

Hotel quarantine inquiry seeks explanation from Brett Sutton after emails contradict his evidence on use of private security firms

By [Elias Clure](#)

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Brett Sutton has been asked to provide an affidavit to the inquiry. (AAP: James Ross)

Victoria's COVID-19 Hotel Quarantine Inquiry has asked Chief Health Officer Brett Sutton to provide another statement to the board after a series of emails contradicted his evidence.

In an extraordinary sitting this afternoon, counsel assisting Tony Neal QC told the chair of the probe that it had received a series of emails and was seeking more documents from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) which better indicated when Professor Sutton knew of the decision to use private security at the hotels.

Professor Sutton claimed in evidence at the inquiry that he was not aware of private security's involvement in the program until he read it in "media reports" in May.

But in a chain of emails tendered to the inquiry today, senior public health bureaucrat Braeden Hogan told Professor Sutton of private security's use on March 27.

"Private security has been contracted to provide security at the hotels with escalation agreements to vic pol (Victoria Police) as needed, " he wrote to Professor Sutton and several other senior health and government officials.

Professor Sutton responded: "Thanks so much Braeden."

Mr Neal said the emails were relevant as they pointed "to the time at which Professor Sutton had knowledge of private security in the hotel program," but stated he was not implying that the inquiry had been misled.

"[There is] no basis for inferring or speculating that any view has been formed about the veracity or otherwise," he said.

DHHS told the inquiry it did not offer up the documents earlier because it did not consider them relevant and was working to a tight timeframe.

The chair of the board of inquiry, Jennifer Coate, said the revelations could mean the reporting date of November 6 would need to be pushed back.

"Most unfortunately these new developments may unsettle the due date of the report, but I am unable to be clear about that at this stage," she said.

"If the report date is affected and needs to be extended I will advise the Premier and seek any necessary extension."

AFP boss tells Senate inquiry he believed police and soldiers would be used in program

Today, Australian Federal Police Commissioner Reece Kershaw told a Senate inquiry he expected the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and police to guard Victoria's quarantine hotels.

Commissioner Kershaw also revealed that a commissioners' forum involving police chiefs from across Australia had agreed that police and the ADF would be guarding the hotels and that Graham Ashton, who was the head of Victoria Police at the time, did not raise any objections.

Commissioner Kershaw was also quizzed on a series of key messages he received from Mr Ashton on March 27, the day the hotel quarantine program was announced.

The Victorian police chief messaged his federal counterpart "private security will be used" and then later sent the text "I think that's the deal set up by our DPC (Department of Premier and Cabinet)".

Commissioner Kershaw told Victorian senator Sarah Henderson he responded "that's new" to the messages because he had thought police and the ADF were going to be used.

"My view was that the agreed or the suggested way forward would be the use of police and ADF," he said.

"That was something that the police commissioners' forum had discussed prior to this."

Commissioner Kershaw could not remember when the meeting took place.

He added that he did not know who made the ill-fated decision to use private security in Victoria and did not have immediate concerns about the failed model.

"It's a flexible approach and it was their decision, not mine ... I moved on to our priorities," he said.