

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Topic: National COVID-19 Coordination Commission funding and spending

Senator: Patrick

Question reference number: 0094

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 19 June 2020

Number of pages: 1

Question:

1. Under what authority and budget is the NCCC funded?
2. What is the total amount allocated so far to the NCCC?
3. What is the total amount spend so far for the NCCC?
4. What are each of the Commissioners and taskforce members being paid for their services?

Answer:

1. The Prime Minister, the Hon Scott Morrison MP, announced the establishment of the National COVID-19 Coordination Commission (NCCC) on 25 March 2020. The NCCC is currently being funded within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (the Department)'s existing appropriation.
2. The Department allocated a budget of \$3.0 million to the NCCC for the 2019-20 financial year.
3. As at 31 August 2020, total expenditure for the NCCC (now known as the National COVID-19 Commission Advisory Board) is \$4.133m.
4. Please refer to Questions on Notice 0016 and 0047.

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Topic: National COVID-19 Coordination Commission Chief Executive Officer

Senator: Patrick

Question reference number: 0095

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 19 June 2020

Number of pages: 2

Question:

1. At the Committee hearing, the CEO Mr Peter Harriss said he “volunteered” for the role. Austender (CN3679406) shows a contract for \$137,550.00 awarded to Harrisolutions Pty Ltd for “Labour Hire Services. This arrangement has been established by the National Covid-19 Coordination Commission.” If so, what is the scope of work associated with the contract?
2. Who selected Peter Harriss as CEO?
3. Who asked him whether he would take the role, and on what date?
4. Were other candidates considered? By who?
5. Why was this role not filled from within the APS?
6. Please provide the assessment against procurement guidelines for this contract.
7. Please provide a copy of the contract.
8. Another Austender contract notice CN3681646 shows \$541,750 has been awarded to Reed, James Alan T/A Resolve Strategic for “Social Policy Research” with limited tender exemption listed as “App A: 6. Research and development services (but not inputs).”
 - a. What is this contract for?
 - b. Who selected James Reed and Resolve Strategic?
 - c. Please provide a copy of the contract.

Answer:

The scope of the work as detailed in the contract for services is as follows;

The Supplier’s specified personnel is to undertake all tasks and duties required to perform the role of Chief Executive Officer of the National COVID-19 Coordination Commission.

The Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (the Department), Mr Phil Gaetjens, considered options both internal and external to the APS and determined that Mr Peter Harris was best qualified to carry out this role. Mr Gaetjens approached Mr Harris on 2 April 2020.

This procurement was assessed against the Department's procurement guidelines including the consideration of value and risk. Exemption 14 of Appendix A of the Commonwealth Procurement Rules was exercised.

Reed, James Alan T/A Resolve Strategic was contracted to conduct market research with the community and business to inform whole of government communications on social and community responses to the COVID-19 pandemic – particularly during the period of social restrictions.

Resolve Strategic was selected by the Department following an assessment process managed by the Department in line with Government Procurement guidelines.

A copy of the contract, with relevant redactions, has been released under FOI No 2020/102.

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Topic: National Coordination Mechanism

Senator: Patrick

Question reference number: 0098

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 19 June 2020

Number of pages: 3

Question:

1. When announcing the NCCC, Prime Minister stated the National Coordination Mechanism (NCM) will report to the NCCC. The NCM is listed on the Home Affairs website but does not mention the NCCC, while the NCCC website does not mention the NCM.

- a. What is the NCM?
- b. What relation does the NCM have with PMC?
- c. What relation does the NCM have with the National Cabinet?
- d. Does the NCM report to the NCCC?
 - i. What does it report?
- e. Does the NCCC give directions to the NCM?
 - i. If not, what is the relationship?
 - ii. If so, what directions has it given?

2. It has been reported (<https://www.afr.com/policy/economy/nev-power-s-plan-to-reboot-australian-manufacturing-20200402-p54gf2>) that

*“Mr Power said the commission was operating in a decentralised way, with each commissioner working autonomously
[Now quoting Mr Power,] “People go to them with issues and opportunities and those commissioners are dealing with them. We are not a centralised process and the reason for that is we want things to happen quickly and decisions to be made with the best people who are capable of making those decisions. We hook up regularly, but it’s not about being managed from the centre”*

- a. Please provide the dates, locations or mode of communication, and minutes of these ‘regular hook ups’.

