

CORONAVIRUS — PUBLIC AND INDEPENDENT EXPERT INQUIRY

Motion

MR Z.R.F. KIRKUP (Dawesville) [4.01 pm]: I move —

That this house urges the government to commit to immediately establish a public and independent expert review to investigate, assess and report back to this house on Western Australia's preparedness to prevent and respond to a COVID-19 outbreak in Western Australia and in particular inquire into —

- (a) the effectiveness of hotel quarantine processes and security protocols;
- (b) the exemption arrangements and associated restrictions, and track and tracing for travellers and essential workers coming into WA;
- (c) the effectiveness of protocols and safeguards to protect aged care facilities, remote communities and other vulnerable Western Australians;
- (d) the capacity for an effective rapid response to a COVID-19 outbreak, similar to that which has occurred in Victoria;
- (e) a comprehensive review of the hospital system and its capacity to manage an increased flow of COVID-19 patients; and
- (f) any other matters that the inquiry sees fit to look into.

I note the fact that the Minister for Health has informed me that he will be slightly late. I appreciate him letting me know in advance, and I understand the reason he is otherwise delayed into this place.

On 7 August, I wrote to the Minister for Health as part of a bipartisan support on behalf of the Liberal Party of the state government's health response to COVID-19. In previous public statements and correspondence, we have recognised the important work that the Department of Health has continued to do to help protect Western Australians from what we expect will be an inevitable coronavirus outbreak in Western Australia. In support of that bipartisanship and in that bipartisan spirit, the Liberal Party has moved this motion here today to ask the government to immediately establish an independent expert rapid review to inquire into, assess and report on our state's preparedness to respond in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak. Importantly, we would also like to assess the threat level that Western Australia is faced with, noting our borders and the current arrangements with travellers and associated exemptions.

Because of the nature of the varied responses across the Federation, there have been very different outcomes to the responses of state governments and subsequent COVID-19 outbreaks. We need look only as far as the contrast between the Liberal Berejiklian government in New South Wales and the Labor Andrews government in Victoria to see what has happened with their coronavirus outbreaks, the impact those outbreaks have had and the devastation that has been left in the wake of the outbreak that has now taken hold in Victoria. If we compare the two states, particularly New South Wales, it certainly appears that, in contrast with Victoria, for the first 10 days, for example, the threshold of unknown community transmission was met. Victoria was out of control and, at the same time, it seems that New South Wales was, hopefully, holding the line. But from those two states—obviously, New South Wales is the more populous—significant lessons could be learnt to help better inform our readiness here in Western Australia. Such a contrast should not be ignored. Those two states border one another. They have significant travel into their airports. They have significantly diverse communities. They had similar responses implemented in different ways with hotel quarantine, and there have been different public health responses. As we learnt from the Minister for Health in his contribution last night to the debate on the Public Health Amendment (COVID-19 Response) Bill, different bureaucratic responses have been implemented in New South Wales compared with those in Victoria, for example, with the Department of Health and Human Services Chief Health Officer and where he sits versus the Chief Health Officer here, or, indeed, the New South Wales Chief Health Officer. I believe that there are lessons to be learnt, and it is important that that is done in a sober manner, with eyes wide open to any lessons that we can glean from those two jurisdictions and others that have successfully suppressed COVID-19, and, indeed, when an outbreak has occurred, how we have responded accordingly.

I think that we have had time on our side here in Western Australia with COVID-19. Our isolation has been an important part of our success when it comes to any potential outbreak. More importantly, Western Australians have done an amazing job in following the health advice almost unquestionably to ensure that they take measures to protect themselves and those around them. The difference, of course, is very stark in Victoria, where in some circumstances I have seen people who simply refuse to wear a mask in melees with the Victorian police. Evidently, in Victoria, an outbreak would not have occurred if there had not been people who were ignoring the lockdown in Melbourne and the associated restrictions put in place on people who otherwise should have been isolating except for certain exemptions. Had those restrictions been adhered to, in all likelihood we would not be facing the situation that we now have in Victoria, which is out of control in all respects. If we compare that with New South Wales and Western Australia, we have done a very good job, particularly in Western Australia. I think it is worth noting

that at every point, the decisions made by the government have been supported by the Liberal Party. When it comes to things like our hard border, it was, indeed, the Liberal Party who called for it first.

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister!

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: At the time, the Minister for Health said that there was a little thing called the Constitution, and suggested that because of articles within the Constitution, we could not implement a hard border. Of course, the Premier said a number of times in answer to questions from the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the National Party and members of the opposition more broadly that he would not want to see a hard border put in place because of the restrictions that it might place on individuals in their freedom of movement through the Federation. Then, we saw that the Labor government took up the suggestion from the Liberal Party and, indeed, implemented a hard border. It was, of course, the Liberal and National Parties that were the first to call for a hard border in Western Australia. That is an irrefutable fact, and the Minister for Emergency Services is welcome to go back in history through *Hansard*, and review it, because, indeed, I can tell him now that it was absolutely the suggestion of members of this side of the house and the total ignorance of the government to implement what we thought was a very important measure.

