

Mrs Liza Harvey; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Dean Nalder; Dr David Honey; Mrs Alyssa Hayden; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Roger Cook

CORONAVIRUS — GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS

Motion

MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough — Leader of the Opposition) [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the McGowan Labor government for its handling of the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions and causing unnecessary economic harm, small business closures and job losses.

At the outset, I have no quarrel with the way this government, in conjunction with the national cabinet, has handled the health crisis around COVID-19. The way that the state Premiers and the Prime Minister have come together, along with all the health ministers, to put in place measures, a strategy and a response around managing the COVID-19 health crisis has been handled well. I want to be very clear and put that on the record. I believe the lockdown was necessary at the start, because we did not understand what we were dealing with, we did not understand quite how virulent COVID-19 would be and we needed a national stocktake of our health system, its capacity and what was going to be required should we have outbreaks of COVID-19. I am glad the Minister for Health is in the chamber to hear this. I think that the health response has been very good. We are now in a very good position in Western Australia and we have had hundreds of nurses trained to step up into intensive care units should we have an outbreak and require additional ICU beds to open. We have access to a stockpile of ventilators, we have a steady supply of personal protective equipment and we have a steady supply of the flu vaccine, which will help us to inoculate our vulnerable Western Australians against the potential prospect of having the flu and COVID-19 at the same time. The health response has been very good and the lockdown needed to occur to allow us to have that stocktake of the health system, to gear everything up and make sure that we properly respond to COVID-19 outbreaks as they occur.

The reality of this is that until a vaccine or a cure is found for COVID-19, we are going to be living with it for a long time. I note that, as I understand it, the Spanish Flu vaccine took 15 years to develop. Coronaviruses are notorious for their rates of mutation, which makes the development of vaccines even more problematic, so we need to find a way to live with COVID-19 and address the jobs crisis we are facing in Western Australia.

The opposition has been calling for the lifting of intrastate border restrictions for quite some time, and we do so in response to the regional tourism and hospitality businesses that are on their knees. We need to bear in mind that businesses in Western Australia were already doing it tough before the COVID-19 crisis. Because of the decline in growth, and, in fact, retraction of the domestic economy, many of our small businesses, particularly our retailers and some of our hospitality businesses, were suffering because of the decline in discretionary spend. If people do not have an extra \$50 a week in their pocket, they will not spend it in retail, on dining experiences or on going out to pubs and hospitality venues; they have to spend it on their bills. The opposition was saying at the end of last year that the household fees and charges basket had increased by \$850 per household, which was causing an issue with discretionary spend on retail and hospitality et cetera. Those were the circumstances the state was in before the COVID-19 crisis.

A lot of those businesses had used up their cash reserves. They did not have cash reserves; they had used up all their loan facilities, options with credit cards and lines of credit with the bank—whatever it might have been they had to help them get through the difficult economic circumstances of 2019. They had used up all those options and they had no cash reserves, and now they are shut because they have no customers. Every day that our borders stay locked down, intrastate travel restrictions remain in place and these restrictions are placed on restaurant, cafes and hospitality venues, is another day that another business will have to close its doors forever. The sad reality, particularly in regional Western Australia, is that when a business closes, the likelihood of it reopening is remote. Buying a house or funding a business in regional WA is the most difficult prospect to get across to any bank manager. The banks do not like lending in regional Western Australia because the markets are quite lumpy. A lot of those towns rely on tourism and, as we know, until COVID-19, the tourism market in regional WA was internationally competitive, so Western Australians voted with their feet. If people had little discretionary spend, they would spend their holidays in places like Bali because it was cheaper. That had a significant impact on towns like Broome, Exmouth and Geraldton, and regions like the goldfields and even the south west. Those were the circumstances we were in prior to the lockdown. We now call on the government to ease these restrictions.

I want to go back to the Premier's position on this crisis. I take members back to Tuesday, 17 March 2020, when I asked a question of the Premier in this place. I asked —

I note the recommendations from the tertiary hospitals medical leads advisory board. Will the Premier immediately support the recommendations of the health experts and doctors on the frontline of the coronavirus fight “by extending isolation restrictions to include all personal interstate travel”?

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Back on 17 March the tertiary hospitals medical leads advisory board had recommended to enforce self-isolation requirements on people travelling interstate. We asked the Premier at that time whether he supported that, and in response I got an absolute spray. I quote what the Premier said —

I want to outline to the house the implications of closing the border with the eastern states. A range of Western Australians need to go east to obtain medical advice and medical attention and have operations and the like. It would impact the supply of important medicines and provisions for Western Australia. It would impact and stop the supply of important goods coming from the east, including a great deal of our fresh food. It would disrupt and stop the supply of Kleenex tissues and toilet paper to our supermarkets in Western Australia. It would severely disrupt the mining industry in Western Australia, a number of whose employees live in the east and come to the west ... there would be severe implications for all Australians and all Western Australians were we to attempt such a measure.

That was in response to the health advice at the time that was saying we should enforce —

Mr P. Papalia: Who was giving that health advice that you are referring to?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: It was from the tertiary hospitals medical leads advisory board, which was recommending —

Mr P. Papalia: Who is that?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: A lead of experts who run our tertiary hospitals. They had seen that there was —

Mr P. Papalia: It wasn't the Chief Health Officer.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: No, this was prior to that. The importance of that was that it was pretty serious medical advice saying that we should be putting self-quarantine restrictions on interstate travellers, and the Premier's response was that it was unnecessary because it would completely wreck our economy. That is what he said, in effect, and he said it in the strongest of terms. In fact, he implied that I wanted to close down the entire country, which I did not imply. All I asked was whether we were going to enforce self-isolation requirements on interstate travellers. We now find ourselves in a position in which the Chief Medical Officer and the Deputy Chief Medical Officer in Canberra are saying that their expertise advice was never to shut down our borders and never to restrict travel within the states. That is what they are saying. They are saying that they did not recommend it.

Mr P. Papalia: No, they did not, but that is a different authority. That is the federal authority looking at information. We look at our relevant health authority and we take our advice from our Chief Health Officer.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I thank the Minister for Tourism so much for explaining the difference between the deputy and the Chief Medical Officer in Canberra and the Chief Health Officer in Australia. I am aware of the separation between the state and the commonwealth. The difference between those two health authorities and those two advisory groups is that the commonwealth advisory groups are taking the advice of all the state Chief Health Officers, and they are dealing with international authorities on these matters. That is why I think we should listen to their advice. In the early days, the Premier was reluctant to listen to that advice, but when the advice of the Chief Health Officer is contradictory to that of the Chief Medical Officer and the Deputy Chief Medical Officer in Canberra and differs from what the Premier wants, he chooses to take a different tack. Back on 17 March, closing the borders was going to cause an economic crisis. We now have that economic crisis, and the health authority is saying that there is no medical reason to support these restrictions. In Western Australia, we have had many consecutive days with no new cases. That has changed this week. We have had four travellers come in from Doha who are self-quarantining, as they were supposed to. They have tested positive for COVID-19, and, no doubt, our system will look after them if they end up with complications. We have also had the six crew members who came in on the sheep transportation vessel in Fremantle and who tested positive for COVID-19, and they are being managed appropriately. This is exactly my point. We had a lockdown to set up a system so that we could manage outbreaks of COVID-19 as and when they occur. We have to find a way to live with this disease and we have to lift the shackles off our small business owners and open up our economy, because the jobs crisis is serious. In April, 62 000 people lost their jobs. They add to the 200 000 people who are underemployed. That is a serious crisis in this state. I know that small business owners are contacting the government, because they often CC me in on messages. They send messages and letters to the Premier and to me as well.

