

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Written question received 3 August 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000412

**Passengers disembarking the Ruby Princess with active cases of covid – SES Level
Departmental Officials:**

Written

Senator: Kristina Keneally

Question:

1. When and how was the first SES-level Departmental Official first made aware that:
 - a. An Agriculture Biosecurity Officer failed to follow the National Protocol for managing novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) risk from cruise ships by failing to administer Traveller with Illness Checklists to ill passengers?
 - b. Australian Border Force Officers failed to follow the National Protocol for managing novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) risk from cruise ships by allowing passengers to disembark before pratique had been granted by a biosecurity officer and only after appropriate assessments had been made in consultation with the relevant health authorities?
 - c. An Australian Border Force Officer incorrectly read a medical form and falsely reported that isolated passengers onboard the Ruby Princess had returned negative results to COVID-19 screening?
 - d. As a result of these errors, ill passengers onboard the Ruby Princess with active cases of COVID-19 were allowed to disembark without entering quarantine?

Answer:

The Commonwealth has provided a detailed account of the events surrounding the disembarkation of the Ruby Princess to the NSW Special Commission of Inquiry into the Ruby Princess (the Commission) in its voluntary submissions to the Commission.

These submissions are dated 12 June 2020, 16 July 2020, 31 July 2020 and 3 August 2020 and are available on the Commission website.

Further commentary relating to the operational matters of officers of other Commonwealth departments is a matter for them.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Written question received 3 August 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000413

Passengers disembarking the Ruby Princess with active cases of covid - Secretary

Written

Senator: Kristina Keneally

Question:

2. When and how was the Secretary first made aware that:
- a. An Agriculture Biosecurity Officer failed to follow the National Protocol for managing novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) risk from cruise ships by failing to administer Traveller with Illness Checklists to ill passengers?
 - b. Australian Border Force Officers failed to follow the National Protocol for managing novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) risk from cruise ships by allowing passengers to disembark before pratique had been granted by a biosecurity officer and only after appropriate assessments had been made in consultation with the relevant health authorities?
 - c. An Australian Border Force Officer incorrectly read a medical form and falsely reported that isolated passengers onboard the Ruby Princess had returned negative results to COVID-19 screening?
 - d. As a result of these errors, ill passengers onboard the Ruby Princess with active cases of COVID-19 were allowed to disembark without entering quarantine?

Answer:

The Commonwealth has provided a detailed account of the events surrounding the disembarkation of the Ruby Princess to the NSW Special Commission of Inquiry into the Ruby Princess (the Commission) in its voluntary submissions to the Commission.

These submissions are dated 12 June 2020, 16 July 2020, 31 July 2020 and 3 August 2020 and are available on the Commission website.

Further commentary relating to the operational matters of officers of other Commonwealth departments is a matter for them.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Written question received 3 August 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000414

Passengers disembarking the Ruby Princess with active cases of covid - Minister :

Written

Senator: Kristina Keneally

Question:

3. When and how was the Minister's Office first made aware that:
- An Agriculture Biosecurity Officer failed to follow the National Protocol for managing novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) risk from cruise ships by failing to administer Traveller with Illness Checklists to ill passengers?
 - Australian Border Force Officers failed to follow the National Protocol for managing novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) risk from cruise ships by allowing passengers to disembark before pratique had been granted by a biosecurity officer and only after appropriate assessments had been made in consultation with the relevant health authorities?
 - An Australian Border Force Officer incorrectly read a medical form and falsely reported that isolated passengers onboard the Ruby Princess had returned negative results to COVID-19 screening?
 - As a result of these errors, ill passengers onboard the Ruby Princess with active cases of COVID-19 were allowed to disembark without entering quarantine?

Answer:

The Commonwealth has provided a detailed account of the events surrounding the disembarkation of the Ruby Princess to the NSW Special Commission of Inquiry into the Ruby Princess (the Commission) in its voluntary submissions to the Commission.

These submissions are dated 12 June 2020, 16 July 2020, 31 July 2020 and 3 August 2020 and are available on the Commission website.

Further commentary relating to the operational matters of officers of other Commonwealth departments is a matter for them.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Written question received 3 August 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000415

Special Commissioner Inquiry into the Ruby Princess:

Written

Senator: Kristina Keneally

Question:

4. With regard to the Commonwealth Submissions to the Special Commissioner Inquiry into the Ruby Princess:

a. Which SES officer(s) in the Department were consulted by the Australian Government Solicitor in the preparing the Submission?

b. Which SES officer(s) in the Department approved the Submission on behalf of the Department?

c. Was the Minister's office provided a copy of the Submission in draft form?

i. If yes:

1. Why was the Minister's office consulted?

2. When was the submission provided in draft submission?

3. What was the Minister's office response to the draft submission? Please include details of any suggestions or requests to change, alter, add to or delete the draft submission? Please also indicate the date each response from the Minister was provided.

ii. If no, why was the Minister's office not consulted?

d. Was the Minister provided a copy of the Submission in draft form?

i. If yes:

4. Why was the Minister consulted?

5. When was the submission provided in draft submission to the Minister?

6. What was the Minister's response to the draft submission? Please include details of any suggestions or requests to change, alter, add to or delete the draft submission? Please also indicate the date each response from the Minister was provided.

ii. If no, why was the Minister not consulted?

