



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade**

4 May 2021

Ms Lyn Beverly  
Committee Secretary  
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Beverly

I am writing to correct evidence given to Senator Wong during the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Senate Estimates hearing on Thursday 25 March 2021 in relation to the following dates (refer to Hansard page 6):

- The Prime Minister announcement after National Cabinet on the agreement to ramp up the use of Howard Springs occurred on 5 March, not 8 March; and
- Australia's borders closed on 20 March, not 13 March.

Yours sincerely

Ms Lynette Wood  
First Assistant Secretary  
Consular and Crisis Management Division

**Senator WONG:** And eight are planned between now and 17 April?

**Ms Wood:** That's correct.

**Senator WONG:** And how many thereafter, if any?

**Ms Adamson:** We want to be very clear about a point made earlier. For the avoidance of all doubt, when you asked about registered Australians and you asked about the difference between Australian citizens and permanent residents, I want to be clear that those numbers do include permanent residents, including when they are not necessarily family members of a citizen. Do you see what I mean? I want to be clear about that.

**Senator WONG:** I didn't understand Ms Wood.

**Ms Adamson:** That's what Ms Wood thought she was saying. We just clarified. I want to be absolutely clear.

**Senator WONG:** I appreciate that. Can you tell me the proportions? Do we have that?

**Ms Wood:** We can get back to you during the course of the morning.

**Senator WONG:** We can have that on notice. It's not urgent. Can we go back to the repatriation flights? Is that okay?

**Ms Wood:** Yes.

**Senator WONG:** There are eight planned between now and 17 April, so they're obviously slightly delayed. Are there any planned thereafter?

**Ms Wood:** Yes, Senator. As the Prime Minister announced after national cabinet on 5 March, an arrangement has been established between the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory to ramp up the use of Howard Springs. At the moment, on average, on a rolling basis every 16 to 18 days, it has a capacity of around 850, and that's going to be progressively ramped up so it has a capacity in coming months of around 2,000.

**Senator WONG:** I'm not criticising you, Ms Wood, but there's been announcement after announcement where the words have been pretty fuzzy. When you say—what was the phrase—

**Ms Wood:** A rolling basis.

**Senator WONG:** Yes—over the next few months—I don't know how many announcements this government has made. The ministerial taskforce is supposed to report to the Prime Minister—that was last year—about how to get people home. We've had announcement after announcement. Do you have a plan as to the ramp-up for Howard Springs?

**Ms Wood:** It's in progress, Senator.

**Senator WONG:** What does that mean? Are you able to tell me what the targets are for each month in terms of the increasing number of places available there?

**Ms Wood:** Senator, I can't give you specific information.

**Senator WONG:** No.

**Ms Wood:** May I explain why?

**Senator WONG:** Sure.

**Ms Wood:** The reason is that the arrangement between the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory is now shifting to a slightly different footing to what it currently is. Ensuring that we have the wrap-around for the flights which are coming in does take a little bit of time to establish, but the plan is underway. We have a tentative schedule of flights, a tentative schedule of where some of the first ones will come from, but to land that—I'm not obfuscating on this, but, to make sure that we match the capacity of flights coming in with the availability of beds and the support services for the quarantine, we're in the process of establishing that at the moment.

**Senator WONG:** When were the borders closed?

**Ms Wood:** On 13 March last year.

**Senator WONG:** Last year. What's the date today?

**Ms Wood:** It's 25 March.

**Senator WONG:** So, it's over a year later and we still don't have a clear plan on this.

**Senator Payne:** That's not correct.

**Senator WONG:** Well, it is.

**Senator Payne:** No, it's not, Senator.