Moreover, because of the time that we have bought ourselves here in Western Australia, it is important that we do not become complacent. I remain concerned, and I am sure that all members in this place share a similar concern, that there is a high level of complacency now in Western Australia when it comes to our preparedness for any coronavirus outbreak that may occur. We know that at the moment, because of the restrictions, many people in Western Australia feel a false sense of security about COVID-19. We need only to go to the streets, bars and restaurants or any places with large gatherings over the weekend when there is good weather and we see people everywhere, I think in total ignorance of the two-metre rule and the necessary social distancing measures. Thankfully, in Western Australia we are not living in such density as they have in New South Wales and Victoria and the capital cities there. Undoubtedly, Perth is not as dense. We are much more spread out. The concern I have is that because we have bought ourselves this time in WA, if there was a COVID-19 outbreak because of one of the 52 people who cross our borders each and every day without quarantine restrictions, there could be a significant risk posed to Western Australians.

If any of those individuals tested positive to COVID-19, Western Australia would take off like a hay shed on a hot day! It would potentially put us at a greater risk than what has occurred in Victoria. On 10 June, Victoria recorded four new active cases. On one day in Victoria, on 10 August, there were 322 active cases. The Victorian government has had to try to respond to that significant increase as best it can.

Lessons could be learnt from Victoria's response. Lessons could also be learnt from how well New South Wales has managed to respond to its COVID-19 crisis. More recently, the city of Auckland has been placed on phase 3 restrictions because of an outbreak, from an unknown community source, involving four individuals. New Zealand had gone 102 days without any community transmission of COVID-19, and all of a sudden, out of nowhere, seemingly, four individuals have it. The city of Auckland is now in total lockdown. If it can happen in New Zealand, it can happen in Western Australia. I suspect the risk is greater in Western Australia because of the number of people who are travelling in and out of our state each and every day.

Through questions on notice asked in the other place by the opposition, we have established that some 6 661 individuals, since we last asked a question on notice, have travelled into Western Australia without a quarantine exemption. As part of his response, the minister cited that most of those people were essential workers such as members of flight crews. I am aware, through friendships of mine, of flight crew members who come into Western Australia. They are flight crew members who go up and down the east coast for one of the major carriers. They fly between Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales, and then they fly over to Perth. They stay in a Western Australian hotel without any quarantine restrictions whatsoever. They walk around the streets. They might be here for two or three days at a time as part of their break. They represent a significant risk.

I appreciate that necessary arrangements need to be put in place. Yesterday, the Minister for Health spoke about a gentleman who was self-isolating in a serviced apartment in the eastern suburbs of Perth. We found that that gentleman could have visitors to his serviced apartment; he just could not leave his serviced apartment. That situation in itself is a risk. I realise he was a seafarer. As part of commonwealth arrangements, it was required that he find his way to Western Australia to ensure that merchant shipping could continue. We are not suggesting for a moment that the arrangements in place to ensure our country can run to the best of its ability should stop, but very real risks are being placed on the Western Australian population, which I think has been led down this path by this state's isolation and by how well we have done in initially responding to COVID-19. There is now a sense of complacency, which I am very concerned about.

It is imperative that an independent committee be established to determine the level of risk posed by our international and interstate borders. We need to try to best understand how we can mitigate against those risks. We need to assess preparations in Western Australia for our capacity to perform surge testing and rapidly ramp up contact tracing and implement, perhaps, isolated suburb-by-suburb lockdowns, regional lockdowns and facility-based lockdowns, if there is an outbreak. Obviously, it is important that what is happening in Victoria does not happen here. We need to be assured that there are very little risks to the Western Australian public. If this independent committee found that there were no issues here, that there is nothing to see and that the Western Australian government has prepared as best as it possibly can to respond to a foreseen outbreak of COVID-19, that is a good outcome, because it provides assurances to the people of Western Australia. If in fact an independent committee found otherwise, a public report to this place would ensure that we were all informed about where further investment and attention should be applied. I do not see why that is such an indigestible issue for this government. This is not a committee inquiry full of politicians that the government may suggest is a partisan or political attack.

Mr F.M. Logan: Yes, it is.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: It is not at all, member for Cockburn. In the correspondence that I provided —

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: If the member for Cockburn wants to politicise the health and welfare of all Western Australians, he can do that. We are not trying to do that. We are trying to protect the health and welfare of Western Australians. That is absolutely what our motion here this afternoon seeks to achieve.