Answer:

The Commonwealth has provided a detailed account of the events surrounding the disembarkation of the Ruby Princess to the NSW Special Commission of Inquiry into the Ruby Princess (the Commission) in its voluntary submissions to the Commission.

These submissions are dated 12 June 2020, 16 July 2020, 31 July 2020 and 3 August 2020 and are available on the Commission website.

The submissions dated 31 July 2020 and 3 August 2020 concerned matters solely relating to Australian Border Force. The Minister's office was not provided with a copy of the 31 July 2020 or 3 August 2020 submission and the Department had no formal role in their approval.

The General Counsel and the Assistant Secretary, Royal Commission Legal Branch were consulted by the Australian Government Solicitor in preparing the Voluntary Statement and the Voluntary Submission to the Commission.

The Voluntary Statement was considered by the Deputy Chief Medical Officer and its provision to the Commission was endorsed by the Acting Secretary. The Voluntary Submission was considered by the Acting Chief Medical Officer and its provision to the Commission was endorsed by the Secretary.

The Minister for Health and the Minister's Office were provided a draft of Part 1 and 2 of the Voluntary Statement on 28 May 2020 for noting. The Minister noted the draft of Part 1 and 2 of the Voluntary Statement the same day.

A more advanced draft of the whole Voluntary Statement was provided to the Minister for Health and the Minister's Office for noting on 5 June 2020. On 10 June 2020, the Minister sought a short introductory preamble be included at the beginning of Part 2 of the Voluntary Statement, which appears at paragraphs 9 and 10 of the final Voluntary Statement. On 11 June 2020, the Minister noted the whole Voluntary Statement. On 12 June 2020, the Minister's Office was provided with a copy of the final Voluntary Statement.

The Minister for Health and the Minister's Office were provided a draft of the Voluntary Submission on 15 July 2020 for noting. On 16 July 2020, the Minister noted the Voluntary Submission.

The Voluntary Submission and the Voluntary Statement were provided to the Minister and the Minister's Office as a matter of standard practice, to be consulted on matters pertaining to the portfolio.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Minister for Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Written question received 3 August 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000416

Ill passengers onboard the Ruby Princess:

Written

Senator: Kristina Keneally

Question:

1. When was the Minister first made aware that:
 - a. An Agriculture Biosecurity Officer failed to follow the National Protocol for managing novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) risk from cruise ships by failing to administer Traveller with Illness Checklists to ill passengers?
 - b. Australian Border Force Officers failed to follow the National Protocol for managing novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) risk from cruise ships by allowing passengers to disembark before pratique had been granted by a biosecurity officer and only after appropriate assessments had been made in consultation with the relevant health authorities?
 - c. An Australian Border Force Officer incorrectly read a medical form and falsely reported that isolated passengers onboard the Ruby Princess had returned negative results to COVID-19 screening?
 - d. As a result of these errors, ill passengers onboard the Ruby Princess with active cases of COVID-19 were allowed to disembark without entering quarantine?
2. What steps has the Minister taken to ensure that this never happens again?

Answer:

The Commonwealth has provided a detailed account of the events surrounding the disembarkation of the Ruby Princess to the NSW Special Commission of Inquiry into the Ruby Princess (Commission) in its submissions to the Commission.

The Commonwealth provided four voluntary submissions to the Commission dated 12 June 2020, 16 July 2020, 31 July 2020 and 3 August 2020.

The Department tabled the four submissions to the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19. These are also publically available through the Commission's website.

Further commentary relating to the operational matters of officers of other Commonwealth departments is a matter for them.

The Australian Government requires international cruise ships not to enter Australian ports through a legislative instrument made by the Health Minister on 18 March 2020 (*Biosecurity (Human Biosecurity Emergency) (Human Coronavirus with Pandemic Potential) (Emergency Requirements) Determination 2020*) (the Determination).

On 20 May 2020, the Determination was extended until 17 September 2020 and will be reviewed again shortly.

The Government is considering the recommendations from the Commission handed down on the 14 August 2020, and has already begun reviewing its policies, training and supervision arrangements at ports.