



The Hon. Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister

TRANSCRIPT
PRESS CONFERENCE
AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENT HOUSE, ACT
WEDNESDAY 8 JULY 2020

EO&E...

PRIME MINISTER: Good afternoon everyone. At this very podium some months ago I said that Australians would be tested like we have never been tested before but we're a strong nation. And that we would meet those tests. And that will be true again now with the situation we're facing in Victoria. This is a global pandemic. There are no guarantees in a global pandemic. You have to deal with the situations that are in front of you. You need to deal with them consistent with your strategy and your plan and you need to bring the country together to focus every resource on fixing the problem and ensuring that we can keep Australians safe and that we can protect lives and we can protect livelihoods. This is the challenge we still face. There has not been a day of complacency when it has come to dealing with this challenge, I can assure you, on behalf of the Australian Government. And through the National Cabinet we have worked together to address all of these challenges and that will continue.

For the people, in particular, of Melbourne, this is hard. This is a hard call on you. It's tough. And it will test you and it will strain, but you have done it once before and you will be able to do it again because you have proven that. You have demonstrated your ability to deal with this. It's happening in Melbourne now. Of course, there's always the risk it could happen in other cities and every step is being taken to seek to prevent that wherever possible. But we're all Melburnians now when it comes to the challenges we face. We're all Victorians now because we're all Australians and that's where the challenge is right now. And so I want to thank all the Premiers, I spoke to most of them yesterday, I've spoken to more of them today, for the great support they're giving to Victoria whether it's in managing the very challenging issues now on the New South Wales/Victorian border or the testing that is being done in Tasmania or in South Australia, or indeed, New South Wales or Queensland, the tracing work that is being done drawing on the health professionals from Western Australia all the way to the east coast, this is a national coordinated effort and over the last several days that has been where my focus has been, working with those Premiers, working with the Chief Medical Officer, working with those on the ground as we are coordinating our response to support the efforts in Victoria. And so that's why there are 350 ADF people down there supporting the New South Wales effort on the border. That's why there are already around 200 ADF who are already supporting in the area of medical testing and other logistical support. That's why there is some several hundred, in fact the numbers of Commonwealth public servants up about 800, 900, supporting the door-to-door efforts. So it is a very significant Commonwealth effort to support what is happening in Victoria right now and we will prevail and we will get on top of it and we will protect the rest of the country because, as I have engaged with other leaders around the world, they are facing the same challenges,

whether in Europe or elsewhere, they are seeing as they're opening up their economy again and fighting for the jobs of their own citizens just as I'm fighting for the jobs of our citizens, then they find there are outbreaks and there are cases, the one in Melbourne is particularly serious, but on an international scale, it is well within the band and so it is not surprising and that's why we need to continue to apply our focus and our effort and just work together as we did in March and in April and in May and in June and so we will do it in July, and August, September, October, November, December, and into next year if necessary. That is what we will do and that's what we'll continue to do. So I do reach out to those people - families, young kids, older residents, people working in essential occupations and just reach out to them and say the nation is with you and we will be with you each and every day because your success is our success. Our success depends on how well you're able to get through and so whether it's the mental health support that needs to go in, whether it's the housing support that needs to be in place, these are the issues that over the last several days we have been dealing with to ensure that Victoria gets all the support they need. So with those remarks, I hope that addresses, as it should, the very significant issues we're now facing.

And now I'd like to turn, if you indulge me to the reason I have asked the Aged Care Minister to join me here today. And I think this is important because as we deal with the challenges of COVID-19 and the COVID-19 recession that is attendant to that and has created these two great crises Australia now deals with, the work of Government continues. The needs out across the country are just as present as they were before and one of the most significant areas of need that we have been addressing as a Government since the 2018-19 Budget in particular, has been the challenges of in-home aged care. Now, it was only last year after the receipt of the interim report of the Aged Care Royal Commission that we immediately responded to the immediate request that there be additional places provided for in-home aged care and we immediately moved to put an additional 10,000 places. Today I'm announcing with the Minister an additional 6,100 in-home aged care places which will bring to an additional 50,000 places at a cost of some \$3 billion that we have announced since the 18-19 budget. And every opportunity we have had as a Government to increase the number of in-home aged care places since the 18-19 budget, the midyear update that followed, the Budget that followed that, the mid year update that followed that, and now where we are here today, where we had hoped to have a Budget obviously earlier this year, but that won't be until October, we believe that was necessary to make this announcement now and we will take every opportunity in the future including the Budget and the midyear statement that follows to continue to address this task. This is about ensuring that Australians, as they age, have greater choices, that families have greater choices. We have many challenges in this country at the moment, but we will see our economy strengthen, we will see Australians kept safe whether it's from COVID or the many other threats that this nation faces, and we will guarantee the essential services that Australians rely on and this is a very good example of that in meeting the needs of our elderly and the in-home aged care places that they need and there'll be more. And we will do that in a responsible budget management which the Treasurer and the Finance Minister and I and other members of the Cabinet will continue to apply the discipline to, so we can meet all of those challenges.

