. Declarations of private interest from ministers and officials are minuted by the Cabinet notetakers.
31. The handling of any specific conflict of interest is a matter for the chair. Where a conflict of interest is declared, the chair may ask the minister to withdraw from discussion and decision-making on that item.

Chairing arrangements and attendance of ministers

32. Ministers must prioritise attendance at Cabinet and committee meetings, except when attending the Federal Executive Council. In-person attendance is expected unless the Cabinet Secretary has agreed to other arrangements.
33. If the Prime Minister is unable to attend Cabinet, the next most senior minister takes the chair. The same principle applies to committees if the chair or deputy chair are absent.
34. There is no quorum for Cabinet or committee meetings. The chair may decide whether a meeting proceeds, based on the importance of listed items, the ministers present and the prudence of taking decisions at that meeting.

35. When the Parliament is sitting, ministers should ensure that routine business does not prevent their attendance at Cabinet or committee meetings. Ministers should make appropriate 'pairing' arrangements and organise for their chamber duty to be performed by other ministers if the timing conflicts with scheduled Cabinet or committee meetings.
36. When ministers are overseas or on leave, the Prime Minister will nominate another minister to exercise their full authority. Where the nominated minister is a Cabinet minister, this authority extends to matters under Cabinet consideration. If an acting portfolio minister is not in the Cabinet, they do not represent the portfolio in the Cabinet or any committees unless expressly agreed by the Prime Minister.
37. Ministers should advise the Cabinet Secretary, in writing, of any planned absence from Cabinet or committee meetings. Where a minister is absent, they generally cannot delegate their Cabinet or committee attendance to another minister.

Co-options

38. The Prime Minister or the Cabinet Secretary may co-opt a non-Cabinet minister to a meeting for discussions relevant to their portfolio area. Co-opted ministers have access to relevant Cabinet papers and attend the meeting for the relevant item.
39. The Prime Minister or Cabinet Secretary may co-opt all members of the outer ministry or all members of the outer ministry and assistant ministers to a meeting of the Cabinet. Such meetings are referred to as (Full) Ministry Cabinet meetings, or (Full) Ministry meetings for short. Such meetings are a meeting of the Cabinet and subject to the matters set out in this Handbook.
40. All non-Cabinet ministers or assistant ministers who are co-opted to a Cabinet or Ministry Cabinet meeting are subject to the Cabinet conventions and principles set out in this Handbook.

Cabinet notetakers

41. Cabinet notetakers attend Cabinet and committee discussions. Only Cabinet notetakers and the Cabinet Secretary may take notes of Cabinet and committee discussions and decisions.
42. Cabinet notetakers, who are typically senior officials from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, draft the Cabinet minute for the Cabinet Secretary's approval.
43. The Prime Minister (or committee chair) may ask notetakers to leave meetings when ministers wish to conduct private discussions.
44. Cabinet notetakers record discussions in official Cabinet Notebooks, issued by Cabinet Division. Cabinet notebooks are protected from early release under the [Archives Act 1983](#) and may not be sought under the [Freedom of Information Act 1982](#).
45. Ministers may request that a comment or discussion not be recorded by a notetaker when it is not relevant to policy discussion.

Attendance of ministerial staff and officials

46. The Prime Minister, or the Cabinet Secretary, may approve attendance by senior officials and ministerial staff at Cabinet meetings. Attendance is strictly limited and must be approved in advance. Consideration of requests will be on a case-by-case basis.
47. The usual practice is that only Cabinet notetakers attend meetings of the Cabinet; ministerial staff and officials do not generally attend Cabinet meetings.
48. The Prime Minister or Cabinet Secretary may approve attendance at committee meetings by ministerial staff and officials to provide subject matter expertise, where needed.
49. Ministerial staff and officials attending Cabinet or committee meetings are subject to the same confidentiality and declaration of private interests disclosure requirements as ministers; attendees must also comply with the relevant codes of conduct applicable to their employment ([Ministerial Staff Code of Conduct](#) or [APS Code of Conduct](#)).

Cabinet business

Forward work program of Cabinet business

50. The Cabinet forward work program is a 12-month plan of upcoming Cabinet business. The forward work program is used to support delivery of the Government's agenda. A key input to the forward work program is a triannual call for proposals that:
 - a) Ensures visibility of future Cabinet business, which strengthens collaboration and supports efficient use of resources and early resolution of problems.
 - b) Enables ministers (supported by departments) to take a strategic and longer-term approach to Cabinet business and to consider the impact of proposals on other portfolios and sequencing between the Cabinet and committees.
 - c) Allows the government to align the Cabinet agenda with its strategic priorities, the Budget process, its legislative agenda and the Parliamentary calendar.
51. Through the call for proposals, which occurs three times a year, ministers are invited to seek authority for proposed items for consideration by the Cabinet over the following 12 months. To assist with forward planning, each proposal must clearly set out:
 - a) The purpose of the proposal and any anticipated recommendations.
 - b) Strategic merit of the proposal and how it aligns with the government's priorities.
 - c) Impacts of the proposal and proposed consultation approach.
 - d) The preferred timing for consideration of the item.
 - e) Critical date rationale to support the scheduling of the item.
 - f) Expected financial impacts of a proposal and an offset strategy.
52. The sponsoring minister must submit proposals to the Prime Minister for consideration. The minister's departmental secretary will be expected to prioritise resources to meet timelines proposed by their minister and the requirements of the Cabinet Handbook.
53. In addition to items given authority by the Prime Minister following the call for proposals, the forward work program will include other items with authority to come forward to the Cabinet, such as a late notice proposal agreed by the Prime Minister or an item directly tasked by the Prime Minister or decision of the Cabinet.
54. More detail on how matters receive authority is under *Late notice proposals* and *Authority to bring forward business* sections.

