

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

### **Inquiry into the Closure of I Cook Foods Pty Limited**

Melbourne—Thursday, 2 September 2021

#### **MEMBERS**

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Dr Tien Kieu—Deputy Chair

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Ms Wendy Lovell

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Dr Samantha Ratnam

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Ms Sheena Watt



**WITNESS** (*via videoconference*)

Ms Jenny Mikakos.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back. This is the Legal and Social Issues Committee's public hearing into the Inquiry into the Closure of I Cook Foods Pty Ltd. We are joined for this part of the hearing by former health minister Ms Jenny Mikakos. Ms Mikakos, just for the sake of time I will not reintroduce the committee. I think most of the members of the public who are watching have also had time to get to know these committee members.

Just by way of explanation, all evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege. As you know, this is under our *Constitution Act* but also the standing orders of the Legislative Council. Therefore any information that you provide during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any actions for what you might say at this hearing, but if you were to go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not have the same privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

As you would be aware, this hearing is being recorded, and you will receive a transcript of the hearing. I encourage you to have a look at that to make sure that we have not misheard you or misrepresented you.

If you would like to make some opening remarks, we will then open it up to committee discussion. Thank you, and thank you for appearing today.

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Thank you, Ms Patten. Can I just check, firstly, that you can see me, because I understand from your secretariat—

**The CHAIR:** No. We cannot see you, Ms Mikakos.

**Ms MIKAKOS:** It says the video is on, so I am not quite sure what the issue is.

**The CHAIR:** To us it says, 'Your camera is off'.

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Okay.

**The CHAIR:** We can hear you loud and clear. That is the most important thing.

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Right. Okay. All right. Look, perhaps I might proceed and perhaps there might be some technical solution. Can I firstly begin with an opening statement, and I want to do so because I want to incorporate my written submission to the committee for the public record but I also wanted to add some additional comments.

**The CHAIR:** I appreciate this will be 5 minutes.

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Yes, I hope so. As the committee is aware, this committee decided last year not to call me before the inquiry when I was the Minister for Health as all relevant information was able to be obtained directly from departmental officials. This remains the case now. I have been invited to comment about matters almost a year after my resignation as the minister in circumstances where I no longer have access to departmental officials to brief me in this matter. I have no hesitation in urging the committee to seek from Minister Foley any departmental documentation that may be relevant to this matter. In my 21 years as a member of Parliament I am unable to recall a situation in which a former minister was asked to appear before a parliamentary inquiry relating to their previous portfolio. The convention is that the minister of the day is required to respond to any request for information for their predecessors. Having said that, I indicated my willingness to assist the committee in this matter as best as I am able, bearing in mind all the limitations I have indicated. I requested questions, and when they were not forthcoming I provided a written submission.

As is apparent from his own evidence last year and was reaffirmed in his evidence today, the decision to close I Cook Foods was made by the then acting Chief Health Officer Professor Brett Sutton under the *Food Act*. In making my previous public comments in this matter, including in the Parliament, I relied on advice provided to me by Dr Sutton and other departmental officials. If there are any questions about what evidence Dr Sutton or

other departmental officials relied on or what process they undertook in issuing their closure order, then those questions should be put directly to those officials, and I am unable to comment on such operational issues.

I undertook my role as a minister to serve the people of Victoria and their interests very seriously and with integrity. The first finding of the committee's report last year was that the Chief Health Officer's decision was made validly and for a proper purpose. In respect of the I Cook closure I do not believe that my former departmental officials acted with any improper purpose or motive in issuing the closure notice. I am expressing a personal belief or opinion here because I am not aware of anything that would suggest otherwise.

I want to make some final points. First, I want to express my condolences to the family and friends of Mrs Jean Painter and in particular to her daughters who gave evidence today. I am pleased you were given a voice. I also want to express my sympathy to the Cook family and to the former staff of I Cook Foods. I am sorry if anything I said in Parliament offended you. As I explained earlier, in making my previous public comments in this matter, including in the Parliament, I relied on advice provided to me by Dr Sutton and other departmental officials.

To my great surprise I received some text messages from Ian Cook soon after I resigned last year, and there were repeated attempts to contact me. They were supportive messages, and I want to thank Ian Cook for what he said, but I want to make it clear to Mr Cook that I did not respond to him because I considered it inappropriate to do so and I consider it inappropriate for a current or a former minister to speak with a party who is currently suing the state of Victoria. It was not from a lack of sympathy or because I wanted to protect anybody. I am here to assist the committee to find the truth. I have nothing to hide and no-one to protect.

