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# Ayres 'met Barilaro ahead of NY job'

MAX MADDISON

An internal Investment NSW briefing note records that Trade Minister Stuart Ayres met with John Barilaro and "supported his appointment" as New York trade commissioner, despite claims he did not have a conversation with the former deputy premier about the role as "there was no reason for me to engage".

Bizarrely, the briefing note has been dismissed as incorrect and a "clerical error" by Investment NSW.

Mr Ayres has repeatedly insisted the appointment of Mr Barilaro to the \$500,000-a-year job was done at arm's-length from government, despite trade roles falling under his portfolio.

At a press conference in Mumbai on Thursday with NSW Premier Dominic Perrotte, Mr Ayres was asked whether he had a conversation with Mr Barilaro once he was identified as the preferred candidate by Investment NSW for the plum role.

"No, I did not," he responded. "There is ... no reason for me to engage with John Barilaro about the objectives of the NSW government's trade and investment policies because he has a clear and intimate understanding."

A briefing note given to Investment NSW chief executive Amy Brown, part of the latest tranche of documents made public as part of the parliamentary inquiry into Mr Barilaro's appointment, appears to contradict Mr Ayres' claim. "Mr Barilaro has now met with the Minister



Ayres

for Enterprise, Trade & Investment, the Hon Stuart Ayres MP, who has supported his appointment," the briefing note stated.

While a date of the meeting is not included, the departmental briefing is approved and dated on June 16 this year, the day before Mr Ayres publicly announced Mr Barilaro's appointment. Mr Ayres was contacted for comment.

Opposition Treasury spokesman Daniel Mookhey attacked Mr Ayres' contradiction, calling on the deputy Liberal leader to "correct the misleading statements ...

"It is now clear that Stuart has misled the public three times in three days. He has very serious questions to answer."

Pressure has been building on Mr Ayres over the past week after a signed briefing note acknowledging former senior bureaucrat Jenny West had been identified as the successful applicant for the New York trade posting. The disclosure contradicts what Mr Ayres told parliament in June, when he asserted no suitable applicant had been identified in the first recruitment phase.

## NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet discussed New York trade role with John Barilaro at a social function

By state political reporter [Ashleigh Raper](#) and [Kathleen Calderwood](#)

Posted Tue 28 Jun 2022 at 3:38pm, updated Tue 28 Jun 2022 at 4:06pm



John Barilaro told Dominic Perrottet of his plans to apply for the trade commissioner's job. (AAP: James Gourley)

NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet has revealed he knew that John Barilaro wanted the plum role as the state's trade commissioner to the US as the pair had discussed it at a social function.

Mr Barilaro was earlier this month named the state's senior trade commissioner to the Americas, to be based in New York, with a salary package topping \$500,000.

The former deputy premier's appointment prompted criticism from Labor who described it as a case of "jobs for the boys".

A parliamentary inquiry into the recruitment process will start on Wednesday.

Mr Perrottet today said that Mr Barilaro spoke to him about his intention to apply for the job at a

### Key points:

- Mr Perrottet has revealed Mr Barilaro told him during a social chat that he intended to apply for the job
- The Premier says the conversation took place after Mr Barilaro left politics
- Mr Perrottet says he wants the public to have confidence in the appointment process

social event.

"I speak to people socially all the time and there's always an interest in people saying I'm interested in this and I'm interested in that," the Premier said.

"From my position it was an independent process."



Dominic Perrottet says he wants the public to have confidence in the recruitment process. (AAP: Jane Dempster)

The Premier said he couldn't recall exactly when Mr Barilaro informed him of his intention to apply for the job but it was after he'd left politics.

"What I said to him is, it's an independent process that goes through an independent panel," Mr Perrottet said.

The ABC has contacted Mr Barilaro for comment.

The Premier said he was later told by the Trade Minister Stuart Ayres that Mr Barilaro had officially applied and was then advised in April that Mr Barilaro had been successful in securing the role.

The appointment didn't go to cabinet because the Premier said it didn't need to.

"The advice that we had received at the time was that these appointments were public sector appointments," he said.

"You have to be careful about undermining the process."

Two other trade commissioner positions had been presented to cabinet but the Premier said they "incorrectly went to cabinet".

Last week, Mr Perrottet announced a review into the recruitment process and former Public Service Commissioner Graeme Head has been tasked with undertaking the investigation.

"I do want public confidence in the process, in the decision-making," Mr Perrottet said.

"So let's allow that inquiry to take it's course."

The Premier said it was up to Mr Head whether he himself is interviewed as part of the review but added: "I don't see the relevance."

The upper house has passed a motion calling on the government to delay deploying Mr Barilaro to New York until the inquiry reports back in the coming weeks.

At the time, Mr Perrottet said that the former Nationals leader was "the best person for the job" and that he was sure he would do "a brilliant job".

The New York posting was one of six trade positions around the world tasked with spruiking the state's investment opportunities.

Before his resignation from state parliament in October, Mr Barilaro, as trade minister, was involved in setting up the international postings.



