

**DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS  
AUSTRALIAN BORDER FORCE**

**PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY WRITTEN QUESTION ON NOTICE**

Select Committee on COVID-19

**QoN Number: CV19-62**

**Subject: Inter-Agency Forums**

***Asked by:*** Rex Patrick

***Question:***

What were the primary inter-agency forums with which Home Affairs/Border Force participated in?

***Answer:***

The Department of Home Affairs regularly facilitates and participates in inter-agency forums held under the National Coordination Mechanism (NCM), which includes representatives from relevant Commonwealth, State and Territory agencies (including First Ministers Departments).

The Australian Border Force regularly facilitates and participates in the Border Measures Band 2 Whole of Government Working Group, Band 2 Check In, National Committee on Trade Facilitation, Trade Facilitation Initiatives Working Group (TFIWG), Customs Advisory Board (CAB), National Passenger Facilitation Committee, and National Sea Passenger Facilitation Committee.

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Select Committee on COVID-19

**QoN Number: CV19-65**

**Subject: PPE Stocks - January**

**Asked by:** Rex Patrick

**Question:**

What stocks of personal protective equipment did Border Force/Home Affairs hold at the beginning of January?

**Answer:**

At the beginning of January 2020, the Australian Border Force held stocks of the following Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Masks
- Gowns
- Gloves
- Safety Glasses
- Hand Sanitiser
- Surface Wipes

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**QoN Number: CV19-66**

**Subject: PPE Acquired through January**

**Asked by:** Rex Patrick

***Question:***

What additional stocks of PPE were acquired through January, prior to the Government's imposition of entry controls on flights from Wuhan and then travellers from all of China on 1 February?

***Answer:***

The Australian Border Force (ABF) acquired additional stocks of P2 masks through January 2020; however, these were originally intended for regions affected by bushfires and smoke haze. In late January, these masks were redirected to ABF teams at international airports, in response to the threat of COVID-19.

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**QoN Number: CV19-67**

**Subject: PPE Use by ABF**

**Asked by:** Rex Patrick

**Question:**

When was PPE first used by Border Force personnel dealing with flights from China? Were the use of gloves or facemasks made mandatory, or was it voluntary?

**Answer:**

Australian Border Force (ABF) officers use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in the course of their normal duties. Examples of this include:

- Passenger baggage examinations; and
- Handling of hazardous substances.

On 10 January 2020, officers were made aware of the existence of a virus originating in China, and advised about World Health Organisation (WHO) recommendations on public health measures around the prevention of influenza and severe acute respiratory infections. These measures included the practicing of hand hygiene, and the donning of a surgical mask, if concerned about their risk of transmission when interacting with passengers from China.

Subsequent PPE messaging to the ABF workforce has been drawn from advice issued by the Department of Health, through their **'Information Sheet for Border Staff'** fact sheets, which was first published on 17 January 2020.

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**QoN Number: CV19-68**

**Subject: Flight MU 749 - Procedures and PPE**

***Asked by:*** Rex Patrick

***Question:***

On 23 January Flight MU 749 from Wuhan landed in Sydney Airport. It was the one flight biosecurity screened before direct flights from Wuhan were cancelled by the Chinese Government. What procedures were followed, and PPE used by Border Force personnel dealing with passengers on that flight?

***Answer:***

Immigration and Customs clearance of the MU749 occurred as per normal practices. Additionally, Australian Border Force officers wore gloves for interactions with travellers arriving on the MU749 flight. Appropriate P2 level face masks were made available to officers along with hand sanitizer and alcohol wipes.

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**QoN Number: CV19-69**

**Subject: ABF PPE Use - flights from Chinese cities**

**Asked by:** Rex Patrick

**Question:**

What PPE was used by Border Force personnel dealing with passengers arriving on subsequent flights from other Chinese cities, especially after the government's decisions of 1 February?

**Answer:**

From 1 February 2020, Officers processing travellers were advised to wear masks (either surgical, P2 or N95) and disposable nitrile gloves whenever undertaking traveller clearance functions.

Where Australian Border Force officers were required to assist biosecurity officers when dealing with unwell passengers, officers were advised to wear a disposable gown, a face shield or protective spectacles, a P2/N95 mask and disposable gloves.

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**QoN Number: CV19-70**

**Subject: PPE Supplied to ABF**

***Asked by:*** Rex Patrick

***Question:***

What additional stocks of PPE has Border Force obtained/been supplied with since the beginning of February?

***Answer:***

Since the beginning of February 2020, the Australian Border Force has purchased/been supplied with the following Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) items:

- Surgical Masks
- P2/N95 Masks
- Safety Glasses
- Goggles
- Gloves
- Gowns
- Coveralls
- Hand Sanitiser
- Surface Wipes

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**QoN Number: CV19-72**

**Subject: Location of ABF Positive COVID Tests**

***Asked by:*** Rex Patrick

***Question:***

Where were the four Border Force personnel who contracted COVID-19 located?

***Answer:***

- Three officers were in Queensland.
- One officer was in New South Wales.



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**PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY WRITTEN QUESTION ON NOTICE**

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**QoN Number: CV19-76**

**Subject: Coronavirus Outbreak - AFP first advised**

***Asked by:*** Rex Patrick

***Question:***

When did AFP first learn of the emerging coronavirus outbreak in China? How was AFP advised of that?