Today's hearing comes at a terrible time for our state and for our nation in responding to the pandemic, and I want to send my best wishes to all Victorians. I want to thank, also, everyone who has reached out to me over the past year. It is much appreciated. Thank you.

**Ms CROZIER:** Chair, could I just ask something here. We do not have a camera on Ms Mikakos. Why are we proceeding? I mean, it is highly irregular that we would have a hearing of this nature without being able to properly engage with a witness. I do not think this is satisfactory.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Crozier, we have today to conduct this hearing. If you want to stop the hearing, I—

**Ms CROZIER:** Well, I appreciate Ms Mikakos—

**The CHAIR:** Due to the fact that we have got some technical issues at Ms Mikakos's end—her camera is not working, and we cannot postpone—we can end it now, or I would suggest we proceed.

**Ms CROZIER:** Well, could we understand exactly why the camera is not working? I mean, this is highly irregular. It makes it almost impossible to conduct a proper—

**The CHAIR:** I would not say it is irregular for a camera not to work during a Zoom conference.

**Ms CROZIER:** No, this hearing, Chair. I mean, this is not the proper process that a public inquiry of this nature should be undertaken in, and I find it unsatisfactory.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Mikakos, do you have any idea why your camera is not working?

**Ms MIKAKOS:** No, I do not, but I will try and—

**Ms CROZIER:** Have you got a phone?

**Ms MIKAKOS:** We can switch to another device. I am just getting text messages, sorry. Can you hear me still?

**The CHAIR:** Yes, we can hear you loud and clear.

**Ms MIKAKOS:** I am getting text messages from your secretariat. Sorry, we did a test run earlier, and everything was working fine. I cannot offer a solution here.

**Ms CROZIER:** Could we have a short break, Chair, just while we sort this out?

**The CHAIR:** We will adjourn for a couple of minutes.

**Ms CROZIER:** Thank you, everybody.

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Thank you.

**Hearing suspended.**

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, everyone. As I am sure anyone watching this knows—best laid plans on Zoom. Ms Mikakos, thank you very much for bearing with us, and thank you for providing us with vision of you.

Look, my only question—a short question—would be: in light of everything that has happened, do you think that naming I Cook Foods at the time was the right decision?

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Look, as I said in my opening statement—and I am sorry you could not see me whilst I made that opening statement—this decision to close I Cook Foods was made by the acting Chief Health Officer at the time, Professor Brett Sutton. That was his decision. These powers do not sit with the Minister for Health—I want to be really clear about that for those watching at home—they are powers that sit with the Chief Health Officer. So he has clearly sought advice from his colleagues in the public health team and has considered what was appropriate in the circumstances. So it is not for me to comment on the appropriateness or otherwise of what transpired. I was briefed about these issues from time to time, and there was nothing that came to light that raised alarm bells as far as I was concerned. And this is why I expressed the view in my opening statement and in my written submission to the committee that I have no reason to believe that my former departmental officials have acted improperly in this matter.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Dr Kieu.

**Dr KIEU:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Ms Mikakos, for assisting us with the inquiry. When you were the minister, would you have been comfortable with allowing I Cook Foods or any other entity to continue production, given that, in particular for the case at hand, I Cook Foods provided food for 10 hospitals, eight Meals on Wheels council programs and two aged-care facilities? Would you have been comfortable with allowing that to be continued?

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Dr Kieu, that would not have been my decision to make. It was Dr Sutton's decision under the *Food Act* as to whether there needed to be a closure order issued or there were other steps that needed to be taken. Certainly in the briefings that I recall receiving at the time and during the course of my time as the Minister for Health there were very concerning issues that came to light.

Clearly we had the death of an elderly woman, Mrs Painter. At the time I respected her and her family's privacy and she was not named. But there was clearly advice linking her death with this particular business. I know that that has caused a great deal of distress to the Cook family. I understand what it is to have your integrity questioned and the efforts that they have made to clear their name. I can respect that and understand that. But there was nothing that I became aware of that led me to have concerns about the conduct of my officials, or certainly not to have any concerns about anyone acting for an improper purpose or motive.