Late notice proposals

55. Alongside items from the Cabinet forward work program, the Cabinet and committees may consider matters that require an urgent decision, with the agreement of the Prime Minister. These are known as late notice proposals and are generally reserved for exceptional, unforeseen and unavoidable circumstances.

56. Requests for late notice proposals must:
- a) Be initiated by the sponsoring minister/s with the Prime Minister.
 - b) Outline the purpose of the submission, the exceptional, unforeseen or unavoidable circumstances or opportunity requiring the late notice proposal, the form of the proposal and any timing imperatives.

Meeting agendas

57. Cabinet Division prepares draft agendas for the Cabinet and committees for the Cabinet Secretary's consideration and the Prime Minister's approval.
58. Agendas are prepared using the Cabinet forward work program and any late notice proposals that have been agreed by the Prime Minister to come forward. Agendas list items for consideration, responsible ministers and co-opted ministers.
59. An item's inclusion on the agenda is dependent on factors such as its priority or urgency, whether it has been submitted in accordance with Cabinet timeframes and any other matters that the Cabinet needs to consider.
60. If a minister wishes to remove an agenda item, they must seek agreement from the Prime Minister or the Cabinet Secretary to do so. Ministers must outline the reasons for removal and propose a new date for Cabinet consideration, if required. Cabinet Division will provide a revised agenda to the Cabinet Secretary for consideration and the Prime Minister for approval.

Authority to bring forward business

61. Ministers must have authority to bring a matter to Cabinet or a committee. Authority is provided in the following ways:
- a) Previous decision of the Cabinet or a committee, recorded in a Cabinet minute, requiring a minister to bring an item back to Cabinet or a committee, referred to as a 'comeback'.
 - b) The Prime Minister's approval to include an item on the Cabinet forward work program for the following 12 months, with the Prime Minister's approval, following the triannual call for proposals.
 - c) The Prime Minister's approval of a late notice request from a minister to add an item to the Cabinet forward work program or a Cabinet agenda.
 - d) Direct tasking from the Prime Minister, or Cabinet Secretary acting on the Prime Minister's authority.
 - e) The Prime Minister, or Cabinet Secretary acting on the Prime Minister's authority, otherwise agreeing to list a matter on an agenda.
62. Ministers must ensure submissions are compliant with their authority, including scope and timing for consideration by the Cabinet or a committee.

63. The Prime Minister or Cabinet Secretary may remove submissions from the forward work program or an agenda if they are not compliant with their authority. Ministers must either revise their submission to comply with authority or seek revised authority to have the matter considered later.
64. If a minister wishes to vary or extinguish an authority in their portfolio, they must seek agreement from the Prime Minister to do so, including through the triannual bid process for the Cabinet forward work program.

Sponsorship, co-sponsorship, and development of submissions in consultation with other ministers

65. Where an item involves the policy interests of more than one minister or relies on another portfolio for implementation, it may be co-sponsored, including by non-Cabinet ministers. Ministers should agree a lead minister for jointly sponsored submissions. Co-sponsoring ministers must all agree recommendations and text in the submission.
66. Non-Cabinet ministers can bring forward submissions with the agreement of the senior portfolio minister. A Cabinet minister must co-sponsor the item, unless otherwise agreed by the Cabinet Secretary.
67. Where a number of a ministers have an interest in an item, it is generally preferred that responsibility be allocated to one or two key ministers, with other ministers thoroughly consulted during the preparation of the submission.
68. Sponsoring ministers must provide relevant ministers, including ministers who will be required to take action agreed in a recommendation, with an opportunity to contribute to the submission.
69. Sponsoring ministers should ensure careful and genuine consideration is given to the views of relevant ministers and resolve issues before submissions are brought forward to the Cabinet or a committee, wherever possible.

Issues for the Cabinet

70. While there are no hard and fast rules about issues that should be considered by the Cabinet and it is ultimately for the Prime Minister to decide the agenda, in general, items would normally require consideration by Cabinet if a proposal:
 - a) Relates to implementation and delivery of government's strategic priorities.
 - b) May lead to significant public comment or controversy.
 - c) Affects the government's financial position, or important financial commitments.
 - d) Impacts the portfolio interests of a number of Cabinet ministers.
 - e) Includes implementation challenges due to complexities, or timeline for delivery.
 - f) Affects state and territory government relations.
 - g) Includes international business, including international treaties and agreements.

