

**IN THE MATTER OF****THE BOARD OF INQUIRY INTO THE HOTEL QUARANTINE PROGRAM****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 in response to the Notice to Produce a Witness Statement (NTP-130) issued by the Board and dated 31 August 2020:

**Q1. Please describe your relevant professional experience and qualifications.**

1. I was appointed Secretary of DPC in December 2014 and have held that position since that time.
2. I served as Director-General of the New South Wales Department of Premier and Cabinet from 2011 to 2014.
3. I was Chief Executive of the South Australian Department of Premier and Cabinet from 2009 to 2011.
4. I first joined DPC in Victoria in 2007. From 2007 to 2009, I held the positions of Deputy Secretary, Sector Improvement Group and, later, Deputy Secretary, National Reform and Climate Change Group.
5. Before joining DPC in 2007, I worked in a variety of government and private sector senior management positions:
  - a. I held leadership roles in the Australian Capital Territory Chief Minister's Department and in the Australian National Training Authority.
  - b. I was an Associate Director at KPMG, where I headed the national education consulting practice.
  - c. I was a foundation Director of the consulting firm Phillips KPA, which works across all education and training sectors.
6. In 2017, I was made an Officer of the Order of Australia for distinguished service to public administration, to innovative policy development and sound governance, and to the delivery of reform in the areas of training, education and disability.

7. I hold a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Laws from the Australian National University.

**Q2. What is your usual role within the Department of Premier and Cabinet (the Department) and what are your usual responsibilities?**

8. As Secretary, I am employed by the Premier as the head of DPC under the *Public Administration Act 2004* (Vic). Under the Act, I am responsible to the Premier and DPC portfolio ministers for the general conduct and the effective, efficient and economical management of the functions and activities of DPC, and the administrative offices that exist in relation to DPC. I am also responsible for advising the Premier and DPC portfolio ministers in all matters relating to DPC and its administrative offices.
9. To understand my role and responsibilities in more detail, it is necessary to understand the role and functions of DPC.
10. **First**, DPC is a central agency within the Victorian Government and is the First Minister's department. As the DPC Secretary, I lead the Victorian Public Service and act as its principal policy adviser to the Premier. As head of the Victorian Public Service, I am broadly responsible for driving the government's objectives, working with other departmental Secretaries and supporting the smooth functioning of Cabinet.
11. Relatedly, I have a broader stewardship role in setting the vision and direction of the Victorian Public Service. I also chair key interdepartmental and whole of government committees, such as the Victorian Secretaries Board and the Mission Coordination Committee (which I explain in questions 8 and 12 respectively).
12. **Second**, DPC provides advice for, and supports the functioning of, Cabinet. Cabinet decision making is the vehicle through which the government determines its direction and management, and part of DPC's role is to assist the functioning of Cabinet, including its committees. DPC also performs this advisory and support function in relation to the Crisis Council of Cabinet (which the Premier chairs), which was established by the Premier in April 2020, as a decision-making forum for the Victorian Government in relation to the pandemic.
13. DPC also briefs the Premier on all matters that the Premier or other Ministers bring to Cabinet and Cabinet committees for consideration and decision. DPC provides advice on Cabinet systems and processes; receives, processes and distributes submissions to

be considered by Cabinet and its committees; coordinates the legislation program, including its relationship with the Cabinet agenda; and manages requests for access to Cabinet and committee documents. Further details about this role are publicly available in the Cabinet Handbook.<sup>1</sup> In this capacity, I am the custodian of Cabinet documents for the government and previous governments. I also attend Cabinet and support the Cabinet Secretary in recording Cabinet decisions.

14. **Third**, DPC has responsibility for relations and interactions with Commonwealth and State and Territory governments on matters that have significance for the whole of the Victorian Government, or where engagement is required with the Prime Minister or the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (such as through National Cabinet). In this capacity, DPC supports the Premier and collaborates with the Commonwealth Cabinet Office, including by providing secretariat support to the National Cabinet. Departments otherwise have responsibility for intergovernmental engagement on their respective portfolio specific matters. I also support the Premier as a member of National Cabinet including by conveying decisions made by National Cabinet to my Victorian Public Service colleagues as required.
15. **Fourth**, DPC works with all departments on whole of government policy to ensure that the development and implementation of government policies and programs align with and are responsive to the government’s overall direction. To this end, DPC includes branches that generally mirror, and collaborate with, the broader Victorian Public Service. For example, DPC’s Social Policy Group includes the Justice branch, which liaises and collaborates with the Department of Justice and Community Safety (**DJCS**) on matters falling within the justice portfolio. Similarly, DPC’s Health and Human Services branch liaises and collaborates with the Department of Health and Human Services (**DHHS**) on matters falling within the health portfolio.
16. DPC is also represented on key interdepartmental committees and working groups within the Victorian Government. These activities enable DPC to maintain a high level understanding of the policies and operations of the various departments and agencies, to report to, and brief, the Premier and the Premier’s Private Office on the status of policies and operations, and review communications material. These activities illustrate how DPC performs what is sometimes termed its “shadowing” function. That “shadowing” function may intensify if there is a particularly sensitive

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/cabinet-handbook>.

issue that arises which would benefit from further input or development. That input may take the form of contributing to analysis, offering advice, or assisting with identifying a response to an issue.