**Dr KIEU:** Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Crozier.

**Ms CROZIER:** Thank you very much, Chair. And thank you very much, Ms Mikakos, for being before us. We really do appreciate you doing that and persevering with those issues you have just had. You have just spoken about some briefing papers. I presume you still do not have those; they will be in the department. That was at the time when you were minister. Is that the case?

**Ms MIKAKOS:** So the only paperwork that I have that relates to this issue are what are called PPQs, and Ms Lovell would be well aware of those. They are possible parliamentary questions. I am not sure if I have an accurate or complete set of those. I would suggest that if the committee would like to see those that they request those from the department. I certainly have no problem at all with those being made available to the committee and would certainly hope that they are made available to the committee. There will be aspects of those documents that would need to be redacted due to legal privilege. There obviously was a legal proceeding

started by I Cook Foods—I think it was approximately in the middle of last year—and obviously the department’s lawyers would have some issues about that information being released. So that is why I am not proposing volunteering it myself. But I do not have formal briefing papers. You understand that those sit with the department.

**Ms CROZIER:** Okay. We can ask for those, then.

**Ms MIKAKOS:** I would encourage the committee to ask Minister Foley to release those. I have got no problem with them being released.

**Ms CROZIER:** Thank you, Ms Mikakos. Can I just go to the issue around Community Chef. As you are aware, I have asked a number of questions in the Parliament around the Pitcher Partners report and board minutes from Community Chef dated 15 April. There is reference to a site visit by Minister Melissa Horne where she speaks about a future plan, a transition strategy in fact. The minutes state:

Melissa conveyed that she was prepared to speak with her fellow cabinet member, Jenni Mikakos, to encourage her to approve the transition strategy.

In these same minutes, they talk about an \$800 000 drawdown of the \$1 million loan facility. Can you enlighten the committee on that \$800 000: why it was required, what the strategy was that Ms Horne was talking about from these board minutes and what you recall from those discussions you had with her?

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Firstly, I know this issue came up in last year’s hearings as I have had a quick look at the transcripts in recent days. I do not recall having a conversation with Melissa Horne about this matter, but that is not to say that it did not happen. But I certainly do not recall it, and she is not a person that I spoke to a great deal despite being a cabinet colleague so I imagine I would recall if that conversation happened. She is of course a local member in the western suburbs and I can understand why she would have taken an interest in the future viability of Community Chef. As to issues around funding and drawdown, you have just had Greg Stenton, the relevant departmental secretary, appear before you. I think they would be questions best directed to him.

**Ms CROZIER:** Unfortunately we did not get a chance to do that, so I am just wanting your recollection.

**Ms MIKAKOS:** I am sure, Ms Crozier, you can still make some further requests of the department for any clarification. Look, the point I would make about Community Chef, because there have certainly been some very serious allegations made over the course of the last two years about this issue—I want to stress that I have got no information that would suggest that Dr Sutton was in any way influenced in issuing his closure order of I Cook Foods by the department’s financial support over more than a decade by successive governments, including by the Baillieu government. Both Greg Stenton and Brett Sutton have addressed this issue about a purported link between the two issues today and also last year as well.

**The CHAIR:** I am sorry. We have run out of time for that. I will move on to Mr Limbrick.

**Mr LIMBRICK:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Ms Mikakos, for appearing today. It is good to see you again. I have probably got lots of questions but not many related to this particular topic. One of the things that we are talking about and the reason that the inquiry was reopened was around these new emails, and one of the recommendations of the last inquiry was to amend the *Food Act* and improve the lines of reporting and communication. Do you think that the fact that these emails came out after the fact is some sort of validation of that recommendation and that there is room for improvement, as was recommended by the inquiry, that you witnessed during your time as health minister?

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Look, I recall the report last year came out in the midst of the second wave. I recall having a look at the findings and the recommendations and having some discussions with my staff about the report. I would not have any hesitation in supporting a review of the *Food Act*. I think any piece of legislation that has been around for a long time needs continuous updating and it needs to be fit for purpose for the modern times. I know there were some issues raised about a report being issued essentially through email. There was some discussion last year around the report and emails being used and the fact that the Act did not really acknowledge emails perhaps at the time that the Act was framed. So I think it is important that legislation be reviewed from time to time and that would also include the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act*. We are in the midst of a pandemic. We had issues around the duration of the state of emergency that came up from time to

time. It is time for all of these pieces of legislation that have been in existence for some time to be looked at. They really need to be fit for purpose.

