

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Inquiry into the Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic
– 18 August 2020

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Defence

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Q7 - 18 August 2020 - State and Commonwealth assistance discussions - Paterson

Question reference number: 7

Senator/Member: James Paterson

Type of question: Spoken

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 01 September 2020

Question:

Senator PATERSON: It seems unusual that there wouldn't be an explanation for that. In addition to the conversations between Defence and the Victorian authorities, are you aware of any discussions between other Commonwealth officials and state officials about this request for deployment?

Lt Gen. Frewen: Around the 850 specifically?

Senator PATERSON: No, any offers from the Commonwealth.

Lt Gen. Frewen: I can speak to the interactions between Defence and the Victorian authorities. I'm sure that there would be ongoing interactions between other government departments and the Victorian authorities, but I can't speak specifically to those.

Senator PATERSON: You can't speak to them because you're not aware of them or you don't feel it's appropriate?

Lt Gen. Frewen: I'm sorry—could you just explain your question again, please?

Senator PATERSON: Yes, sure. I'm just interested to know this. Obviously there's been miscommunication between the ADF and Victorian authorities about assistance. I'm interested to know whether there were communications between other arms of the federal government and the Victorian government that you're aware of—for example, the Department of Defence, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet or the Department of Health. Are you aware of any discussions between the Victorian government and other arms of the federal government about ADF assistance to Victoria?

Lt Gen. Frewen: When the Prime Minister made his offer on the 27th, it's my understanding that the Prime Minister's department would have been engaging with the Premier's office in Victoria and reinforcing the Prime Minister's request.

Senator PATERSON: Could you take on notice to get information on any of those communications, please, because I think it would assist the committee to understand the fuller picture of what was happening between the federal government and the state government about this issue. I'm particularly interested to know whether, at any point, the Victorian government offered any explanation to the Commonwealth as to why it had chosen

to take a different pathway to other states, such as New South Wales—whether they contrasted their preferred approach to handling hotel quarantine with other states.

Lt Gen. Frewen: I think questions on correspondence from, say, the Prime Minister's department to the Premier's department would be best addressed to Prime Minister and Cabinet.

CHAIR: Senator Hanson put that on notice through the committee.

Lt Gen. Frewen: The way Victoria approach the COVID situation and the sort of requests Victoria make to us is a matter for Victoria. Each of the states and territories make their decisions, and we respond to the support requests.

Senator PATERSON: Sure. Just to the extent that you feel you're able to, I'd be grateful for any further information you can provide on notice. Just to summarise and to be very clear here, ADF assistance was available to Victoria on an equal basis to every other state throughout this crisis, was it not?

Lt Gen. Frewen: Yes.

Answer:

Discussions between state officials and any other arm of the federal government is not a matter for Defence.

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Defence

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Q8 - 18 August 2020 - Aged care facilities ADF are occupying - Siewert

Question reference number: 8

Senator/Member: Rachel Siewert

Type of question: Spoken

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 01 September 2020

Question:

Senator SIEWERT: General, I just want to clarify: when you said that you had been supporting three aged-care facilities, you then named four. Are you still currently supporting three?

Lt Gen. Frewen: We have supported four. We're currently still in two.

Senator SIEWERT: You're still in two. Are those the Japara and the Kalyna?

Lt Gen. Frewen: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: How many personnel do you have in there?

Rear Adm. Sharkey: I believe in each facility there are six clinical staff assigned in shifts of three each—two shifts of three.

Senator SIEWERT: In each facility?

Rear Adm. Sharkey: Correct.

Senator SIEWERT: When you say 'clinical staff', are they nurses?

Rear Adm. Sharkey: Registered nurses and enrolled nurses.

Senator SIEWERT: So you have three per facility. What is the size of those two facilities? How many residents are in there?

Rear Adm. Sharkey: I'd have to take that on notice.

Answer:

As at 2:46pm on 18 August 2020, the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services Sharepoint Daily Update, reported:

- 102 residents occupying Kalyna Care; and
- 120 residents occupying Japara Goonawarra.