17. **Fifth**, and in addition to DPC's core functions as a central agency, it is also the department with lead responsibility for certain portfolio areas (for example, Aboriginal Affairs, Equality, Multicultural Affairs, Industrial Relations, Veterans, Youth and Women). This means that some DPC staff lead policy work with respect to a particular policy area, whilst others perform the traditional central agency responsibilities I have described above.
18. DPC also provides administrative support to a range of entities that fall within its portfolio responsibilities. These are sometimes termed "portfolio entities" or "portfolio agencies" and include, for example, the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council (within the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio), the Victorian Veterans Council (within the Veterans portfolio) and the Victorian Multicultural Commission (within the Multicultural Affairs portfolio).
19. I lead and support DPC in all of these roles. My usual responsibilities include keeping the Premier informed of significant issues, playing a leadership role in developing major policy initiatives, overseeing the development of public policy solutions, maintaining an awareness of the social and political landscape, facilitating and supporting relationships between the Premier and DPC portfolio agencies, supporting the Premier to manage relationships with portfolio stakeholders, and undertaking formal negotiations and building relationships between DPC, the Commonwealth and other States and Territories.
20. I am also the chairperson of the State Crisis and Resilience Council, which is a statutory council that acts as the peak crisis and emergency management advisory body in Victoria, responsible for providing advice to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services in relation to whole of government policy and strategy for emergency management in Victoria, and for the implementation of that policy and strategy. This role does not entail operational responsibility for specific emergency responses, which generally sits with the Emergency Management Commissioner supported by Emergency Management Victoria and the State Control Centre. For completeness, I note that the State Crisis and Resilience Council has met on three occasions this year (the Hotel Quarantine Program was not discussed at any of these meetings).

**Q3. What role did you play in the Hotel Quarantine Program and for what were you responsible?**

21. My primary role in the Hotel Quarantine Program was to maintain a high level, general awareness about the strategic settings of the Hotel Quarantine Program, otherwise known as Operation Soteria (specifically, about the funding arrangements for the Hotel Quarantine Program and matters requiring intergovernmental engagement). I provided advice to the Premier (including in the Premier's role as a member of National Cabinet) and to the Premier's Private Office, as required from time to time. I also provided advice to the Crisis Council of Cabinet, in relation to the Hotel Quarantine Program (see further my response to question 7).
22. In addition to my primary role just identified:
- a. I communicated the decision by National Cabinet on 27 March 2020 to require, by 11.59pm on 28 March 2020, all international arrivals to undertake a mandatory 14-day quarantine in a hotel, to Simon Phemister, Secretary of the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (**DJPR**). I refer to the contents of this communication in answer to question 15 below.
  - b. I was involved in targeted engagement between the Victorian and Commonwealth governments, regarding the number and details of arrivals from overseas.
23. I did not have an operational role in relation to the Hotel Quarantine Program.

**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.**

24. Yes. DPC staff were directly involved in monitoring the Hotel Quarantine Program. They also played a limited role in reviewing and approving a number of communications. Further, DPC staff also assisted with the transition of control of the Hotel Quarantine Program, and other governance arrangements.

Monitoring

25. The monitoring work I refer to paragraph 24 was as follows.

26. **First**, DPC staff attended Operation Soteria meetings and, during the operational planning phase of the Hotel Quarantine Program, combined-agency information sharing teleconferences.<sup>2</sup>
27. **Second**, DPC staff participated in intergovernmental forums, such as the National Coordination Mechanism for Return Travellers, to manage the allocation of repatriation flights across jurisdictions to ensure that hotel quarantine capacity was not overwhelmed. DPC worked closely with lead operational departments, primarily DHHS and DJPR, to provide this advice to the Commonwealth.<sup>3</sup>
28. **Third**, DPC staff received general updates, and served as conduits between various departments and the Premier's Private Office by seeking responses to questions provided by the Premier's Private Office from relevant departments on various issues (for example, when concerns of quarantining travellers arose, DPC provided information obtained from the relevant department to the Premier's Private Office on the steps being taken by the department to address these concerns).<sup>4</sup>
29. Where significant issues were identified, DPC staff worked proactively with lead departments and agencies to address them. For example:
- a. early in the Hotel Quarantine Program, there was a death in a hotel. DPC worked closely with the relevant department to establish a new approach which incorporated additional measures to be put in place to address mental health concerns;<sup>5</sup> and
  - b. once outbreaks from the Hotel Quarantine Program were identified, DPC worked with DJPR and with the Commonwealth to limit future international arrivals of travellers to Melbourne to prevent overwhelming the Hotel Quarantine Program.<sup>6</sup>
30. **Fourth**, DPC liaised with the Commonwealth on particular intergovernmental issues. For example, to clarify funding arrangements for the Hotel Quarantine Program,<sup>7</sup> and to seek improved data on arrivals and to cooperate on diplomatic queries.<sup>8</sup> DPC had a particular focus on funding for the Hotel Quarantine Program and ensuring the orderly