But with that, I'll ask Richard to make a few comments about the specifics and then I'm happy to take your questions.

SENATOR THE HON. RICHARD COLBECK, MINISTER FOR AGED CARE AND SENIOR AUSTRALIANS: Thanks, PM. So the additional 6,100 packages is evenly split between levels 1, 2 and 3 packages. Their rollout will commence immediately. And as the Prime Minister has said, that takes our investment in home care packages to 50,000 since the 18-19 Budget and investment of over \$3 billion. And as the Prime Minister has said - it continues our commitment to providing choice for senior Australians as they age, but also the opportunity for them to stay safe, be at home and age at home if that's their choice. We're also

announcing today that the royal commission reporting date will be extended to the 26th February. So that's a 3 and half month extension to the royal commission - the commission having had to close down for about three months due to COVID, had requested an extension and we're announcing an extension to the 26th of February. And Commissioner Pagone will become the chair instead of the acting chair of the commission as part of the announcement we are making today with respect to the extension of the commission.

PRIME MINISTER: Thank you, happy to take questions.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, our second most popular state is now shut-off from the rest of the country. There are increased caseloads by the day. Is this more than just the localised outbreak that you have talked about, or are you confident that this is under control?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, there are three rings of containment and the rings of containment has always been part of the Government's national plan together with the states and territories. There are those suburbs specifically where we are seeking, I should say the Victorian Government is seeking to ensure that containment measures are there. Then there's the broader Melbourne metropolitan area and including the Mitchell Shire and then beyond that there's the Victorian border. And as each of those rings does its job, it puts less pressure on the ring external to it. And I know that the New South Wales Premier, I spoke to her again this morning, is very focused on ensuring that there is appropriate protections around those border towns and - you know, I saw the same queues as everyone else this morning. And as I flagged on Monday afternoon in a radio interview, there will be some, there will be some disruption for a period of time as these arrangements are put in place. That's, I think, to be expected and there will be some inconvenience and that's regrettable and we ask for people to show patience about that. I mean, the case numbers today, slightly less than what they were yesterday and we would hope to get better news on those case numbers. I mean the level of testing has been significant and we need to stay on top of that, but the isolation of those who are found to have had COVID is important as it always has been. I'd be saying to those particularly in New South Wales and those in the border towns that, particularly in the border towns, we're not seeking to see people move from there up to Sydney or places like that. I think for the time being, it's wise and good common sense that if you live in and around those border towns, that you'd stay close to those towns at present and not be going off to family events or other things more broadly across the state. The Premier has indicated similar sentiments this morning and I support that. Similarly people living elsewhere across New South Wales, now is not the time to make your way to close by the Victorian border. That's just not good common sense. And we'd ask people to exercise good judgement about those things. There's lots of family events and other gatherings that take place and if people could exercise some judgement about their attendance of those particularly around border towns, then I think that's the right thing to do.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, given the breaches with hotel quarantine in Victoria, is there any case for slowing down the arrival of people into Australia at international airports? Is there a problem with the sheer load of, that's coming there? Should that be considered?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, the short answer to that is yes and I'll be taking a proposal to that end to National Cabinet on Friday and I have been discussing that with Premiers over the last sort of 24 hours. I had a good discussion with Premier McGowan about the same thing yesterday. I mean the fact is that New South Wales has been bearing the largest burden of people returning to Australia and they're people, they're Queenslanders, they're Western Australians, they're Tasmanians and New South Wales has done the heavy-lifting on that and foot the bill for it too, I should say. And I thought that was one of the, another

good example of how the National Cabinet was working. No-one was squabbling about money about who was going to pick up the bill for quarantine. The large states, which were New South Wales and Victoria, accepted that and got on with it. And I commend them for that. Now, in Victoria, we have suspended those flights coming in and that has meant that people have moved on to other flights going into other capitals and we have looked at that and as I said I'll be taking a proposal to National Cabinet to slow that down as of this Friday.