3. If they are different to the above, provide the dates, locations or mode of communication, and minutes of any formal meetings of the NCCC executive board.

4. Given Commissioners are working 'autonomously', what is the position description of the CEO?
5. Does the CEO have visibility of the tasks and functions of all Commissioners and taskforces?

Answer:

1.
 - a. The National Coordination Mechanism (NCM), established on 5 March 2020, operates through the Department of Home Affairs and coordinates the *non-health* elements of managing the COVID-19 crisis across state and territory jurisdictions and industry. The NCM brings a consistent national approach to providing essential services across a range of critical sectors, such as energy, resources, emergency services, essential services and supply chains.
 - b. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) attends all meetings of the NCM in an observer capacity.
 - c. The NCM is a subcommittee of National Cabinet, providing advice and support to inform the deliberations of National Cabinet by bringing together the most up-to-date technical and policy advice from across the public services of each jurisdiction.
 - d. The Commission has regularly engaged with the NCM, based in the Department of Home Affairs, particularly in the Commission's first phase of its work on 'troubleshooting'. To inform its advice to Government, the Commission continues to receive regular reporting from the NCM as it coordinates the cross-jurisdictional response to non-health aspects of the pandemic.
 - e. No, the Commission does not give directions to the NCM. In the first phase of its work, the Commission worked collaboratively with the NCM to manage and respond to the many offers of assistance and the requests for support from industry and the public. The Commission continues to engage with the NCM, drawing on NCM reporting and using the NCM to engage with state and territory officials, as the Commission develops its strategic advice to Government on economic recovery.
2. The Chair and Commissioners speak often via telephone on an ad hoc basis.

3. As at 23 September 2020, the Commission’s Executive Board has met 35 times since it was established. Executive Board meetings are held via teleconference.

- 25 March 2020
- 27 March 2020
- 31 March 2020
- 2 April 2020
- 7 April 2020
- 9 April 2020
- 16 April 2020
- 20 April 2020
- 22 April 2020
- 30 April 2020
- 4 May 2020
- 6 May 2020
- 13 May 2020
- 15 May 2020
- 18 May 2020
- 20 May 2020
- 28 May 2020
- 1 June 2020
- 3 June 2020
- 10 June 2020
- 17 June 2020
- 22 June 2020
- 1 July 2020
- 8 July 2020
- 15 July 2020
- 20 July 2020
- 29 July 2020
- 4 August 2020
- 12 August 2020
- 20 August 2020
- 26 August 2020
- 2 September 2020
- 9 September 2020
- 16 September 2020
- 23 September 2020

4. There is no specific position description for the NCCC Chief Executive Officer. As a temporary position for an advisory body established in a period of national crisis, a set of qualities was considered essential to the occupant – experience of crisis management; ability to work co-operatively at very senior level; understanding of public policy and administrative process; and the ability to get things done, sustainably.

5. The CEO has visibility of the tasks and functions of all Commissioners but not all taskforces. Task forces work directly with certain Commissioners.

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Topic: Whole-of-Government communications unit

Senator: Gallagher

Question reference number: 0130

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 19 June 2020

Number of pages: 2

Question:

In relation to the whole-of-government communications unit:

- a. On what date was the Department's whole-of-government communications unit established.
- b. Was the unit initiated by the Department or at the request of the Prime Minister's office.
- c. Is final approval for communications material prepared by the communication unit undertaken by the Department or the Prime Minister's Office.
- d. How many staff work in the unit and at what level. Has that number changed over the COVID-19 crisis. If so, please provide further details.
- e. What is the expected duration of the whole of government communications unit
- f. Where does the whole-of-government communications unit sit within the Departmental organisational structure.

Answer:

The whole-of-government communication work was commenced by staff in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in March 2020, with key staff transferred into the National COVID-19 Coordination Commission on 9 April 2020.

Final approval of communication material is provided by the Department.

There are three staff allocated – One SES Band 1, one EL2 and one APS6. There has been nil change. As at 19 June 2020, they sat within the National COVID-19 Coordination Commission.

This operation will continue as long as the Government needs to communicate with the community, on the health and economic response to COVID-19, in a coordinated way.