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<sup>2</sup> See e.g. DPC.0003.0001.0004; DPC.0003.0001.0080; DPC.0002.0001.1127; DPC.0002.0001.1935.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. DPC.0002.0001.0196; DPC.0001.0001.0849; DPC.0001.0001.2968; DPC.0001.0001.2972; DPC.0002.0001.0624.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. DPC.0001.0001.0800; DPC.0001.0001.0971; DPC.0001.0001.6997; DPC.0003.0001.0317.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. DPC.0001.0001.0971.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. DPC.0001.0001.5867.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. DPC.0001.0001.6117 and DPC.0001.0001.6125.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. DPC.0011.0001.0129; DPC.0001.0001.0791; DPC.0002.0001.0398.

arrival of passengers from overseas and engaged with the Commonwealth for these purposes.

31. **Fifth**, DPC staff prepared briefings to the Premier in relation to the Hotel Quarantine Program ahead of Cabinet (including Crisis Council of Cabinet) and/or National Cabinet meetings, as discussed below in response to question 7.

#### Communications

32. As noted in paragraph 24, DPC staff were involved in communications in relation to the Hotel Quarantine Program. They reviewed and approved some communications and communication plans.<sup>9</sup>
33. DPC helped draft initial summary material on 28 March 2020 to assist during the early establishment phase of the Hotel Quarantine Program but has otherwise only reviewed and approved materials prepared by DHHS, DJPR and other agencies. Communications material prepared by departments was provided to DPC for review, with suggestions provided for clarity and consistency with other communications relating to the pandemic and to ensure communication was appropriately targeted to the relevant audience. The majority of documents given to DPC for review were provided in the first days and weeks of the operation of quarantine. DPC's work in this area decreased over time.

#### Transition assistance

34. Since the COVID-19 infection control issues were first identified in late May 2020 in relation to the Hotel Quarantine Program, DPC staff assisted other departments and agencies in establishing new governance arrangements in the Hotel Quarantine Program. DPC staff aided the transition of operational responsibilities from DJPR to DHHS, and DHHS to DJCS and Corrections Victoria, by gathering and assisting the transfer of relevant information where necessary. An example of DPC's assistance with the transition of responsibilities to DJCS was that it provided a DJCS executive with an email on 25 June 2020 attaching key documents related to the Hotel Quarantine Program. The documents provided on that date were (i) DJPR's daily report on key statistics and issues, (ii) information provided by DHHS for the purposes of answering a request by the Premier's Private Office the previous week on

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<sup>9</sup> See e.g. DPC.0001.0001.6779 and DPC.0001.0001.6780; DPC.0007.0001.0052 and DPC.0007.0001.0053; DPC.0007.0001.0031 and DPC.0007.0001.0032; DPC.0007.0001.0353 and DPC.0007.0001.0354.

how DHHS was managing outbreaks, (iii) repatriation flight information, (iv) advice provided to quarantined travellers, and (v) the Operation Soteria Plan as at 22 May 2020.<sup>10</sup>

35. In early June, DPC staff supported the Premier in implementing the necessary machinery of government changes required to transfer the responsibility of the Hotel Quarantine Program from the Minister for Health to the Attorney-General. This involved amending the General Order and Administrative Arrangements Orders under the *Public Administration Act*.
36. DPC also had a policy role in advising the Premier and the Crisis Council of Cabinet in relation to the reset of the Hotel Quarantine Program. DPC has been involved in the development and strengthening of the new governance arrangements for the Hotel Quarantine Program and continues to work closely with DJCS in re-establishing the program.

#### Secondees

37. DPC staff were not involved in any operational elements of the Hotel Quarantine Program, save for DPC staff who were seconded to other departments to assist with the Hotel Quarantine Program.<sup>11</sup> Most of the staff who were seconded to other departments were not working as DPC staff during their involvement in the Hotel Quarantine Program, although in at least one instance a secondee continued to perform some of their DPC functions.<sup>12</sup> I understand that due to the urgency of the secondments and their sometimes informal and short-term nature, many secondees continued to use their DPC email addresses during their secondments.<sup>13</sup>

#### The framework of the Hotel Quarantine Program

38. Finally, it is relevant to note that the Hotel Quarantine Program was managed and delivered under the emergency management framework, which is overseen by Emergency Management Victoria. Emergency Management Victoria is not a portfolio agency of DPC and, therefore, DPC did not have a direct role over its, or the State Control Centre's, administration of the Hotel Quarantine Program.

<sup>10</sup> DPC.0001.0001.5282. See also eg DPC.0007.0001.1007, DPC.0001.0001.6014, DPC.0001.0001.6069.