JOURNALIST: You previously been opposed to border closures and you've said the borders should reopen. So is it safe to say that you have now changed your position on that in light of the community transmission in Victoria?

PRIME MINISTER: No, no, it's not.

JOURNALIST: And in relation to JobKeeper, there will obviously be a lot of anxiety now about when that runs out. Is it potentially an option to extend JobKeeper for longer by geography, just in Victoria?

PRIME MINISTER: Two points. First of all, no my position on borders hasn't changed. We need to understand what's happened here in Victoria. What we have effectively done is Victoria has self-isolated. So that creates a protection for all the other states and territories at the one time and it doesn't leave it to the arbitrary decision of one Premier or another Premier. I mean, my view about people moving from New South Wales to Queensland or to South Australia or Western Australia has not changed. When you have a situation of an outbreak, you contain the outbreak. And that outbreak is presently in Melbourne. And to ensure we don't get further breaches of that, that outbreak is being contained now at the Victorian border. And that has always been the approach. Arbitrary decisions about state borders is a separate issue and we'll continue to maintain our position that Australia is one country, and that response that is needed in relation to outbreaks, well, that will be put in place and that will provide the appropriate protections and that's what's being done. This is about Victoria isolating itself, not other states shutting itself off from Victoria. And there is a key difference in that.

JOURNALIST: If the situation escalates will there be a need to be...

PRIME MINISTER: Sorry, on JobKeeper on the other issue. I've answered this question many times. And I have been consistent in saying that there'll be a further phase of support that goes beyond September. So there's been - and there will be, and I said that to the Victorian Premier and as I said to Alan Joyce some weeks ago when the specific issues of Qantas were raised and the Treasurer has said the same thing. There will be a further phase of how we continue to provide support and as I was able to assure the Premier the other night, just like I can assure people in, in industries or in businesses or parts of the country that are more affected by COVID than others, then where there is the need, then there will continue to be support. And so this is about tailoring a national program to provide support where the support is needed and because of what has happened in Victoria, obviously the need there will be far greater than was previously and that need will be met.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, the McGowan Government did ask for the Federal Government to help enforce those caps on international tourists into WA. Is that something you will do? And just on Victoria - Ministers Porter and Cormann say the AFL grand final should be held in Perth if it can't be held at the MCG. Is that something you support, that you'd like to see, and also the Minister for Sport, maybe can I have your opinion as well?

PRIME MINISTER: I spoke to Premier McGowan yesterday. The issue is not redistributing the load from Western Australia to other states. I mean Western Australia has been taking about a quarter of what New South Wales has. So I don't think there's a strong case that Western Australia should carry any lesser load than it has been up until this time. I mean, Queensland and New South Wales are taking far more than Western Australia and, you know, the same issues need to be managed there and Western Australia is a strong and competent state and I'm sure they can manage their share of the burden. The issue is what the overall level of returning Australians are and that's why I'll be bringing a proposal on Friday to reduce that load which means it's - that's a lesser load for everybody rather than shifting Western Australia's load on to someone else. I'm sure Western Australian pride would prohibit any suggestion that another state would have to carry Western Australia's water on something like this.

JOURNALIST: On the grand final, and Ministers Porter and Cormann said if it can't be held at the MCG, which is more of a likelihood now...

PRIME MINISTER: To be honest, where the AFL grand final is being played at the moment is one of the furthest things from my mind. It really is. I mean, the AFL, I'm sure will sort that out and states and territories will sort that out. Right now, we're dealing with a pandemic outbreak in Victoria - right now.

JOURNALIST: If the situation escalates, will there be a need to reimpose some of the nationwide restrictions?

