



## **Australian Government**

Australian Government response to the  
Environment and Communications References Committee report:

Australian Antarctic Division funding

NOVEMBER 2024

## Introduction

On 9 August 2023, the Senate referred an inquiry into the current management of the funding of the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) to the Environment and Communications References Committee. The committee was referred the following terms of reference:

*The current management of the funding of the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD), with particular reference to:*

- (a) revelations that the AAD is pursuing cuts worth roughly 16% of its operating budget;*
- (b) the direct and indirect impacts of cuts to public funding of Australia's Antarctic activities, including on full-time, part-time and contract AAD jobs;*
- (c) the ramifications for Australia's international commitments and obligations;*
- (d) the internal compilation of a list of at least 56 existing projects, programs and research activities that could be cut and/or terminated;*
- (e) the extent of the Albanese Government's involvement in, and response to, these cost-cutting plans;*
- (f) the consequences of funding cuts to Australia's Antarctic program for our country's geopolitical and strategic international interests;*
- (g) complications that the proposed \$25 million worth of cuts will cause for the full delivery of the Australian Antarctic Science Strategic Plan, the Australian Antarctic Strategy, the 20-year Action Plan, and the extra \$804.4 million Antarctic funding package delivered by the Morrison Government in early 2022;*
- (h) the widespread view, including among numerous Antarctic science experts, that funding cuts of this scale and nature are catastrophic for Australia; and*
- (i) any other related matters.*

On 9 May 2024, the committee tabled a report titled Australian Antarctic Division funding.

The Government notes that it is the responsibility of the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) to deliver Antarctic science and policy objectives within the budget envelope provided by the Government. As detailed in evidence to the inquiry, there has been no 'cut' in funding appropriated to the department. In contrast, the government has provided record funding to the Australian Antarctic Program.

Since coming into government, the Government has delivered over \$1.4 billion in new funding for the Australian Antarctic Program. This includes appropriating \$804.4 million over ten years to deliver its priorities in Antarctica in the October 2022-23 Budget and further significant investments in 2024-25 to support delivery of the Australian Antarctic Program, committing almost half a billion dollars to build a brand new research station on Macquarie Island, support Antarctic shipping and secure Tasmania's future status as Australia's Antarctic and Southern Ocean Gateway. This is in addition to the \$60 million in contingency funding for supplementary shipping which was made available at the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook for 2023-24.

The Government will invest \$371.1 million over nine years for a new research station on Macquarie Island to provide year-round facilities for the multiple Australian and Tasmanian government departments and agencies that use the island. The station will allow Australia to

continue to build its understanding of the Southern Ocean, while delivering critical services like weather forecasting, natural disaster alerts, international nuclear monitoring and measurement of greenhouse gas emissions.

The Government will also provide a capital contribution to the Tasmanian Government of \$188 million over four years from 2025-26, to enable construction of a new, fit-for-purpose Macquarie Wharf 6 in the Port of Hobart and secure the long-term future of the Australian Antarctic Program in Tasmania.

The Government is providing \$109.6 million over three years from 2023-24 to support the continued operations of RSV *Nuyina*, including management of short-term shipping risks. A further \$17.6 million over two years from 2024-25 in new funding supports marine science and environmental management by allowing the RSV *Nuyina* to undertake an additional 60 days at sea each year across the next two years. It will enable a dedicated marine science voyage in 2024-25 to study the Denman Glacier, which is one of the fastest retreating glaciers in Antarctica and holds a potential sea level rise of 1.5 metres. It will also provide for an environmental management visit to the sub-Antarctic Heard Island and McDonald Islands, intended for 2025-26.

This will build on the delivery of world-class science through the Denman Terrestrial Campaign, conducting a 1200km traverse to deliver essential equipment for the Million Year Ice Core Project – one of the most ambitious and challenging scientific projects yet to be undertaken in Antarctica, seabird monitoring at Mawson and Bunger Hills, environmental risk mitigation and remediation of contaminated sites at Casey research station, underway observations and instrument deployments on RSV *Nuyina*. The AAD is also delivering a range of priority science across our Antarctic and sub-Antarctic stations, including long term monitoring of the atmosphere and cryosphere, sea level, ice sheets, seismic waves, radionuclide and infrasound, fisheries and Antarctic mapping.

