

1. How would you describe the government culture around responding to formal questions from journalists?
2. Has it got more difficult to check facts or have questions answered, compared to previous years?
3. Are questions/ queries more likely to go unanswered compared to previous years?
4. If so, what difficulties does this pose for you as a working journalist?

Response from Mark Riley, Political Editor, Seven News:

1. Mixed. It depends heavily on the office. Most are good. Some not so.

2. No. It is much better now than when I came to Canberra in 1993. The experience always depends on the particular Minister, adviser and office culture, but I found most difficulty in getting timely and complete answers from Keating Government ministers and those in the Howard Government, particularly in its first term and then again in the years after Children Overboard and during the Iraq War. There were some exceptions. Peter Costello ran a pretty open office, for example. Peter Reith ran a closed one. The Rudd and Gillard governments were generally very good to deal with on information. The Abbott Government wasn't so good. It enforced a system of centralised control. It seemed most media enquiries had to go past the PMO first, which regularly caused delays and frustrations. Again, though, it was a mixed experience that depended heavily on the minister and the office. The Turnbull Government was much better. In the main, it allowed ministers to deal with questions independently. The Morrison Government has continued that tradition. I deal most frequently with the relevant PMOs. Most are very good. They understand the mutual benefit of a productive relationship with major media organisations. We always have our disagreements. That's natural. But we accept that both sides have our jobs to do. The Morrison PMO is one of the best I've dealt with for timely and comprehensive information.

3. No. For the reasons outlined in the previous response, I've found this government – and its recent predecessors – much more willing to provide prompt and comprehensive responses than the Keating and Howard governments were.

4. I have much more difficulty getting timely responses or, indeed, any responses at all from departments these days. That experience is the mirror image of those with prime ministers' and ministers' offices. While access to information from ministerial and prime ministerial offices has improved greatly in my 27 years here, getting anything at all from the bureaucracy is often close to impossible. They routinely request written questions via email. It regularly takes several days to get any answer. Even then, it is usually of little use. Often, there is simply no answer. It was not always thus.