To the extent that we are not trying to politicise this, we suggested in our correspondence to the Minister for Health that the independent expert committee could be overseen by a former Labor Minister for Health in Hon Jim McGinty, AM, or Hon Dr Kim Hames. In both circumstances, we would have supported that. I cannot understand how the Labor state government would be averse to a former Labor minister being in charge of an independent expert review committee to ensure that we are best placed to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to the composition of the committee, we suggested that perhaps Dr Miller, or representatives from the Western Australian branch of the Australian Medical Association, could be a part of that. This is a measure that the AMA absolutely supports to ensure that we are thoroughly conducting a root and branch review of our state's preparedness to respond to an outbreak. Other expert organisations that could be on it are research institutes such as the Telethon Kids Institute or Harry Perkins. The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners could also be on it. Any manner of independent experts, or co-opted experts from within the Department of Health, could be on it to ensure that this committee would be thoroughly guided in looking into certain areas of concern.

When we look at what has occurred in Victoria, there are areas of concern that warrant attention. As of today, Victoria has recorded 15 646 cases of COVID-19. Its second wave has substantially eclipsed its first outbreak earlier this year. In the two months between June and August, there was a significant increase in the number of cases. There are now 7 877 active cases in Victoria. There are 43 Victorians in intensive care units and 25 on ventilated beds. There are 662 Victorians in hospital who have tested positive to COVID-19. Unfortunately, 267 people have died. Before this occurred, Victoria was considered to be on top of COVID-19. It had been suppressed to such an extent that Daniel Andrews, the Premier of Victoria, was lauded. In fact I think *The West Australian* called Daniel Andrews the eastern states' version of the Western Australian Premier! There was such support for Daniel Andrews because the community considered that he had done such a good job in suppressing COVID-19. That could not be said now. What we are seeing in Victoria is a horrendous set of circumstances that we need to ensure we learn from, prepare for and respond to. That is not suggesting that the Parliament is best placed to do that. Independent experts should make those inquiries, conduct such an investigation and make such assessments so that they can frankly and fearlessly recommend to the Parliament areas for improvement.

We know from the COVID-19 situation in other countries that there is unlikely to be very little transmission or very little chance of an outbreak for an extended period. An outbreak of COVID-19 in Western Australia is inevitable at some point. That is a significant concern, and one that we should all be prepared for. We have a very low number of cases in Western Australia at the moment, thankfully, but we have a low number of people being tested. Testing in Western Australia continues to be at a very low rate. Per 100 000 people, at the moment in Western Australia the number of people who have been tested sits at 10.7 per cent. In comparison, 28 per cent of Victorians have been tested. In New South Wales that number is 21 per cent, in South Australia it is 17 per cent, in Tasmania it is 14 per cent, and in Queensland it is 13 per cent. Western Australia is below the Northern Territory, at 11.6 per cent of cases per 100 000 people. Western Australia is significantly down the ranks when it comes to testing regimes. That is a concern. Is our testing regime ready to respond in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak? Will there be shortages that we saw when COVID-19 first impacted Western Australia and there were international supply constraints? Are we best placed to respond to that? That is a significant issue.

Looking at what has happened in Victoria causes some of us to think about how Western Australia might best respond. Between 1 June and 11 August, which is considered to be the time frame more recently, up until today's

date, when there has been a second wave in Victoria, there were a number of outbreak sites that would cause us some concern if we had a similar set of circumstances in Western Australia.

In Victoria, they were behind in testing, tracing and isolating when the initial outbreak occurred. They were too far behind and there was a range of issues; it got away from them, which is why we have seen such a significant second wave. Facilities were hotspots for those outbreaks. We do not know whether the vulnerable communities in Western Australia are prepared. At the moment in Victoria, there is an argument between governments about whether aged-care facilities are the federal government's responsibility. The federal government has suggested that the licensing arrangements be issued by the federal government. I do not doubt that for a second.

Mr R.H. Cook interjected.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Sure. Remind me, minister: do they operate in the state of Victoria? Does the state of Victoria have any control over individuals? When someone walks onto aged-care facility land, are they walking onto land that is akin to federal government land? Absolutely not.

Several members interjected.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: In that case, there are no public health regulations in Western Australia that apply to aged-care facilities.

Several members interjected.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: That is not true. There are absolutely.

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I am surprised that the minister would know how it works moreover.

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Considering that the minister was the person who signed off on the state of emergency in Western Australia, I am very concerned that he might not know how it works.

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Emergency Services!

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I will be shocked because the minister will be able to make a contribution! They tend to ignore him from time to time.

Mr F.M. Logan: You're such a small-minded man.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Acting Speaker!

Mrs A.K. Hayden: You're pathetic.

Mr F.M. Logan: You're stupid.

The ACTING SPEAKER: You are doing it to each other.

Point of Order

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: I believe the minister should withdraw that comment. He called the member "stupid". His behaviour is totally out of line.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman): Points of order will be heard in silence. Member for Darling Range and Minister for Emergency Services —

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I call you twice, minister, and I call you once, member. You are called. For the note, I will say it again: you are called twice, minister. That is for Hansard to note. You do not keep arguing across the chamber.