**Mr LIMBRICK:** I could not agree more. We are actually attempting to amend the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act* ourselves right now through a private members Bill. But thank you very much.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Good luck with that.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Vaghela.

**Ms VAGHELA:** Thanks, Chair. And thanks, Ms Mikakos, for your time today to appear in front of the committee, and also good to see you again. My question to you is: I am aware that I Cook Foods previously made an application for preliminary discovery for documents from the department in the Supreme Court and these were offered by the department on a confidential basis but that offer was rejected by I Cook Foods. Did the Supreme Court recommend that these documents be provided to I Cook Foods subject to confidentiality provisions?

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Look, that is my recollection, because this issue came up, I recall, in the Parliament. Look, the department is required to be a model litigant, and when these issues come up from time to time, you know, these are decisions made by departmental lawyers—and it is in-house lawyers, and sometimes it uses external law firms as well. They are not decisions made by ministers, and certainly I had no involvement in those types of decisions. But, you know, I would express my frustration that things might have been slow to move on some of these occasions, because I do not believe that the department had anything to hide, and I would expect the department to be cooperating fully with any litigant in any matter and making sure that the interests of justice are served. And there is still litigation on foot, as I understand it, in this matter. Despite whatever the committee might find, the Cook family still have the opportunity to pursue their claims through a court of law, and they may choose to do so—and good luck to them. But there is certainly no role for a minister to be interfering in those processes. I would expect that the department was a model litigant, and if it was not or it delayed or took too long in responding to any requests made by a court, then I would be disappointed by that.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Ms VAGHELA:** Thanks, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Lovell.

**Ms LOVELL:** Thanks very much. And hi, Jenny.

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Hello.

**Ms LOVELL:** Jenny, this morning we heard from Professor Sutton and Dr Bone that they made the decision to close I Cook Foods without having all of the information they could have had at their fingertips, in particular a report or an investigation that they had requested that the Knox City Council undertake—they did not have that information when they made the decision. Also in your opening statement you made an apology to the Cook family for what they have been through in this saga. Is that an admission that you now doubt the advice that you received from the department and Professor Sutton was correct?

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Well, firstly, what I did say to the Cook family is I expressed my sympathy to them for their circumstances and also to the former staff of their business for the stress and anxiety that they have felt. Clearly it is very deeply felt. And I expressed my, you know, apology if there was any offence taken. I know that Mr Cook referred to that last year in some comments he made in his evidence. He seemed to take offence at some comments I had made in the Parliament where I essentially was responding to questions I was asked about this matter and I was conveying the advice that I had been given by my department about what had transpired.

There are essentially two trains of evidence or allegations that have been made. One is about whether the decision was validly made, and then the other issue is around whether it was made for a proper purpose. And I have expressed an opinion around my view that I have no information to suggest that the decision was made for

an improper purpose. I do not believe I can express a view around whether it was validly made if these facts are in contention now, and I think that is for the department to respond to those particular questions. I know that there was some evidence given—I think it is by Mr Christy; have I got the name correct?—

**Ms LOVELL:** Yes, Mr Christy. That is right. Mr Ray Christy, from Knox, yes.

**Ms MIKAKOS:** the other day around what reports went to the department and when. That was certainly interesting to me, to hear his evidence. That is really for Dr Sutton, as the decision-maker, to respond to these matters, and I believe he did earlier, as did Dr Bone.

**Ms LOVELL:** Thank you. Do you think that the department should issue an apology to the Cook family?

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Well, that implies, Ms Lovell, that the decision that was made was made improperly or invalidly. I think that is for a court of law to make that determination. I really think that that will be for the courts to determine.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Ms LOVELL:** Thank you. And just one last question—

**The CHAIR:** Ms Lovell, I am sorry, your time has expired.

**Ms LOVELL:** Thank you. Thanks, Jenny.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Watt.

**Ms WATT:** Thank you, Chair, and thanks, Ms Mikakos, for appearing before us today and for your patience with the technology. It is never easy.

I just had a question following up from the discussion at the hearing last week about the role of the department and local councils in administering the *Food Act 1984* and the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code. What is your understanding of how the department and local governments work together to ensure that food sold in Victoria is safe for the community?

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Thanks for that question. Look, these issues were canvassed in considerable detail last year. I do not think it serves any great purpose to go through that again. Obviously the two levels of government need to cooperate closely, typically. There are powers set for both local government and the department in the *Food Act*. It will typically be the council that will be making such a closure order, rather than the department, and the circumstances of why that did not occur in this case were canvassed at great length last year.

