

**WA'S SAFE TRANSITION PLAN**

*Motion*

**HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West — Leader of the Opposition)** [10.09 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house —

- (a) notes the government's announcement on 5 November 2021 of the plan for the opening of the state from the COVID-19 restrictions, called WA's safe transition plan;
- (b) notes the lack of detail in the announced plan and requests that the government table modelling and health advice that shows when Western Australia is predicted to reach 90 per cent vaccination of over-12s for each local government area in the state;
- (c) asks the government to explain in detail how it will monitor and manage mandated vaccination cohorts and the impacts this will have on business, employees and the economy in both the metropolitan and regional Western Australia; and
- (d) notes the constant failings of the Western Australian health system and asks the state government to explain in detail the preparations it has made to ensure that the health system can cope with COVID when it arrives.

I suspect that this is going to be an ongoing and repetitive debate over the next 12 months because we would like some details about how the government intends to manage the COVID crisis when it arrives in virus form in Western Australia, probably in 2022. How are we prepared, and how will the community—particularly the business community—respond?

This is not the first time we have attempted to debate this issue and get some information from the government. I remind members that we first did this through a motion of mine on 19 August 2021. At that point we debated mandatory vaccinations; how business would manage that process; the legal requirements; and how businesses could ensure that they provide a safe workplace for their workers, a safe environment for their customers, and meet all their legal obligations. That was on 19 August; it is now nearly three months later, and we are still struggling to get information out of the government as to exactly how these things will proceed.

Some information has come out about some mandated vaccination procedures. A two-tier system has been announced under which workers in a number of industries will have to have their first vaccination by 30 November so that they are fully vaccinated by 31 December. In a range of other industries, they will have to have their first dose by 31 December so that they are fully vaccinated by 31 January. Of course, there are other people in the health system who are supposed to already be fully vaccinated. Both Hon Martin Aldridge and I have asked questions about how successful that has been; we are still waiting for answers on that, but we are also waiting for answers on a lot of other things.

In the previous debate on 19 August, we asked questions about the legal requirements for providing a safe workplace and for looking after employees. The Minister for Regional Development at that time referred to a finding of the Fair Work Commission that stated —

Employers should get their own legal advice ...

The minister then said —

This is the principle that we are adopting.

There are a quarter of a million or so small businesses floating around the state of Western Australia, and the advice from the government is, "We're not certain; small businesses should seek their own legal advice." I would have thought it was incumbent upon the government to provide a bit more certainty than, "Go and seek your own legal advice", particularly given that we are now nearly three months down the track. That was 19 August; it is now 11 November, and that level of certainty still has not been provided. We are still waiting for answers about how this will work.

The government has now announced a mandated process, but we are still trying to find out how that is going to be policed. What system will be put in place for employers? Will someone be coming into workplaces to ensure that employers have checked the vaccination status of their employees? Will employees be forced to provide a vaccine passport? Are employers able to take employees at their word that they are fully vaccinated? What will be the checks and balances? Will inspectors be coming into workplaces to make sure it is all in place?

I have asked a range of questions this week to try to get some information, particularly on the public service side, but also about the impacts on small business. Small businesses in particular are coming to me and saying, "How do we manage this process?" I note that the first thing the government usually does when we question anything about the rollout of its vaccination process is to accuse us of being anti-vaxxers. Hopefully that can be put to rest after the

debate yesterday, in which the opposition took a firm position. Not every person who questions how the government is managing this process should be ridiculed as an anti-vaxxer. This is the process of the government, Acting President: to avoid any criticism of anything it does, it reverts to using hysterical phrases. It is not good enough. There is a role for all of us to hold the government to account on how it is doing this.

Businesses in particular—the area that I am focused on in this motion—have been left incredibly confused about both their rights and their responsibilities. Businesses in that first cohort are not sure whether they should, on 1 December, sack people who have not had their first vaccination. What are the rights and entitlements of businesses in this case? Most of the first cohort are people in the public service. I will be interested to see how many public servants have been removed from their positions, because a number of them, particularly in health and aged care, are already required to be fully vaccinated. How many of those people have been lost? Do we have a 100 per cent vaccination rate amongst those critical parts of the Western Australian public service? I suspect not, but the government is keeping all of this secret. We have to try to edge it out all the time to work out precisely what is going on. Let us see what the government has achieved with the public service. I asked a question this week about how many public servants are expected to choose not to be vaccinated and how many are vaccinated. Basically, again, I got no answer. We are waiting for a response from Health to a question, as the Minister for Health appears to be willing to try to provide some of that information, but it is not just workers in the health system who are impacted. Some businesses will join in on the early vaccination requirement—the mandate of first vaccination by the thirtieth of this month and two vaccinations by the thirty-first of next month. It is not, entirely, the public service. How are those businesses expected to manage this process? What, precisely, will they be doing?