I want to explain how this is impacting people. I will read an email to the Premier from the owner of Malaga Markets, which I have been copied in on. It states —

We over past few months have been supporting our 75 plus tenants, mainly mum dad business and our very loyal tremendous staff.

Malaga markets is and was a very successful markets with great offerings and exceptional food hall, and great community atmosphere, we have built up this market over last 16 years to be hugely popular.

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The current restrictions and singling food courts for phase 3 is not to open now is having a profound if not soon to be catastrophic economic effect upon many of our operators and their ability to trade again.

Through having a great relationship with our tenants, we could now open with all our tenants returning.

I am very supportive of how you have handled this virus and locking it out, but now there is so much confusion of why we can't open and who can operate, a hairdresser can open wash someone's hair and trim a beard. a café can have 10 people, most restaurants won't open with just 20 people as they would be worst off.

Due to our expansive area we could easily have a 4 m² restriction and occupy 30 to 50 % of food hall, we have very strong sanitising and cleaning practices in place already, if we could open, we would with better distancing than most restaurants, hairdresser yoga classes, cafes etc giving much needed trade to our operators. We can easily provide a safe environment.

My fear is that the markets won't be able to open as singled out! for a few weeks and our tenants already under huge financial stress cannot wait, some are having to borrow more money and losing the desire to come back due to stress of not knowing when they can start earning income again.

We as owners have had to borrow more money from the banks, as we receive virtually no rental income, but have ongoing costs, this **will** put pressure on our banking covenants. We have not collected rent for last two months and told tenants they don't have to pay until restrictions lifted, —

This man has been doing the right thing. He has borrowed money to cover his costs so that he does not have to lean on his tenants and can continue to give them a rental holiday. He is desperate and so are his tenants. His view is —

it is vital we as owners support our tenants at same time our financial future is now in considerable doubt. The Code of Conduct does not really fit a market structure. After 16 years of owning the markets this is quite upsetting to say the least

Those markets have 75 businesses, owned by mums and dads, that just want a clear signal from the government about when they can open again. The inconsistency of the messages has been part of the problem these businesses have. They are confused about the messaging. On the one hand, social distancing is not essential on public transport, but, on the other hand, beauticians have to stay closed and hairdressers can open. How was the figure of 20 patrons in a hospitality business arrived at? All the people I speak to in the hospitality sector say that they will not open for 20 customers. If they open, they will still have to pay for refrigeration and it is very hard to anticipate food ordering. They have to have on all the lights and the heating at this time of year. They have to have minimum staff requirements so they can manage the flow of customers through their venues, and there is no real guarantee of what their customers will spend.

I now turn to pubs. Just last week I was talking to a tavern owner who called me because he really needed to speak to me. He did not understand the rules. He took me into his pub—I will not mention the name; it is a quite a quirky name. He said, "This is why I'm so confused and so upset. I'm lucky. I've got the drive-through bottle shop. If I didn't have that, I'd be belly up." His pub has a bar, and most of his customers, who work in teams, come from work and stand at the bar, have a beer, talk about what happened on site and go home to have dinner with their families. That is the model. Every now and then on a Friday night, a few of the locals would hang around and play a game of pool or darts or whatever it might be. He has been told the rules and he does not understand them. He has a stainless steel bar, so he could have 10 patrons easily socially distancing. He has mapped out a distance of one and a half metres between where his patrons would stand and where his staff would stand at the stainless steel bar top, which is very easy to clean between sittings or sessions of patrons, but he is not allowed to open unless he serves food to these people. He can open for 20 individuals and serve them food, but he serves only pizza and chips. He has said that he does not want to encourage his local people to come in and have a meal of pizza and chips. Pizza and chips are an adjunct or a snack for people who stop for a beer on their way home from work or on a Friday night. He has said that they should not be eating pizza and chips for dinner as it is not very healthy. He wants someone to explain to him why it is safer in the context of the spread of COVID-19 for 20 people to have a drink while getting table service for an hour and a half as opposed to 10 people standing at a bar for half an hour while socially distancing. He does not get it. He does not understand why this restriction is in place. These people are his locals. He cannot open because he does not understand the rules; they make no sense to him and he knows that they make no sense to his locals. He does not want to have a fight with those local people over whether they can stand at the bar and have a beer. That is not his fight. They are not his rules, but they are unworkable rules that are keeping his venue closed and ensuring that his casual workers have no employment. It does not make sense.

The other part of it that does not make sense was when the takeaway restrictions were in place. As a responsible publican, he has routinely refused to serve spirits to a collection of people. He will not let them buy a bottle of spirits because he knows that that leads to a violence issue in their home. When the takeaway restrictions were in place,

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the message put out by the government was that people could get a couple of bottles of wine, a carton of beer and a bottle of spirits, so these patrons he knew were not safe to sell a bottle of spirits to demanded that he sell them a bottle of spirits because the government said that they were entitled to it. He said that, as a responsible publican, he had to turn them away from the whole lot. He said that he would have happily sold some of these individuals two cartons of beer because he knows that beer is not their problem; their problem is with spirits.

Mr V.A. Catania: The mixers.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The mixers; that is exactly right. That does not make any sense to him, and that is why we are calling on the government to lift those restrictions to help some of these hospitality businesses reopen.

We have no community spread of COVID-19 in WA. That is a credit to the management of this crisis, but we cannot stay locked down forever. Explain to me the logic of this when there is no demonstrable community spread. I say this in the knowledge that people socialised over Easter and on Mother's Day. I drove around the parks in my electorate and around Burswood Park, because my sisters live near there, and they were packed. If there was going to be an outbreak of COVID-19, after it had been dormant in our community and contained in people who were asymptomatic, we would be starting to see it now. We know that people got together at Easter and on Mother's Day, but cases are still not popping up in our community. If we have that across the length and breadth of Western Australia, why can our people not move around? Those restrictions have recently been lifted, but the problem is that it is not viable for the businesses in regional WA to open if they can have only 20 patrons through their doors. That is the reality of it. That is why we are asking the government to lift these restrictions for the sake of business.

I will read the advice of the Chief Health Officer, Dr Andy Robertson, from 18 May on health.wa.gov.au. He said —

Maintaining staff and community safety in the use of public transport is everyone's responsibility. When using public transport, I encourage you to practice good hygiene. Public transport should not be used for travelling if you feel unwell.