I was asked to participate around the so-called new evidence. I did not believe that there was any additional light that I could add to the new evidence that we have heard this year, but I indicated my willingness to assist the committee.

**Ms WATT:** Thank you, Ms Mikakos. Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Ondarchie.

**Mr ONDARCHIE:** Hello, Ms Mikakos. I am with you: I think that we need to find the truth, and I also acknowledge that people's integrity has been questioned along the journey, and you have expressed that yourself, and I think we need to sort that out.

In 2020, when you were asked a question by Ms Crozier in the house relating to this I Cook Foods matter, you said:

... I have every confidence in Dr Sutton ...

Do you still maintain that position?

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Firstly, what my view is now is really not relevant, given that I am no longer the minister. But what I would say is I would refer you to my resignation statement, which is pinned to my Twitter account,



in which I expressed my disappointment that there were clearly matters that my departmental officials should have briefed me on. This relates to issues around the pandemic response and our state's response. Clearly when I was referring to departmental officials I also had Dr Sutton in mind in that, and there were clearly circumstances where I felt very frustrated and disappointed, but they are not relevant to the matter that we are here to discuss today.

**Mr ONDARCHIE:** The only reason I ask that is that it was in relation to a question around I Cook Foods, and I just wanted to confirm what your view was of Dr Sutton at the moment. But given that you have mentioned your response on Twitter in your statement, under the protection of Parliament we really have not had a chance to give you a chance to have a say about that—after you were unceremoniously dumped by the Premier. Who ultimately decided on private security guards at hotel quarantine?

**The CHAIR:** Mr Ondarchie. I mean, it is cheeky, but let us stick to the inquiry at hand.

**Mr ONDARCHIE:** Well, I did not bring up her resignation statement.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Ondarchie, if you would like to stick to the inquiry at hand.

**Mr ONDARCHIE:** But she has a chance to set the record straight now and make sure her integrity is no longer questioned.

**The CHAIR:** You are very generous, Mr Ondarchie.

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Mr Ondarchie, what I would say is that this committee, the same committee that you are a member of, had an inquiry late last year into contact tracing and chose not to call me as a witness. There has not been any re-examination of issues related to the Coate inquiry either. I am mindful of the fact that there is currently litigation on foot relating to the state's pandemic response and it is yet to be resolved, and I do bear that in mind in terms of what I say about these matters. But I am committed to the people of Victoria knowing the truth in all matters, and I believe that there will come a time when that might be able to occur, whether that is in a court of law or—

**Mr ONDARCHIE:** You can do it now, if you like.

**Ms MIKAKOS:** potentially a federal royal commission. And I would support such a royal commission because I think there is a need for a thorough examination of the entire pandemic response by the federal government and by state governments, not just in terms of hotel quarantine—vaccine rollouts, hospital preparedness and also to look at the lessons to be learned for the future, because these pandemics will keep occurring. So I think that needs to occur at some point in the future, and I have seen some federal Labor MPs support that. I know there has been a view expressed by Jeff Kennett and others. There are clearly some people across the political divide who think these issues need to be looked at more deeply, and I would certainly support those moves and be happy to participate in any such royal commission.

**Mr ONDARCHIE:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Mr ONDARCHIE:** The shame in all this is that you were such a loyal supporter of Daniel Andrews and he threw you under a bus.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Ondarchie, I am sorry, your time has expired. Ms Vaghela.

**Ms VAGHELA:** Thanks, Chair. Ms Mikakos, one of the principles underpinning the administration of the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* is the precautionary principle whereby if a public health risk poses a serious threat, lack of scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent or control the public health risk. Why do you think it is important to protect the public from a public health risk?

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Look, the pandemic that we are experiencing at the moment is your case in point of why public health measures need to be put in place to protect Victorians, and I am proud of the work that I and others did, including members of the public health team and officials in my department, to protect Victorians. Clearly mistakes were made, and they have been made by many jurisdictions across our country, and those

lessons need to be learned. And that precautionary principle is one of course that needs to guide the actions and the advice led by the Chief Health Officer.

**Ms VAGHELA:** So are you saying it is necessary for these powers to be exercised by the Chief Health Officer and authorised officers under the Act?

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Well, they are important powers, but they are for him to decide the circumstances in which he exercises them.

