

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

22 May 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000245

Question Subject: AHPPC first briefing

Type of Question: Written

Senator: Katy Gallagher

Question:

On what date/s did the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee first brief (a) the Minister for Health (b) the Cabinet and/or (c) the National Cabinet on COVID-19.

Answer:

The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) is a subcommittee of National Cabinet.

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

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

22 May 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000256

Question Subject: Additional information on formal advice

Type of Question: Written

Senator: Rex Patrick

Question:

In answer to a Question on Notice the Minister for Health has advised that the CMO and Health Department submitted "formal advice" to the Minister for Health on 20 January 2020 concerning actions taken to date by the Department. The Minister states that as a consequence of that advice, among other things, "the CMO met with the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to discuss the US Border response.

- A. On what date did the CMO first confer with the US CDC? What was the nature of that discussion?
- B. What discussions did the CMO have with Chinese health officials?
- C. On what date did any discussions take place between the CMO and Chinese authorities? What was the substance of any such exchanges?

Answer:

- A. The Chief Medical Officer (CMO) attended a teleconference on Tuesday 21 January 2020 with the United States of America Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDC). This meeting was held to discuss the nature of and rationale for airport screening in the United States of America.
- B. The CMO has not had direct discussions with Chinese health officials.
- C. The CMO has not had direct discussions with Chinese authorities.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

22 May 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000257

Question Subject: Border Security on Wuhan flights

Type of Question: Written

Senator: Rex Patrick

Question:

On 21 January 2020 the CMO announced each of the three direct flights a week from Wuhan to Sydney would be met by border security, biosecurity staff and New South Wales Health. (The first flight was met on 23 January 2020.)

A. What consideration given at this time, 21 January, to the self-quarantine and entry restrictions that were subsequently imposed on travellers from China on 1 February, eleven days later?

B. To what extent was Health initially swayed WHO advice against imposing border restrictions?

Answer:

- A) The CMO announced on 21 January 2020 that each of the three flights from Wuhan would be met by the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE) biosecurity officers and NSW Health healthcare professionals. The measures implemented, which included the provision of information sheets to passengers and screening by healthcare professionals, were considered proportionate to the risk, based on the epidemiological information available at that point.
- B) The Australian Government values the expertise of the World Health Organization (WHO) and has implemented a public health response consistent with guidance developed by the WHO, as outlined in the *International Health Regulations 2005*.

The Australian Government actively relies on infectious disease information provided by WHO member countries through reporting systems implemented under the International Health Regulations. These systems were a main source of information regarding the growing COVID-19 outbreak in early 2020 within Wuhan, China.

The WHO recommendation against restrictions to international travel and trade was given due regard, however the Australian Government (based on the recommendation of AHPPC) deemed travel restrictions as of 1 February 2020 appropriate. This was based on the risk of imported cases to Australia and consideration of the travel and trade levels shared with mainland China. Under the International Health Regulations, State Parties are not precluded from implementing measures which achieve a greater level of protection than WHO recommendations.