He also said —

As some of the restrictions put in place are gradually eased, so that more in our community can return to education and work, essential services like public transport will support that return. I am confident that the use of public transport can be done safely during this phase of the COVID-19 response if simple measures are taken to limit the risks associated with exposure to and spread of COVID-19.

We can use public transport if we use the measures that have been recommended here, but all our hospitality businesses are having to take a training program on basic health hygiene before opening up. The Chief Health Officer's advice refers to handwashing and the use of alcohol-based hand sanitiser when people do not have access to somewhere to wash their hands. It also states that people should not touch their face, they should cover their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing or cough or sneeze into their upper sleeve or elbow. The advice also states that the wearing of a mask is not recommended if people are healthy. This is the health advice for public transport. Why is it different for our hospitality venues and restaurants? When we look at what the other states are doing—I know that Western Australians do not like it when we refer to the other states—in New South Wales, from this weekend, up to 50 people will be able to dine in restaurants, pubs and cafes, and beauty salons can reopen with no more than 10 clients at any one time, who must be spaced four square metres apart. That is doable; it can be managed.

Mr P. Papalia: The thing about New South Wales and the other states with those numbers, it's true that the same criticism that is placed on the 20 applies to those because the four-square-metre rule is still in play and everyone at the AHPPC has accepted that that remains in place, so even though they say from 1 June you can go to 50, when you go to New South Wales pubs, cafes and restaurants, unless they have a really huge space, they can't actually go to 50. It's the same limitation everywhere in the country except for the Northern Territory.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Minister, I accept that, but every case that has ever presented in Western Australia has come from a cruise ship passenger, a returning international traveller, a returning interstate traveller or somebody who lives in close proximity to those travellers. We have had no community spread. It has all been managed. The virus is not evident in our community and it is certainly not evident in the ramped up testing that is being done, so why are the restrictions still in place? That has not been adequately explained. It is not logical.

Mr P. Papalia: When the health minister comes back, you put that to him. But he'd probably say there is no evidence of community spread as opposed to there is no community spread. Ultimately, it's the advice from the Chief Health Officer.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: That is exactly what I said: there is no evidence of community spread. When I talk about opening interstate borders, I look at our neighbouring states, the Northern Territory and South Australia. They have an equally successful track record, not that there is generally a lot of flow between those states from a tourism

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perspective. But in the face of all these border restrictions, we know from questions on notice that were placed in the Legislative Council that more than 7 000 people have flown into WA from other states since the lockdown ensued. We know that nearly 3 000 people have flown in from international destinations and that every day of the week, hundreds of truck drivers have been driving their trucks from Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria through South Australia across the Nullarbor into our distribution centres delivering goods that are distributed to department stores and retail outlets and to people's doors through online ordering. That has been happening throughout the entire lockdown. That truck traffic has not stopped and we do not know what measures are in place around those truckies as they come across the interstate borders. I used to work in a roadhouse a long time ago. Roadhouses are particularly difficult places to keep clean. Truck drivers will go into roadhouses having sat in their cabs for hours. They will eat a meal in the restaurant, use the bathroom and shower facilities, fill up with fuel and take off up the road to have a sleep before continuing their journey. This has been happening with hundreds and hundreds of truck drivers right throughout the entire lockdown period.

Mr P. Papalia: They're all contact traceable. They're all notified people. They're acknowledged as being exempt. It's not like they're random people.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I accept that they have had exemptions. However, my argument is that that has been occurring from the states of Victoria and Queensland, and from New South Wales, which is where a lot of warehouse goods come into port, through Sydney in particular. Those truck drivers are moving those goods to this state. Presumably, they go home to their families, and they then pick up another load and come back. We have not had any spread of COVID-19 at any of the truck stops along the way. Those truck stops may be well managed. However, that to me presents an argument for opening things up, particularly intrastate, to save our regional tourism businesses.

Mr P. Papalia: I disagree with the member. My concern would be that, yes, there is a very low level of interstate movement with the people who come here —

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Tourists, yes.

Mr P. Papalia: — but when we open up to tourists and potentially to a larger number of people who are far less known with respect to tracing, we increase the risk. It is just a matter of not escalating the risk. It is not a matter of eliminating it.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Thank you, minister, for your interjection. There are a couple of things in that. I will wind up, because other members want to speak. First, there is no evidence of community spread of COVID-19 within Western Australia. Let us look at that. Therefore, why have restrictions been placed on beauticians, but not hairdressers? Why do we need to limit interactions in our pubs to 20 people and enforce the four-metre rule?

Mr P. Papalia: Because it is a phase.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I understand that it is a phase. However, if there is no spread now, for how long will this phase continue? These businesses need a lifeline.

Secondly, I know that the hard border rhetoric is really popular with the community. The Premier is a very influential person in this state. We are calling on the Premier to lead the conversation for a COVID-19 jobs recovery program and help to put people's minds at ease around easing these restrictions and easing the borders. Instead, the Premier keeps reinforcing it and reinforcing it. Every day that the Premier does not provide leadership on this issue and does not provide a window of opportunity for these businesses and a light at the end of the tunnel is the day that these business owners lose heart, is the day that they close, and is the day that they make the decision that the whole family will join the JobSeeker queue because it will be too hard to start up again. We are asking the Premier to show some leadership. We have no evidence of community spread in Western Australia. The Premier needs to get people moving around the state. He needs to encourage that.

The way to encourage that is to allow the businesses in regional WA to provide something that people want. I want to go down south. In fact, I will be going to Denmark and Albany in a weekend's time. However, under the current restrictions, it is not viable for the restaurants that I normally frequent and the places that I want to visit to open. The opportunity for those businesses to get a couple of hundred bucks out of me for dinner and perhaps \$50 for a carton of wine or whatever it might be will be lost. I will go and visit my friends, and the grocery stores will benefit because we might buy some pork or something for a roast and cook it ourselves. We want to go down south and support those business owners, but they cannot open, because there is no point. I am saying that we should change these restrictions and provide some hope for these businesses. We need to offer them a lifeline. The Premier needs to show leadership.

What is the plan to come out of this COVID-19 jobs crisis? How do we get the 62 000 people who lost their jobs in April back to work? How do we provide additional employment for the hospitality workers who form part of the 62 000 unemployed and the 200 000 people underemployed? How do we get them all back to work? The longer

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people stay unemployed, the longer they will stay there, the worse it will be for our economy, and the harder the recovery will be. We need to learn to live with COVID-19 and understand that there will be outbreaks. We will need to have isolation units. We may need to isolate particular suburbs or towns. We will have to ramp up and ramp down in a very managed fashion, using contact tracing and the testing protocol, and by making sure that the health response is right and that we can manage the spread of this disease as it continues to come to Western Australia.

We have not beaten it. We are never going to beat it. We have to find a way to open up our economy and live with it. I call on the ministers and the Premier to use the resources at their disposal in government agencies to work with the private sector to find a way to lead us out of this economic depression. The longer we stay shut, the longer this crisis will go on and the less hope there will be that Western Australians will get to return to work.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse) [4.35 pm]: I would like to contribute to this debate. I support the Leader of the Opposition's motion, which states —

This house condemns the McGowan Labor government for its handling of the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions and causing unnecessary economic harm, small business closures and job losses.

