

CORONAVIRUS — INTRASTATE TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

213. MR S.J. PRICE to the Premier:

Can the Premier update the house on the implementation of unprecedented intrastate travel restrictions overnight?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I thank the member for Forrestfield for the question. Last night, travel restrictions between our regions came into force around our state. Western Australians will not be able to travel outside their regional boundaries, unless for an exempt purpose. These are our normal regional boundaries, except for Perth and Peel, which is considered to be one region because of their interconnectedness. There are obviously exemptions for essential purposes: for example, getting home; getting to and from work, including FIFO, freight, construction and agricultural work; being a primary carer or fulfilling a parenting order; the need to attend medical appointments; the need to access groceries or supplies; the need to attend school or an educational institution; and, of course, compassionate grounds. The full set of directions is on the Western Australian government website now.

This is about striking the right balance. We are doing this in order to keep the state running whilst at the same time trying to stop the spread of the virus into vulnerable regional areas. It is enforceable, and penalties can apply to people who travel across regional boundaries without an exemption. It is completely unprecedented. This is not something I wanted to do. We apologise to all Western Australians for having to do this, and we thank them for their understanding.

The orders came into effect around the state at 11.59 last night. Checkpoints are set up around the state at regional borders by the Western Australia Police Force with assistance at checkpoints from agencies, including Main Roads, the Australian Defence Force and the State Emergency Service, so that means a range of voluntary groups and also the Army. In particular, I would like to thank the police for all their work; they have been doing a terrific job. Early reports are that it is working well and freight is still going through. Indeed, I think freight might be working very well. Obviously, some people will be frustrated and impatient. We ask people to understand why we are doing this. The advice this morning was that, overnight, more than 1 000 vehicles went through checkpoints across the state, and two were turned around. This is an encouraging piece of advice and shows that the vast majority of people in the community understand that they should travel only as necessary. Police have been instructed to be as understanding as possible. But we ask all Western Australians, if they are crossing these borders for essential purposes, to make it as easy as possible for authorities to say yes to them. If they have some sort of documentation to back up the nature of their travel—their employment, a letter from their boss, proof of address or a court order—anything to make it easier would be much appreciated. This is not a time to go on holidays or to be a grey nomad. The new case numbers over the last few days have been encouraging, but we have to stay absolutely vigilant about the spread of the illness and, as the Minister for Health said, we are sailing into the storm, not out of it. Western Australia is a big state and this is an essential step-by-step process to stop the spread of the coronavirus to regional and remote communities. We thank all people across the state, especially regional Western Australians, for their understanding at this time.