

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Inquiry into the Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Spoken

QoN 002 7 May 2021

Topic: India travel measures

Senator Kristina Keneally

Question

Senator KENEALLY: But had the government asked to you consider vaccinating Australians in India? Had they asked you to consider it anew or is it that you reconsidered your previous advice and advised the government that there was no change? I am trying to understand if the government actually actively sought advice, given the change of situation in India—the terrible circumstances that the high commissioner has outlined and the ban, not allowing Australians to come home. I am just trying to understand if the government have taken any proactive steps to contemplate what things they can do to assist Australians who are stuck in India.

Ms Wood: At the moment, the policy decision remains the same: that Australians overseas are not being vaccinated by the Australian government.

CHAIR: Including those who are being refused access to the country.

Senator KENEALLY: I understand that, Ms Wood, but that is not the question I am asking you. I am asking you whether the government asked you to consider that.

Ms Wood: Yes, we have considered it.

Senator KENEALLY: Did the government ask you to consider it?

Ms Wood: I wasn't directed to consider it, no.

Senator KENEALLY: That is what I am asking. I am asking: did the minister or the government ask DFAT to provide advice on it? Did they ask you to consider it?

Ms Wood: They asked us for our advice, yes.

Senator KENEALLY: When?

Ms Wood: During this week.

Senator KENEALLY: So they did ask you? I apologise; I know it is difficult when we are on video. So who asked for that advice?

Ms Wood: In terms of the specific time frame and who asked what and when, I will need to take those details on notice. I can provide those to you separately.

Answer

DFAT provided briefing on the possibility of vaccinating Australians in India on 5 May 2021.

The Australian High Commission in New Delhi estimates there are 25,000 to 30,000 Australians in locations across India. The number and geographic spread of Australians would be a significant logistical barrier to vaccinating Australians there. There would be significant risks to the health and safety of officials and citizens in delivering a vaccination program overseas in the midst of a large wave of new COVID-19 infections.