Debate Resumed

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: When I look at the outbreak categories in Victoria, I note that there is a huge concern, and I think that lessons could be learnt for Western Australia from what has happened in that jurisdiction. I note that our Deputy Chief Health Officer was dispatched there, and I think that was a very good move. When the minister spoke about it, the opposition supported it, because lessons could be learnt from that at a departmental level. What we are asking for in this case is an independent expert review committee. I do not understand for the life of me how that is such an unpalatable concept for the government.

Mr W.J. Johnston: Sit down and we'll tell you.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I look forward to the minister's contribution at some point.

The outbreak categories in Victoria should be a concern to all of us. In the second wave outbreak in Victoria, 137 aged-care or residential-care facilities have been subject to 2 453 cases of COVID-19. Of course, unfortunately, we have seen a higher than average fatality rate from the outbreaks in those facilities. Sixty-nine schools, 53 hospitals and healthcare facilities, 21 childcare facilities, nine facilities for those who are disabled, eight food premises, five correctional facilities, one laboratory and 369 associated others, which include student accommodation, social settings, family homes and the like, were subject to outbreaks. For the category of workplaces, warehouses and food distribution areas are a significant concern. Forty-three warehouses, nine food distribution workplaces, 14 retail workplaces, five food premises, 14 abattoir locations, 11 supermarkets and 23 others, which include TAFEs, gyms and the like, were subject to outbreaks. They are very different locations from one another. There is no uniformity in that, except that obviously when a large number of people socialise and live closely together, such as in aged-care facilities, a spike occurs. A significantly broad number of categories of workplaces have been subject to this second wave, including schools, aged-care facilities, food premises and abattoirs. There is no uniformity in this. As we know, the virus is indiscriminate. It has affected nearly every type of location we can think of in Victoria.

Our concern is: how well prepared are our aged-care and residential-care facilities in Western Australia? I do not know. How well prepared are our schools? We do not know.

Mr T.J. Healy interjected.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: We do not, member; we do not know at all.

Mr T.J. Healy: The minister will tell you.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I look forward to that, member for Southern River.

We do not know how well prepared our correctional facilities, food distribution warehouses, abattoirs and other warehouses might be in order to implement their COVID-safe response plans. We must remember that some time has passed since the government required every food business that operated in Western Australia to have a COVID-safe plan. How many of those plans are still relevant? How many of those are still actively inquired into by the Department of Health? When was the last time that Department of Health inspectors, including rangers at the time, checked on those businesses to make sure that they had their COVID-safe plans together? My concern is that if there has been no oversight work to ensure that there is fitness in the community to respond to this, as is our collective responsibility, this virus could get ahead of us, akin to what has occurred in Victoria.

My other concern is with our hospital system. I am well aware that a number of ventilators have been purchased by the government to respond to any respiratory issues that may occur in someone who is COVID-19 positive. I think that surging has been very important. It was an important decision by the government and I assume that they are largely warehoused in the event that they need to be rolled out. I also appreciate the ICU rooms that have been recently procured. I think that 10 were rolled out in the regions. That was also a very good move.

Mr R.H. Cook: Negative pressure.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Sorry—negative pressure rooms. Peel Health Campus has one negative pressure room and people have to walk through the entire emergency department to get to it, which poses a significant risk to all the clinicians. These are very good moves, but we do not know whether there is a need for more investment across our health system. I am hopeful that our infrastructure will be able to respond if there is an outbreak similar to what has happened in Victoria. In Victoria, 600 people with COVID-19 are now in hospital, let alone those who are in ICU and on ventilators.

Our concern obviously stems from the fact that there is a high level of complacency in Western Australia. I do not think any of us could doubt that. Indeed, we saw it in this chamber yesterday. At times, social distancing is not a high priority for members; it is not quickly thought of. When COVID-19 first hit, it was top of mind for all of us. Although the flu rate is below the seasonal threshold, it is still trickling along. Obviously, flu is spreading in the community because people are socialising again. I appreciate that we do not want Western Australia to go into what the Prime Minister called sawtooth lockdowns, whereby restrictions are eased and then we have to clamp down and return very quickly to what I imagine would be phase 1 or phase 2. That is exactly what has happened in Auckland and, unfortunately, that is exactly what has happened in Victoria. That causes significant consternation amongst the people in those jurisdictions who not only are fearful about what has occurred, but also have a sense of frustration, which has been borne out in Victoria where an anti-authoritarian streak has now taken hold. People are ignoring the advice of the government about simple things such as mask wearing. Today the New South Wales Premier had to implore people to wear a mask. She has said, “Don’t ask; wear a mask”. That is the line. Governments have said to people that they have to take protective measures to protect themselves from a COVID-19 outbreak. People in New South Wales are wearing masks and, thankfully, they are holding the line on the rate of infection. I think they are probably on a knife’s edge at the moment, from what I have seen, but they are holding the line as best they can. We do not want to be like Victoria. We do not want to be seen to be behind the curve of infection. We want to stay ahead of this outbreak as much as we can. Key to that is ensuring that we have a thorough level of preparedness and a thorough review of our state’s response in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak.