- h) Deals with national emergencies, including decisions to take military action.
 - i) Affects Australia's constitutional arrangements.
 - j) Involves new or amended legislation or regulations.
 - k) Involves significant or controversial exercise of a minister's statutory power.
 - l) Responds to recommendations made in parliamentary committee reports.
 - m) Proposes reviews or public inquiries.
 - n) Recommends significant government appointments.
71. Where possible, ministers should combine related matters into one Submission to enable the Cabinet to focus on key strategic elements.
 72. Requests from ministers to commission any major policy reviews must be directed to the Prime Minister in the first instance.
 73. Ministers are only able to bring forward a proposal for the establishment of a new entity, board or advisory board (or similar) with the agreement of the Prime Minister and the Minister for Finance.

Statutory decisions

74. Ministers may consult the Cabinet on the exercise of individual statutory powers. This allows views from the Cabinet to be accounted for by the decision-maker and supports the Cabinet to defend the decision publicly and collectively. However, the Cabinet cannot make, or appear to make, a decision that the statute requires a minister or specified individual to make.

Settling matters by correspondence

75. Where all interested ministers agree that a proposal does not raise significant sensitivities following consultation, those ministers may request that the proposal be considered and agreed by correspondence to the Prime Minister. To settle an issue by correspondence, the lead minister must write to the Prime Minister seeking approval for the course of action agreed with relevant ministers. Affected ministers should be copied into the correspondence.
76. Where the Prime Minister does not agree to settle a matter by correspondence, the Prime Minister may refer the minister's correspondence to the Cabinet or a committee for consideration, or the minister will be advised to prepare a submission for consideration by the Cabinet or a committee.
77. In some circumstances, Cabinet will agree that final details of Cabinet proposals be settled by exchange of correspondence, usually with final approval from the Prime Minister in his or her role as the Chair of the Cabinet.
78. Correspondence to resolve Cabinet proposals is considered part of the Cabinet deliberation and should be handled accordingly.

Cabinet minutes

79. Cabinet minutes record the decisions of Cabinet and committees. These are prepared by the Cabinet notetakers and approved by the Cabinet Secretary.
80. As several committees are sub-committees of Cabinet, their decisions must be endorsed by Cabinet before they have effect. Cabinet may alter a committee decision or ask a committee to reconsider before endorsing.
81. The Prime Minister may endorse committee minutes as final if decisions need to be urgently implemented.
82. Where a minister has concerns about the accuracy of minutes, they should write to the Cabinet Secretary to seek an amendment. The Cabinet Secretary may issue an amended Cabinet minute, or the matter may need to be considered by the Cabinet or the responsible committee.
83. Where a Cabinet minute requires action across several portfolios, the sponsoring minister should initiate follow-up action, usually by correspondence, with relevant ministers.
84. Where a minor amendment is required to an authority provided by Cabinet, the sponsoring minister/s should write to the Prime Minister to seek a variation to the scope of the authority prior to implementation.

Circulation of minutes to departments

85. Cabinet Division is responsible for the circulation of Cabinet minutes to sponsoring and relevant ministers and departments.
86. Departmental secretaries must have procedures in place to ensure that Cabinet minutes are handled in accordance with the [Australian Government Protective Security Policy Framework \(PSPF\)](#). Minutes should be accessed, distributed and handled in accordance with the 'need-to-know' principle.
87. Departments with coordinating responsibilities affected by a Cabinet minute should, as appropriate, convey the effect of that Cabinet minute to relevant departments and authorities.
88. Where departments consider they have a genuine reason to access a Cabinet minute, they must make a written request to Cabinet Division.

Announcement of decisions

89. Cabinet decisions are announced as decisions of the government. Where a public announcement is intended, ministers should include specific recommendations in their submission seeking Cabinet's approval to their proposed approach.
90. Where Federal Executive Council approval of a Cabinet decision is required, in general the decision cannot be announced until approved by the Governor-General.

91. In certain circumstances, the Governor-General may approve an early announcement. Any requests for an early announcement should be submitted to the Federal Executive Council Secretariat. Further information on the Federal Executive Council is in the [Federal Executive Council Handbook](#).

Implementation and delivery of decisions

92. Sponsoring ministers, supported by their departments, are responsible for ensuring policy proposals can be implemented and delivered. Implementation plans should be agreed in consultation with impacted ministers as early as possible in the development of the proposal.
93. Ministers must consider implementation plans to ensure policies and major initiatives are robust, have adequately considered delivery risks and can be implemented to achieve the intended policy outcome. Sponsoring ministers must provide detail on implementation and delivery challenges and risks in the submission to assist the Cabinet to make an informed decision.

Forms of Cabinet business

94. Items may go to Cabinet in the following formats:
- a) Cabinet Submission.
 - b) Preliminary Discussion Submission.
 - c) Short Notice Submission.
 - d) Oral Update.
 - e) Other item.
 - f) Cabinet Memorandum.
95. Ministers must seek approval from the Prime Minister or Cabinet Secretary for the format of the item to go forward to the Cabinet. Cabinet Division can provide advice on formats, templates and drafting guidance.