**Ms VAGHELA:** Thanks, Ms Mikakos. Thanks, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Watt.

**Ms WATT:** Thank you. I have got no further questions. You actually covered off what was my question in your opening remarks, Ms Mikakos. Thank you very much.

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Dr Bach.

**Dr BACH:** Thanks, Chair. And thanks so much, Ms Mikakos, for being with us. I noted your comments just before about your disappointment and your frustration at not being properly briefed by some of your officials through the period of the pandemic when you were the health minister. We heard earlier today from officials in your old department about the fact that they misled us, albeit they say inadvertently, when they met with us on 24 June last year. There were two key issues on which we were not told the truth—and again officials say they told us this inadvertently—firstly, regarding the fact that we were told I Cook Foods was the sole supplier of foods to Knox hospital. Dr Sutton said that time and time again to our inquiry. That was wrong, and he admitted that today. And, secondly, we were told time and time again that all suppliers of foods had been investigated, and it came out in evidence today that, again, that was incorrect. Can you please share with us when you were briefed as minister about the fact—the fact, as admitted by your former officials earlier today—that they had misled our inquiry?

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Look, to the best of my recollection I do not recall any advice that my former departmental officials had in any way provided incorrect information to your committee. And I think the allegations that you are making are really for them to respond to.

**Dr BACH:** Thank you very much for clearing that up, Ms Mikakos. As a former official within the Department of Human Services myself, as a former ministerial adviser to the chief minister in the Department of Human Services, I find it staggering and utterly unacceptable that the lead minister in the department would not be briefed upon this. And ultimately, of course, this rests upon the shoulders of the Chief Health Officer, who continues to have enormous control over our day-to-day lives. You made some comments in your other evidence about him.

Given the fact that you were not briefed about this incredibly serious matter, you were sent into the Parliament to answer hostile questions from members of the opposition—like me, like Ms Crozier—about these matters, without full information, indeed without truthful information. Based upon that and your earlier evidence, do you have faith and trust in Brett Sutton as the Chief Health Officer?

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Look, I think the issues that you are posing really are relating to the pandemic response now, and I think we are really straying away from dealing with the matters relating to I Cook Foods. But what I would say is that there is no information that came to light whilst I was the Minister for Health that had me concerned about the reliability of the advice that I was given in relation to the closure of I Cook Foods. Some matters that did not relate to I Cook Foods but related to the pandemic response led me to seek reassurances about these issues prior to Dr Sutton and Dr Bone appearing before your committee last year. There were a lot of allegations, a lot of issues, swirling around in the media, and I sought a very detailed briefing from them to go through these issues, because I wanted to be reassured. And I recall receiving that verbal briefing in some detail, and I—

**Dr BACH:** But they did not tell you, Ms Mikakos, in that briefing, that there were multiple suppliers of food. There were six. They did not tell you in that briefing. Is that right?

**Ms MIKAKOS:** Look, this briefing was in the midst of many other things going on. I cannot recall now the exact precise details of exactly what was discussed, but there was certainly nothing that came to light that would lead me to be concerned that something improper had occurred.

**Dr BACH:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Thank you, Dr Bach. Dr Kieu.

**Dr KIEU:** Thank you. In your opening statement and also as a minister you said that you did not involve yourself in the day-to-day matters or interfere with their operations, so I have no further questions to ask. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Dr Kieu. Well, that actually concludes the questions, and that concludes today's hearing. Thank you very much, Ms Mikakos, for bearing with us and for the hearing today.

**Mr ONDARCHIE:** On a point of order, Chair, we had an hour allocated to this. We have only gone 37 minutes.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Ondarchie, some people did not have questions, including me, and that has—

**Mr ONDARCHIE:** There could be more questions, though.

**The CHAIR:** brought us to the end of this inquiry.

**Ms CROZIER:** Could we have one more?

**The CHAIR:** You were all given the time that you had for questions.

**Mr ONDARCHIE:** But we are still 23 minutes short of our—

**The CHAIR:** We are not 23 minutes short of this inquiry, Mr Ondarchie, by any means. We were supposed to conclude at 4.00 pm, and it is now 4.15. You were all allocated a certain amount of time for questions. You have all either used that full time—in fact I have been more generous with that time—or, as with some members, did not use that time. The time has concluded. Thank you.

I appreciate all of the members. I appreciate Ms Mikakos and all of the witnesses that have appeared before us. This concludes the hearing today. Thank you very much.

**Committee adjourned.**