PRIME MINISTER: That is not something that is being put to me now, that's not the advice that we're receiving. Let's remember that seven states and territories around the country remain in a very strong position when it comes to our response to COVID-19. That's what we're seeking to continue to protect. That doesn't mean there won't be cases in any of those states and territories, but the rest of the programs in those states and territories are, outside of trying to deal with some of the issues around the border towns and New South Wales and Victoria, I'm sure the Premier will say more about that when she's in a position to do so, but more broadly - I think the rest of the country is getting on with it which means they're opening up and their jobs are coming back and that's welcome news but obviously the impact in Victoria is significant and very disappointing, but it's something that we will work together to build up again just like we did last time.

Yeah, Michelle?

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, on your proposal to restrict people coming in, are you thinking of a pause or of just containing numbers? And would people be likely to have to pay for their own quarantine?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, it's more a containing numbers, I mean, there is a volume that can be accommodated by the states and territories currently, but they certainly wouldn't want to see that increase. With Melbourne shutdown from that point of view, then taking on higher burdens is what we're seeking to avoid. In relation to paying - that is a decision for the states and territories. The states and territories can send people a bill today if they wish and if they wish to do that, then the Commonwealth would have no objection to that. They'd be acting solely within their rights to do that. I think that would be a completely understandable proposition for people who have been away for some time and there's been many opportunities for people to return. If they're choosing to do so now, they have obviously delayed that decision for a period.

JOURNALIST: Any idea of the pipeline of numbers?

PRIME MINISTER: Compared to normal volumes, Michelle, it's very, very low to what you normally expect and it's still very low now. But at this time, we don't want to put any more pressure on the system than is absolutely necessary.

Rosie?

JOURNALIST: Just on the rings of containment, to clarify, are you supportive of Daniel Andrews's six-week lockdown of greater Melbourne? And on JobKeeper, are you suggesting that someone in a job in Victoria may be able to get income support for longer compared to someone in the same job in, say, Brisbane because of what has happened there?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I'm not suggesting that at all. We're running a national programme of support. That national programme of support will give people in the same areas of need the same support. So it's not a state-based programme or anything like that, in the same way it has operated up until now. It's been something that has operated nationally and something that has been directed towards businesses that have had that fall-off in turnover and to their employees, and similarly JobSeeker is applied across the nation. So these programmes act very much as automatic stabilisers in these circumstances and that's the design element that will continue. I mean, what we have done in providing the support we have, is we have been very careful about the design of the support we have provided. We haven't made the mistakes of trying to invent new systems because of the great difficulties that presents, as we saw during the GFC. And I note that the Deloitte report that came out this year which showed that we were able to get the support out there significantly and sooner than happened last time. And I think that was because we followed that very disciplined position of using existing channels, making sure it was well calibrated and targeted and temporary and that's what we have done. I think all Australians know that level of support can't go on forever. But the needs are continuing and we understand that. We have understood that for some time and we have been preparing our next phase on the basis of that understanding.

Shane?

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, what would bringing forward the 2022/23 tax cuts to, say, the October Budget do for the economy?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, any decisions on those matters are matters for the Budget and other budgets beyond that. So that's a matter that the Treasurer and I will address in the context of the Budget, not today.

JOURNALIST: Face masks, Prime Minister, there does seem to be a shift in thinking on this from the World Health Organization, citing growing evidence, they say, that the virus is spread through the air. In view of that, I think the AMA is adopting a position in Victoria as well. Have you sought any revised or updated medical advice on whether they should?

PRIME MINISTER: The medical panel gives us advice on this issue pretty much every time we meet and sometimes more often than that. So it has been a constant stream of advice from the medical expert panel, from the AHPPC, and they will continue to provide that advice and we will continue to follow it.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, just on China, the updated travel warning about Australians facing detention in China, are you expecting any, sort of, criticism from the Chinese Government about that? And can you provide an update on your consideration of resettlement options for Hong Kongers?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, we are still considering that matter, to go to your second question, and I'll have more to say about that soon. In relation to the other matter, officials upgraded that advice as it's been communicated and as yet I haven't had anything put in front of me, but from time to time travel advisories are changed and on this occasion, the officials have upgraded that advice.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, can you confirm that your preference for supporting the people of Hong Kong is to use existing pathways rather than creating something new? And secondly, to follow-up Rosie's question, are you supportive of the lockdown of greater Melbourne?