Cabinet Submission

96. Cabinet Submissions are the standard format for Cabinet business and are used in most circumstances.
97. Submissions should:
- a) Define the issue to be addressed and what decision/s is being sought.
 - b) Identify how the proposal aligns with the government's strategic priorities and policy agenda.
 - c) Any time imperatives for decision-making.
 - d) Set out the benefits, disadvantages and risks associated with the proposed policy.
 - e) Clearly explain financial impacts, and intended offsets, where required.
 - f) Explain wider policy impacts, in particular the impact on gender equality as per gender responsive budget requirements, and impacts on First Nations peoples.
 - g) Explain implementation strategies, timelines, responsibilities, risks and mitigations.
 - h) Outline legislative implications.
98. Proposals with financial implications are brought forward during the annual Budget and MYEFO processes. Proposals must comply with the requirements of this Handbook, Cabinet Circulars and the Budget Process Operational Rules.

Preliminary Discussion Submission

99. Preliminary Discussion Submissions support early Cabinet discussions to scope policy issues or set direction before detailed policy work is undertaken.
100. Preliminary Discussion Submissions may be used to support initial consideration of complex or cross-cutting policy matters. This gives the Cabinet the opportunity to settle policy direction before detailed proposals are developed for consideration by the relevant committee, such as ERC for proposals with financial implications.
101. Preliminary Discussion Submissions are subject to the normal consultation process (Exposure Draft, Coordination Final and Final) and timelines, but do not require final advice on cost, risks or impacts.
102. These submissions should include:
 - a) A high-level outline of the proposal.
 - b) An option or options and issues to resolve.
 - c) Indicative costs (costs do not need to be agreed at this stage).
 - d) Preliminary advice, risks, impacts and implementation issues.
 - e) Known sensitivities, and communication and stakeholder engagement strategies.

Short Notice Submission

103. Short Notice Submissions use the same format as Cabinet Submissions and have the same information requirements. The key difference is that Short Notice Submissions proceed straight to Coordination Final stage, rather than being subject to the full consultation process that applies to Cabinet Submissions.
104. Given the truncated consultation process, Short Notice Submissions should only be used in limited circumstances for urgent and unforeseen matters, or for comebacks to ERC during the annual Budget and MYEFO processes.

Recommendations

105. Cabinet Submissions, Short Notice Submissions and Preliminary Discussion Submissions must include recommendations for ministers to consider.
106. Recommendations should be action orientated, capture what the Cabinet is being asked to agree and provide clear direction regarding next steps. They should be able to be read in isolation, with the underlying rationale set out in the body of the submission.
107. Recommendations should not be used to build the argument for a proposal; that should be done in the body of the submission. Use of 'noting' recommendations should be minimised.
108. Departments should contact Cabinet Division at any early stage for guidance on drafting recommendations.

Oral Update

- 109. Oral Updates are generally only used for time-sensitive matters, where items are 'for noting' and not seeking substantive decisions.
- 110. A minister may only circulate a document (other than a submission) to support an Oral Update if approved by the Prime Minister or Cabinet Secretary.

Other items

- 111. Ad-hoc documents requiring Cabinet consideration or visibility may come forward as an 'Other' agenda item.
- 112. A minister may only bring forward an 'Other' item if approved by the Prime Minister or Cabinet Secretary.

Cabinet Memorandum

- 113. Officials may submit a Cabinet Memorandum in response to requests from the Cabinet or a committee for supplementary information or the development of options.
- 114. Memoranda should provide conclusions and summaries of information presented, but no recommendations.
- 115. Departments drafting memoranda should ensure they have the required authority and conform to the same lodgement requirements as for Cabinet Submissions.

Attachments

- 116. Submissions and memoranda may include attachments to provide additional information on proposals or recommendations (for example, new policy proposals, or commissioned reports for the Cabinet's consideration).
- 117. Attachments are part of the Cabinet Submission and should be handled in the same way as the Cabinet Submission.

Proposals requiring legislative change

- 118. Cabinet Submissions must indicate where proposals require legislative change.
- 119. Submissions should focus on policy parameters and not seek the Cabinet's endorsement of the form or wording of proposed legislation, or attach drafting instructions or draft legislation, unless the authority specifically requires this. Cabinet must also not be asked to provide a specific drafting priority or to fix a date for introduction of legislation.
- 120. Where legal advice is necessary to inform proposals requiring legislation, ministers must seek advice from the [Australian Government Solicitor](#) or a provider permitted by the *Legal Services Directions 2017*. Further information on the legislative process can be found in the [Legislation Handbook](#) and on legal and legislation requirements for new policy proposals in the Budget Process Operational Rules.