<sup>11</sup> Secondees included, at different times, Nicole Lynch, Kate Houghton,

<sup>12</sup> For example, performed some ordinary DPC work during her ten-day secondment.

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. DPC.0005.0001.0087.



**Q5. Are you aware of any concerns raised by Department staff about any aspect of the Hotel Quarantine Program, arising from their involvement? Please provide details, including relevant documents.**

39. No. I do not recall any concerns being raised with me by my department staff and I understand that DPC records do not disclose any formal reporting of concerns or complaints by my department staff in relation to the Hotel Quarantine Program.

**Q6. Did the Department oversee any aspect of the Hotel Quarantine Program? If so, please provide details.**

40. No, DPC did not oversee any aspect of the Hotel Quarantine Program, in that it did not direct any operational aspects of the Hotel Quarantine Program. It did, however, perform the roles identified in my answer to question 4 above.

**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 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.**

41. Yes, I briefed the Premier (but no other Victorian Government Minister) about aspects of the Hotel Quarantine Program. Other senior executives in DPC did likewise. We did this by providing the verbal and written briefings I describe below.

42. By way of background, DPC provides written briefings to the Premier on almost all matters that are put before the Crisis Council of Cabinet itself.

43. Verbal briefings were also provided before Crisis Council of Cabinet meetings. DPC attendees at a verbal briefing generally included at least me and most if not all of the Deputy Secretaries, and the General Counsel, and usually the relevant Deputy Secretary or the General Counsel took the lead on a brief relevant to their area of responsibility. The verbal briefings occurred more frequently in the early stages of the Crisis Council of Cabinet. They subsequently became less frequent because of time pressures and the speed at which urgent matters had to be considered by the Crisis Council of Cabinet. I do not now remember the precise content of those verbal briefings.

44. DPC provided written and verbal briefings to the Premier on matters before National Cabinet. The verbal briefing occurred immediately prior to the relevant National Cabinet meeting.
45. Verbal briefings for Crisis Council of Cabinet and National Cabinet were usually confined to the matters contained on the agenda for the upcoming meeting, and were usually based on the written briefs that had already been prepared. However, not all matters in the written briefs were covered in a verbal briefing (and not to the same level of detail).
46. I set out in detail the written briefings provided by me, and other DPC executives, in relation to the Hotel Quarantine Program, below.

#### Briefings relating to National Cabinet

47. A written brief, approved by Jeremi Moule, Deputy Secretary, Governance Policy and Coordination, was provided to me and the Premier's Private Office (at the same time) ahead of the 29 March 2020 National Cabinet meeting. The briefing included content which was approved by Tim Ada, Deputy Secretary, Economic Policy and State Productivity, in relation to an update on arrangements implemented by Victoria to give effect to the 27 March 2020 National Cabinet decision to quarantine all returning travellers for 14 days, with effect from 29 March 2020.<sup>14</sup> Before the meeting, Jeremi Moule, Deputy Secretary, and I provided a verbal briefing to the Premier regarding the matters on the agenda for that meeting. I do not remember whether the implementation of the National Cabinet decision to quarantine all returning overseas travellers for 14 days was discussed in the verbal briefing.

#### Briefings relating to Crisis Council of Cabinet

48. Some written briefings to the Crisis Council of Cabinet, prepared by DPC (and approved by the senior DPC executive whose name appears at the bottom of the written brief) contained information relating to the Hotel Quarantine Program. Sometimes only a passing reference was made to the Hotel Quarantine Program, as a part of the wider COVID-19 response. Other written briefs contained detailed consideration of submissions from other departments that were to go to the Crisis Council of Cabinet, concerning the Hotel Quarantine Program.

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<sup>14</sup> DPC.0016.0001.0040.

*Passing reference to the Hotel Quarantine Program*

49. Examples of briefings which contained only a passing reference to the Hotel Quarantine Program are as follows:
- a. The written brief to the Premier titled “CCC49 — Testing Update — Dashboard” for the meeting to be held on 27 April 2020, in summarising a submission to the Crisis Council of Cabinet, noted that “5845 returned travellers have been held in mandatory quarantine in Victoria, with 46 of those testing positive to COVID-19”.<sup>15</sup>
  - b. The written briefs to the Premier for the meetings to be held on 4 May 2020<sup>16</sup> and 14 May 2020<sup>17</sup> contained references to the total number of persons who had been in quarantine.
  - c. The written brief to the Premier for the meeting to be held on 18 May 2020 contained one reference to the Hotel Quarantine Program, which was: “Only 39 cases are not associated with a known outbreak or hotel quarantine”.<sup>18</sup>
  - d. The written brief to the Premier on 1 June 2020 referred to there being seven positive staff and contractors working at the Rydges Swanston Street Hotel.<sup>19</sup>

*Detailed consideration of the Hotel Quarantine Program*

50. By way of broad overview, the briefs which considered the Hotel Quarantine Program in more detail concerned:
- a. early estimates of the costs and funding of the Hotel Quarantine Program;
  - b. the maturation of the service delivery model. What I mean by this is that the Hotel Quarantine Program was one aspect of a wider COVID-19 Emergency Accommodation Framework. Over time, consideration was given to, for example, who would be able to access emergency accommodation (for instance, front line workers, family violence victims, and international students at risk of homelessness), and adjusting the nature of the service, including the provision of expanded health and social supports; and
  - c. governance arrangements.
51. These briefings were as follows:

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<sup>15</sup> DPC.0012.0001.0057.