Investment NSW CEO Amy Brown previously reported to John Barilaro, in his role as trade minister. *(Supplied: Investment NSW)*

## J.BARILARO

The chief executive of Investment NSW, Amy Brown, was on the interview panel that selected Mr Barilaro only months after he ceased to be her boss.

In a statement, a spokesperson for Investment NSW said there was no conflict of interest.

The Premier has said no suitable candidates were found in an initial round of interviews for the New York job.

However, documents obtained by Labor show two candidates exceeded three selection criteria and met the fourth.

Mr Perrottet has denied reports that one of those candidates, Jenny West, was offered the job before the offer was later rescinded.

"The advice I've received is [Jenny West] was not offered the job," he said.



## Liberals deputy leader Stuart Ayres texted John Barilaro details of trade job advertisement

By [Isobel Roe](#) and [Sue Daniel](#)

Posted Mon 1 Aug 2022 at 8:30am, updated Mon 1 Aug 2022 at 12:10pm



Stuart Ayres is distancing himself from the former deputy leader John Barilaro. (AAP: Jane Dempster)

Trade Minister Stuart Ayres says he texted the former deputy premier John Barilaro a copy of the job advertisement for the New York trade commissioner role when it was advertised in December.

Mr Ayres has been under increasing pressure after [documents released publicly to the parliament called into question his involvement in the recruitment process](#) and whether he misled parliament.

"When we advertised this role in the Financial Review in December, I sent him a copy of the advertisement," Mr Ayres said today.

"He had contacted me about it, I made it clear to him he would need to apply as a private citizen and go through an independent, open and transparent process.

### Key points:

- In a Facebook post last night, Mr Ayres said he and Mr Barilaro were not close friends
- Mr Ayres said he did not meet Mr Barilaro but admits texting him the newspaper job ad
- Secret government files on Mr Barilaro's appointment show another candidate was recommended ahead of him, at some stage

"I don't think sending him a copy of the ad is anything untoward other than showing him how he can apply as a private citizen."

When asked whether he had texted a copy of the advertisement to any other candidate, Mr Ayres said he had not.



John Barilaro will appear before the inquiry into his appointment next week. (AAP: Joel Carrett)

Mr Ayres has insisted the appointment of John Barilaro to the role was done "at arm's length" from the government.

"John Barilaro was not treated differently."

But a public service email chain released by the government suggests Mr Ayres was informed of the final two candidates in the application process before one was picked.

The email, which discusses the schedule for candidate interviews, says there should be 30 minutes set aside at the end of each interview to discuss recommendations for the Minister.

"Two candidates will then be submitted for his consideration," the email reads.

The Premier is continuing to express confidence in Mr Ayres, and the deputy leader said he would not be standing aside.

"I have no intention to stand aside. My strong view is that the NSW public service has conducted an appropriate recruitment process," he said.

In a lengthy statement on his Facebook page late yesterday, Mr Ayres defended his actions over the recruitment process.

He said he and Mr Barilaro were not close friends and he described his actions as being driven by his desire to "put the people of NSW first".

"While I respected Mr Barilaro in his role as deputy premier, leader of National Party and his passionate (and at times excessive) advocacy of regional NSW, I don't think we ever called each other close friends", he said.

"In fact, I can't think of one time in the 11 years we were both in parliament together that we shared a meal or a beer together outside of a work function.

"Every action I have taken has been to remove politics from the recruitment of these roles and put the people of NSW first."

Mr Ayres's involvement came under [increased scrutiny on Friday after an email sent by Investment NSW chief executive Amy Brown came to light](#).

The email stated Mr Ayres had added a name to the shortlist for the position.

The name was not Mr Barilaro's, but the email was released on the same day Mr Ayres declared the recruitment process was separated from the government.

[Secret government documents relating to Mr Barilaro's appointment released this morning suggest there was another candidate recommended ahead of him](#), at some stage during the recruitment process.

Last week, the government agreed to stop the documents being deemed privileged, after the opposition fought to have them released into the public domain.

Mr Barilaro is no longer taking the job and next Monday will front a parliamentary inquiry investigating the matter.





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# I should have told Bara not to apply

**EXCLUSIVE**  
**JAMES O'DOHERTY**

DISMAYED Liberals increasingly think Trade Minister Stuart Ayres should stand aside from the ministry and as the party's deputy leader over his role in the trade commissioner scandal, as Mr Ayres admitted he would have handled the saga differently if he had his time again.

But despite internal chatter about who could take over from Mr Ayres as deputy leader, no clear contender has emerged.

It comes as The Daily Telegraph can reveal that taxpayers are paying almost \$10,000 a month to rent an office in New York despite having no trade and investment commissioner to work there.

Liberals expect Premier Dominic Perrottet could receive the findings of an independent review into the appointment of John Barilaro to the \$500,000-a-year trade post as early as today. The review will likely decide Mr Ayres' fate.

Mr Ayres on Tuesday conceded that if that report found he had done the wrong thing, his ministerial position would be untenable. However, he said that if he was cleared by the report, that should be the end of the matter.