I was astounded when I asked two questions on Tuesday and got exactly the same answer. I asked what protection the government will offer small businesses in particular that are required to terminate an employee as a result of complying with the government's compulsory vaccination mandate. I got the same answer, twice —

The government is currently consulting with affected industries on the mandatory vaccination requirements announced on 20 October 2021. That consultation will inform the drafting of legal directions ...

Let us look at the history of this a little. The government is consulting with industry, in some cases three weeks before an employer has to make a decision because an employee has refused to have their first vaccination and obviously will not get their second vaccination in time to comply, on what all those requirements should look like. This is three weeks out. Even if we take the larger cohort in the private sector who will have to have their first vaccination by 31 December, it is only six weeks away. Businesses are trying to make decisions about how to manage this process now, today, yesterday, last week and last month, and probably on 19 August when we debated this for the first time and asked the government how this process was going to be managed. Three months later, and three weeks from the first major tipping point and six weeks from the second major tipping point, the government is consulting with industry. It knew three months ago that this was coming. Three months ago, the government understood that there would be mandated vaccinations. I suspect that the government was working on this policy at the beginning of the year. I suspect that, at the beginning of this year, the government was probably deciding that a mandated vaccination policy would be rolled out later this year. The McGowan government has probably had all this year to work out precisely how this would work, yet when we asked this week how it would work, it said it was in the consultation phase. It has announced the outcomes, and it is in the consultation phase on how those outcomes will be delivered. I would have thought it has this completely twisted about. How on earth do businesses react when government sets an example like that? It is no wonder that businesses are concerned. Businesses are highly concerned. Businesses are worried about what they will do over the next couple of months. There are some basic problems they probably cannot fix. What do they do if they have a critical employee who refuses to get vaccinated? They will probably have to dismiss that person or ask them to resign. That will have an impact on businesses—particularly businesses that already have a critical staff shortage. It might help to remind the government that there are critical workforce shortages across the board. The Minister for Regional Development stood this week and told us about Work and Wander Out Yonder mark II, which is, I think, called “ctrl your holiday” or “ctrl your working holiday”. It is c-t-r-l, not “control” written out.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** “ctrl your summer job”.

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** It is “ctrl your summer job”. Thank you very much. I think that will be at least as successful as the Work and Wander Out Yonder program.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** How many people took work through Wander Out Yonder—1 500 people?

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** Did the government fix the workforce issues? No. The workforce issues still exist. This is the latest thought bubble. It is fine. This is the latest advertising campaign. We like a good advertising campaign. It keeps the government in good with the media outlets. That is fine. It is a great advertising campaign. Getting an adequate workforce in place has been a long-term failure of this government. It is not just the farming workforce and the minister has —

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** Every time we try, you criticise.

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** That is because the government is doing such a terrible job. It does a terrible job. If it could do a better job at it, we would not have to complain about it. Sorry, we got distracted there, Acting President. There are obviously workforce —

Several members interjected.

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** There are workforce shortages across the entire state. It is absolutely the case.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Jackie Jarvis):** Order, members! I am sure Hansard is having as much difficulty as I am in hearing the Leader of the Opposition. Leader of the Opposition, please resume.

**Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS:** I thank you for your protection, Acting President. There are obviously workforce shortages. We will come to a crisis point partly at the end of this month in a smaller way, and then the next month in particular, when businesses will have to make significant decisions and remove workers in areas with workforce shortages. What is the government's strategy for this? It is about to make its own issue significantly worse. It probably has another advertising campaign coming up in the new year with the next set of ads. If the last one was someone skipping through the orchard to occasionally pick a piece of fruit, maybe this one will be of someone skipping out amongst the coffee tables, taking a cup of coffee out there. Heaven knows what the next one will be around the workforce shortages and the COVID campaign.