During the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a plan to flatten the curve. As a regional member, I advocated for and supported this effort. The plan was to give hospitals and health workers the opportunity to prepare in order to cope with COVID. I take this opportunity to thank the Minister for Health and the Premier for the great work they have done with the health response.

On behalf of the community I wrote to the Premier and the Minister for Health about a range of issues. In particular, I urged the Premier and the minister to shut down communities to visitors in the lead-up to Easter. There was great concern in the Vasse community about what would happen in the electorate during Easter, when the population can double or triple. I had heard feedback from our health professionals and medical centres about the limitations and shortage of personal protective equipment, and that our regional hospitals and health systems had to reconfigure their operations, obtain ventilators and a range of other equipment to respond so that they would not be overwhelmed by the health crisis.

However, things have started to change, and the ambition of going beyond flattening the curve is costing people their livelihoods. We are seeing significant concern about intergenerational debt and issues around welfare. Our priority must be not only people's lives, but also their livelihoods. There is no evidence of community spread and, importantly, we have reached the goal of establishing capacity at health centres and have more than flattened the curve. In fact, we are seeing the goalposts dragged out to new parameters. As a community, we have obeyed calls for physical distancing and the shutting down of businesses, believing the promise that we would need to do this only to flatten the curve, and that once we had bought enough time for our health system to cope, we would see the economy open up again.

Western Australia has done well. We have a sparse population, and we had seasonally warm temperatures when the crisis hit and the advantage of having observed the crisis unfold in other states and in other countries. I think many members would agree that the Western Australian community deserves credit for that. But things have changed. As I stated earlier, we have more than flattened the curve. Today, there are no new cases. We know that there are 12 cases in Western Australia—six from the ship yesterday, four from Doha via Victoria and two Western Australian cases. There is no evidence of community spread and 549 people in the community have now recovered.

From a health perspective, I note that Liz McLeod from the COVID team said recently that she credits our success to the gift of time. She said that preparation in hospitals had now happened and that they have a pool of an additional 7 000 staff, and that from a health perspective, they are ready for a second wave if that happens.

I quote from an article on WAtoday in which Hollywood Private Hospital specialist Dr Clay Golledge said —

... the implementation of intrastate borders was “to do at the time when it looked like it was going to get out of control because nobody knew which way it was going to go”.

“But more by good luck than good management we've managed to bring things under control really quickly because we stopped importing the virus,” ...

There is confidence in the community. Schools are open and compulsory. In fact, in the weeks since they have been open, there has been no evidence of student-to-student or student-to-teacher transmission according to recent comments made by the Minister for Education and Training. Our health professionals have initiated a plan for a DETECT study in our schools for asymptomatic testing, which I understand has been well supported. Although it has been delayed, I understand it will take place on 8 June, which is positive.

Recently, Gareth Parker stated in an article —

The zeal for zero also enhances the chance the Government continues to be too timid coming out of these draconian business shutdowns, at significant unnecessary extra cost to lives and livelihoods.

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Unfortunately, the Premier is wedded to the daily zero. The people paying the price for that mission creep are West Australian businesses and workers.

I think that sums up the theme of this motion.

Last week in Parliament, the Minister for Transport and the Premier confirmed that there will not be any restrictions on our public transport system. The Premier stated in this place —

We have advised people to go back to work. We have told people that it is safe to go back to work. We have students back at school. We also have to get people to work. As of a couple of days ago, we had patronage on public transport running at greater than 60 per cent, and I suspect that it is higher than that now.

That information was based on health advice that was provided to the government. We know that some of our Public Transport Authority trains can carry up to 1 100 persons. Clearly, there is one rule in the community for the government business of public transport but a different rule for small businesses that operate across the state. Why can more than 20 people not practice social distancing at a restaurant or in a venue when the rules for public transport do not have the same limit or the same level of scrutiny? The issue is not the easing of restrictions on public transport, but the inconsistency of the rules for small businesses, which are also employers.

Over the last 24 hours, unfortunately, this Premier politicised the crisis for all to see with the incorrect claims that he was given no warning from the federal government about the passengers on the *Al Kuwait*. That created unnecessary fear and scaremongering in the community about the risk of COVID when the fact was that the risk was being managed. In this place yesterday, according to the uncorrected *Hansard*, the Premier stated —

We have taken a cautious approach. Today there is a whole bunch of people on a ship in Fremantle Harbour; yesterday a bunch of people came off an aircraft from Doha. We are only one case escaping from one of those situations away from potentially having a big health problem. That is why we have put in place a cautious approach to lifting restrictions.

Comparisons of this crisis were also made that likened the *Al Kuwait* to the *Ruby Princess*. Again, this was scaremongering. Our federal Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management said that the emails he had been exposed to prove that Mr McGowan was incorrect and accused him of creating unnecessary fear in the community by suggesting border security measures had failed without taking the time to confirm the facts. That is a reference taken from an article on WAtoday.

Using this as an argument to restrict the livelihoods of Western Australians illustrates the significant issue of integrity that we are now seeing from this Premier in his managing and handling of this crisis. We saw that with the media conference in March when the Premier raised concerns over the *MSC Magnifica* heading to Fremantle with 250 COVID-infected crew members, which, at that stage, he said would potentially overwhelm the health system. It was later confirmed that that was not the case.

This fear has an obvious impact, and there are other impacts apart from those of shutting down the economy. The Leader of the Opposition pointed to the fact that 62 000 jobs have been lost in the last month. Deloitte Access Economics suggests that it could be as many as 80 000 jobs, according to full-time payroll slips. A United Nations report says that after decades of rising living standards in the world's poorer countries, in a matter of months, tens of millions of people will go back into extreme poverty. There are other implications from shutting down economies and there are fair concerns that need to be taken into consideration. The argument that it is putting the economy or money first does not take into account the real welfare issues that we are raising here. We have heard about the rise of domestic violence—a 40 per cent increase—and mental health issues. In Margaret River and across the region, significant homelessness is arising during this period, as well as the livelihoods that are at threat as a result of the shutdown of small businesses.

Like the Leader of the Opposition, we certainly understand and agree with the necessary shutdown of the economy during this health crisis. I mirror those sentiments and that level of support for the way in which the Premier, until recently, has managed the health crisis. However, the situation has changed, and we are now seeing significant inconsistencies that are hurting the livelihoods of Western Australians, particularly in our regional towns and our tourism industry. In late April, I called for a plan to open up the south west region to support tourism. It is pleasing that that has happened and that other regions will also be opened. There were some inconsistencies, but those changes are positive. Opening the regions is one thing, but we need to see businesses open, too. Some regions have been hurt more than others, given their significant reliance on tourism. I appreciate that the north west and Broome have taken a significant hit for that reason.

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There are some inconsistencies around the rules for businesses. Vehicles are exempt from the 20-person rule, which includes trains, aircraft and public transport. However, I have heard from the tourism industry about inconsistencies. It is seeking some clarity about what the rules mean for charter vehicles.

