

APPENDIX 2



Senator the Hon Marise Payne
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Minister for Women

MC21-008364

Senator Deborah O'Neill
Chair
Australian Senate Committee of Privileges
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Chair

Possible improper interference – Economics Reference Committee naval shipbuilding inquiry

Thank you for the letter regarding the Minister for Defence's invitation for core members of the Economics Reference Committee (the Committee) and the Committee Secretariat to review unredacted documents.

The Government recognises the important work of the Committee and is committed to working to assist the committee in its inquiry into Australia's sovereign naval shipbuilding capability.

The Office of the Minister for Defence has been in discussions with the Committee Secretariat and Senator Rex Patrick's Office in relation to the invitation for the Committee to view unredacted documents. Unfortunately, at this stage, the Minister for Defence has been unable to agree to terms with the Committee to provide access.

I am advised a further proposal has been developed to provide access, which seeks to address the concerns raised by the Committee and its members during discussions with the Office of the Minister for Defence. I am advised this proposal was provided to the Committee for its consideration on 13 October by the Minister for Defence.

Yours sincerely

MARISE PAYNE



Senate Economics References Committee

9 February 2022

Senator Deborah O'Neill
Chair
Senate Privileges Committee

By email: priv.sen@aph.gov.au

The Privileges Committee Inquiry into Possible improper interference— Economics References Committee naval shipbuilding inquiry

Dear Senator O'Neill,

I am writing to you as Chair of the Senate Economics References Committee.

Following on from my correspondence of 9 December 2021, I would like to further inform you as to the status of the Committee's attempts to access the documents that were requested as part of the Order for the Production of Documents (OPD).

As discussed, the papers have been made available to the Committee only in Parliament House and under the supervision of Department of Defence staff. Arrangements are now in place, and one of our committee members, Senator Rex Patrick, has taken the opportunity to view the documents.

While these documents have finally been made available in an unsatisfactory manner, not to mention their highly dubious confidential nature and the need to conceal their contents for so long, the Committee remains concerned at the timing of Minister Dutton's response. The Committee reiterates that it was only in the final sitting week of 2021, just before Senators departed the building for two months, were the documents made available. This could be construed as a subtle but intentional impediment to the Committee's work—particularly as it is just prior to the election period.

The committee considers the delay to be unreasonable.

Should you require further information, please contact the Committee Secretary, Mr Mark Fitt, on (02) 6277 3540 or Mark.Fitt@aph.gov.au.

Sincerely,

Senator Anthony Chisholm
Chair—Senate Economics References Committee