The department has also made a significant and long-term commitment to implementing the recommendations of the Russell Review in full, and has already taken a number of steps to improve governance and culture within the division, including to ensure better budget oversight. The department has increased transparency and scrutiny of budgets, resulting in the AAD's success in delivering significant outcomes, within its budget, in the 2023-24 financial year.

The Government's response to the recommendations in the report is as follows.

## Response

### Recommendation 1

The committee recommends the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) immediately develop and publish annual accountability metrics and performance targets, which better support and promote the role of Antarctic science. Such metrics should include (but not be limited to):

- details of science funding as a percentage of the operational budget of the AAD;
- the proportion of AAD staff engaged in a science role as a percentage of all AAD staff, with a breakdown of ongoing, non-ongoing and contractor positions;
- the development and utilisation of science infrastructure in Antarctica, including science beds on bases;
- the number of science projects supported, not supported or otherwise delayed; and
- the use of the RSV Nuyina in Antarctic research and how the RSV Nuyina will be utilised in future years.

The committee recommends the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water release a discussion paper with proposed accountability metrics and annual performance targets, with details on how these metrics will be improved and increased over time.

### Response

The Government accepts this recommendation in principle.

DCCEEW has published information about the 2024-25 Antarctic Season on the Australian Antarctic Program's website.

The department has matured its performance approach since its creation, including for Outcome 3. Work to mature our approach to ensure performance measures that demonstrate progress in achieving the purpose of the department in accordance with the requirements of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Rule 2014* is ongoing. The department publishes data relevant to its existing performance measures, including for Outcome 3, in its Annual Report.

The department will leverage the work of the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO)'s *audit of the Annual Performance Statements of Australian Government Entities – 2022-23* and work with the Australian Antarctic Science Council to review the performance measures for Outcome 3 in line with requirements under the PGPA Act and Rule and guidance from the Department of Finance.

Improved performance measures will better support the department to demonstrate progress towards achieving its purpose and key activities. The Government does not consider it appropriate to release a discussion paper with proposed accountability metrics for the AAD.

**Recommendation 2**

The committee recommends the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) commission an independent review of the management, culture and performance of the AAD's operations and logistics branches. The review should consider how these sections of the AAD interact with and support the endeavours of the Science Branch. The review should be completed as soon as possible, to contribute to the development and implementation of an integrated planning model at the AAD.

**Response**

The Government accepts this recommendation in part.

The Russell Review, released in April 2023, has already provided a comprehensive independent analysis of the Australian Antarctic Division's culture and provides recommendations to build a foundation for cultural change across the whole division, including in relation to improved leadership, management and governance arrangements.

In making her findings, Ms Russell was able to draw on the experiences of more than 40% of the AAD's staff, who contributed to the review through surveys, interviews or written submissions.

The foundations built through Ms Russell's recommendations seek to improve both management and performance across the AAD. Work underway, while not specific to the Operations and Logistics or Science Branches, will support enabling a positive culture and create a psychologically safe workplace for our people and performance to thrive.

DCCEEW has made a significant investment and a long-term commitment to implementing the recommendations of the Russell Review in full. A 'one-division' approach recognises the interdependency of all elements of the AAD in successful delivery of the Australian Antarctic Program, and that meaningful and enduring change is necessary across the whole division with support from the department. This will require sustained effort and ongoing transparency around implementation progress and results.

The department will formally monitor and evaluate progress over the medium and long-term and report openly about its overall status. This will include:

- A 12-month review of progress towards building a positive culture through implementing the recommendations of the Russell Review.
- A two-year independent review to evaluate progress and outcomes achieved.

**Recommendation 3**

The committee recommends that the Australian Antarctic Division prioritise the development and implementation of an integrated planning model, as recommended by the Australian Antarctic Science Program Governance Review of December 2017 (the 'Clarke Review').

**Response**

The Government accepts this recommendation in principle.

The Government agrees that integrated planning is a principle that must be embedded in the way the AAD does business and is essential for the effective operation of the Australian Antarctic Program, to enable delivery of our crucial scientific and geo-strategic policy outcomes and meet our workplace health and safety obligations for our staff and other participants of the Australian Antarctic Program.

