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## Government Briefings Reveal Rising Costs, Unstable Markets, and Budget Strain

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Recently released **Incoming Government Briefs (IGBs)**, obtained under the **Freedom of Information (FOI)** Act, reveal how government departments are struggling to meet rising demands under the current Labor administration. These documents, prepared for both new and returning ministers. Outline the state of Australia's key public sectors. What they show is concerning: overstretched services, growing international pressures, and funding cuts across critical areas.

One consistent theme is departments being asked to “do more with less.” The **Fair Work Commission (FWC)**, for instance, has taken on nearly 30 new functions since 2022, yet its funding has barely increased. The Commission warned it may not be able to maintain

performance without additional resources. Among its new responsibilities is monitoring the controversial **Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU)**, which remains under partial administration.

The **Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)** flagged increased global volatility as a major challenge, particularly as international trade becomes more unpredictable. Similarly, the **Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry** warned that the era of free trade and global certainty is over. The message was clear: Australia can no longer rely on past trade success to protect its economy.

Domestically, the gap between rhetoric and reality is widening. The **Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW)** is facing deep funding cuts – from \$884 million in 2024–25 down to \$528 million by 2028–29 – even as it's tasked with addressing climate and environmental challenges. Nearly \$7 billion in potential project funding remains redacted, raising further transparency concerns.

Meanwhile, the **Treasury** mistakenly released internal advice suggesting higher taxes – an embarrassing blunder, but one that confirms the government is quietly considering policies that would place more pressure on households and businesses already facing a cost-of-living crunch.

Higher education is also at risk. The decision to reduce international student numbers could cost the economy over \$4 billion, according to **Universities Australia**. The broader impact on research and teaching quality remains uncertain, with large portions of the government's analysis blacked out.

Across the board, the message from Australia's civil service is clear: expectations are rising, while support is shrinking. The government's bold ambitions are not matched by coherent planning or sustainable funding. While fringe projects like floating saunas on Lake Burley Griffin attract headlines, essential services are under strain.