I appreciate that the government has suggested this afternoon and in response to questions asked during question time yesterday and to media queries by my local newspapers that there is no point in wasting resources on an exercise like this. Indeed, yesterday the Premier went so far as to suggest that somehow this would politicise the COVID-19 outbreak. Nothing could be further from the truth. We want to make sure that the people of Western Australia are protected as best as possible, and that the state of Western Australia is as prepared as possible to respond to a second wave or any isolated outbreaks. I think that is an important task, and it would be without risk to the government. For the government to say that it is investigating something and has found a couple of issues, or no issues at all, would be a good thing for the government. A constant review process needs to take place, but it is not something that can be done by the people who have been charged with responsibility for responding if an outbreak were to occur. It is imperative that there is an independent expert medical review of our state's level of preparation for a COVID-19 response. That is supported by the opposition, broadly supported by the community and broadly supported by the medical fraternity. It should also be supported by the government, and it is unfortunate to hear the language that is already coming out to suggest that somehow the opposition, because we care about the people of Western Australia, is trying to politicise this issue. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Western Australian Liberal Party was the first to call for strong borders, and the government said that that was unnecessary. The Western Australian Liberal Party was the first to call for regional borders in the Perth and Peel regions, and the government said that that was unnecessary. The Western Australian Liberal Party is the first to call for an independent expert review, but unfortunately it seems once again that the government thinks that that is unnecessary. I hope the government's decision does not come back to bite it, because I fear that if there is an outbreak, the people of Western Australia will expect that there should have been a review of our state's preparation. I implore the government to change its mind and come with us to ensure that the people of Western Australia are best prepared to respond to a future COVID-19 outbreak, when one occurs.

MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Minister for Health) [4.30 pm]: As the member foreshadowed, we have signalled our intention in relation to this motion because we had to do so by response in local media. It is extraordinary; the period of time between a letter landing in one's inbox and a tweet or press release from the member for Dawesville to the local media is remarkably narrow! So, yes, we have indicated that we will not support this motion.

It has been particularly good to see the range of positions the member has had on this issue; he has had more positions on it than Clay Gollidge! I suppose the member's strategy is that, at some point in time, he will have to be right. If he takes every single position on this debate, at some point in time he will be able to say, "There, I told you so! We were right all along." The problem is that we do not know who the member for Dawesville is. He has had so many positions on this issue. He claimed today that the hard borders were actually his idea! In fact, he is known in the community for his soft stance on borders and his willingness to risk the public health of Western Australians as part of his political rhetoric to back up the Prime Minister, who also called for softer borders. He is in lock-step with Clive Palmer and the federal government. He has been scampering along behind their coattails all the way, to back their position.

Let us have a look at some history. On ABC news on 19 May, a journalist asked the Leader of the Opposition —

So if you were Premier, —

Perish the thought —

would you reopen the interstate border now?

The Leader of the Opposition said —

I would.

On the same day the Leader of the Opposition said —

There doesn't appear to be a valid reason to keep the interstate borders closed.

On 16 June she doubled down to say, as part of her critique —

It's politically expedient to maintain the hard borders.

On the same day she said —

There's clearly no evidence that it is actually medically required at this point.

I am not quite sure why the member for Dawesville is advancing some sort of theory about lax border controls, because if the Liberal Party were in government, we would have no border control at all. If the Liberal Party were in government, regardless of whether we had exemptions, non-exemptions, hotel quarantining, home quarantining or people being turned away—which we often do—this question would be academic, because it would have already let them in. It would already have simply thrown open the floodgates and allowed everyone from other states to

come into Western Australia. That is the opposition's official position, and it is a position that the Leader of the Opposition has assertively put forward in media opportunity after media opportunity.

On 3 June, the Leader of the Opposition said about hard borders —

We have been calling for three weeks now for the Premier to soften his stance with respect of hard borders ... the hard border rhetoric is a myth.

I am not quite sure where the member for Dawesville stands on this issue. In fact, I do not think there is a person in Western Australia who knows where his entire party stands on this issue. What we do know is that if the opposition were in government, its critique of strong borders would be completely academic because it does not believe in strong borders and it does not believe in border control. It believes simply in marching in lock-step with Clive Palmer and Christian Porter to tear down our borders and imperil the public health of Western Australians. From that perspective, I am not quite sure why the member would come in here dripping with such sincerity about the alleged 52 people per day who are coming in.

Of course, there are no absolutes in this debate. As the member observed, we have to manage public health risk while continuing to protect our economy and making sure we are part of a national regime led by the national cabinet, and the Premier has done an outstanding job. It has been widely recognised in polls and in public commentary that he has the balance right. We are part of the national cabinet, we are part of team Australia, but we are protecting the interests of Western Australia through our hard border measures—measures that, if the opposition were in government, would be torn down.

Perhaps we should get an independent committee to come in and have a look at how things would be if the opposition were in government. That way, the WA public would have some accountability and see exactly what is going on with regard to the public health risk to Western Australians. The biggest risk to the public health of Western Australians is the Liberal Party and Clive Palmer, and we will not stand for that. We will hold fast and continue doing the hard work necessary to ensure that we keep our borders safe.

