

**IN THE MATTER OF**

**THE BOARD OF INQUIRY INTO THE HOTEL QUARANTINE PROGRAM**

**FURTHER STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHER BARCROFT ECCLES**

SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF PREMIER AND CABINET

I, Christopher Barcroft Eccles, Secretary, Department of Premier and Cabinet (**DPC**), say as follows:

1. I refer to the statement I provided to the Board of Inquiry, in response to the Notice to Produce a Witness Statement (NTP-130), dated 8 September 2020 (**my first statement**). Since my first statement certain matters and documents have come to my attention upon which I wish to comment.<sup>1</sup>

**Q4. Were any Department staff directly involved in any aspect of the conception, planning, operation or monitoring of the Hotel Quarantine Program? If so, please provide details and any relevant documents.**

2. In addition to the matters I identified in my first statement, work was undertaken by the Victorian government’s Behavioural Insights Unit, together with DHHS, with respect to the Hotel Quarantine Program.
3. The Behavioural Insights Unit is located within DPC. It undertakes work with departments and agencies to understand problems from a behavioural perspective, and helps design solutions. The work of the Behavioural Insights Unit in respect of the Hotel Quarantine Program was varied, but included behavioural advice on barriers and enablers to personal protective equipment use to inform DHHS guidance for hotels — which was provided to DHHS in June and July 2020.<sup>2</sup> I do not know whether, and to what extent, the advice provided by the Behavioural Insights Unit was ultimately adopted or utilised.
4. In addition, the date in my first statement at [35] should be “July 2020” not “early June” 2020.

**Q7. Did you, or any other executive in your Department, report directly to the Premier or any other Victorian Government Minister about any aspect of the Hotel**

---

<sup>1</sup> I adopt the definitions used in my first statement.

<sup>2</sup> See, eg, DPC.0021.0001.2062, DPC.0021.0001.1954.

**Quarantine Program about which your Department had knowledge? If so, what were the frequency, nature and contents of that/those report(s)? Please provide details, including relevant documents.**

5. I refer to [48] to [51] of my first statement.
6. In addition to the Crisis Council of Cabinet submissions and associated DPC briefs set out in those paragraphs, DPC prepared a written brief in relation to a submission for the Crisis Council of Cabinet meeting to be held on 23 June 2020, titled “Public Health Resilience Dashboard – Update”,<sup>3</sup> which described the purpose of the submission as presenting key health indicators for managing Victoria's response to COVID-19 and progress against core metrics for informing decision-making on easing restrictions. The written brief summarised and recommended that the Premier note the submission.<sup>4</sup>

**Q9. The Victorian Secretaries Board met on**

- a) **27 March 2020; and**
- b) **1 April 2020.**

**In relation to these meetings, to what extent was the Victorian Hotel Quarantine Program discussed, and what was the substance of those conversations? Please refer to and produce any notes or minutes of those meetings.**

7. I refer to [61] of my first statement, where I address the 1 April 2020 Victorian Secretaries Board meeting. The long-form notes of the 1 April 2020 meeting taken by my senior adviser at that time, do not record any discussion or decision in relation to the Hotel Quarantine Program.<sup>5</sup>

**Q19. Were you ever involved – whether as conduit, observer, or recipient – of requests made by or on behalf of other Victorian government departments for assistance to be given by:**

- a) **Victoria Police; and/or**
- b) **Australian Defence Force personnel,**

---

<sup>3</sup> DPC.0024.0001.0001.

<sup>4</sup> DPC.0024.0001.0054.

<sup>5</sup> The notes were provided on a confidential basis to the Inquiry.

**in the Victorian Hotel Quarantine Program? If so, in relation to each such request: Who made those requests? To whom were they made? What assistance was requested and when?**