The Government welcomes the Committee's finding that there "have been considerable improvements in business practices" in the AAD. The work already underway within the AAD to develop a collaborative culture, re-set accountability and decision-making arrangements and provide certainty about budget will be critical to the success of the Program and are the foundations of an integrated planning approach.

The AAD will continue to focus on this area, drawing on insights from a number of recent reviews, to deliver a practical integrated planning process.

#### **Recommendation 4**

The committee recommends the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water implement all recommendations of the Independent Review of Workplace Culture and Change at the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) and table in the Senate a full government response to the Independent Review, no later than 30 June 2024.

#### **Response**

The Government accepts this recommendation in principle.

DCCEEW has committed to implementing the recommendations arising from the Russell Review in full. The department's comprehensive response was released on 3 April 2023. The department has published a 12-month review of progress towards building a positive culture through implementing the department's Russell response plan. The Russell Review, the department's response, and the 12-month review are available at [www.dcceew.gov.au/about/publications/russell-review](http://www.dcceew.gov.au/about/publications/russell-review).

#### **Recommendation 5**

The committee recommends that the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water release the draft Decadal Plan, including the six draft science outcome statements, as soon as possible. A brief public consultation period should follow the release of the draft Decadal Plan, to ensure it reflects the views of the Antarctic scientific community.

#### **Recommendation 6**

The committee recommends that the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water finalise the Decadal Plan and provide it to the Minister for the Environment and Water within three months of appointment of a new Chief Scientist to the Australian Antarctic Division, or no later than 31 October 2024, whichever is earlier.

The committee recommends that the Decadal Plan be endorsed by the Australian Government and fully funded as part of the 2025-26 Budget. The Decadal Plan should be made public as soon as finalised, and no later than the end of 2024.

## **Response**

The Government accepts these recommendations in principle.

Science plays a core role in advancing Australia's Antarctic and national interests. Our scientific activities provide a strong presence in the Australian Antarctic Territory, and our collaborations foster engagement with other Antarctic nations and underpin a shared understanding of the region.

The Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan outlines Australia's position as a leader in Antarctic science and demonstrates the Government's continued commitment to Antarctic science. The Government remains committed to a Decadal Plan for Australian Antarctic Science which will sit under the Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan. It will guide the activities of the Australian Antarctic Science Program to ensure that Australia continues to deliver world class science, maintaining Australia's position as a leader with a reputation for excellence in Antarctic science. The Decadal Plan will set the direction for key science activities to be undertaken over the next decade in support of Australia's national interests.

The Decadal Plan is being developed in close consultation with the scientific community. Over 200 Australian Antarctic Science Program participants have provided input and a further 50 experts contributed to the process of prioritising this input into the highest priority outcomes.

The department is looking forward to working with the science council under the leadership of the new Chair Dr Nick Gales, to finalise the Decadal Plan. Noting that the current draft outcome statements were provided by the department in testimony to the inquiry, the department will provide further drafts of the Decadal Plan, including the outcome statements, to stakeholders as part of the work to finalise the Decadal Plan.

Decisions about additional funding will be considered in the context of future budget processes.

### **Recommendation 7**

The committee recommends the Australian Antarctic Division immediately readvertise the 20 positions which were originally announced in 2022-23, and progress the recruitment for ongoing staff wherever possible, and for staffing within the Science Branch.

## **Response**

The Government notes this recommendation.

DCCEEW is focused on ensuring secure and ongoing employment for staff. Where appropriate, the department will continue to work through the process of converting contract positions into ongoing roles, including for positions which have been filled through non-ongoing or contract arrangements for many years.

We have already begun this process and have converted over 30 staff to ongoing positions.

Further work is underway to recruit positions in the Science branch, which will support: environmental stewardship and remediation; Australia's engagement under the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CAMLR), including through seabird research and fisheries data analysis; data integration and curation, mapping

services, our understanding and response to avian influenza; and the Antarctic Climate and Million Year Ice Core programs.

**Recommendation 8**

The committee recommends that the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, through endorsement of the Expenditure Review Committee, include in all future Budgets a line item specifically identifying the Antarctic science appropriation for each Budget year and across the forward estimates.