Our number one focus is to protect Western Australians and to implement the WA recovery plan—bringing people back into the workforce in a COVID-safe way. Building another layer of bureaucracy is completely unnecessary, unhelpful and irresponsible. We are in the middle of this pandemic, not the end, and that is why we need all guns blazing on the public health risk in order to make sure we have the appropriate level of preparedness, vigilance and capacity to respond, as the member for Dawesville says he wants us to have. Now is not the time to pull troops off the front line to sit in committees of review and distract resources away from that task. We have seen the situation in New Zealand; it is an important opportunity to remind ourselves that we are not through this and that we have a long way to go. We have to remain vigilant, and now is not the time to ask senior public servants to take their attention away from preparing for and responding to any local threat. We need to support our authorities to get on with the job at hand.

A type of language and rhetoric is starting to sneak into the public debate via the Liberal Party of Western Australia, and it is to continually second-guess the people who are keeping us safe, have kept us safe, and continue to advise the state McGowan government in a way that has allowed us the outstanding success that we have had. I remind members that, as a result of everything we have done, today we have one active case of COVID-19 in Western Australia, and we know that this person is currently in hotel quarantine and had travelled from interstate. There are no international cases in our quarantine hotels. Why? Because of our rigorous processes of quarantining and protection and making sure that we have testing regimes in place.

International arrivals are tested on days 2 and 12. Those tests have picked up every case of coronavirus arriving in our state and prevented it from spreading. In Western Australia, we have had no community spread of the disease for 122 days. New Zealand is heralding the fact that it had 102 days before a case of community-based spread of the disease was found. We are already at 122 days.

Mr D.T. Redman: The issue is right here now; I understand that. We are standing ready for there to be a COVID issue and we have ourselves prepped for it. When we project six months, 12 months, two years or five years, either we will stay standing ready—the status we have now—or we will have some sort of outbreak that we have to respond to. There is no good time for an inquiry into the process, yet an inquiry is arguably very relevant to have a level of accountability for the government's response to a very unique circumstance. So, fast-forward for me. When is a good time to have an inquiry? It is pretty hard to predict that it will be likely under these circumstances.

Mr R.H. COOK: I will ask the Minister for Emergency Services to respond to that specific issue.

We are working assiduously on our outbreak plans, preparation and preparedness. As the member for Warren–Blackwood observed, there will be some outbreak at some point and it is important we are ready for that. As I foreshadowed to the member for Dawesville in my contribution last night on the Public Health Amendment (COVID-19 Response) Bill, we will provide all members of Parliament with briefings on our outbreak preparedness

in the coming few weeks, as we have provided briefings all the way through to members of Parliament at large, to the member for Dawesville as the opposition's health representative, and to the member for Central Wheatbelt and Hon Martin Aldridge as representatives of the Nationals WA. We have taken every opportunity to make sure people are aware of the work that is ongoing. Let me look at some of the work that has been undertaken.

The Department of Health, as the hazard management agency, has undertaken a range of activities to make sure we are ready, including the rapid recruitment and mobilisation of staff; global sourcing and procurement of personal protection equipment, including securing additional warehouses to hold stock and ensure that we are ready to rapidly deploy equipment should the need arise; the development of a ventilated bed capacity framework, which outlines steps for a surge in ventilated beds from a baseline of 111 public ventilated beds to a potential total of 647 ventilated beds should they be required; the development of a general bed capacity framework, which outlines steps for a surge in general beds from a baseline of 3 627 open beds to over 8 600 general beds if required; and the development of outbreak and surge plans to manage any potential outbreak in metropolitan and regional Western Australia, as well as in remote Aboriginal communities and in particular settings. The member for Dawesville talked about aged-care settings. We are working continuously with the aged-care sector. I have had meetings with people from the aged-care sector and we will meet with them again shortly.

If I may segue, the criticism the Andrews government has received from the commonwealth government is extraordinary. The commonwealth funds, regulates and essentially runs the aged-care sector, but it points at the Andrews government and says, "You have to explain what's gone wrong here" when it is fundamentally the responsibility of the commonwealth government to look after aged care. It was caught asleep at the wheel and should have done much more.

Throughout July 2020, the state health incident control centre has progressed the following initiatives to continue to improve hotel quarantine processes: continued weekly meetings with hotel and security management at each hotel to discuss emerging issues and compliance with processes and protocols; ongoing refresher personal protective equipment training for hotel staff and security guards; ongoing audits of hotels conducted by public health infection, prevention and control nurses; development of plans to manage passengers in hotel quarantine in support of the recent issuance of the "Quarantine (Closing the Border) Amendment Directions (No 3)" that restrict entry into Western Australia by persons from Victoria and New South Wales. The SHICC is also currently participating in the national review of hotel quarantine, led by Adjunct Professor Sarah-Jane Halton, AO, PSM. The review will assist in identifying management gaps and opportunities to improve the management of quarantine in hotels in Western Australia.