One Liberal told the Telegraph the report "has to be emphatic" in clearing Mr Ayres of wrongdoing for him to survive. The MP said Mr Ayres may face a challenge for the deputy

role at a party room meeting on Tuesday, describing next week's parliamentary sitting as a potential "killing season".

"If it was Canberra they'd be collecting signatures (for a spill) by now," the MP said.

The Telegraph revealed on Tuesday Infrastructure and Cities Minister Rob Stokes texted Mr Ayres last week urging him to reconsider his position after documents revealed Mr Ayres knew public servant Jenny West had been deemed the "successful candidate" for the New York trade role.

Mr Ayres continued to maintain he did not influence the recruitment process.

However, he conceded he should have told Mr Barilaro not to apply for the position.

"I should have told him that even though he's a private citizen ... it was probably not in his best interests, or the state's best interests, to apply," he said.

Mr Barilaro asked Mr Ayres about the role in December last year, while he was still employed as an MP.

"Weeks before John Barilaro quit the parliament and created a million-dollar by-election, he was talking with Stuart Ayres about his next job," Labor Treasury spokesman Daniel Mookhey said.

Meanwhile, answers provided by Investment NSW CEO Amy Brown to a parliamentary inquiry have revealed it costs \$9827 a month to lease out an office for the trade commissioner, within the Australian Consulate in New York.



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# Get trade jobs finalised before politicians meddle: bureaucrat

## EXCLUSIVE

**Lucy Cormack**

State political reporter

An incoming secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet feared ministers would meddle with the appointment of trade commissioners and urged bureaucrats to finalise the process before politicians could intervene.

Internal emails from July last year, obtained by the *Herald*, suggest then-incoming secretary Jim Betts wanted recruitment reports



**Nurses warn of further action** **NEWS PAGE 15**

for the lucrative roles finalised before they were sent to senior ministers, including then-deputy premier John Barilaro.

The appointment process be-

hind the trade roles is under fierce scrutiny following Barilaro's controversial appointment to the US \$500,000-a-year job this month, now the subject of two inquiries.

The July correspondence between Investment NSW boss Amy Brown and staff relates to the preferred candidates for the overseas positions, which included former bureaucrat Jenny West, who was offered the US role before it was rescinded last year.

An upper house inquiry into **Continued Page 2**



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J.BARILARO

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# Emails warned of 'meddling with process'

From Page 1

Barilaro's appointment will hold its first hearing today, with Brown the first witness to give evidence.

In an email on July 25, Brown wrote: "Jim B strongly recommends that the recruitment reports fully signed by each panel member ... before this brief is sent up to the ministers, in anticipation of them meddling with due process".

Betts was one of three bureaucrats to interview West for the US posting, along with Brown and former Tasmanian Liberal senator Warwick Smith.

Betts told the *Herald* yesterday he had "no comment to make on a process which is already subject to an independent review".

In another email, Brown's chief of staff said she would prepare drafts of the interview panel reports for then-treasurer Dominic Perrottet, then deputy premier Barilaro, then jobs and investment minister Stuart Ayres and two senior public servants.

The following week, Investment NSW wrote to Betts' office insisting they send a signed copy of his selection panel report for the US role, to be included in a brief to the deputy premier's office "ASAP".

At the time, Dominic Perrottet was the treasurer and Barilaro the deputy premier. Barilaro resigned less than three months later, and was appointed US trade commissioner this month.

Leader of the opposition in the upper house Penny Sharpe said the public was right to be concerned by revelations contained in the internal emails.

"These documents show that NSW's most senior public servants have been forced to try to protect recruitment processes from ministerial interference," she said.

The emails revealed by the *Herald* challenge repeated claims by the government that the appointments were strictly public service decisions. Perrottet yesterday again insisted the trade roles were not statutory roles and independent of cabinet.

"I've made that very clear," he said. "They are roles that are made

by the public service and a determination by the secretary of the department."

However, he said Barilaro had told him of his intention to apply for the US role in a "social setting" some time after the former deputy premier left parliament.

"I think in a social setting he may have said he was applying for a position, which was an independent process," Perrottet said. "I speak to people socially all the time and there is always interested people saying I'm interested in this, I'm interested in that."

"I was advised by Minister Ayres at some date ... that he had applied for the role. But that was an independent process in which we were not to be intervening," he added.

Perrottet said it was not appropriate to provide a running commentary on the appointment, having commissioned an independent review, which he will receive in coming weeks and make public.

An Investment NSW spokesperson did not respond to questions, saying the agency was assisting the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the upper house reviews of the US trade role "and as such it is not appropriate to make any further comment".

The *Herald* yesterday revealed Ayres met with the preferred candidates for two trade commissioner roles late last year, with further emails revealing Investment NSW wanted candidate approval from the Premier before their appointments were publicly announced.

The premier said the emails had been brought to his attention through the media and that there was nothing known to him or his chief of staff in relation to the approvals process.

Opposition treasury spokesman Daniel Mookhey said the government needed to explain why the incoming leader of the public service appeared to be "warning his future subordinate to expect ministerial skulduggery".

He added that the public deserved to know why Investment NSW was "rushing to tell the deputy premier's office about the panel's decision to select Ms West for the job".