Cabinet Submission process

Consultation

121. Consultation is fundamental to good policy development. It ensures that relevant factors are taken into account, implementation issues are identified and areas of dispute are resolved, where possible, in advance of Cabinet consideration. In doing so, consideration should be given to the need to balance the benefits of consultation with the need for confidentiality about Cabinet deliberations to uphold collective responsibility and Cabinet solidarity.
122. To the extent possible, ministers and departments should commence consultation in advance of a submission being formally lodged. Circulation of pre-Exposure Drafts is an effective way to obtain early feedback on proposals. Pre-Exposure Drafts can be circulated multiple times to resolve issues.
123. Sponsoring ministers must obtain agreement from relevant ministers on all factual matters, including costs, before putting an item to Cabinet.
124. Ministers must ensure that as part of mandatory consultation of the impact of proposals on priority policy areas be assessed before a submission is considered by Cabinet. Specific requirements include:
 - a) Early consultation with the Department of the Treasury or the Department of Finance, ideally prior to the Exposure Draft stage, where proposals have revenue or expenditure implications.
 - b) Departments are responsible for ensuring that Cabinet Submissions and policy proposals meet the [Australian Government Impact Analysis Framework](#) requirements. Departments should contact the Office of Impact Analysis if they require advice and assistance.
 - c) Early consultation with the Australian Government Solicitor to confirm legal impacts, ideally prior to the Exposure Draft stage, as required for legislative proposals and new policy proposals, particularly where they involve expenditure.
 - d) Early, genuine and meaningful consideration is given to the impact of proposals on First Nations people by:
 - i. Consulting with the [National Indigenous Australians Agency](#) and relevant communities and organisations.
 - ii. Ensuring new policy proposals embed and progress the government's commitments in the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#), including the priority reforms, socio-economic targets and cross-cutting policy areas.

- e) Ministers are responsible for ensuring that Cabinet Submissions and policy proposals meet gender responsive budgeting requirements outlined in [Including Gender: An APS Guide to Gender Analysis and Gender Impact Assessment](#) to contribute to achieving gender equality in line with [Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality](#).
125. The Cabinet Secretary may reject Cabinet items that have not undertaken the required consultation and items not accompanied by relevant impact statements, expense or revenue costings.

Mandatory consultation stages and lodgement deadlines

126. Cabinet consultation processes and timelines balance the need for informed and robust Cabinet decisions with the dynamics of the modern governing environment.
127. Cabinet Submissions and Preliminary Discussion Submissions processes include 2 mandatory consultation stages:
- a) Exposure Draft.
 - b) Coordination Final.
128. Exposure Drafts of submissions must be released for consultation a minimum of 10 business days before the submission is scheduled to be considered by the Cabinet or a committee and must generally be available for consultation for at least 5 business days.
129. Coordination Finals of submissions must be released for coordination comments 5 business days before the submission is scheduled to be considered by the Cabinet or a Committee.
130. Cabinet Division will release the final version of submissions to ministers and departments 3 business days before the scheduled Cabinet or committee meeting.
131. Cabinet Division will seek advice from sponsoring departments about the readiness of items 4 weeks before the relevant Cabinet or Committee meeting.
132. If Cabinet Division considers that an item is unlikely to meet timelines, that advice will be provided to the Cabinet Secretary. The sponsoring minister/s may also be required to write to the Cabinet Secretary to explain why the item will be late and why it should remain on the agenda for the relevant meeting.
133. The Cabinet Secretary will only approve late lodgement in exceptional circumstances.

Exposure Drafts

134. Circulation of an Exposure Draft of a submission is the first mandatory consultation phase. Comments and feedback from other departments are provided to the sponsoring minister and their department for consideration. These comments do not go to Cabinet.
135. Ministers are encouraged to seek to address Exposure Draft comments to resolve areas of potential disagreement ahead of consideration by the Cabinet where possible.

136. Exposure Draft consultation should include:
- a) Relevant ministers and departments, including central agencies for comment on:
 - i. The substantive policy proposal.
 - ii. Implementation and delivery planning to support successful implementation and delivery.
 - iii. Analysis of impacts, risks and challenges associated with proposals.
 - iv. Cabinet Division, to get feedback on compliance with mandatory requirements for Cabinet documents.
137. Mandatory impact statements should be completed before the Exposure Draft phase. Exposure Drafts should include draft financial information, to support consideration by the Department of the Treasury and the Department of Finance.
138. While departments support their ministers in drafting submissions, submissions are brought forward by ministers and it is essential that ministers have adequate time to review and provide direction on a draft submission.
139. Departments should provide draft submissions to ministers well before the due date for an Exposure Draft. Departments may not circulate Exposure Drafts without approval from the sponsoring minister/s.
140. Subject to ministerial approval, Exposure Drafts can be circulated well in advance of the 10-day deadline, including where an item has not been allocated to a specific meeting date. Multiple Exposure Drafts can also be circulated to refine submissions and reach agreement.

Coordination Finals

141. Once a submission has been released at the Coordination Final stage, the item is under the control of Cabinet Division.
142. Consulted departments provide coordination comments, which is impartial advice that is not cleared by ministers or their staff. This step maintains the independence of the Australian Public Service in providing impartial advice directly to the Cabinet.
143. Submissions are generally not amended at the Coordination Final stage. However, coordination comments from consulted agencies are added to a specific section in the Final Submission to enable ministers to consider these views as part of their deliberations.
144. Coordination comments should be succinct (no longer than half a page), focusing only on the key issues that ministers may wish to consider. Coordination comments must include the position title of the clearing officer in the relevant department.
145. Departments must provide their Coordination Final comments promptly to ensure Final Submissions can be lodged 3 working days before the relevant Cabinet or committee meeting. Cabinet Division may enter a nil comment where a department fails to lodge their coordination comments on time.