Considering the COVID-19 outbreak in Victorian residential aged-care facilities, the Department of Health continues to work extensively and collaboratively with the aged-care sector and the commonwealth to ensure that all providers are as prepared as possible. The Department of Health has developed guidelines around the interface between hospital, community and residential care facilities; facilitated engagement and shared information across the primary health and aged-care sectors in a Western Australian health context, including stakeholder forums and key information provision; communicated to the aged-care sector regarding available resources and care supports, including promoting access to the public health information line, Healthdirect and the Metropolitan Palliative Care Consultancy Service; and enhanced the residential care line to support care of older persons in a WA residential care facility with secondary triage by a geriatrician. Specific outbreak plans and information packs for residential aged-care facilities have been developed and the Department of Health is in regular contact with WA aged-care providers to provide support as needed.

That is just a snapshot of the work that is being undertaken at the moment, work which we want to continue to undertake and which we will happily inform all members of Parliament about when we have the opportunity. Now is not the time to pull our teams from the front line. Now is the time to remain vigilant and to make sure we continue to put our foot on the pedal. The member for Dawesville observed that there is creeping complacency in the Western Australian community, potentially around physical distancing and another measures. As leaders in the community, we have to continue to remind them of the importance of continuing to observe those measures. One thing we must do is continue to work together to make sure the Western Australian community understands that we are moving forward together. Let us not criticise this. Let us not politicise this. Let us not have what has gone on in Victoria happen in Western Australia. The work of the Victorian opposition has been deplorable. It has attacked the Premier and the Minister for Health. It has attacked people relentlessly rather than getting behind them and their efforts. The Victorian opposition is trying to gain rank political advantage by the critique of the work that is going on, which is a sign of where this can go if we, as political leaders in Western Australia, do not continue to stick together. Let us not go down that path. Let us not have happen what we have seen from Josh Frydenberg and Linda Reynolds. Let us not have the situation in which Josh Frydenberg, one of the senior figures of national cabinet, takes the opportunity to attack the Andrews government for a fundamental failure of the commonwealth government—its failure to properly plan and regulate the aged-care sector. The financial regulation of the aged-care sector by the commonwealth has directly led to the situation in which we now have outbreaks. It has led to a situation in which —

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup interjected.

Mr R.H. COOK: I am just about to justify it, member for Dawesville, so sit there and learn! If the sector continues to be run down —

Mr I.C. Blayney interjected.

Mr R.H. COOK: What is your problem back there, member for Geraldton?

Mr I.C. Blayney: What about the security people the Andrews government put on the doors of the hotels?

Mr R.H. COOK: That is not aged care, member for Geraldton.

Mr I.C. Blayney interjected.

Mr R.H. COOK: The member for Geraldton may not have been here for the debate last night. I invite him to read *Hansard* where he will see a long and informed discussion about this between me, the member for Dawesville and the member for Moore. We are not talking about hotel quarantine at the moment. We are talking about the fact that the commonwealth government fundamentally attacked the Daniel Andrews government for its own failures. If the commonwealth government continues to financially strangle the aged-care sector for long enough and continues to devalue the aged-care sector, undermining the qualifications and capacity of the sector's staffing, it is not surprising that when staff are put in peril by being exposed to COVID-19-positive patients, they say "I'm being paid three-fifths of full to be employed here. I'm going to abandon my post." I do not blame those staff members for the fact that a lot of those aged-care facilities did not have the capacity to respond when they needed to because they are working on a knife's edge. They are working on a financial funding knife's edge. It is not surprising for such a fragile sector to be the first sector to crack when it came under pressure as a result of the pandemic.

We will not invite another set of people to come in and look at this. We have great people in the Public Health Emergency Operations Centre working with the Chief Health Officer. They are some of the best minds and practitioners in the state and the country. They are about keeping us safe. How about we just back them? How about we just say what a fantastic job we have done in WA because of Dr Andy Robertson, Dr Paul Armstrong, Professor Tarun Weeramanthri and all the others, and the great work they have done in leading this public health response? Let us not politicise this in the way we have seen the commonwealth Minister for Defence do, who attacked the Andrews government on some sort of spurious notion that the commonwealth offered help.

The commonwealth was missing in action at the beginning of this pandemic. When we were faced with the *Artania* and the *Magnifica*, where was Peter Dutton? Nowhere! Where was the commonwealth responsibility for defending our shores? Nowhere! When we went to Peter Dutton and said that we wanted assistance with the *Artania* and the *Magnifica*, he said that border control is the responsibility of the state government. If one person on that ship had applied for refugee status, he would have had the entire naval armada on the ship! Because it was just a cruise ship full of sick people who were about to infect the people of Western Australia, he was missing in action. Let us stop this politicisation, this banter and this ongoing critique. Let us get behind the people who have kept us safe and go forward.

