

# PROOF VERSION ONLY

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into the Victorian Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Melbourne—Wednesday, 26 August 2020

*(via videoconference)*

#### MEMBERS

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Richard Riordan—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Gary Maas

Mr Danny O'Brien

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Ingrid Stitt

Ms Bridget Vallenge

Necessary corrections to be notified to  
executive officer of committee

**The CHAIR:** Sorry to interrupt you there, Minister, but the time for the presentation has expired. I will pass the call to the Deputy Chair, Mr Richard Riordan, MP.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Thank you, Chair. Morning, Minister. My first question this morning is to Commissioner Crisp. We assume we have got Commissioner Crisp. There he is. Commissioner, can you please outline: which COVID minister do you and EMV directly report to and/or send briefs?

**Mr CRISP:** For me as Emergency Management Commissioner, EMV is an organisation that supports me in relation to that particular role. So my responsibilities—as Minister Neville has pointed out, the pandemic is a health emergency and the Department of Health and Human Services is the control agency and has appointed state controllers, with the secretary having overall responsibility for that particular emergency. With regards to the state of disaster that is now in place, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services has a clear role in relation to the declaration of that state of disaster.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Okay, so the question being: which minister is that? So you are telling me you do not report to a minister?

**Mr CRISP:** My day-to-day work is actually reporting to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and I have met regularly with the minister throughout this particular pandemic, often on a daily basis.

**Mr RIORDAN:** As the Emergency Management Commissioner, do you send reports or briefs to the Premier?

**Mr CRISP:** No, I do not.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Right. Does that also include briefings from time to time to the minister and the crisis cabinet? Do you send briefs to them?

**Mr CRISP:** I provide input to submissions that go to the cabinet.

**Mr RIORDAN:** So issues that you become aware of that you believe are significant, you report them to the crisis cabinet?

**Mr CRISP:** Where there are submissions being developed in relation to how we are managing this overall pandemic, where it sits within my emergency management framework, so whether that is with regards to—as an example, the minister touched on Operation Benessere. Again, that was an operation that had to be stood up very, very quickly. Again, there was a submission developed around that, so I provided input to that submission in relation to the emergency management component of that submission.

**Mr RIORDAN:** So likewise, something as significant as organising hotel quarantine, you would have sent information to the Premier and crisis cabinet on that as well, I presume?

**Mr CRISP:** On that particular issue, as we are probably all well aware, it was stood up very quickly. We had 36 hours from the time of announcement for that operation to be stood up at midnight on 28 March, and again I was regularly briefing my minister as we were working through that particular operational plan.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Okay, so your minister heard that.

Commissioner, the ADF detailed to the Senate inquiry last Tuesday that there was a standing capacity in all states and territories known as joint operational support sections for the express purpose of facilitating defence aid to the civil community. Were you aware that Victoria was able to draw upon this ADF standing capacity?

**Mr CRISP:** Victoria had drawn upon ADF support from very early days with this pandemic. We learned very clearly from the experience over the bushfires, where we had significant ADF resources in support of the state—at times up to 1600 a day were working. So when this pandemic first began we were very clear in terms of wanting the ADF to come in to the State Control Centre to support us around planning and logistics, which is exactly what they did when we set up Operation Soteria.

**Mr RIORDAN:** So as Emergency Management Commissioner were you aware that this ADF support was available for use in hotel quarantine?

**Mr RIORDAN:** So my question was: did you believe that they had a role—even though you were unaware that they could help, did you believe that they could have a role in helping with hotel quarantine?

**Mr CRISP:** No, not at that time, on the 27th or the 28th.

**Mr RIORDAN:** It did not occur to you that they would be useful for that purpose, when other states were using them for that purpose?

**Mr CRISP:** No, not at that stage. We believed that we had the resources within the state to meet the needs of that particular program.

**Mr RIORDAN:** So, Commissioner, on the 27 March meeting, the ADF—I think it was Brigadier Matt Burr—met with you. You were present and the ADF, and they presented ADF support options for hotel quarantine. Was there a PowerPoint presentation used at that meeting?

**Mr CRISP:** On 27 March?

**Mr RIORDAN:** Yes, the planning meeting that the ADF were there to help you with. Did they present a PowerPoint presentation to you at that meeting?

**Mr CRISP:** My only recollection of a document we might have used for that meeting was actually the framework of an operational plan, not in relation to options around ADF support in terms of actual hotel quarantine.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Would you be able to supply that document to the committee?