Finals

146. Cabinet Division is required to release the Final version of a submission to ministers 3 working days before a Cabinet or committee meeting.
147. Where all coordination comments are supportive, Cabinet Division will release the submission as Final on behalf of the Cabinet Secretary.
148. Where some or all coordination comments indicate concerns or do not support the proposal, Cabinet Division will seek approval from sponsoring minister/s and the Cabinet Secretary to release a submission as Final.

Amending and withdrawing Cabinet documents

149. Sponsoring ministers and departments are responsible for making changes to Cabinet items at the pre-Exposure Draft and Exposure Draft stages.
150. Once a submission has been released at the Coordination Final stage, the item is under the control of Cabinet Division. Only minor editorial amendments can be made at this stage.
151. The Cabinet Secretary may remove recommendations that do not have authority or are non-compliant with the authority or Cabinet requirements.
152. The Cabinet Secretary may remove new policy proposals from Cabinet Submissions that are not accompanied by offsets, unless previously approved by the Prime Minister.
153. It is generally expected that significant changes to a submission are to be settled before it is released for coordination comments.
154. However, occasionally submissions may require significant changes after release for coordination comments. Where this happens, the Submission may be deferred to a later Cabinet meeting to allow a new Coordination Final to be lodged.
155. If circumstances require that the submission goes forward as planned, the sponsoring minister/s may seek approval from the Cabinet Secretary to release a Coordination Final Corrigendum.
156. A Coordination Final Corrigendum enables the sponsoring minister/s and their departments to amend the submission. It is then released to relevant departments to provide updated coordination comments (if necessary). These comments will be included in the Final Submission, consistent with the process in paragraph 143.

Appointments

157. Ministers must seek approval from the Prime Minister of significant appointments in their portfolio before they are finalised.
158. Ministers must have regard to the nature or function of a role, its impact on government policy, level of remuneration, public profile, or any sensitivities attributed to the nominee or position in determining whether an appointment should be submitted to the Prime Minister. Previous approval arrangements for the position can be used as a guide.
159. Additional guidance may be issued from time to time regarding significant appointments. As a general matter, significant appointments include:
 - a) Full-time or part-time appointments to significant boards, commissions or statutory offices, including any board or statutory offices relating to primary bodies (non-corporate Commonwealth entities, corporate Commonwealth entities and Commonwealth companies).
 - b) Appointments to significant non-statutory tribunals, advisory bodies and commissions of inquiry.
 - c) Full-time chief executive officer (CEO) and managing director (MD) positions, including where the board selects the CEO/MD.
 - d) Acting appointments in the above categories of more than 3 months. Initial acting appointments of up to 3 months can be made by the minister, but extensions require the Prime Minister's approval.

Appointment process and timeframes

160. Ministers must submit nominations for significant appointments to the Prime Minister no later than 20 working days before a decision is required.
 - a) Nominations that meet this timeframe should be submitted to the Prime Minister via a completed Significant Appointments form along with a Private Interests Declaration, due diligence checklist, curriculum vitae and membership list for the relevant board.
 - b) Once a signed Significant Appointments form is received from the minister, the Prime Minister will decide whether to progress the appointment by correspondence or refer the nomination to the Cabinet for consideration. If the Prime Minister refers the nomination to the Cabinet, the nomination will generally be scheduled for the first Cabinet meeting following the expiry of the 20-working day period.
 - c) Appointment nominations lodged on time do not require separate correspondence to the Prime Minister in addition to the Significant Appointments form and accompanying documents.

161. Requests for the Prime Minister's urgent consideration (within 20 working days) will only be considered in exceptional circumstances. Ministers requesting urgent approval of appointments must write to the Prime Minister outlining the:
- a) Urgent and unavoidable circumstances requiring consideration within the 20-working day period.
 - b) Reasons why earlier submission of the nomination was not possible.
 - c) Reasons why acting or other interim arrangements cannot be put in place to accommodate the 20-working day period.
162. For appointments made by the Governor-General, ministers should take into account timeframes for lodgement of documents for the Federal Executive Council, which are in addition to the 20-working day period.
163. To avoid pre-empting any decisions, ministers and departments must only approach potential appointees to ascertain:
- a) Their willingness to be put forward for consideration along with other candidates.
 - b) Whether there would be any conflict of interest in accordance with the government's requirements, including to request declarations of private interests.
164. Ministers are responsible for appointments within their portfolios at all times, including for adherence to relevant legislation and the [Australian Government Appointments Framework](#) (Appointments Framework) where applicable. Ministers are also responsible for ensuring:
- a) gender, diversity and geographic balance in the organisations' membership in line with the [Equal Employment Opportunity \(Commonwealth Authorities\) Act 1987](#) and the government's [Gender Balance on Australian Government Boards Target](#).
 - b) their departments undertake appropriate due diligence prior to recommending significant appointments to the Prime Minister.
165. Consistent with the Appointments Framework, ministers are required to provide a regular (at least six monthly) forward schedule of upcoming known significant appointments to the Prime Minister. Cabinet Division will coordinate this process in the middle and at the end of each calendar year.