It would be interesting if the government took the time to inform the industries that will be impacted before it made the decision. The problem is that the decision was made months ago. We debated it in this house three months ago. Industry is still uncertain about how it will respond. It is not good enough to tell industries to get their own legal advice on the legal requirements. I just do not think that is adequate. I have asked the government numerous times in the house what it is doing about legal advice, and it falls back to the position that it cannot give us legal advice. I have not asked the government what the legal advice is necessarily. I have asked whether it is providing any. Is industry receiving it? Is the government providing anything to support those businesses? Obviously not, because it cannot answer the question. Businesses are not being supported in that way and they are concerned. They are concerned about their legal obligations. They are concerned about how they will manage their workforce. They are actually concerned about employees who refuse to get vaccinated. I have said repeatedly that I support vaccinations and that we should all get vaccinated because that is what we do for the community. But most employers are interested in looking after the welfare of also the last 10 per cent, potentially, of employees who will refuse to be vaccinated. They actually do not want to hang them out to dry. I am not suggesting that the government does that, but that will be the effect if it does not have in place the sorts of processes and policies that the opposition has been asking for for months. The government cannot argue that the biggest impact will occur when the group that does not need to be double vaccinated until 31 January receives its second vaccination, because, guess what? They actually have to have their first vaccination in time to get their second vaccination by that date. We do not know whether there will be an inspectorate to make sure that this is happening, but, if that is the case, it would be interesting to know whether businesses actually understand and know that. There is enormous concern throughout Western Australia that this is not being done in a way that businesses can understand or is easy. It is not a simple process to find this out. Sure, there are websites that people can go to—most of them re-announce the government's press releases—and there is some information in the press releases, but, at a practical level, businesses do not understand how they are going to manage the requirements placed upon them.

We also do not know what happens if the government fails to get to a 90 per cent double-dose vaccination rate. I have asked about that this week, too. What is plan B if we do not get to 80 per cent? I will give the government some credit because it has, to some degree, been a victim of its own success. Keeping the COVID-19 virus out of this state has reduced the incentive for people to seek vaccination. This has probably added to vaccination hesitancy because the virus has not been as rampant in this state as it has been in New South Wales and Victoria. New South Wales has hit the 90 per cent double-dose vaccination rate because of its significant outbreaks. We have not had that. Well done to the government; it is, to some degree, a victim of its own success, but that does not mean that it does not have to address the issue going forward. It cannot live off this hubris of "Gee we've done a good job" forever. It will have to account for this down the track.

The COVID virus and its Delta strain will come into the state at some point. The health system is not ready for those pressures that admittedly every other state is suffering under as well. It is not ready for the pre-COVID pressures, let alone the pressures when the virus gets into the state. We are not ready for that. But what do we do if the 90 per cent vaccination rate is not achieved or is not achieved within the time frames that the government expects? What is plan B? Is plan B that we do not have WA's safe transition plan until that rate is hit? What happens if that is a year away because of vaccine hesitancy? What happens if we do not hit those numbers? What campaign will be put in place at that point? Those are fairly simple questions. The government's plan is that we do not open up anything of significance until we hit the 90 per cent double-dose vaccination rate—sure. But it is not too much to ask the

government: what is plan B? When we open up under various circumstances, what will the rules be around everything from wearing a mask to interstate and international transport? What will the rules be at 90 per cent? What will they be at 95 per cent? What was announced a couple of weeks ago was effectively a plan to have a plan. From my understanding, the Premier did not even say that when we hit 80 per cent, we would be provided with all the information that we want. He said, “At 80 per cent we’ll give you a date by which we’ll open up” and that was it. He said, “When we hit 80 per cent, we’ll tell you the time frame at which we might announce a plan for 90 per cent.” How much certainty is in that? I do not understand how this government can treat its community with such utter contempt, keep it in the dark and not explain to everybody who needs to plan for the next 12 months how this is going to work.

Maybe the government does not understand. Maybe the Labor Party does not understand business and industry. Maybe it does not realise that it should not plan for just the next three months. Maybe it needs a few more business people to work that out. It does not realise it has to get finance for the next five years and plan for the next 12 months. How can anybody do that when this government is determined to keep the entire community, business and non-business, in the dark? It is not that hard to tell people what its plan is.