<sup>16</sup> DPC.0012.0001.0128.

<sup>17</sup> DPC.0012.0001.0260.

<sup>18</sup> DPC.0012.0001.0289.

<sup>19</sup> DPC.0012.0001.0340.

- a. A written brief in relation to a submission to the Crisis Council of Cabinet meeting to be held on 8 April 2020, titled “CoVID 19 Emergency Accommodation Framework”,<sup>20</sup> which described the purpose of the submission as providing an overview of the COVID-19 emergency accommodation support arrangements and current demand (which includes the mandatory quarantine of international arrivals), and sought agreement to governance arrangements, extension of the Hotels of Heroes program to all healthcare workers, and additional funding to secure suitable accommodation for victims of family violence. The written brief summarised and recommended the Premier support the submission, subject to certain additions to one of the recommendations which did not directly concern the Hotel Quarantine Program.<sup>21</sup>
- b. A written brief in relation to a submission for the Crisis Council of Cabinet meeting to be held on 24 April 2020, titled “COVID 19 Emergency Accommodation Framework”,<sup>22</sup> which described the purpose of the submission as being to amend the current service model for quarantining return travellers and Hotels for Heroes placements under the COVID-19 Emergency Accommodation Program, including to reserve rooms for international students at risk of homelessness, and extend the program to a broader range of frontline workers. The written brief summarised the submission (noting, among other things, the expanded health and social supports to persons in quarantine), and recommended that the Premier support the submission, with a request for a report back on updated costings, occupancy rates and projected demand for accommodation for quarantined travellers.<sup>23</sup>
- c. A written brief in relation to a submission for the Crisis Council of Cabinet meeting to be held on 4 June 2020, titled “Coronavirus (COVID-19) Emergency Accommodation Report Back”,<sup>24</sup> which described the purpose of the submission as providing a report back on government costs for Coronavirus Emergency Accommodation to that date, and sought additional

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<sup>20</sup> DPC.0012.0001.0733.

<sup>21</sup> DPC.0012.0001.0039.

<sup>22</sup> DPC.0001.0001.6565.

<sup>23</sup> DPC.0012.0001.0049.

<sup>24</sup> DPC.0012.0001.0356.

and reprioritised funding to support operations to the end of June 2020. The written brief summarised the submission (noting, among other things, that the additional funding included support for specialist cleaning following the cluster outbreak at the Rydges on Swanston hotel) and recommended that the Premier support the submission.<sup>25</sup>

- d. A written brief in relation to a submission for the Crisis Council of Cabinet meeting to be held on 27 June 2020, titled “Alternative supervision model for COVID-19 hotel”,<sup>26</sup> which described the purpose of the submission as outlining an alternative approach to the supervision of hotel security and a phased approach to implementation. The written brief summarised and recommended that the Premier support the submission.<sup>27</sup>
- e. A written brief in relation to a submission for the Crisis Council of Cabinet meeting to be held on 8 July 2020, titled “COVID 19 mandatory quarantine accommodation program”,<sup>28</sup> which described the purpose of the submission as seeking agreement to new governance and accountability settings, and a new operating model for the Hotel Quarantine Program. The written brief summarised a draft version of the submission and recommended that consideration be deferred to better assess and mitigate infection control risks.<sup>29</sup>
- f. A written brief in relation to a second submission for the Crisis Council of Cabinet meeting to be held on 8 July 2020, titled “Board of Inquiry into the COVID-19 Hotel Quarantine Program”, which described the purpose of the submission as seeking approval or agreement to arrangements to facilitate the efficient conduct of the Board of Inquiry into the Hotel Quarantine Program. The written brief summarised and recommended that the Premier support the submission.
- g. A written brief in relation to a submission for the Crisis Council of Cabinet meeting to be held on 9 July 2020, titled “COVID-19 mandatory quarantine accommodation program”,<sup>30</sup> which described the purpose of the submission as seeking agreement to new governance and accountability settings, and a new

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<sup>25</sup> DPC.0012.0001.0367.

<sup>26</sup> DPC.0012.0001.0463.

<sup>27</sup> DPC.0008.0001.3213.

<sup>28</sup> DPC.0001.0001.6536.

<sup>29</sup> DPC.0012.0001.0528.