Appointments of relatives

166. Ministers must absent themselves from all discussions about the appointment of a close relative or partner of the minister, in order to avoid any real or perceived conflicts of interest. Ministers must also declare other significant relationships as needed. Cabinet minutes will record ministers who recuse themselves from discussions.

Announcement and finalisation

167. Public announcements can generally only be made once the appointment has been approved by the Governor-General, the Prime Minister or the Cabinet, as required.
168. Following the formal appointment process, ministers and their departments are responsible for finalising appointments and ensuring the [Australian Government's Organisation Register](#) is updated.

Protection and security of Cabinet documents

169. The security and confidentiality of all Cabinet documents and information, including draft Cabinet documents, is critical to the integrity of the Cabinet system and the conventions of Cabinet confidentiality and collective responsibility.
170. All Cabinet documents carry a security classification of PROTECTED CABINET or higher and must be created, handled and stored in line with the requirements of the Cabinet Handbook, the PSPF and any other applicable legislation, policies and procedures. These requirements apply to ministers, their staff and officials.

Special nature of Cabinet documents and information

171. Cabinet documents are documents prepared for submission to Cabinet, or which deal with Cabinet meetings, including but not limited to:
 - a) Cabinet Submissions, memoranda, and Preliminary Discussion Submissions (Pre-Exposure Drafts, Exposure Drafts, Coordination Final, Final versions and corrigenda versions of these) as well as their attachments.
 - b) Presentations made in the Cabinet room.
 - c) Agendas for Cabinet meetings.
 - d) Official records and minutes of the decisions of Cabinet and its committees.
 - e) Central agency briefs submitted to accompany Cabinet submissions (e.g. Green Briefs on financial implications).
 - f) Drafts of Cabinet Submissions, memoranda, Preliminary Discussion Submissions and records of the Cabinet or committee.
 - g) Cabinet notebooks.
172. Information that reveals the deliberations or decisions of the Cabinet, including proposals or positions to be advanced in future Cabinet meetings, may appear in a range of other documents, including briefings, emails and written correspondence, such as correspondence seeking authority to bring forward a matter for consideration by the Cabinet. Such documents must be handled confidentially and in line with security procedures.
173. Cabinet documents must not be provided to sources external to government. However, it may be necessary to consult with external sources about matters the subject of Cabinet consideration to ensure Cabinet can make informed decisions.

Custody of Cabinet documents

174. A new series of Cabinet records is established for each government.
175. Cabinet documents are the property of the Commonwealth, held in the care and control of the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and confidential to the government that created them. They are issued to ministers and departments on a need-to-know basis. They are not the property of the sponsoring minister or department.
176. Access to a former government's Cabinet documents by succeeding governments is not granted without the approval of the current parliamentary leader of the appropriate political party.
177. Ministers and their staff should not seek from departments the Cabinet documents of the previous government, or the advice provided to it.
178. Cabinet records and Cabinet notebooks are accessible to the public when they enter the open access period under the Archives Act. The open access period is 20 years for Cabinet records and 30 years for Cabinet notebooks.
179. Under the Archives Act, former ministers and certain other former office holders may request access to Cabinet documents with which they dealt personally while in office that are not yet in the open access period.

Secure handling of Cabinet documents

180. Cabinet documents must be circulated via the CabNet+ system. CabNet+ maintains an auditable record of access to Cabinet documents.
181. Cabinet documents must not be copied. This includes no transcribing or copying of text of Cabinet documents (particularly minutes or the content of Cabinet notebooks) into departmental IT systems.
182. Circulation of Cabinet documents must be restricted to those officials who have a role in contributing to the issues in the document and who hold an appropriate security clearance.
183. These rules should be read together with periodic guidance issued by Cabinet Division via Cabinet Circulars on secure handling of Cabinet documents.

Unauthorised disclosure of Cabinet documents

184. Persons who access, disclose or discuss Cabinet material, including draft Cabinet documents, without authorisation undermine Cabinet confidentiality and collective ministerial responsibility.
185. Unauthorised or incorrect access to or release of Cabinet information may be a breach of the PSPF or the [Public Service Act 1999](#), and may constitute a criminal offence under the [Criminal Code Act 1995](#) or other Commonwealth legislation.

186. Departments and ministers' offices must take appropriate steps to contain the unauthorised access or disclosure of Cabinet information. Ministers' offices and departments must also notify affected stakeholders, review arrangements for securing and handling Cabinet information, and report the suspected Cabinet information security breach and remedial steps taken to Cabinet Division.

Freedom of information laws and disclosure of Cabinet documents

187. The sensitivity and confidentiality of Cabinet documents is recognised in section 34 of the Freedom of Information Act, which provides an exemption from disclosure for Cabinet documents and information.
188. Cabinet confidentiality is also a well-established ground to make a public interest immunity claim where disclosure of Cabinet documents has been sought in legal proceedings or in the Parliament.
189. Where access to Cabinet material has been requested under the Freedom of Information Act or production is otherwise sought, departments should consult with Cabinet Division as the custodian of the official records of Cabinet and managers of Cabinet process.

Caretaker conventions

190. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet releases guidance on Caretaker Conventions ahead of each caretaker period of government. This is the primary document that guides activity during the caretaker period.
191. The Cabinet and committees may meet in the caretaker period, where necessary, for the continuance of the normal business of government. Meetings are scheduled by exception only to consider limited or urgent matters.