**Response**

The Government notes this recommendation.

DCCEEW's Portfolio Budget Statement includes dedicated funding for the Antarctic Program (Outcome 3) for each Budget year and across the forward estimates. Outcome 3 includes capital and operational funding for departmental operations (including for staff, logistics and operations to deliver Australia's scientific research and operations in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean). Outcome 3 also includes \$5 million a year until 2028-29 under the Antarctic Science Collaboration Initiative. This administered funding supports the Australian Antarctic Program Partnership.

**Recommendation 9**

The committee recommends the Australian Government, as a matter of urgency, provide ongoing annual funding to the Special Research Initiative in Excellence in Antarctic Science, to be indexed annually and incorporated into the Decadal Plan on an ongoing basis.

**Recommendation 10**

The committee recommends the Australian Government immediately transfer Australian Research Council funding for Antarctic science, including the Special Research Initiative in Excellence in Antarctic Science, to the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.

**Response**

The Government notes these recommendations.

The Government supports arrangements that deliver integrated and strategic Antarctic science in support of Australia's national Antarctic interests. The Decadal Plan for Australian Antarctic Science and the Australian Antarctic Science Council are key to ensuring a whole of government approach to Antarctic science.

The Government supports long-term certainty for Antarctic science. Decisions about additional funding will be considered in the context of future budgets.



**Recommendation 11**

The committee recommends the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade review the current arrangements for its dedicated Antarctic office, so that it better co-ordinates and promotes Australia's whole-of-government scientific, strategic and geopolitical engagement with Antarctica. The review should consider whether the DFAT Antarctic office is adequately resourced and supported by an appropriate number of full-time staff.

**Response**

The Government notes this recommendation.

In addition to staff that work on Antarctic issues across the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), DFAT established a standalone Antarctic Section in September 2022. DFAT is keeping the role and resourcing of this new section under review as it evolves. DFAT and DCCEEW will continue to work closely together across government to increase awareness and expertise on Antarctic issues and to coordinate scientific and geopolitical engagement to deliver a joined-up Australian Antarctic Program that supports Australia's national interests.

**Recommendation 12**

The committee recommends that the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water review the terms of reference for the Australian Antarctic Science Council (AASC). The review should be broad but include consideration of at least the following matters:

- the membership of the AASC;
- implementing a process for declaring and managing conflicts of interest; and
- the extent to which the AASC should have responsibility for the allocation of Antarctic science funding.

**Response**

The Government accepts this recommendation.

DCCEEW has commenced work to review the terms of reference for the Australian Antarctic Science Council, including consideration of the matters raised by the committee. The Minister for the Environment and Water will consider the terms of reference in the context of considering the Decadal Plan for Australian Antarctic Science.

**Recommendation 13**

The committee recommends the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water develop as a matter of priority a business case for the acquisition of a second vessel to support Australia's presence in Antarctica. Such a vessel should be deployed primarily for logistics, to allow the RSV Nuyina to be deployed with a greater focus and frequency on science projects.

**Response**

The Government notes this recommendation.

The RSV *Nuyina* is a world-leading icebreaker, resupply and marine science vessel. Delays with its delivery and commissioning, which date back to the Morrison Liberal-National Government, have delayed the full use of this advanced scientific capability, however the Government notes the achievements of the RSV *Nuyina* in delivering outcomes during the 2023-24 Antarctic season.

The Government will continue to improve planning and deployment of assets to maximise scientific outcomes in Antarctica, and has announced an additional \$109.6 million in the 2024-25 Budget to support RSV *Nuyina* to deliver the Australian Antarctic Program, and \$17.6 million over two years for dedicated marine science voyages.

Decisions about further funding will be considered in the context of future budget processes.

#### **Recommendation 14**

The committee recommends the Australian Government increase funding to Antarctic shipping to enable the RSV *Nuyina* to ship 250-300 days per year, and to include contingency funding for the hiring or leasing of a second ship as needed.

#### **Response**

The Government accepts this recommendation in part.