**HON COLIN de GRUSSA (Agricultural — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [10.30 am]: I, too, rise to speak on this excellent motion moved by my colleague the Leader of the Opposition on a plan for a plan that this government released not so long ago, but it is a plan without a real plan. Let us look at where we are at. The latest figure I could get from the government’s website on vaccination statistics—it was updated at midnight on 10 November—is that in the WA population, the 12-plus age group has reached 67 per cent double-dosed. The safe transition plan outlined by the government specifically says that we need to reach that 80 per cent double-dose vaccination rate of 12 years and over before it will give us a date. I have many questions around that. Obviously as we get closer and the percentage of people who have received that double dose gets higher, we know that there will be a cohort of people who do not want to, or are hesitant to, get vaccinated. I want to know what modelling has been done on the time frame that will be required to reach that 80 per cent mark. It is pretty obvious that the rate will slow down as we approach those higher numbers.

I turn to the further plans. The Western Australian Department of Health has on its website a modelling on the COVID-19 transition plan. It states —

The WA Department of Health built a model to simulate a COVID-19 epidemic in Western Australia, customised to WA’s population. The modelling simulates the effects of vaccination coverage, public health and social measures ... such as mask wearing, testing ...

A simple chart on that website shows two comparisons between an 80 per cent and 90 per cent vaccination coverage, the days following the establishment of community transmission and the peak in symptomatic daily cases. It is pretty clear from that chart, based on its assumptions, that an 80 per cent vaccination rate will result in significantly higher daily cases. However, it is not clear what the assumptions are behind that model and whether that model is simply a prediction based on the entire population of Western Australia, 80 per cent of which is situated around the Perth and Peel region. The vaccination rate is significantly lower in other areas across the state and the questions are: how will we reach these vaccination rates in those areas and what will happen if we do not? This morning’s *The West Australian* contains an interesting opinion piece by Peter Law that refers to some of the modelling and the government’s plan. I will quote some of his excellent article. It states —

The transition plan released on Friday, which was more of an announcement for a future plan, appeared rushed following weeks of pressure from the Opposition.

There was only a vague “late January, early February” time frame for the restart of quarantine-free travel and the promise of light-touch restrictions came with a heavy caveat.

That is, if WA falls short of McGowan’s ambitious 90 per cent double dose vaccination target, everyone—irrespective of whether they rolled up their sleeves or not—will be penalised with “step up measures”.

That is critically important. Those of us who choose to do the right thing, who are vaccinated or are seeking to get vaccinated, have no real incentive because it is up to those who are not vaccinated. The ball is in their court and the rest of us will suffer as a consequence of that.

**Hon Kyle McGinn** interjected.

**Hon COLIN de GRUSSA:** The “Lord of the Docks” has spoken, but I will not be taking interjections from the “Lord of the Docks”.

The government has failed to convince those people who are hesitant to get vaccinated that they should get vaccinated. That is the real key here. The rest of us will have to suffer the consequences because of the choices of other people, which the government has not been able to change.

The key point in this article, to quote it again, is —

But the real motivation for taking a different reopening strategy to every other major State was contained in the WA Health Department modelling used to justify the 90 per cent jab target.

The calculations suggest there would be 200 fewer deaths from COVID in the first year and the number of people who caught the virus over 12 months would more than halve from 104,000 to 43,000.

Arguably of more importance than saving the lives of people who chose not to be vaccinated, the modelling shows the peak in daily infections and hospital admissions would also be “substantially delayed”.

Interestingly, delayed, perhaps, until the government has had a chance to fix the mess it has created in our hospital system. As someone who has spent around 30 hours in emergency departments in the last month—not something I would recommend to anyone—I can see why we would not want COVID in this state at the moment. Our hospital system will not cope. It is not ready. It will be a monumental job to make it ready for any kind of COVID breakout, or any other serious infection breakout for that matter, because of the pressure and demand on our hospital system now and the lack of resources in our emergency departments. Therefore, Peter Law’s article is very apt in making it clear that this is more about delaying the peak to suit a time line that will enable WA Health to get some sort of restoration of health services in this state.

My colleagues have asked for modelling to be tabled for when Western Australia is predicted to reach a 90 per cent vaccination rate of over 12-year-olds for each local government area of the state because that is critical. If this modelling is simply population wide, that is not good enough. We need to know exactly what is happening with vaccination rates in every local government area across this state so that we are informed of what sort of rollout is needed, and where it is needed, to get those rates up. Otherwise, there will be a real risk, and a fear by some people—which perhaps the government will be able to allay—that this state will end up being effectively segregated into areas that will be able to open up and areas that will not be able to open up. How will that provide certainty for the businesses in those communities? What is the plan to deal with those people who are not vaccinated? What is the plan to get those local government areas to lift their vaccination rates?

