

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Topic: Leaking of the Manufacturing Taskforce Report

Senator: Patrick

Question reference number: 0200

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 31 August 2020

Number of pages: 2

Question:

On 20 May the Commission's manufacturing taskforce report was leaked. Most of the document was dedicated to expanding the production and consumption of gas, including cutting regulation and providing public subsidies for production and infrastructure.

1. How many versions of the manufacturing report has the NCCC / NCCAB provided to the Government?
2. Which Departments and to whom were they provided?
3. Has the NCCC / NCCAB received any feedback or guidance from the Government on those reports?
4. From the testimony of Mr Thompson at the hearing on 4 June and Mr Harris prior to that, no reports up to that point in time were Cabinet In Confidence. It is now understood that an FOI application, submitted in 4 June, for a copy of the Manufacturing Report has been denied on the basis of it being Cabinet In Confidence.
 - a. Please explain the disparity?
 - b. Please provide a copy to the Committee?
 - c. On what day was this report or its content given to the Government?

Answer:

The then National COVID-19 Coordination Commission, now known as the National COVID-19 Commission Advisory Board (NCC), formally provided the final manufacturing report to the Government.

In developing the report, the Manufacturing Taskforce Chair consulted with relevant departments and ministers, amongst other stakeholders. NCC staff also consulted with key departments.

NCC provides advice to ministers as one input to government decision-making. Where the NCC's advice becomes subject to Cabinet deliberations, Cabinet confidentiality conventions apply, as is the case in this instance.

It is a longstanding practice not to disclose information about the operation and business of the Cabinet and its committees, as to do so could potentially reveal the deliberations of Cabinet, which are confidential. The convention of Cabinet confidentiality enables policy ideas to be contested in a highly confidential manner in order to ensure that Cabinet's deliberations result in the best policy decisions possible for the Australian community.

The final manufacturing report was formally provided to Government on 3 June 2020.