***Answer:***

The AFP was first advised of the coronavirus outbreak on Monday 20 January 2020. This notification occurred to the AFP's Commander Asia, who is located at the Australian Embassy in Beijing, China.

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**PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY WRITTEN QUESTION ON NOTICE**

Select Committee on COVID-19

**QoN Number: CV19-77**

**Subject: Pandemic Planning Exercises - AFP**

**Asked by:** Rex Patrick

**Question:**

What Australian pandemic planning exercises did engage in prior to the COVID-19 outbreak?

What was the level of AFP participation?

Were any lessons learned by AFP from exercise participation that were relevant to the present situation?

**Answer:**

In 2013, the AFP established Operation OBTINEO as a whole-of-enterprise approach to business continuity planning and preparation in the event of an enterprise-wide incident.

The three categories of disruption primarily covered by Operation OBTINEO are:

1. loss of ICT;
2. loss of infrastructure; and
3. loss of personnel (including due to a pandemic).

The AFP's annual business continuity plan renewal process, undertaken by all business areas, includes a requirement to conduct a business continuity exercise. One of the exercise scenarios provided to business areas is a reduction in personnel due to pandemic.

In addition to individual business area annual exercising, the AFP conducts two broader Operation OBTINEO exercises every year. One of these exercises is a desktop exercise focussing on roles and responsibilities of the Business Continuity Committee members, with the other being a simulation or field disruption exercise.

The AFP also employs a health team (doctor and nurses) who have public health qualifications and experience including in pandemic planning. This team conduct regular drills on critical incidents including public health emergencies.

The AFP has also participated in pandemic planning exercise with the Department of Home Affairs.

The AFP health team conduct regular reviews of critical incidents to inform lessons learnt and improve internal policies and processes.

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**QoN Number: CV19-56**

**Subject: Pandemic Planning Exercises**

***Asked by: Rex Patrick***

***Question:***

What Australian pandemic planning exercises has Home Affairs/Border Force engaged in prior to the COVID-19 outbreak?

***Answer:***

In February 2018 the Department led a review of the crisis management arrangements related to a national health crisis. Participants were drawn from across the Portfolio and Australian Public Service, including the Australian Border Force, Australian Federal Police, Departments of Health, Defence, Agriculture and Water Resources, Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Then extant crisis arrangements, including plans, coordination frameworks and communications protocols were tested through a scenario exercise involving a pandemic outbreak of a zoonotic influenza virus, with escalating severity from ordinary to very significant to catastrophic crisis.

Since the stress test was undertaken, the Department has continued to refine and develop its crisis management arrangements, drawing on findings from this process and others developed through crisis management exercises and the live activation of crisis arrangements.

To further develop Australia's disaster management preparedness and recovery capability, during 2017-2019 the Department, through Emergency Management Australia, conducted a series of scenario-based workshops which focused on planning for severe to catastrophic disasters, and to promote a shared understanding of priorities and potential initiatives to enhance meaningful national and jurisdictional preparedness. These workshops were based on a hazard-agnostic approach to disaster management – where the same authority, governance and arrangements are used regardless of the source of the threat or risk.

The outcomes of these activities have assisted the Department of Home Affairs in strengthening the role of Emergency Management Australia during periods of crisis, strengthening State-Territory stakeholder management and identifying what capabilities Australia needs to support recovery from the consequences of a national catastrophic crisis.

A key outcome is the National Coordination Mechanism (NCM), which is operating in place of the National Crisis Committee (NCC) due to the scale and tempo of the COVID-19 work. The NCM operates through the Department of Home Affairs, and together with the States and Territories coordinates the whole-of-Government responses to issues outside of the direct health management of COVID-19.

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**QoN Number: CV19-58**

**Subject: Pandemic Planning Exercises - Lessons Learned**

***Asked by: Rex Patrick***

***Question:***

Were any lessons learned by Home Affairs/Border Force that were relevant to the present situation?

***Answer:***

Refer to answer QONCV19-56.

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**QoN Number: CV19-60**

**Subject: Minister Briefings**

***Asked by:*** Rex Patrick

***Question:***

When was the Minister for Home Affairs first briefed by Border Force/Home Affairs on the coronavirus outbreak and its implications for border control etc?

***Answer:***

21 January 2020.

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**QoN Number: CV19-63**

**Subject: Border Force Guidance**

***Asked by:*** Rex Patrick

***Question:***

When were Border Force personnel informed and given guidance about the risk of human-to-human transmission – i.e. that people coming from China and elsewhere could be carrying an infectious disease?

***Answer:***

The date that Border Force personnel were informed and given guidance about the risk of human-to-human transmission was 21 January 2020.



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**QoN Number: CV19-78**

**Subject: Planning and Preparation - AFP**

**Asked by:** Rex Patrick

**Question:**

When was AFP first engaged in planning and preparations for Australia's response to the coronavirus outbreak?

**Answer:**

On 22 January 2020, the AFP began to receive health advice via government partners. Please refer to IQ20-000116 for further detail.

On 2 February 2020, the AFP established Operation BURDEI to assist with the repatriation of Australians returning from China and Japan. The AFP deployed 52 officers to Christmas Island, Learmonth and Darwin to assist with the quarantining of Australians. On 5 March 2020, Operation BURDEI was de-activated and Operation PROTECT was established.