Geraldton Air Charter and whale shark operators are seeking clarity about whether they can operate. I am also seeking to clarify why it is okay for someone to stay at a caravan park and go across the road and eat a takeaway meal, but they cannot eat at the venue.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms J.M. Freeman): Member, you can talk to me. Clearly, these members who are speaking are not listening.

Ms L. METTAM: An accommodation venue in my electorate has 90 per cent capacity this long weekend, which is fantastic, but they are limited to a maximum of 20 persons in their venues. Therefore, they are limited in the type of hospitality they can provide their guests, which is inconsistent with some of the other rules that we are seeing. This is a missed opportunity for accessing some of our tourism attractions. I understand that today in Parliament, the Premier was unable to provide the health advice on playgrounds. Epidemiologists this week in *The West Australian* noted the inconsistencies in the rules regarding playground access, given our understanding of the disease in Western Australia at this time. I appreciate that Broome and the Kimberley have vulnerable populations, but I would like clarity on and confidence about when those regions will be able to reopen and when businesses will be able to take bookings and receive customers.

I turn now to the relief package that has been provided to the tourism industry. Until recently, 94 per cent of tourism operators were not eligible for any state assistance and 52 per cent did not seek the JobKeeper payment. That should ring alarm bells about what that means for those operators. Some people were provided assistance through the recovery fund, which helped 1 600 businesses across the state. To give members some context, there are 2 700 tourism businesses in the south west region alone.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms L. METTAM: Limitations were placed on that funding package. I will refer to local tourism operators and the limited support that was provided only to accredited operators or those with specific industry membership. Anne Johnston, a proprietor of a local resort, said that she had been a member of the tourism association but that it became cost prohibitive and provided no return on her investment. She has been in business for 15 years and annually provided complimentary accommodation to visitors' centres for events like the Ironman competition, which contributes to the viability of the business. She feels let down because, as a business owner, she is not eligible for the tourism recovery package, despite years of supporting the industry. Another business owner says, "We're in this together? No, the only people in it together are those sitting around Tourism WA and the state government's tourism support group who decide who is eligible for the latest tourism grants for tourism operators." Those in the industry long before COVID-19 needed to make hard choices just to stay afloat and now when these operators are facing closure due to forced lockdowns and border closures, the state government has decided to punish them further by listening to and backing larger organisations. Another operator, in reference to the limit of 20 patrons at venues, believes that the limit will not be viable for their venue. The business will be opening to keep its team motivated and to re-engage with its community in the hope that the business might break even. However, the operator does not believe it is logical for the limit on the maximum number of patrons to be the same regardless of whether it is a small venue or a large, spacious venue. As the Leader of the Opposition pointed to, we are seeing different rules applied in the other states. I understand that South Australia has had no new positive coronavirus cases since the beginning of May, and it has brought forward the easing of restrictions for pubs and restaurants, with an allowance of up to 80 customers from 1 June, and pubs will be permitted to serve alcohol, without food, to seated patrons.

Mr R.H. Cook: You realise it is only 27 May, so they have not done it yet.

Mr P. Papalia: And there is the four-square-metre rule, so they will not actually have 80 people.

Ms L. METTAM: There is some clarity around what the plan is.

Mr P. Papalia: There is one pub in the whole of Western Australia that could fit 100 people if we allowed it tomorrow.

Ms L. METTAM: There are some issues with the four-square-metre rule here.

Mr P. Papalia: It is everywhere in the country.

Ms L. METTAM: That is a fair concern that has been raised on behalf of the tourism industry as well.

A group of strangers can get onto public transport and a train, and students can attend school.

Mr P. Papalia: But that is true everywhere.

Ms L. METTAM: Why is it not true for our small businesses? That is the point we are making. People have undertaken these Australian Hotels Association courses, and they respect hygiene and physical distancing, so what

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is the difference? Our small businesses employ people, they train our people, and I have a lot of confidence in them and what they can undertake. The rule around a meal having to be provided with a tasting has hurt some of our small wineries as well.

I leave the last of my time to talk about another issue. A great way to open up an economy during a pandemic is to use contact tracing and testing. The minister pointed to that, and I understand that today there was an announcement about the DETECT study, which is great news. I have written to the Minister for Health on a number of matters related to private testing by accredited laboratories for our fly in, fly out workers as well, and also to allow accredited laboratories to test in regional areas. There is a great opportunity for our private accredited laboratories to provide COVID-19 testing in the absence of more accessible public testing. I wrote to the minister about this, and there was ultimately a good outcome, with two drive-through clinics, one in Busselton and one in Bunbury. That was very positive, but the bureaucratic process that exists here in WA compared with other states is worth highlighting. In WA, there is a lengthy process of site-by-site approval for these clinics. It is quite a protracted process, and unnecessarily so, given that these tests have been accredited and they provide an additional tool to our response to COVID-19. In every other state, there are criteria for testing, which are symptoms, but in Western Australia every site needs to be approved by Health. Other states do not require site-by-site approval. Although the announcement today about expanded testing is very positive, we have the lowest testing rates in the country.

Mr P. Papalia: That is just not true.

Ms L. METTAM: We do, per capita.

Mr P. Papalia: Per capita, we are third.

Ms L. METTAM: I point to last Friday's report.

Mr P. Papalia: Wait until the health minister comes back and see.

Ms L. METTAM: Okay. The report states that Western Australia's testing rate per 100 000 people —

Mr P. Papalia: On what day?

Ms L. METTAM: It was last Friday, 22 May.

Mr P. Papalia: It is just not true. The last time I got the report from the State Disaster Council meeting we were third or fourth. We are in the middle.

Ms L. METTAM: This is the Western Australian figure for the total tests per 100 000 population, according to the Australian government. Here is the minister now.

Mr R.H. Cook: I was listening to that. Historically, that is true. Remember early on in the piece we were having difficulties getting reagent, because all the supply chains got chopped off with the US. If you take the period 1 May through to 7 May, so a contemporary period rather than historically, we are about fourth. We are only behind Tasmania, New South Wales and Victoria, for obvious reasons, but ahead of Queensland, South Australia, the ACT and the Northern Territory. I concede that if the figure is taken from that report, the member is right: over the whole period, we are behind.

Ms L. METTAM: Per capita.

Mr R.H. Cook: Yes, we are behind. But on a per capita basis right now, we are —

Ms L. METTAM: Per 100 000 people, we have one of the lowest rates; in fact, we have the lowest rate.

Mr R.H. Cook: That is right if you take the entire period, but if you take the period now, we are the fourth highest. So everyone's right.

Ms L. METTAM: I think my point is still very valid.

Mr R.H. Cook: It is a very valid point, member.

Ms L. METTAM: I think the process that accredited laboratories had to go through of getting site-by-site approval still stinks. It was a great outcome to see the opening of clinics in Bunbury and Busselton, and I understand that some other clinics are opening, including in Kalgoorlie. I also understand that our shadow Minister for Health wrote to the minister about the opportunity to further expand COVID-19 testing and commence a wastewater surveillance program, which I understand has been successful in other areas.