<sup>30</sup> DPC.0012.0001.0532.

operating model for the Hotel Quarantine Program. The written brief summarised and recommended the Premier support the submission.<sup>31</sup>

- h. A written brief in relation to a submission for the Crisis Council of Cabinet meeting to be held on 27 July 2020, titled “Transfer and integration of COVID-19 hotel quarantine and emergency accommodation programs”,<sup>32</sup> which described the purpose of the submission as seeking agreement to transition responsibility for the Hotel Quarantine Program to the Attorney-General and DJCS. The written brief summarised and recommended that the Premier support the submission.<sup>33</sup>

52. There have also been a number of additional written briefings in relation to other submissions to the Crisis Council of Cabinet throughout August 2020 in relation to the establishment of the new Hotel Quarantine Program under the Attorney-General and DJCS’s responsibilities. These written briefs can also be provided to the Inquiry if it would assist.
53. Finally, while I would not characterise it as reporting directly to the Premier by me or another DPC executive, as set out above at paragraph 28, DPC provided information to the Premier’s Private Office in relation to the Hotel Quarantine Program.

**Q8. What is the Victorian Secretaries Board and what is your role on it?**

54. The Victorian Secretaries Board is the forum for Secretaries and other senior public sector leaders (specifically the Chief Commissioner of Police and the Victorian Public Sector Commissioner) to meet to discuss matters of strategic importance for the public sector. Its vision is to drive high quality public policy, public administration and public sector performance for the benefit of all Victorians. Its purposes are to promote coordination, leadership and stewardship. It is a forum to discuss strategic issues that directly relate to its vision and purposes and that require discussion and consideration by all members and for which no alternative forum is available.<sup>34</sup> It does not have a statutory or other legal basis.
55. As the Secretary of DPC, I chair the Victorian Secretaries Board. DPC provides secretariat support.

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<sup>31</sup> DPC.0012.0001.0549.

<sup>32</sup> DPC.0012.0001.0835.

<sup>33</sup> DPC.0012.0001.0832.

<sup>34</sup> DPC.0014.0001.0009.

56. The fortnightly meetings of the Board were effectively suspended after 8 April 2020. The Board's functions were subsumed by the functions of the Mission Coordination Committee, and those of the Public Sector Administration Committee. The Victorian Secretaries Board has met on several occasions since the regular fortnightly meetings were suspended, in particular, on 10 June, 5 August and 3 September 2020.
57. I explain the Mission Coordination Committee below in question 12. As to the Public Sector Administration Committee, that Committee is chaired by a Deputy Secretary of DPC and functions as the primary decision-making forum for day-to-day matters affecting the Victorian Public Service, while the Mission Coordination Committee is focused upon the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**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.**

58. The Hotel Quarantine Program was discussed at the 27 March 2020 meeting. I do not have an independent recollection of the meeting now.
59. I have been provided with the minutes of that meeting<sup>35</sup> and with notes taken by my senior adviser at the time, [REDACTED]<sup>36</sup>
60. Consistent with the Victorian Secretaries Board's function set out at paragraph 54, no decisions were made in respect of the operations of the Hotel Quarantine Program.
61. I do not have an independent recollection of the 1 April 2020 meeting, but the minutes record no discussion or decision in relation to the Hotel Quarantine Program.<sup>37</sup>

**Q10. Save insofar as already covered in answer to the previous question, on what occasions, and to what extent, has the Victorian Secretaries Board (or any subcommittee of it) discussed and/or resolved any matters in relation to the role(s) of:**

- a) **Victoria Police;**

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<sup>35</sup> DPC.0016.0001.0095.

<sup>36</sup> DPC.0013.0001.0001.

<sup>37</sup> DPC.0016.0001.0100.

- b) private security contractors; and/or
- c) Australian Defence Force personnel,

**in the Victorian Hotel Quarantine Program. What was the substance of those discussions and resolutions? Please refer to and produce any notes or minutes of those meetings.**

62. None.

**Q11. As far as you are aware, which person, person(s) or group of persons (howsoever described) made the following decisions in relation to the Hotel Quarantine Program:**

- a) the decision to appoint the Department of Health and Human Services as lead agency;
- b) the decision to vest contractual relationship responsibility to Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions;
- c) the decision to engage private security companies;
- d) the decision to establish COVID-19 positive hotels at:
  - i) Rydges on Swanston; and
  - ii) The Brady?

**In relation to each, please identify the relevant decision maker(s), the date on which the decision(s) was/were made, and to the best of your understanding, the reasons for that/those decision(s) being made. Refer to any notes or documents where appropriate to evidence the fact, timing and reasons for the decision(s).**

- 63. I was not involved in, and therefore do not have specific knowledge about the details of, these decisions.
- 64. However, I make the following observations in respect of the decisions referred to in paragraphs (a), (b) and (c) of the question.

(a) The decision to appoint the Department of Health and Human Services as lead agency

- 65. I have reviewed version 1 of the Operational Plan for the Hotel Quarantine Program, dated 28 March 2020.<sup>38</sup> On the final page of that document,<sup>39</sup> the functions of

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<sup>38</sup> DPC.0001.0001.6766.