**Hon Kyle McGinn** interjected.

**Hon COLIN de GRUSSA:** The honourable member does not seem to have a plan. That is the key here. We are talking about an 80 per cent vaccination rate. We already know that the vaccination rate in many local government areas across Western Australia is well below the state average. That is a massive issue. If we want to reach an 80 per cent vaccination rate across the board, we will effectively have to reach a significantly higher rate than that, otherwise local government areas across this state may well be closed and have their own borders up—we will have islands within an island.

**Hon Kate Doust:** What are you doing as a member of Parliament to encourage your constituents to get vaccinated?

**Hon COLIN de GRUSSA:** I actively encourage people to get vaccinated.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon COLIN de GRUSSA:** I actively encourage people to get vaccinated. I think vaccination is the obvious thing to do. But it will not necessarily be me they listen to.

**Hon Kate Doust:** You’re a role model.

**Hon COLIN de GRUSSA:** It will be community leaders they listen to. Politicians, sadly, are regarded somewhat like used car salesmen. Although we do whatever we can to promote vaccination, the fact of the matter is that it is local community leaders and localised targeted campaigns within those communities that in my view will be key to ensuring that those communities get their vaccination rates up.

It is about making sure that vaccines are available and that there is easy access to as many vaccines as possible. It is about making sure that we engage with every local leader in those communities—not just politicians—to ensure that people realise that it is absolutely critical that they get vaccinated or they could end up being locked in while people in other parts of the state will be free to travel within WA, interstate and overseas. People could end up being stuck in little islands within WA, which we have a significant issue with. We talked about workforce issues before. Obviously, I am going to run out of time to talk about that, but I think the Leader of the Opposition covered it well.

**HON STEVE MARTIN (Agricultural) [10.40 am]:** I rise to also make a contribution to this excellent motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition, Hon Dr Steve Thomas. In the limited time that I have available I will confine my remarks to a couple of specific subjects. However, I want to refer to some of the remarks made by Hon Dr Steve Thomas about the WA’s safe transition plan and the government’s consultation regarding the recent announcements.

In effect, this motion is asking the government what small business has been asking us and our officers: we need some clarity and information. It is late in the year—it is the middle of November 2021 and we have been at this

for a while and a lack of certainty remains. Anyone who has been in small business or worked for small business knows how difficult it can be to plan business day to day let alone month to month. Hon Dr Steve Thomas talked about having a discussion with key employees. What will happen to someone who has one employee and they are uncertain about the vaccination status of their single employee? Obviously, some businesses with just a single employee are nervous.

I will turn to some of the health implications that are raised in the motion and use my time to discuss the very sad news out of Geraldton recently. Yesterday, after 86 years, St John of God Geraldton Hospital ceased offering maternity services. I happened to be in Geraldton last week when that announcement was made and there was a sense of shock in the local community that this could happen after, as I said, 86 years. The people of Geraldton and the broader midwest have depended on that service for decades. In fact, during the COVID pandemic, St John of God Geraldton Hospital has been the only hospital with a maternity ward in Geraldton and the midwest. Some time ago, Geraldton Regional Hospital transferred its maternity services to St John of God, but in recent months, maternity services have come back to the regional hospital, so because of a shortage of midwives and staff, St John of God decided that it would shut down its maternity services because they were no longer viable.

As members can imagine, expectant mothers and families have been having discussions about what they will do. I know that some of them who have been in touch with my office will be coming to Perth because they wish to remove the uncertainty and risk from that very important and nervous time. By the way, what are things looking like in Perth maternity hospitals at the moment? In the last three months, our hospitals have been on maternity bypass on 62 occasions. Obviously, I cannot speak from firsthand experience, but I can imagine what maternity bypass feels like for a woman.

**Hon Kate Doust:** No, you can't. How can you possibly know that?

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** That is what I said—I cannot know that. Maternity bypass sounds terrifying and would create a great deal of stress.

That represents about 20 bypasses a month across the health system and included one mother, due with twins, being bypassed from two hospitals before being able to finally give birth. Women from Geraldton and the midwest will add to that situation in Perth.