Annex A – Cabinet committees

Expenditure Review Committee (ERC)

ERC considers new expenditure and revenue proposals during and between Budget updates, informed by gender analysis in line with gender responsive budgeting requirements. Decisions of the ERC require the endorsement of the Cabinet.

Members:

- The Hon Anthony Albanese MP (Chair)
- The Hon Dr Jim Chalmers MP (Deputy Chair)
- Senator the Hon Penny Wong
- Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher
- The Hon Richard Marles MP
- The Hon Mark Butler MP
- The Hon Catherine King MP
- The Hon Amanda Rishworth MP
- The Hon Dr Daniel Mulino MP

Government Communications Committee (GCC)

GCC provides oversight and coordination of government advertising campaigns. Decisions of the GCC require the endorsement of the Cabinet.

Members:

- Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher (Chair)
- Senator the Hon Don Farrell
- The Hon Jason Clare MP (Deputy Chair)
- Senator the Hon Murray Watt
- The Hon Patrick Gorman MP

National Security Committee (NSC)

NSC considers the highest-priority, highest-risk and most strategic national security matters of the day. Decisions of the NSC do not require the endorsement of the Cabinet.

Members:

- The Hon Anthony Albanese MP (Chair)
- The Hon Richard Marles MP (Deputy Chair)
- Senator the Hon Penny Wong
- The Hon Dr Jim Chalmers MP
- Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher
- The Hon Tony Burke MP

- The Hon Chris Bowen MP
- The Hon Michelle Rowland MP
- The Hon Pat Conroy MP

Parliamentary Business Committee (PBC)

PBC considers priorities for the government's legislation program. Decisions of the PBC do not require the endorsement of the Cabinet.

Members:

- The Hon Tony Burke MP (Chair)
- Senator the Hon Penny Wong (Deputy Chair)
- Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher
- The Hon Mark Butler MP
- The Hon Michelle Rowland MP
- The Hon Patrick Gorman MP

Priority and Delivery Committee (PDC)

PDC provides regular oversight of the delivery of key government policies and priorities. Decisions of the PDC require the endorsement of the Cabinet.

Members:

- The Hon Anthony Albanese MP (Chair)
- The Hon Dr Jim Chalmers MP
- Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher

National Security Investment Subcommittee (NSIS)

NSIS considers lower-risk, operational and technical national security matters which are primarily financial in nature, however may also include policy considerations. The NSIS is a subcommittee of the NSC. Decisions of the NSIS require the endorsement of the NSC.

Members:

- Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher (Chair)
- The Hon Richard Marles MP (Deputy Chair)
- The Hon Tony Burke MP
- The Hon Pat Conroy MP

Annex B – Cabinet Submission lodgement timelines and lifecycle

Working days from meeting	Stage	Sponsoring ministers supported by department	Consulted ministers and departments
∞ days	Authority received	The Prime Minister provides authority to bring an item forward through one of the following mechanisms: • Previous decision of the Cabinet or a committee, recorded in a Cabinet minute, requiring a minister to bring an item back to Cabinet or a committee, referred to as a 'comeback' • The Prime Minister's approval to include an item on the Cabinet forward work program for the following 12 months, with the Prime Minister's approval, following the triannual call for proposals • The Prime Minister's approval of a late notice request from a minister to add an item to the Cabinet forward work program or a Cabinet agenda • Direct tasking from the Prime Minister, or Cabinet Secretary acting on the Prime Minister's authority • The Prime Minister, or Cabinet Secretary acting on the Prime Minister's authority, otherwise agreeing to list a matter on an agenda.	-
∞ days	Draft Submission	Confirm mandatory impacts against relevant guidance or with agencies.	• Departments of the Treasury and Finance provide advice and agreement to any cost or revenue impacts • National Indigenous Australians Agency to confirm First Nations impact requirements • Conduct initial gender analysis and assess requirement for Gender Impact Assessment in line with criteria set out in Including Gender: An APS Guide to Gender Analysis and Gender Impact Analysis. • Office of Impact Analysis, if advice and assistance is required about Australian Government Impact Analysis Framework requirements • Australian Government Solicitor to confirm legislative impacts.

Working days from meeting	Stage	Sponsoring ministers supported by department	Consulted ministers and departments
∞ days	Pre-Exposure Draft released	There is no limit on the number of pre-Exposure Drafts that are released to support consultation.	Consulted agencies provide early comment on a draft version.
10 days	Exposure Draft released	- Considers and incorporates comments - Ministerial approval for Coordination Final version.	Consulted agencies provide substantive comments on any errors, impacts, risks and challenges of the proposal(s).
5 days	Coordination Final released	- Cabinet Division complete a compliance check - Department prepares ministerial briefing.	Consulted agencies provide formal comments.
3 days	Final released	- Cabinet Division seeks sponsoring minister(s') agreement to release Final. - Cabinet Division circulates Final to ministers: - The Final includes coordination comments received from departments.	-
0	Cabinet meeting	-	-
+2 days	Cabinet Minute released	Department/s implement the decision/s.	-