The Government has provided an additional \$127.3 million for Antarctic shipping in the 2024-25 Budget. This includes funding to meet increasing operational costs associated with the RSV *Nuyina*, as well as \$17.6 million over the next two years, supporting the RSV *Nuyina* to spend an additional 60 days at sea each year, on a science voyage to the Denman Glacier in 2024-25, and the Heard Island and McDonald Islands management voyage in 2025-26. It also includes the \$60 million in contingency funding for supplementary shipping which was made available at the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook for 2023-24.

Decisions about funding will be considered in the context of future budget processes.

#### **Recommendation 15**

The committee recommends that the Australian and Tasmanian Governments and the Australian Antarctic Division work to swiftly resolve any outstanding matters related to the redevelopment of Wharf 6 at Macquarie Point, including issues of funding and the contract provisions with TasPorts, in a fair and appropriate manner. The committee further recommends that the AAD publicly provide a report on progress no later than 30 June 2025.

#### **Response**

The Government accepts this recommendation.

The Government has secured Hobart's future as the home port of Australia's icebreaker, RSV *Nuyina*, and the long-term future of the Australian Antarctic Program in Tasmania, with an agreement with the Tasmanian Government for a new, fit-for-purpose Macquarie Wharf 6.

The Government will provide a capital contribution to the Tasmanian Government of \$188 million over four years from 2025-26. The funding will enable construction of a new Macquarie Wharf 6 in the Port of Hobart, securing Tasmania's future status as Australia's Antarctic and Southern Ocean Gateway.

The Tasmanian Government will provide a refuelling solution for RSV *Nuyina* in the Port of Hobart, and will manage the project and be responsible for all construction costs and ongoing maintenance of the Wharf over the 30-year period.

**Recommendation 16**

The committee recommends that the Australian National Audit Office undertake its potential 2023-24 audit into the effectiveness of the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water's management of Australia's Antarctic presence, including arrangements to support Australia fulfilling its environmental responsibilities.

**Response**

The Government notes this recommendation.

As an independent officer of the Parliament the Auditor-General's responses to parliamentary committee recommendations directed to the ANAO are not included as part of the government response. The ANAO will provide a response to this recommendation directly to the Environment and Communications References Committee.

**Coalition Recommendation 1**

That Minister the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP clearly explain on the public record, including in a Ministerial Statement to Parliament, why she failed to heed the advice—provided to her from as least as early as March or April 2023—that there were a range of financial and associated pressures mounting at the Australian Antarctic Division.

**Coalition Recommendation 2**

That Minister the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP clearly explain on the public record, including in a Ministerial Statement to Parliament, why she failed to take any practical action following her office being directly advised, in July 2023, that there had been an extraordinary overspend of \$41.4 million at the Australian Antarctic Division.

**Response**

The Government notes these recommendations.

The management of the department, including departmental funding, is a matter for the Secretary of the department. Since DCCEEW's establishment on 1 July 2022, the Secretary has continued to invest in maturing the department's systems and processes to ensure appropriate oversight over budgets and report on the delivery of outcomes. This investment will continue.

The Government has made a significant investment in the 2024-25 budget to support delivery of the Australian Antarctic Program, committing almost half a billion dollars to build a brand new research station on Macquarie Island and support Antarctic shipping. This is in addition to the \$60 million in contingency funding for supplementary shipping which was made available at the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) for 2023-24.

Additionally, the program will be bolstered by a \$188 million investment announced at MYEFO for 2024-25 for the construction of a new Macquarie Wharf 6 at the Port of Hobart. This new wharf will serve as a dedicated facility for the RSV Nuyina.

**Coalition Recommendation 3**

That the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water immediately publicly release the full, itemised list of commitments in the original and comprehensive \$804.4 million funding package announced by the Coalition Government in early 2022—as well as an up-to-date, revised list of how much has been spent on each of those items and how much remains to be spent. There also needs to be a clear indication for each item of how much money has been shifted away from them—and to where this money has been redirected.

**Response**

The Government does not accept this recommendation.

The Government notes that the Coalition did not appropriate the funding it announced in early 2022. Documentation in relation to the deliberations on this funding package are Cabinet documents, which are confidential to the Government which created them and not the property of the sponsoring minister or department.