<sup>39</sup> DPC.0001.0001.6766 at .6778.



“command and control” are ascribed to the two “lead agencies” — SCC (the State Control Centre) and DHHS. For each stage of the operation, DHHS is described as having “operational command”. Accordingly, having reviewed that document, it appears to me that this decision was made by 8.00pm on 28 March 2020.

(b) The decision to vest contractual relationship responsibility to Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions

66. Version 1 of the Operational Plan for the Hotel Quarantine Program, dated 28 March 2020 (to which I refer at paragraph 65) ascribes DJPR with responsibilities to “manage accommodation contracts” and “manage private security contracts...”.<sup>40</sup> Accordingly, it appears to me that this decision was made by 8:00pm on 28 March 2020.

(c) The decision to engage private security companies

67. As stated at paragraph 66, I have reviewed version 1 of the Operational Plan for the Hotel Quarantine Program, dated 28 March 2020, which ascribes DJPR with responsibilities to “manage private security contracts...”.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, I have reviewed the brief to the Premier for the National Cabinet meeting on 29 March 2020 which states “The Victorian Government has engaged 2 security companies to assist DHHS Authorised Officers and Victoria Police to enforce the arrangements”.<sup>42</sup> I do not know when, between National Cabinet’s decision on 27 March and the Operational Plan being prepared on 28 March 2020, or the brief to the Premier being drafted, the decision was made to engage private security companies.

**Q12. What is the Mission Coordination Committee? When was it established and what is your role in it?**

68. The Mission Coordination Committee is the principal officers’ forum to support the delivery and coordination of public sector missions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic emergency. It was established as part of the broader governance changes instituted in early April 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
69. Its membership consists of the Secretaries of all departments, the Deputy Secretaries of certain groups within DPC (Economic Policy and State Productivity; Governance, Policy and Coordination; and Social Policy), the Premier’s Chief of Staff and Deputy

<sup>40</sup> DPC.0001.0001.6766 at .6772-.6773.

<sup>41</sup> DPC.0001.0001.6766 at .6773.

<sup>42</sup> DPC.0016.0001.0040 at .0044.

Chief of Staff, and the Treasurer's Chief of Staff. It supports the delivery of critical missions to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and to prepare for the recovery and restoration in Victoria.

70. The Mission Coordination Committee supports the work of the Crisis Council of Cabinet including by coordinating and reviewing the items on the agenda for a Crisis Council of Cabinet meeting. On occasion, the Mission Coordination Committee reviews and/or discusses submissions to the Crisis Council of Cabinet. It acts as a "clearing house" for the material that will go to the Crisis Council of Cabinet. The terms of reference<sup>43</sup> and operations of the Mission Coordination Committee, including coordination processes for the Crisis Council of Cabinet, were considered and endorsed at the first Mission Coordination Committee held on 15 April 2020.<sup>44</sup>
71. As the Secretary of DPC, I chair the Committee. DPC staff provide secretariat support.

**Q13. What role(s) did/does the Mission Coordination Committee play in relation to the Victorian Hotel Quarantine Program? If the role(s) have changed over time, describe how it has so changed, when it has so changed, and the reasons for it changing.**

72. The Mission Coordination Committee played a role in the Hotel Quarantine Program insofar as it reviewed the agenda items that went to the Crisis Council of Cabinet which dealt with the Hotel Quarantine Program.<sup>45</sup>
73. As I explained in relation to question 7, the Crisis Council of Cabinet considered the Hotel Quarantine Program on several occasions. A list of all items proposed to be on the agenda for the Crisis Council of Cabinet (including the item titles and short descriptions) were provided to the Mission Coordination Committee first, consistent with its "clearing house" role.
74. I do not recall whether there was any discussion in relation to the relevant agenda items, or any of the submissions that dealt with the Hotel Quarantine Program in detail, in Mission Coordination Committee meetings. Passing reference has been made to the Hotel Quarantine Program in Committee meetings.<sup>46</sup> However,

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<sup>43</sup> DPC.0016.0001.0092.

<sup>44</sup> DPC.0016.0001.0115.

<sup>45</sup> See the model agenda at DPC.0014.0001.0010.

<sup>46</sup> For example, the meeting agenda for 17 April 2020 refers to quarantine of international arrivals: DPC.0001.0002.0003 at .0018.

operational matters relating to the Hotel Quarantine Program were not considered at these meetings.

75. The Hotel Quarantine Program was being run through the State Control Centre and, therefore, as an emergency management response, it was not under the direct operational control of the Crisis Council of Cabinet (or therefore the Mission Coordination Committee). However, the Crisis Council of Cabinet (and therefore the Mission Coordination Committee), considered strategic policy issues, such as whether the Hotel Quarantine Program should be expanded — for example, to international students and victims of family violence.