PRIME MINISTER: Look, we continue to be concerned about issues in Hong Kong, as many nations are, and we have remained in close contact with other like-minded countries about this issue. This is about how we, as a nation, are responding domestically to these issues. So these are decisions for Australia about who we provide visas to and on what terms and over what period of time. They're Australian sovereign issues. They aren't about other countries, they're about our country. So we'll make decisions about our visa program and how we run that in accordance with the rules that we set and as I said before, I'll have more to say about that soon, not today. On the issue of the broader shutdown of Melbourne, this is a matter that the Premier advised me of and, of course, based on their advice and the advice that I have received from the Chief Medical Officer, then this was necessary. I hope it isn't for that long. I hope it's for as short a period as possible. But given the seriousness of the issue and the containment that was occurring in the initial postcodes and what was occurring there, that this was a more practical measure in the Premier's view and the advice that he had received. So it's not my job to second-guess Premiers on these things. It's my job, as the Prime Minister, to rally the governments of Australia and our own Government and the people of Australia to support Victorians in this time of need.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, I note your earlier comments before. Can I just ask, are you considering bringing forward those tax cuts? I note your comment before. Are you considering bringing forward those tax cuts? It would seem from what the Opposition said today with Jim Chalmers that they're seeking some clarity on that. And once we start to establish travel bridges with other nations, would you be looking to impose a tax on those Australians looking to travel overseas to help recoup some of the expenses the Government has paid here, locally, and also to encourage people to travel at home?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, there's a lot of speculation on all those questions. So I don't intend to engage in what is the normal budget speculation when you lead up to a budget. Those matters will be addressed in the Budget. So, I mean, we haven't even concluded any arrangements with any other countries at the moment and it will be some time yet before we even were able to achieve that even for New Zealand or potentially any countries in the Pacific.

JOURNALIST: Would you think about it?

PRIME MINISTER: I'm not here to tell people what I'm thinking about, I'm here to tell people what we're doing. The Government is focused on dealing with what's happening right now in Australia. Those issues are not matters that are pressing upon the Government.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, a large proportion of the new cases in Victoria of community transmission have come in the younger population, people in their 20s.

PRIME MINISTER: True.

JOURNALIST: How concerned are you about creeping complacency within the community? And what would be your message to those young people in Victoria and around the rest of the country who think this virus is not their problem?

PRIME MINISTER: Doesn't matter what age you are, it doesn't matter what job you have, it doesn't matter what your income is, it matters that we all just together, continue to follow the sensible medical advice that has kept Australia in one of the most envied positions in the world in relation to our COVID-19 response. And we all have responsibilities there and we all owe it to each other to keep exercising them. As a Government, it's our job to ensure we're continuing to follow the strategy we put in place and support that with resources. Whether it's in supporting people through incredibly difficult economic times, whether it's supporting our elderly with the announcement we have made today and getting on with the job of providing the Government that we promised to deliver, whether it is supporting through the ADF on the ground the measures that are necessary to contain the spread of the virus. We will keep doing our job and I know Australians will keep doing theirs. And right now, that job is if you're a Melburnian, is to tough it out and it will be tough, but know the rest of the country is with you. The rest of the country knows that the sacrifice that you're going through right now is not just for you and your own family, but it's for the broader Australian community. And I want to thank Melburnians. I mean, I want to thank them very much for how they're dealing with this right now. I can imagine the frustration. You can imagine a business that had just started opening up again and now they got to close down again. Heartbreaking. Frustrating. Talking to their staff, kids were about to go back to school, the uncertainty that is attached to all of that, we all understand. But this is a virus that doesn't, you know, communicate itself in terms of its intentions or how it's going to behave. We're dealing with a lot of unknowns here and that means that there will be circumstances like this and how we respond is what we have control over. We don't have control over the virus, as such, but we do have control over how we respond and I think how Melburnians, in particular, and Victorians more broadly, are dealing with this very hard news is commendable and I thank you very, very much for it. And we will stay on the job in supporting you and giving the Victorian Government every help they need, not just the Australian Government, but all the other state and territory governments as well. On Friday, the National Cabinet will meet, as it does, on a fortnightly basis. There'll be a number of matters that will be considered in relation to this and I'll be able to update you more about those things on Friday. Thank you all very much.

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