We know where this debate is going. We saw it today from the member for Hillarys, who came in and made a dog-whistling comment about people for whom English is a second language. We know where this debate is going and we are not going to let members opposite take it there. We are going to continue to do a good job, to protect Western Australians and to bring them back to the workplace through our hard borders and through standing up for the people of Western Australia. We will not be supporting the motion.

MR F.M. LOGAN (Cockburn — Minister for Emergency Services) [4.52 pm]: Does the member for Dawesville support what the government has done so far?

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup: We've been very clear about that.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: Does he support what we have done so far? Yes or no? Does the member support what the government and the State Disaster Council have done so far?

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup: You can refer to exactly what I said a second ago.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Make your submissions, Minister for Emergency Services.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I hope the member does, and I hope all members of the Liberal Party and the Nationals WA support what has happened so far. It is not just the Minister for Health and the Premier. A massive team of people is behind what is happening here in Western Australia and keeping us safe. The member for Dawesville's argument is that if we have an inquiry now, we may well be able to pick up some lessons learnt, keep our eyes wide open about what has happened in the eastern states, and use that should there be an outbreak in Western Australia. Does the member not believe that we have done just that already in the first wave that hit Western Australia? Does the member not believe that we have dealt with it properly? We should look at, for example, remote Aboriginal communities, the immediate setting up of Rottnest Island, the hotel quarantines, the intrastate borders, the interstate

borders and the way in which we handled the *Artania* and *Vasco da Gama* ships. Those ships were terrible. They were full of COVID-19 patients, and we handled them carefully and properly. We got people better and sent them back home. We should look at what happened in Halls Creek. There was an outbreak in Halls Creek and we dealt with it. The member should look at what happened with the *Al Kuwait* livestock carrier. We dealt with it. It is not as if we have not had outbreaks in Western Australia on a continuous basis. We have had outbreaks, and from each one we have learnt.

The way that the whole COVID crisis has been handled in Western Australia has come about because we have the State Disaster Council. I have spoken about this before in Parliament. The State Disaster Council is chaired by the Premier and includes the Ministers for Emergency Services, Health, Police, Local Government, Transport and others, but it also includes a lot of specialists, such as the director general of the Department of Health and, of course, the Chief Medical Officer. That council takes the information that is provided to us by specialists in their own areas in the public and private sectors—particularly in health, because this is a health pandemic—and makes decisions as a result of that information. That is where the final decisions are made—at the State Disaster Council. Beneath that is the State Emergency Management Committee, which is chaired by the State Emergency Coordinator, who is the Commissioner of Police. On that committee we have virtually all the heads of government departments, private sector representatives, commonwealth representatives, state utility representatives and representatives of national utilities such as Telstra and others. It is a very large group that works very well. All of them are specialists in their areas and they provide advice to the State Disaster Council. It is not as though we do not have a series of coordinating groups that provide advice and evaluate everything as it happens. If, for example, we have outbreaks such as those when the cruise ships were arriving here, those organisations deal with them and provide advice to the State Disaster Council. It is not simply coming out of the Minister for Health's head, the Minister for Emergency Services' head or the Premier's head; we are being advised by specialists. That is how emergencies work. A health pandemic is one of the 28 hazards that are dealt with by the State Emergency Management Committee. The health pandemic plan was in place. As the lead minister on this, the Minister for Health put that plan in place. The pandemic plan that we use in WA is very similar to every other pandemic plan in Australia because there is coordination. It is very similar to pandemic plans across the world because countries talk to each other about emergency hazards and how to go about dealing with them. If other countries around the world had followed what we have done, which is to stick to the plan and deal with the pandemic, and had not allowed political interference, they may not be in the situation that they are in. The problem we have around the world is that many countries have not stuck to the emergency pandemic plan that they had agreed to. That is internationally recognised. The problem they have is that there has been political interference. People have said, "I don't believe it. This is nonsense and we're going to do something else." That is half the problem with the pandemic that is affecting the entire globe.

The member for Dawesville raised the issue of whether things are being reviewed and evaluated. In particular, he raised the issue of education being evaluated should another pandemic break out. Last week, the State Emergency Management Committee met to discuss the current outbreak plans for WA, including the remote Aboriginal community outbreak response plan; the residential aged-care facility outbreak response plan; the prison outbreak response plan; the hospital outbreak response plan; the school and childcare service outbreak response plan, which includes childcare centres and boarding schools; the mining offshore facilities outbreak response plan; the commercial vessels outbreak response plan; and the congregate living outbreak response plan. In answer to the member's question about whether these plans are being reviewed and updated, the answer is, as of last week, yes. It is being done by the state emergency coordinating group.

The member's other argument about what occurred on the borders indicates that the Libs were the first political party —

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup: The opposition.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: I would say that it was the Liberal Party—because I am not sure that the Nationals WA did—that was the first party to call for the closure of borders. I have the 18 March *Hansard* here and the Leader of the Opposition said —

If members go back and check the *Hansard*, they will see that I did not call for travel to stop or borders to be closed.

I do not know where the member got that from.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.