Mr R.H. Cook: The early stages of that study were encouraging. I think the Therapeutic Goods Administration has now decided that it is probably going down the toilet!

Ms L. METTAM: Okay.

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Mr R.H. Cook: The shadow minister is correct; there was an earlier study that I think was in fact funded by the TGA, because it wanted to test the theory that you could do mass testing through wastewater, but I don't think it stacked up in the end.

Ms L. METTAM: There are other ways. I have talked about the more bureaucratic approach to testing in Western Australia when it comes to private accredited laboratories. There are other ways that we could support testing so that we could support the opening of the community and have an understanding of the level of community spread, such as by assisting businesses to get back to work through commercial testing. I understand that, in every other state, such testing does not necessarily have to fit any criteria. The companies pay for the service themselves; they are not billed by Medicare. The arrangement is between a company and their employees. There is an opportunity, but commercial people here will think twice about that opportunity. There are two barriers to that testing in Western Australia—firstly, it has to be part of a research program, and, secondly, approval for that research has to be sought from the Chief Health Officer. I understand that process can take weeks. If businesses want to undertake work to protect their workforce, they should be able to do so. WA is the only state that has such a draconian approach to testing, and it is costly and bureaucratic. That testing would ultimately provide a good health outcome for those businesses, and also provide the government with an understanding of community spread and put it in a better position to respond. I understand that in Victoria, 200 000 tests have been done since 11 May. From that testing, four community cases were picked up from a specific batch of 13 000 tests. In contrast, WA has undertaken 74 000 tests over the whole outbreak period, which indicates that there is an issue. We touched on the DETECT program in schools, which I think is really valuable; I am happy that a couple of schools in my electorate will be involved in that asymptomatic testing program. However, I think that program has been significantly delayed. In relation to the testing approach, I think the fines that health professionals are being given or threatened with are a concern. I accept that it is a popular decision to shut down small businesses and put in place borders with a mantra to protect people. However, we have now, unfortunately, seen the Premier politicise this crisis, ignoring health advice at the cost of desperately needed jobs. The only jobs that seem to matter are those in the public service. The only patrons who seem to count are the ones using the public transport system, but the falling government revenue may be the real driver of the changes. The total indifference to jobs at the expense of politicising the crisis should be a concern to every Western Australian. The threat of a secondary outbreak remains a threat to all of us and we must be prepared from not only a health perspective, but also an economic perspective. We must continue to be vigilant.

MR K.M. O'DONNELL (Kalgoorlie) [5.05 pm]: Greetings, Mr Acting Speaker. I was hoping that the Premier would be here but he is not. I would like to put on the record my thanks to the Premier for steering the ship through this COVID-19 pandemic. I would like to have personally said thank you but I have not come across him. I have thanked the Deputy Premier for doing a good job.

I welcomed the announcement that regional boundaries are to be lifted. Most people, including me, expected the easing of restrictions over time. When the number of regions was cut from 13 to four, allowing 80 per cent of the population the freedom to travel from Albany to Yanchep and out to Southern Cross, it was said that it was an easing of restrictions. I did not think it was an easing of the restrictions but, rather, an opening of the floodgates. Those living in the City of Greater Geraldton and the goldfields were left languishing. It felt like the state was having a birthday party and we were not invited. The goldfields and Geraldton should have been included in that central region when the number of regions was cut from 13 to four. No commonsense was applied or medical evidence provided to support the decision to preclude those living in Kalgoorlie–Boulder and Geraldton from travelling to the metropolitan area—none at all. I wrote to the Premier asking for the medical evidence from the Chief Health Officer that said we cannot open up the region of Kalgoorlie–Boulder to the metropolitan region. We were told that the rationale was based on medical advice from the Chief Health Officer but we were not given the evidence.

Allowing up to 20 people into cafes and hotels is better than nothing; I agree with that. In Kalgoorlie–Boulder, the Palace Hotel, Judd's at the Kalgoorlie Hotel and the Exchange Hotel can accommodate, and segregate, patrons into various upstairs and downstairs rooms. It would not have cost the government to help employees to get some work. Lifting hotel patron restrictions would have helped the owners to get some money into the business. The kitchen in the Palace Hotel could have opened and the hotel could have seated 20 patrons in Hoover's Bar and Bistro downstairs, where they could be segregated. The doors could have been locked and another 20 patrons could have been segregated. The hotel could have used a room upstairs to provide an area for another 20 patrons. Providing seating for that many patrons would have been profitable for the hotel. The hotel would have been able to put on staff and give people a chance to get back to work. It might have been hard for the government to say to the hotel owners that if they want to open up, they need to let the government know and make contact. I would have loved to see specific conditions applied to hotels, and if they were found to have breached the conditions, they could have been closed—full stop; throw the kitchen sink at them. This is a good chance to help those hotels that want to do the right thing to open up and help the economy. Even though some hotels have a huge floor space, they are not allowed to let patrons use the bar area. Their bar areas are sometimes up to 50 metres long. The owners could even paint circles on the floor to help patrons maintain social distancing. The hotels should have been allowed to have more

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patrons whilst maintaining the 20-person limit in different areas. That could have helped the hotels immensely. Surely, if decisions are made on the basis of health advice, that advice can be shared with the public so they understand and accept it. By not sharing the information, questions will keep arising. Even the Australian Hotels Association has questioned the 20-patron limit. Why is it okay for 20 people to go to a pub or a hotel, but be compelled to have a meal? Why can 20 people not go to a pub and have a beer or a soft drink? Is the Chief Health Officer saying that people are more prone to getting the virus if they do not have a meal? If we were told why, that would be fine, I would understand it.

When the number of locked regional zones changed from 13 to four, did the Chief Health Officer disagree or did he agree that 80 per cent of the population could be free to move around without restriction? Was that his decision? Did the Chief Health Officer say to keep Geraldton and Kalgoorlie closed from Perth? Initially when boundaries were set up, exemptions were declared, but no-one would or could approve an exemption until the individual had driven possibly hundreds of kilometres to a checkpoint. That was originally; for example, someone from Laverton who wanted to go to Perth would drive more than 400 kilometres to Kalgoorlie–Boulder and another 40 to 50 kilometres towards Coolgardie before being stopped at a checkpoint. If that person believed that they were entitled to keep going—that would have been why they were headed that way—but the officer at the checkpoint who had a list said the person did not meet the criteria, that person would then have to turn around and go back. Because police were manning the checkpoints, at that stage, it would have been simplest to go to the nearest police station for authorisation rather than having to turn around. Figures clearly indicate that quite a lot of vehicles were turned around at checkpoints and told to go back. As I say, the police were making the decisions, but we know that the perception by a policeman or anyone else can be different from ours. I have been there and done that for 34 years. I would say, “Right, we should arrest this person”, and my partner would say, “No; they haven’t breached it.” I would say yes and my partner would say no. It is quite easy for people to have different perceptions, but that was not appreciated and people were left to turn up at checkpoints. The G2G PASS app came in and numerous problems and long waiting times were experienced, especially when it was one adult per permit rather than there being a family permit.