**Hon Sandra Carr:** Are we talking about COVID or maternity hospitals now?

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** If the member has a glance at the motion, she will see that it refers to the constant failings in the WA health system. I will move on.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT:** Order!

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT:** Members, order! Hon Steve Martin has the floor.

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** Thank you, Acting President. Obviously, members have not read the particular motion in front of them; they should read paragraph (d). It is good to hear some of the regional members' voices today. It is great to hear their contributions. It has been a long week and a half with silence from some areas across the chamber. It is good on a Thursday morning to hear some of those regional members making comments.

I will refer to another issue in the health sector. As regional members will be aware, especially those of us in the Agricultural Region who have been out and about during the country show season over the past couple of months, there are a couple of constants at country shows. There are always regional politicians, of course; there are wonderful doughnut stands; and there are St John Ambulance volunteers everywhere people go. I have not sought them out; they have sought me out for a chat over the past couple of months.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** Do they know who you are?

**Hon STEVE MARTIN:** Of course they do, minister.

They call in for a chat. They are concerned about a couple of topics. One of them is the concept of ambulance ramping and how they feel that that is a slight on their reputation as ambulance service providers—I know they are regional people, but it is the broader ambulance topic. They see what is happening with ambulance ramping as a badly named crisis. They are doing their job, whether it is patient transfers or picking people up. They are doing a good job in getting people to hospital doors, but the problem is from the doors to the beds. They are concerned about that.

The other thing they are concerned about is the parliamentary inquiry into the provision of ambulance services. Obviously, that inquiry will take its course and committee members will come up with some recommendations. On behalf of the St John volunteers, I will let members know that they are concerned that that community and volunteer-based system, which works extremely well, might be put at risk by the outcome of that inquiry.

I will give members who do not live in the regions some idea of what that volunteer service looks like. I met recently with a St John volunteer in a very small town. I will not name him; he would be embarrassed. He works seven days a week in a convenience store with his wife and a couple of staff. They start early and finish late. In his very precious spare time, he volunteers as a St John Ambulance officer, and has done for more than a decade. He knows the locals, he knows the local roads, and he knows exactly what is happening in his community. He is a long way from a regional centre. He is concerned that if this inquiry recommends changes to that volunteer structure, they will be serviced by a professional full-time ambulance service that is based 150 kilometres away. At three in the morning, on a dark gravel road, someone will come, eventually, from 150 kilometres away to service that community in the awful event of, say, a car crash. They are very concerned about the possibility of that inquiry recommending a result that would not work in regional WA.

I want to talk about the uncertainty in business with the transition plan. It is complicated even for those of us who do this all the time. But for any small business person reading what was announced the other day, there are uncertainties about what is happening when. There are also uncertainties about what will happen in the event of a lockdown next week—if, God forbid, we get a COVID case—and before those dates that are in the plan are triggered. What will that mean for the employer of one, two or three staff? As Hon Dr Steve Thomas said, it is unclear what rights employers have to demand access to those health details. I think the Rios and the BHPs, by the way, might have a better go at this. Those of us who fly regularly have been to the airport and seen the Rio tent. We have seen how well organised and well structured those major businesses are, but what will small employers, such as newsagents, farmers and hairdressers, be able to demand of their employees to discover their vaccination status? Therefore, I think small business in particular is seeking more clarity and I hope the government provides it. The minister has asked for some positive news from this side of the chamber, so I will finish by mentioning my home town, Wickiepin. I believe we are topping the entire southern half of the state regionally with nearly an 85 per cent single dose rate, and I think we are doing extremely well on the second dose as well, so there are some good news stories out there on the vaccination front.

**HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (South West — Minister for Regional Development)** [10.49 am]: The debate on this motion is interesting and an important debate to be had, so we appreciate the opposition bringing this important issue forward. However, I must say that I am pretty confused about where the opposition members stand. On one part, they seem to be a bit cross and grumpy that we are going with a 90 per cent fully vaccinated rate before we open up. Then the next speaker gets up and seems to be suggesting that we should not even be opening up at 90 per cent because we should wait until every local government authority across the state reaches 90 per cent.