**Mr CRISP:** I will take that on notice, Mr Riordan.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Okay. That would be useful. Did you discuss with your minister after that meeting the options that were available for hotel quarantine?

**Mr CRISP:** I briefed my minister regularly throughout that day with regard to how the plan was being developed and who was going to be taking responsibility for various parts of that plan.



**Mr RIORDAN:** Commissioner, if I could turn to 27 March and the decisions around hotel quarantine and the decision to use private security guards which emanated from those two meetings that you have talked about, both the Prime Minister and the Premier have made it clear the ADF support was available for hotel quarantine. And the Premier said:

I'm very grateful to the Prime Minister for him agreeing to let this be a true partnership between Victoria Police, our health officials, as well as the Australian Defence Force. I think that will work very well.

Can you confirm that the decision to use private security guards for hotel quarantine was made at that State Control Centre meeting at 4.30 on the 27th?

**Mr CRISP:** I understand that work had already been undertaken to plan for hotel quarantine and that there had already been engagement with private security to undertake the primary security role for hotel quarantine.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Right. During the course of this hearing we have had no-one really able to tell us who was specifically at the meeting. As the chair of that meeting, can you tell us who was at that meeting and who was represented? We know there were two ADF members. Who else specifically was involved in the decision-making process at that meeting?

**Mr CRISP:** Yes. There were a number of government departments and agencies represented. So there were representatives of from the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions; from Victoria Police; from, as you mentioned, the ADF; and from the Department of Health and Human Services.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Right, and presumably your role as chair would be then to present the findings of that meeting to the crisis cabinet?

**Mr CRISP:** No, no. My role, which is consistent with my legislative role, was very much about coordination. So we at that stage, as the minister pointed out—

onshore gas drilling, extending native logging for another 10 years—decisions that are actually hurting the environment—are actually being made?

**Ms NEVILLE:** Thank you, Mr Hibbins, for that. I think they are very different issues, and there are different reasons for what would impede something proceeding. So, for example, the climate change emission targets—we are in a very different world right now in terms of emissions and where we may end up, so being in a position to set proper targets that would reflect the reality of what our emissions are and what our agencies are doing et cetera is much more difficult. There has been a very long process with the Crib Point gas decision. It is not something that has happened overnight. It has been a long process, and I understand from the minister responsible, Richard Wynne, that he in fact did extend public exhibition periods. He made changes to how people could submit, how people could be part of the decision, so he had made changes in relation to this particular decision.

I think it was 2018 that the decision was made to require an EES, so it has been long going. It is not a short-term decision. There has been extensive consultation, extensive ability for people to put in for it. In fact I think something like over 400 EES information packs went out, 52 hard copies and it has logged almost 3000 unique visitors to the EES website. So all of those things that could be done from home, from people's workplaces could be done. They did not need to be done in person. It was a longer period of exhibition. There will be public hearings, as I understand. There is now a process with the advisory committee which is being chaired by Planning Panels Victoria. So the minister I think has been able to assure people that there have been proper processes and time provided for people to input. We are still not at the end of that process, and people will have an opportunity to be able to continue to input into any final decision.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Thank you, Minister. I also want to ask about—

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, and I am sorry to cut you off there but the clock has just sounded. The member's time has expired, and I will pass the call to Mr Danny O'Brien, MP.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Commissioner Crisp, can I just continue on the line of questioning Mr Riordan was asking at the time his time expired. You said you did not brief the Crisis Council of Cabinet after the 27 March meeting. Is that correct?

**Ms NEVILLE:** Mr O'Brien, the cabinet did not exist then. The cabinet crisis committee did not exist on 27 March. It did not exist until 3 April.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Okay.

**Ms NEVILLE:** And I am sure the Attorney-General and others have mentioned that to the committee before.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Did you brief the cabinet at all out of that meeting, Commissioner? We cannot hear you.

**The CHAIR:** Commissioner, we cannot hear you again.

**Mr CRISP:** I briefed my minister, Mr O'Brien.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** So who did brief cabinet out of that meeting?

**Mr CRISP:** I briefed my minister regularly throughout that day as to what was being planned.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** You said before those present were DJPR, VicPol, ADF, DHHS. Was DPC or anyone from the Premier's office at that meeting?

**Mr CRISP:** There was a representative from DPC.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Okay, so would DPC have taken ultimate responsibility for this to go back to cabinet?

**Mr CRISP:** We have a health emergency, so our control arrangements are that DHHS are the control agencies.