We have evidence of a wife needing to go to Perth for medical reasons. She applied and was approved almost instantly; however, it took just under a week for the husband’s trip to be approved. They even started driving to Perth, because she had to go to Perth, and he got his permit while driving to Perth. They did not know what they would do when he got down to the lakes. I applied a couple of weeks ago for my G2G PASS app so that I could come to work. I met the criteria but I still used the G2G app. From memory, I think it took an hour to come back. The app can work. Going forward, hopefully, the app—heaven forbid we ever need it again—could possibly have a family permit, especially for people in the regions. We do not want only one person, such as a mother who has to take her kid with her, driving to Perth for medical reasons. It is hard for a mother or anyone with a kid to drive 600 kilometres. It could be 1 500 kays. Eucla is in my electorate and a person from there could be driving to Perth, which would be nearly 2 000 kilometres. We do not want a wife to be able to get approval while her husband might not be. There has been unnecessary economic harm. The closing of gun shops is an example that I strongly disagree with. On television I saw people in America trying to get guns, and I believe that somebody said to the Premier that we had to shut our gun shops. WA has one of the strongest, most stringent testing and licensing systems in Australia. For 20 years, one of my jobs in the police department was gun licensing. Many people from the eastern states mentioned how hard it is here. I am glad it is hard over here because it means that the government could have kept the gun shops open. People could still have purchased guns. A person could have said, “I want that .223 calibre rifle” and the gun shop owner would get a sale, and the economy and employment would still tick over, with the money there, but the application would take time. The police department could have said that it was putting a hold on approving applications and people still would have put in those applications, because they still want their gun, whether they get it next week or not. Some people would get irate, but we could have still kept the shops open, even if there was a run on ammunition like there was on toilet paper. Coles put a limit on the sale of toilet paper. The government could have put a direction out to put a limit on the sale of rounds—only 50 rounds or 200 rounds; I do not know. The closure of gun shops had a big impact. Whichever bureaucrat brought the decision to the government based that decision on how gun shops in Perth are gun shops only and that is it. In the regions, I do not know of a gun shop that is just a gun shop. They might be a gun shop and a newsagent, a gun shop and a chemist, or a gun shop and a clothing store combined. These closures had an impact. Going forward, we will not need to do that. That is my opinion and that was something that the government did not need to do.

Mr R.H. Cook: The person who gave us the advice on that was the Commissioner of Police.

Mr P. Papalia: I was going to say that it was requested by the police.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: Really? I would not have thought that.

Mr R.H. Cook: You usually have a pretty good sense of this.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: Yes.

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Mr P. Papalia: It was based on evidence of sales—a spike.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: Yes; it could be. Even if there were evidence, people could purchase a gun but it does not mean that they could take the gun; we know that. That is what I am saying. Even if the police department said that it was putting a hold on firearms, the firearms dealer could still stay open.

Mr P. Papalia: Would you refuse the police commissioner's request?

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: No! I still call the commissioner "Sir".

Mr R.H. Cook: We had a 20 per cent surge in sales.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: Yes.

Mr R.H. Cook: I think it was because they were perhaps looking at the vision in North America —

Mr P. Papalia: A lot was going on at the time.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: Correct; I thoroughly agree. People were purging all the stuff out of the shops.

Mr P. Papalia: There was a lot of craziness going on.

Mr R.H. Cook: Toilet paper and guns.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: Yes, I agree. However, as I said, we are so stringent with our law that we could have just put a hold on licensing, and the gun shops could have still made a turnover. I dare say people will now be catching up. They wanted to, but it was just financial.

By delaying the lifting of restrictions in the goldfields, many constituents were unable to get flights for travel, because with only four flights a week for Kalgoorlie–Boulder, they are practically booked out, if not booked out. People were saying that they tried to book a seat and they could not get on. The airline is spreading out the seats. Not all 180 seats are being sold; it is limited. Once the restrictions are lifted, airlines can then put on additional capacity, which will be a big help.

A gym owner in Kalgoorlie–Boulder is pleading for gyms to open, as she fears the demise of her business. In an article in the *Kalgoorlie Miner* of 13 May, Willow Shanks, the owner of Inspired Life gym, said that her business could go under if the government does not allow gyms to fully reopen. The article states —

Willow Shanks has poured 15 years of blood, sweat and tears into her Inspired Life gym and fitness centre that had a membership base of more than 1000 before the coronavirus pandemic struck.

...

Just more than seven weeks later, with hefty outgoings in rates and rent and no income, the 36-year-old told the *Kalgoorlie Miner* her business was in a battle for survival and unless the State Government eased restrictions on gyms, and soon, it was a battle she might well lose.

... while the decision to shut gyms, alongside cafes and cinemas and other businesses, was "devastating", she could understand why that was necessary at the time.

But she said with the cases of coronavirus on a sharp downward trend, it was time for the State Government to ease restrictions for gyms.

She said —

... there was not much of an appetite for group fitness classes and the overheads to reopen for one or two group sessions a day meant it would be a loss-making venture ...

Ms Shanks said if the gym could reopen at full capacity with a 20-person limit at any one time she would be able to reactivate all memberships, set up a booking system and that people would be more spread out than being confined to a class.

... "I don't want to go into a group fitness class with people jumping around next to me, I want to work out solo on a station by myself away from others and social distance.

...

"Gyms these days are a much wider demographic, we're a place of community and family and people with a commitment to a very healthy lifestyle," she said.

"We're very clean and hygienic, probably more so than most businesses."

It is good to see that the community sporting and recreation facilities fund's annual and forward planning grants were opened on Monday and are being fast-tracked as part of the COVID-19 recovery. I welcome that. However, many regional community sporting groups are facing significant financial strain at the moment, with no revenue coming in. They cannot collect membership fees, ask sponsors for money, run a canteen or bar, run raffles or collect gate

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takings. Many had outlaid money in preparation for the winter sports season. They cannot recover from the loss of revenue. Grants and funding are always welcome, but it is not the extra funding that is in question; it is its effectiveness during this pandemic. The harsh reality is that, at the moment, clubs and associations are more worried about paying the light bill and insurance than they are about building extensions to their clubrooms.

Sports clubs that rent local government facilities are unable to be subsidised for utility bills as they are not the facility owners. Surely, helping them on the little things would count. Would the government look at a dedicated community sporting fund that all clubs could access? Apart from Lotterywest grants, which are fantastic for those who are eligible, they are not readily available to many clubs. I am not talking about the ones with a little property shed, but those with actual clubrooms. This would help many to survive. A \$1 000 or \$2 000 grant could help them pay their bills.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: That would be a good thing, rather than a grant for which they have to put up a third of the money; most clubs just do not have that at the moment.

There is a small tourism business in Leonora that has fallen through the cracks. It trains tourist prospectors to hunt for gold and runs adventure camps out in the bush. It has been operating for six years. It adds a lot to the local community by attracting tourists, but it is not eligible for the Western Australian tourism recovery fund because it does not have industry affiliation. What assistance could this business get? How many small and family-run businesses are left out because of this? Tourism businesses should not have to be affiliated with an association just to get help. I know the Minister for Tourism would have had to draw a line in the sand somewhere, and I accept that, but it would be good if, once things improve, he could say, "Hold on; can we do anything for others?"