It was the Albanese Government that appropriated \$804.4 million over ten years to deliver its priorities in Antarctica. This funding was appropriated as a single measure in the October 2022-23 Budget. It was described in the Regional Ministerial Budget Statement 2022-23 as follows:

- \$136.6 million over the next five years for critical activities including environmental protection and management, charting activities for safe navigation and continuation of Australia's inland (Antarctic traverse) transport for major science campaigns
- \$92.3 million per year from 2026-27 to support Australia's ongoing Antarctic activities
- \$17.4 million for enhanced marine science in the Southern Ocean

All funding appropriated to Outcome 3 in 2022-23 and 2023-24 was expended in delivery of these priorities.

To date the following has been delivered

- in partnership with the University of Tasmania, an agreement to build a world-leading Southern Ocean research aquarium; krill and krill ecosystems are a major science focus of the program
- safety improvements, including:
  - twin-engine helicopters were introduced into the program in 2022-23 to enhance safety and to support remote field work as they provide greater range and increased passenger capability;
  - a new operational management centre was established in 2022 to enable a high degree of situational awareness and ensure the availability and management of emergency response and safety measures to protect personnel and assets;
  - rollout of an ICT uplift program, including providing better tracking of expeditioners in deep field and remote locations
- development and deployment of remote field base capabilities to support science projects, including the Denman Terrestrial Campaign
- enhancing our international engagement to support a strong and effective Antarctic Treaty System and to deepen engagement with other Antarctic states
- designed and delivered an Antarctic traverse capability which is critical to delivering the flagship Million Year Ice Core program – one of Australia's most ambitious and challenging scientific projects in Antarctica – the quest to drill ice cores that can provide a million-year record of Earth's climate and atmospheric composition
- continuing to investigate opportunities for the application of innovative, remote technologies
- continuing to deliver core critical activities for the Australian Antarctic Program including environmental management activities such as environmental risk mitigation and remediation of contaminated sites at Casey.

This funding is ongoing and will continue to be used to deliver commitments to advance Australia's national interests in Antarctica, as set out in the *Australian Antarctic Strategy and 20 Year Action Plan*.

**Coalition Recommendation 4**

That the Albanese Government immediately commit, in writing, to no further reductions during its time in office of the Australian Antarctic Division's footprint in Hobart.

As part of this, the Government should commit to finalising and delivering new funding and development plans for the Macquarie Wharf upgrades and fuel barge as a matter of urgency. Similarly, they must urgently clarify and finalise their plans for the construction of the Antarctic and Science Precinct, and the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources headquarters.

**Response**

The Government notes this recommendation.

The Australian Government remains committed to Hobart as Australia's Antarctic Gateway, the home of the Australian Antarctic Division and the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) headquarters.

Since coming into government, the Government has delivered over \$1.4 billion in new funding for the Australian Antarctic Program and secured the long-term future of the Program in Tasmania. This includes a capital contribution to the Tasmanian Government of \$188 million over four years from 2025-26, for the construction of a new Macquarie Wharf 6 in the Port of Hobart. In return, the Tasmanian Government will provide a refuelling solution for RSV *Nuyina* in the Port of Hobart.

**Coalition Recommendation 5**

That TasPorts be explicitly instructed, and/or even mandated by changes to its charter conditions, by the Tasmanian and Federal governments to work more cooperatively and proactively with other stakeholders.

**Response**

The Government notes this recommendation.

The management of TasPorts is a matter for the Tasmanian Liberal Government. There is no role for the Australian Government to engage in the management of a State Government Business Enterprise.

**Coalition Recommendation 6**

That the Albanese Government immediately oversee a significant improvement in the quality of answers to questions asked at Parliamentary hearings and on notice—in a direct reversal of their (recently-leaked) instructions to public servants to the completely opposite effect.

**Response**

The Government notes this recommendation.

The Government acknowledges the important role the Parliament and its Committees play in examining the operations of government and takes its obligations very seriously.

The Government remains committed to engaging with Parliamentary Committees in a transparent and accountable manner.

**Coalition Recommendation 7**

That a further private hearing of the committee be held to examine whether certain witnesses should be regarded as having been in contempt of their obligations to this inquiry process, and whether other potential witnesses may have been bullied into deciding not to participate.

**Response**

The Government notes this recommendation.

This recommendation is a matter for the committee.