**Q14. Save insofar as already covered in answer to the previous question, on what occasions, and to what extent, has the Mission Coordination Committee (or any subcommittee of it) discussed and/or resolved any matters in relation to the role(s) of:**

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

**in the Victorian Hotel Quarantine Program. What was the substance of those discussions and those resolutions? Please refer to and produce any notes or minutes of those meetings.**

76. None.

**Q15. Did you communicate with the Secretary of the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions at around midday on 27 March 2020 about:**

- a) **the decision of National Cabinet to implement a mandatory quarantine regime; and/or**
- b) **the need to establish a Hotel Quarantine Program in Victoria? If so, what was the substance of that communication?**

**Please refer to and produce any relevant notes of that communication.**

77. Yes. I called Simon Phemister, the Secretary of DJPR at about midday on 27 March 2020. The call was short, perhaps a few minutes. I had been attending a National Cabinet Meeting at which quarantine was being discussed, and where it was ultimately agreed that all travellers arriving in Australia would be required to

undertake a mandatory 14-day isolation, in designated facilities. I stepped out of the meeting, before it concluded, and called Mr Phemister to advise him that there had been agreement that all new international arrivals will need to quarantine for 14 days effective from midnight on Saturday.

78. In my conversation with Mr Phemister I said that there was a need for hotels, and the need for people with deep logistical experience to work on the quarantine project (the priority at the time, as I understood it, was to source the accommodation — the Hotel Quarantine Program itself, of course, became considerably larger than just the sourcing of accommodation). I recommended Jeroen Weimar from the Department of Transport, who might have the relevant expertise. I also impressed upon Mr Phemister the urgency. He replied to the effect that he would get on with it. I then re-joined the National Cabinet meeting.

**Q16. If you did have such communication to the Secretary of the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, who or what caused you to make that communication?**

79. I decided to call Mr Phemister. The reason I was able to identify very quickly that I should speak to Mr Phemister was that I was aware that DJPR had already undertaken considerable work in securing hotel rooms. That work had followed a decision by the Victorian Government to source hotel rooms for latent capacity in relation to the pandemic. I knew there had been a 20 March 2020 Expenditure Review Committee meeting where it was resolved to provide \$80 million for the Minister of Jobs, Innovation and Trade to source latent capacity for 5,000 hotel rooms. That is, approval was given for an \$80 million package in response to the expected significant numbers of people who would need to self-isolate, but would need assistance to do so (such as homeless people, people in care, family violence victim survivors and identified workforces). Accordingly, I understood that DJPR had already been undertaking preparatory work in sourcing hotel rooms. At the time I called Mr Phemister on 27 March 2020, I understood that DJPR had already sourced about 5,000 hotel rooms across a number of providers.

**Q17. With whom else, if anyone, did you communicate about:**

- a) **the decision of National Cabinet to implement a mandatory quarantine regime; and/or**
- b) **the need to establish a Hotel Quarantine Program in Victoria,**

**between around midday and 4:00pm on 27 March 2020? If so, with whom did you communicate, and, as best you are able to recall, at what time(s) did you engage in those communications and what was their substance? Please refer to and produce any relevant notes of each communication.**

80. I do not recall communicating with anyone else about those matters during that time. However, I think it is likely that before I stepped out of the National Cabinet meeting to make the call to Mr Phemister, I briefly advised the Premier of what I was doing. I also think it likely that I spoke to the Premier's Chief-of-Staff, who I recall was present in the anteroom to the telepresence room where the National Cabinet meeting was being relayed. In that conversation, it is likely that I communicated the substance of the National Cabinet decision and that I was about to speak to Mr Phemister.
81. Once the decision of National Cabinet to implement a mandatory quarantine regime was communicated by me to Mr Phemister, I commenced preparing and supporting the Premier for upcoming National Cabinet meetings, scheduled for Sunday 29 March, Monday 30 March, and Friday 3 April, which would be dealing with a variety of other urgent matters relating to the preparation of the nation and the State to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic emergency.
82. At the same time, the government was on the cusp of finalising its redesign of the government and public service structure to most efficiently and effectively respond to the public health crisis facing the State. My attention at the time of National Cabinet's decision to implement mandatory quarantine was focused on this task, including the finalisation of the design, and delivery, of the new structure, which includes the current Crisis Council of Cabinet and the Mission Coordination Committee. The new structure was announced on Friday 3 April and the Crisis Council of Cabinet met for the first time on Monday 6 April 2020.

**Q18. Have you been involved in any, and if so what, communication(s) with:**

- a) any, and if so which, member(s) of Victoria Police;
- b) any, and if so which, Australian Defence Force personnel,

**in relation to their respective roles, or ability to undertake roles in the Hotel Quarantine Program? If so, when were and what was the substance of those communications? Please refer to and produce any relevant notes, emails, letters or notes of those communications.**

83. No, I do not recall any such communications.

**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,**

**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?**

84. No, I was not.

**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?**

85. Not applicable.

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

86. Not applicable.

Signed:



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**CHRISTOPHER ECCLES**

**8 September 2020**