I was very interested in Hon Colin de Grussa getting up and saying that he had gone onto the website and found the latest figures and that we were 67 per cent fully vaccinated, and that is true. But what he actually, obviously, missed was the fact that we have an 81 per cent first dose rate. The majority of people who are getting vaccinated are getting the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, for which there is a three or four week wait between the first vaccination and the second. If members think that through, if we have an 81 per cent first dose rate, it is very, very likely—in fact, that has been the experience in every other state—that in four weeks' time we are pretty likely to have our 80 per cent. At that point, we can make a very reliable prediction about when we will meet 90 per cent.

The Leader of the Opposition is full of despair. He says, “We’re probably never going to meet 90. It’s not going to happen!”

**Hon Dr Steve Thomas:** What if it doesn’t happen?

**Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN:** He asks, “What if it doesn’t happen? What if we don’t get anyone vaccinated?” We have to look at what is highly probable. We can look at the pattern around the world and in particular the other Australian states. It is true that because we have not had community transmission in Western Australia—we have been uniquely successful in keeping that out—it has actually created a bit of a laissez-faire attitude towards becoming vaccinated. There is no mystery about that. There is no scandal about that. We all recognise that that is the case. Hopefully, everyone in this place understands that inevitably, and I think we have said this over and again, at some point COVID-19 will come into WA and it will come when we open up to all the other states. I think it is important for people to understand that currently if you are from Tasmania, South Australia, Northern Territory or Queensland, you can come freely into Western Australia. Therefore, the suggestion that we are absolutely cut off from the rest of the country is not true. But when we reach that 90 per cent rate and we open up, COVID-19 is going to come into this state. We all recognise that. But, obviously, part of our strategy has been that knowing that this will happen, we have worked through which industries do we have to make sure that the people who work there are vaccinated so that we are well prepared and able to cope with this virus when it does come into the state.

The Leader of the Opposition was very concerned about the impact on business. All ministers have been attending forums with industry in our areas. I will tell members that in the agricultural sector, all the companies that have workers who are likely to be in group 1 or 2 are strongly in favour of this. They want us to mandate this. This makes their job easier. Members keep talking about the employers’ concerns about their unvaccinated workers, but do they know what most of these employers are really concerned about? They are concerned about how to protect their

vaccinated workers. What are their obligations to their vaccinated workers, who we all know still can contract COVID, albeit in a milder form, should this come in? We have all this focus on the rights of the unvaccinated people, but what about the rights of the people who have actually gone out there and got themselves vaccinated?

I refer to abattoirs. Around the world it has been observed that for a whole variety of physical circumstances in which abattoirs operate, as well as some of the socio-economic circumstances of their workers, abattoirs are an area of very high vulnerability. Operators of abattoirs and meat processors were very, very keen to make sure that they were captured in this, and they have quite clearly been captured under group 1. This week, the directions have been issued. Many employers, certainly those in the mining industry, who have not waited for these provisions in many instances rely on the occupational health and safety legislation. They have an obligation to provide a safe workplace for all their workers, and that obligation is compromised by allowing unvaccinated workers to mix with vaccinated workers. Clearly, we have to look at the whole structure of our legislative framework. It is accepted across the board that once we open up, there will be community infection and transmission, and employers have an obligation under occupational health and safety legislation to protect their workers. The first set of directions that have been issued relate to abattoirs and meat processors. All the directions in relation to the other group 1 workers—those who are required to have their first vaccination by 1 December—will be completed by the end of this week. In addition to the obligations, rights and responsibilities that an employer has under the Occupational Safety and Health Act, this creates a very clear framework and legal circumstance in which an employer can demand evidence from a worker that they are fully vaccinated should they want to continue employment in that workplace.

We saw a boost in numbers of vaccinations coming on board this week. There is no doubt that these provisions have contributed to that. I understand that Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd, which is going to be in group 2, is very clear that it considers itself to be a transport and logistics operation, and it wants to be able to provide clarity to its employees that they will be required to provide evidence that they are fully vaccinated by the end of January. That work is continuing.

**Hon Dr Steve Thomas:** Will the government be checking that?

**Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN:** There will be regimes of protection, but what we do know is that certainly the large firms will have human resources systems and that will be part of their HR system. Documentation is required for anyone who is employing anyone. They need to get tax file numbers and ensure that they have superannuation accounts, as there are HR requirements around that. The legal ability for an employer to ask for proof will clearly be there. It will not be that unduly complicated. They could take a photocopy or get a printed copy of their electronic vaccination certificates.

Debate interrupted.