

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: Arrangements Prior to National Cabinet Committee

Senator: Davey

Question reference number: 001

Type of question: Committee hearing 13 May 2020 (Hansard page to be confirmed)

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 13 May 2020

Number of pages: 2

Question:

Senator Davey: National Cabinet was only announced in mid-March. What processes were in place before National Cabinet was formed to ensure there was state cooperation with our response?

Answer:

The Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), Mr Phil Gaetjens, first spoke collectively with his state and territory counterparts (Senior Officials Meeting – SOM) regarding COVID-19 on 14 February 2020. PM&C Deputy Secretaries with responsibility for Commonwealth-State relations first spoke collectively with their state and territory counterparts (Deputy Senior Officials Meeting – DSOM) regarding COVID-19 on 3 February 2020.

Prior to the establishment of the National Coordination mechanism (NCM) from 5 March 2020, PM&C co-chaired (with the Department of Home Affairs) National Crisis Committee (NCC) meetings on COVID-19, from 25 January 2020, that involved state and territory representatives. From 5 March 2020 onwards, the NCM (chaired by the Department of Home Affairs) has operated in place of the NCC due to the scale and tempo of the COVID-19 response. SOM and the NCM have continued to meet regularly since the establishment of National Cabinet.

Meetings with state and territory senior officials chaired by PM&C.

Date	Purpose of meeting
25 January 2020	National Crisis Committee meeting on COVID-19
27 January 2020	National Crisis Committee meeting on COVID-19
1 February 2020	National Crisis Committee meeting on COVID-19
3 February 2020	National Crisis Committee meeting on COVID-19
3 February 2020	Pre-COAG DSOM (COVID-19 agenda item for COAG)
11 February 2020	National Crisis Committee meeting on COVID-19
14 February 2020	Special COVID-19 SOM
14 February 2020	National Crisis Committee meeting on COVID-19
15 February 2020	National Crisis Committee meeting on COVID-19
17 February 2020	Special COVID-19 SOM
17 February 2020	Pre-COAG DSOM (COVID-19 agenda item for COAG)

27 February 2020	Special COVID-19 SOM
28 February 2020	Special COVID-19 DSOM
2 March 2020	Joint Deputy Heads of Treasury/DSOM
3 March 2020	Pre-COAG SOM (COVID-19 agenda item for COAG)
5 March 2020	Special COVID-19 SOM
10 March 2020	Pre-COAG DSOM (COVID-19 agenda item for COAG)
11 March 2020	Special COVID-19 SOM

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Topic: Professor Brendan Murphy First Briefing to the Cabinet regarding COVID-19

Senator: Gallagher

Question reference number: 002

Type of question: Committee hearing 13 May 2020 (Hansard page to be confirmed)

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 13 May 2020

Number of pages: 1

Question:

Senator Gallagher: I'm just seeking the date on which Professor Murphy first briefed the Cabinet about COVID-19?

Answer:

Revealing information about when the Chief Medical Officer, Professor Brendan Murphy, first briefed the Cabinet on the coronavirus pandemic would or could reasonably be expected to disclose the deliberations of the Cabinet.

It is a longstanding practice not to disclose information about the operation and business of the Cabinet and its committees, including when a matter went to the Cabinet, who attended, and what form of submission was provided, as to do so could potentially reveal the deliberations of the Cabinet, which are confidential.

The deliberations of the Cabinet and its committees should be conducted in confidence so that the freedom of those deliberations can be preserved. It is not in the public interest to disclose information about the Cabinet's deliberations as it may impact on the Government's ability to receive confidential information and make appropriate decisions impacting on the Australian community.

This approach has been used consistently for several years and is consistent with the approach taken by previous Secretaries.