

CONFIDENTIAL

**CONFIDENTIAL STATEMENT TO THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE BY MARK
CONNELL**

**APPOINTMENT OF MR JOHN BARILARO AS SENIOR TRADE AND INVESTMENT
COMMISSIONER TO THE AMERICAS**

My name is Mark Connell, and I am the former Chief of Staff to the Deputy Premier John Barilaro.

I held that position from April 2017 until December 2019 when it was mutually agreed that I relinquish my position due to Mr Barilaro ceasing to take my advice and seeking outside counsel.

My employment ceased in December 2019.

Upon request, my written statement to the committee is as follows and I request that this statement as evidence is to be marked as “confidential”.

Regarding the matter of the appointment of Mr John Barilaro as Senior Trade and Investment Commissioner to the Americas, proceeded by an independent inquiry, this Upper House committee inquiry, reports, and public statements made by various Ministers, I felt compelled to provide this statement as evidence to you.

I have read the terms of reference, and my understanding is that my evidence falls within its remit.

I believe in following the due processes of good governance.

An incident occurred in my role as Chief of Staff to Mr Barilaro which concerned this matter the committee is currently investigating.

I strongly believed that my knowledge of this incident, should be disclosed as it may be of interest or value for the Committee to consider.

Therefore, in the matter of public interest, I contacted The Hon. Penny Sharpe, and disclosed this incident to her.

My conversation with Ms. Sharpe has been limited to this specific matter.

I refer to an incident which occurred in April 2019. I am unable to identify the precise date because I no longer have access to my diaries.

However, I am confident it was the month of April 2019, as a meeting occurred for the relevant newly appointed Ministers responsible for trade and investment.

Mr Barilaro had been appointed the NSW Minister for Trade, approximately one month earlier, and attended this meeting. Also, in attendance was the then Treasurer, The Hon. Dom Perrottet and The Hon. Stuart Ayres, who was appointed Minister for Investment.

After this meeting, Mr Barilaro came directly to my office.

He said, 'I've just come from a meeting with Dom and Stuart regarding trade and we're going to bring back the Agent General in London as well as a bunch of other postings around the world'.

He then stated, 'This is it; this is the job for when I get the *fuck* out of this place'.

I responded to Mr Barilaro and stated, 'but John, the Agent General role will be filled well before you retire from this place'.

Mr Barilaro then said, 'I don't want to go to London, fuck that, I'm off to New York.'

I responded and stated, 'our current office and staff are in California.'

Mr Barilaro responded and stated, 'I'll get them to put one in New York, that's where I'm off too'.

The conversation in relation to this matter then ended.

I did not have any involvement, knowledge, or discussions with **any** persons, in relation to this particular matter, prior to, or proceeding this “isolated” discussion with Mr Barilaro.

I learnt of Mr Barilaro’s appointment to this position when it was announced by the media, this prompted my recollection of the discussion outlined above.

It is for the Committee to evaluate whether my evidence is of interest to this matter.

Thank you for providing me with an opportunity to submit evidence to the Committee.

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Mark Connell
17.07.2022