

CORONAVIRUS — INTERSTATE BORDER RESTRICTIONS — TRANSITION PLAN

710. Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE to the Premier:

I refer to Western Australia's safe transition plan to ease our controlled border. Can the Premier outline to the house how the transition plan will help to minimise any impact the inevitable arrival of COVID-19 may have on what is currently a free and unrestricted way of life in WA, and can the Premier advise the house what the response has been to the state's transition plan?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I thank the member for Thornlie for the question. Our transition plan is a world first. It is a unique way of coming out of what has been a very difficult time. We plan on easing border controls with the states of New South Wales and Victoria, and internationally, when there is no community transmission in our state, and, combined with that, very high levels of vaccination. What we are aiming for is a soft landing out of COVID in late January or early February next year, whereby we will not disrupt our way of life over the next two and a half to three months. That is the aim. Obviously, that is different from other parts of Australia. Obviously, people in New South Wales and Victoria have had a terrible time of it for basically the last two years, but particularly the last six or eight months. We are trying to avoid all that and having to put in severe restrictions, and also avoid some of the dramatic health impacts that could be experienced if we had COVID come in before that point in time.

The modelling we released the other day from the Department of Health indicated that at an 80 per cent double-dose vaccination rate, there would be far more deaths in Western Australia than if we waited to reach a 90 per cent double-dose rate. The modelling by the Doherty Institute, just so that members know, because I do not think all of it is published, clearly shows that 90 per cent double-dose vaccination is far safer than 80 per cent double-dose vaccination. That is what we were advised on Friday at national cabinet, just so that members know. The modelling shows that 200 lives will be saved by waiting, essentially, another month. I know that there is a lot of heat and angst out there about it, but waiting another month means that we will save 200 Western Australian lives, we will not put in restrictions over the Christmas period and we will not shut down businesses and the like. I actually think that is a fair and reasonable approach to this situation.

I have noticed that over the last two years, every time we try to do something or make a decision, there is a lot of heat and anger from various people around the place, but, at the end of the day, being careful and cautious has worked socially, in a health sense and in an economic sense as well. It turns out that since the start of COVID, the number of people in Western Australia who have contracted COVID here and passed away is one. The others were from cruise ships that came in from overseas and that sort of thing, such as the German cruise ship that was in Fremantle harbour. Over the last two years, one person contracted the illness in Western Australia and passed away. Compared with anywhere else in the world, that is a pretty amazing record. That is because we did very careful things over the course of the last two years, despite all the opposition and heat and anger that has been stirred up around the place.

The modelling is there, and to those people who say I should ignore it, I say: imagine if we did ignore it and 200 people died. Those same people would then be saying, "Why did you ignore the modelling and allow 200 people to die?" That is exactly what the same people would be saying, particularly some of the media commentators from the east.

I note that yesterday the Prime Minister was critical. On Friday, he said to me that each state is moving at its own pace and each state is different, which is true. We are different. Increasingly, the longer I am in this role, I realise that we are different. We are different. I saw him say on the television last night, "You don't want to be locked down. We don't want Western Australia to be locked down." We are not locked down. I just want to tell them over there: we are not locked down! He said that we have closed borders. We are not closed to most of Australia—Queensland, the Northern Territory, South Australia and Tasmania. People can travel away and go and visit, if they like; that is possible at the moment. But New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory, where there is widespread spread of the virus—no. Doesn't that make sense? I remind the Prime Minister that Western Australia is not locked down, just so that he fully understands. We are the most open economy and community in Australia. Virtually every other state currently has lockdowns, has people wearing masks and has restrictions in place. The Northern Territory has them; South Australia has them; Queensland has them. We do not have them. Our situation is extraordinarily positive compared with all those places.

I note that Mr Bradley Woods from the Australian Hotels Association was glowing in his praise of the Western Australian approach because it will ensure that there are not restrictions over the important summer period for many businesses across the state, and his commentary reflected that the other day. That is true. All those people who run cafes, bars and restaurants and even retailers rely upon that Christmas trade. Imagine if we had restrictions and lockdowns in place over that period because we precipitously opened the border and then they missed out on that income over that period. Imagine that! I do not want to do that to them. That is hundreds of thousands of Western Australian families. I do not want to do that to them.

Perth Airport also said that it is good because now there can be planning put in place for reopening flights, particularly internationally. That is a good endorsement from Perth Airport, and, obviously, certainly from late January to early February that will be able to occur. It basically means that people need to wait a little bit more than a month beyond other states.

Today, we have surpassed an 80 per cent first-dose rate of those aged 12-plus; we are now at a nearly 67 per cent double-dose rate of those aged 12-plus, and we climb each and every day. Over the weekend, nearly 30 000 people were vaccinated. That is the population of Kalgoorlie, just so that members understand. Over the weekend, 30 000 people received doses of the vaccine. The vaccination program will continue to roll out, despite the criticism of those opposite; we will continue to do it and make sure we get as many Western Australians vaccinated as soon as possible.