

**Personal Submission to Commonwealth Government COVID-19 Response Inquiry**  
**Dr David Berger, December 14th 2023**

**Who am I?**

I am a UK-qualified specialist GP, working in rural hospitals in Australia for the last ten years. I have extensive experience in both general practice and emergency medicine and have been a vocal and influential advocate for staff and patient safety, and especially for those with vulnerabilities, since the beginning of the pandemic, both on Twitter and in the mainstream media. Here, I cite a few examples of my media articles, which demonstrate my paradigm-shifting advocacy:

[Underlying health conditions? That's almost all of us](#) Sydney Morning Herald / The Age. 2021 September  
[Australia must act to prevent airborne transmission of SARS-CoV-2](#). Med J Aust 2021. 2021 July Hyde Z, Berger D, Miller A.

[Up the line to death: covid-19 has revealed a mortal betrayal of the world's healthcare workers](#) BMJ Opinion. 2021 January

[Category Errors Can Kill](#). Safeguard magazine, NZ. 2021 March/April

[Our infection control response is broken. We need a new model - and fast](#) Op-ed in Sunday editions of Sydney Morning Herald, The Age and Brisbane Times. 2020 August

[Please stop calling healthcare workers 'heroes'. It's killing us](#) Op-ed in Sunday editions of Sydney Morning Herald, The Age and Brisbane Times. 2020 July

**This Inquiry lacks independence and thus lacks credibility**

I have had extensive experience practising as a doctor in rural and remote Australia during the pandemic and also as an advocate. I have many points of substance to make to an independent inquiry into Australia's handling of the COVID pandemic, but this Inquiry is not independent. The Inquiry's terms of reference state that:

*"The Prime Minister has appointed an Independent Panel of three eminent people to conduct the Inquiry. The Independent Panel will consult with relevant experts and people with a diverse range of backgrounds and lived experience."*

It is simply untrue, however, that this Inquiry is independent. And, not only is it untrue, it is untrue to the extent that it fits the definition of 'Vranyo', a Russian word, meaning a level of untruth so blatant and so brazen that it corrupts those who collude with it by pretending it is anything but an outright lie:

*"A Russian friend explained vranyo this way: 'You know I'm lying, and I know that you know, and you know that I know that you know, but I go ahead with a straight face, and you nod seriously and take notes.'" — [REDACTED]*  
[REDACTED] in ForeignPolicy.com, Feb 2018

[REDACTED] on 'Vranyo', quoted in [REDACTED], Freedom of Speech in Russia: Politics and Media from [REDACTED], 2016:

[REDACTED] noted that vranyo was greeted with 'delicate reciprocity' at all social gatherings of his day, making the lie a two-way collaboration..."

**The first reason why this Inquiry is not independent**

Because it is not a Royal Commission. Thus, by definition, it is not independent of government. [The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability](#) describes a Royal Commission thus on its front page:

*"A Royal Commission is an investigation, independent of government, into a matter of great importance. Royal Commissions have broad powers to hold public hearings, call witnesses under oath and compel evidence."*

The very fact that a Royal Commission, with its wide ranging powers and ability to compel, is **not** being held into the greatest global health crisis since 1918 and the greatest crisis to affect Australia since WW2 should itself arouse the deepest suspicions about the desire of the government to see a truly independent inquiry scrutinise Australia's pandemic response. What greater societal event could there ever possibly be than this one to justify appointing a Royal Commission?

### **The second reason why this Inquiry is not independent**

Because of the appointment, as one of only three members, of arguably the country's most active media 'expert' during the entire pandemic, Professor [REDACTED]. From the beginning of the pandemic, Professor [REDACTED] has been an almost daily presence in the national media, and she continues to be one. She has given reams of commentary, advice and forecasts, much of which has turned out to be, frankly, wrong. This puts her in an impossible position of conflict as a member of a supposedly 'Independent Panel'.

The actual substance of her multitude of public positions on COVID policy, epidemiology and science almost does not matter, however. The mere fact that she has offered them so prolifically renders her unsuitable as a member of any inquiry into the pandemic, because it gives her positions to defend, on which her professional and public standing depend. It is self-evident that she can not possibly be viewed as an independent arbiter on questions, the answers to which she has opined upon repeatedly and categorically, often on the basis of limited to no evidence.

Here are just a few examples of her many explicitly stated positions over the years that make her an unsuitable member of a supposedly 'Independent Panel':

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

### Summary

For the reasons stated, the assertion that this Inquiry is in any way 'Independent' rises to the 'Vranvo' level of untruth. Instead, we are reminded of that trope of a public inquiry, so pithily expressed by [REDACTED] in 'Yes, Minister': *"A basic rule of government is never look into anything you don't have to, and never set up an inquiry unless you know in advance what its findings will be."*

This Inquiry is a charade, which can deliver no meaningful insights to help guide us in the future, and it is vital that this fact, and the reasons why, are placed on the public record, which is why I am making this submission.