8. Since signing my first statement, emails from late June 2020 have come to my attention that I have had the opportunity to consider. Having considered those emails, I note the following.
9. On 24 June 2020, at 7.41am, I received an email from Kym Peake, Secretary of DHHS, the substance of which was that assistance from the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to support elements of the Victorian government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic would be "hugely appreciated".<sup>6</sup> Among the support sought was 50 to 100 ADF personnel to provide "security support for passengers entering and exiting hotel quarantine".
10. On 24 June 2020, at 8.15am, I emailed Phil Gaetjens, Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, to pass on the requests contained in Ms Peake's email, including the request for 50 to 100 ADF personnel to provide "security support for passengers entering and exiting hotel quarantine".<sup>7</sup>
11. On 24 June 2020, at 11.24pm, I received an email from Rebecca Falkingham, Secretary of DJCS, regarding Victorian government requests for ADF assistance.<sup>8</sup> I forwarded this update to the Premier's Chief of Staff.<sup>9</sup>
12. On 25 June 2020, at 12.21pm, I received an email from Ms Peake, advising me that a request for assistance for 850 ADF personnel had been made by the Victorian government on the evening of 24 June 2020.<sup>10</sup> According to Ms Peake's email, the request for support for hotel quarantine had been made while options for replacing the then current security arrangements were developed. She advised that "the RFA is being rescinded as further options are being developed".
13. On 25 June 2020, at 3.13pm, I received an email from Mr Gaetjens referring to a recent conversation with me about a request for ADF assistance.<sup>11</sup> I cannot recall the discussion to which Mr Gaetjens refers. I do not believe I sent any further information to Mr Gaetjens regarding any requests for ADF assistance.

---

<sup>6</sup> DPC.0018.0001.0002.

<sup>7</sup> DPC.0014.0001.0006.

<sup>8</sup> DPC.0018.0001.0004.

<sup>9</sup> DPC.0018.0001.0005.

<sup>10</sup> DPC.0018.0001.0006.

<sup>11</sup> DPC.0014.0001.0008.

14. Slightly later on 25 June 2020, at 3.41pm, Ms Falkingham provided me with an update on recent requests for assistance by the ADF.<sup>12</sup> Ms Falkingham listed four requests, two agreed on 24 June and two “new as at 25 June”.
15. I believe I spoke to Ms Falkingham on or about 25 June 2020 and asked her to pass on a request from me to Victoria’s Emergency Management Commissioner, Andrew Crisp, to approach the ADF about assisting with personnel to transport returned travellers from the airport to hotel quarantine. I do not know what if anything came of that request to Commissioner Crisp.
16. At about this time, an alternative model for hotel quarantine supervision (i.e. security) was being developed. The alternative model for hotel quarantine supervision involved the use of Corrections Victoria staff for supervision in hotel quarantine, and Victoria Police for enforcement.<sup>13</sup> That alternative model, as further developed, was then considered by the Crisis Council of Cabinet on 27 June 2020 as set out in [51(d)] of my first statement.

**Q20. As far as you are aware, what was the result, or action taken in response to each request identified in answer to the previous question? Why?**

17. I have addressed at [12] of this statement the outcome of one of the requests for assistance on the evening of 24 June 2020 (which was withdrawn).
18. I am otherwise unaware of the result of the other requests for support.

**Q21. If you wish to include any additional information in your witness statement, please set it out below.**

19. In about early April 2020, I contacted Mr Gaetjens and asked him whether the Commonwealth could provide any financial assistance to Victoria for security in the Hotel Quarantine Program.
20. Mr Gaetjens responded by email on 8 April 2020 saying, in effect, that the Commonwealth would only provide in-kind assistance of ADF personnel, and only if Victoria changed its operating model. I replied, saying, “Thanks Phil”.<sup>14</sup>
21. I have reviewed [5.1] to [5.6] of former Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police Graham Ashton’s statement dated 7 September 2020. I do not recall receiving the text message from Mr Ashton sent at 1.16 pm on 27 March 2020 (referred to by him

---

<sup>12</sup> DPC.0020.0001.0024.

<sup>13</sup> See DPC.0020.0001.0031; DPC.0020.0001.0032.

<sup>14</sup> DPC.0014.0001.0004.

at [5.5]), and do not have a copy of that text message on my phone. I do not now recall what, if anything, I did in response to that text message.

22. No decision was made by me nor, as far as I am aware, any other person within DPC, to engage private security for use in the Hotel Quarantine Program.
23. Accordingly, while I do not recall if I called Mr Ashton after receipt of his text message referred to at [5.5] of his statement, if I had done so I would not have (and would not have been able to) convey any decision about the use of private security — as no such decision had been made by me or anyone to whom I had spoken.

Signed:



---

**CHRISTOPHER ECCLES**

**16 September 2020**