Mr P. Papalia: Get business to drive the visitor numbers. That's what we're going to do.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: But the boundaries are not open yet.

Mr P. Papalia: On Thursday night they will be.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: On Thursday. Will the minister be going out in the media saying, "Come to the goldfields"?

Mr V.A. Catania: "Go to Kyran's office"!

Several members interjected.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: Sometimes you are on a hiding to nothing, whatever you do!

Mr P. Papalia: No, but getting back to business is the best thing.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: Yes, I agree; thank you.

I was going to ask the Premier, but I will ask the Deputy Premier instead, whether he could advise the number of days there has been no COVID-19 transmission in the community. After reading up on this, I regard that as the most important number for us. Although the number of infections in people coming from overseas, which will continue to occur, is important, it is the number of community transmission-free days that is most important. As long as procedures and quarantine protocols are being followed, which is demonstrated by people being quarantined in hotels, transmission is limited. It is good that the protocols the government has put in place are working. However, I would like to know how many days it has been since the last community transmission. I appreciate the job that the Deputy Premier is doing.

Mr R.H. Cook: It was 29 April.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: That was the last date of community transmission—really?

Mr R.H. Cook: A known source, so it was not a problem; we knew exactly where it had come from—from where they had caught the disease. They didn't have any close contacts, because they were already quarantined. But 29 April is when there was last transmission within Western Australia.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: Thank you.

Just going on, I want to make a comment. I am not taking a snipe at the Minister for Transport. I printed this article from the ABC news website six days ago. It reads —

Social distancing is being encouraged but is no longer required on public transport ...

Transport Minister Rita Saffioti said while it was encouraged, social distancing was not something that was now required on public transport.

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“The advice from the Chief Health Officer of Western Australia is that while we try and encourage [people] to keep a distance, it’s not something that’s going to be enforced, and it’s just basically not something that is required for public transport,” ...

I just weigh up that it is okay for everybody to pile in on public transport, but then they get back to, say, a hotel, with a big area and space for social distancing, or a gym—some gyms are big—and people have to socially distance. There can be only 20 people at most in those spaces. As I say, it is a hard job. There just does not seem to be equity there. But I will try to put the minister’s hat on. I know that she is not going to please everybody, and she has to make a stance. I just thought that one seems a bit —

Mr R.H. Cook: Member, the more you dig into this, the more you can find inherent contradictions, because it is not a perfect science or a mathematical equation.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: No.

Mr R.H. Cook: But, essentially, going on public transport to work is an essential activity. When someone sits or stands on a train, they tend to not interact with others, in stark contrast to when people go to a pub, where they are standing around, moving around the bar, the public toilets and all that sort of stuff. That is generally the logic behind it.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: Yes. Hopefully, going forward, it will not be too long. I am not advocating everybody to get down to the pub until three or four in the morning and get drunk—no. One thing I have noticed is that, for me, Kalgoorlie–Boulder is back to being a country town. There is a bit of quietness. I know from my policing friends that it has been fantastic drug-wise. I do not think the country wants us to close its borders so that we can keep the drugs down, but that has been a plus.

I will finish up. Thank you for listening to me; I appreciate that.

MR V.A. CATANIA (North West Central) [5.28 pm]: I rise to support the motion put forward by the Liberal Party, because it is time to open up. It is time to open up our cafes, restaurants and pubs to allow tourists to have something to do when they come to the regions. I hope everyone is travelling to the north west this weekend and beyond, because, finally, we have those borders open to allow people from the south of Western Australia to travel north to support our small businesses, regional communities and tourism operators. We need the playgrounds and skate parks open. We need the beauty salons open. We need to be open for business. We need to be able to support our tourism businesses and our small businesses and thus support our regional communities.

We have allowed more people on our buses and trains than in our hotels, motels, pubs, cafes and restaurants. How can small businesses be expected to survive, especially those in the north of Western Australia where the opportunity to earn a dollar occurs between April and September? Regional communities rely on tourists to support their tourism businesses so that they can get through the 12 months. Let me explain. Tourism in the north of the state is very different from tourism in the south of the state. The south west comes off its tourism boom after the Christmas period. Businesses in the south west were able to earn a dollar this year. Of course, it would have been difficult for them in the last few months, but imagine how hard it has been for businesses in the north west that have not earned a dollar since the peak period ended in September last year. They do not know when the borders will open. I was one of those people looking after my electorate and calling for the borders to be closed, to protect regional Western Australians and vulnerable people—our seniors, our Aboriginal population and our Aboriginal communities. We have done that. We did that in a bipartisan way by calling for the borders to be closed. We have now got to the point that those borders need to open, because in the majority of cases, there is no help for small businesses. It is not there. There is still uncertainty for charters, whether it is a whale shark operator, a fishing charter or those that offer scenic flights. There is still no certainty for tourism businesses in the north west of Western Australia, which have been calling, writing and asking questions. They are not getting any answer to whether they can start to operate from this weekend.

When there are flights, we will be able to grow and seize the wonderful opportunity that will get people in Perth and in the south to holiday at home, in places that they have never been before. Once they come up to the north west, whether it is Kalbarri, Shark Bay, Carnarvon, Coral Bay, Exmouth, Mt Augustus, Karijini or other northern parts of the state, they will want to keep coming back. That is one way to capitalise on internal tourism. But not everyone can get in a car and drive; the north west is a long way to go. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was expensive to fly to a lot of places in the north west. The cost of flying to and staying in places like Bali for 10 days could buy one flight to regional Western Australia. That was a problem before, and now the cost of flights is going through the roof and the flights are limited. We understand that they must be limited to essential travel, whether that is for medical or work reasons, but what is the plan going forward to ensure that airlines not only can service regional communities, but also are able to capture internal tourism—people who want to escape for a weekend, school holidays or a certain period? How will they be able to afford to do it? How will they do it?

Mrs Liza Harvey; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Kyrán O'Donnell; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Dean Nalder; Dr David Honey; Mrs Alyssa Hayden; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Roger Cook

One business that has been forgotten in all this is the roadhouse. Our vitally important roadhouses have had to remain open because they are classified as an essential service for the trucking industry so that it can get goods and services around the state. But roadhouses are much like a pub. They have operating costs. A lot of roadhouses are not on the power grid; they burn diesel. It can cost in excess of \$20 000 to keep a roadhouse open for one month—\$20 000! When no-one is travelling on the roads and buying fuel, how do these roadhouses pay that \$20 000? They are not cheap. They are remote, difficult to staff and expensive to get fuel to, yet they are an essential service that has been impacted. We need to keep our roadhouses, hence why we need to open up the borders. They are like our pubs, which have not had any income, unless they could do takeaways, but very few could. Takeaways are not the answer.

We have had discussions in the house about the toilet tax. There was a great announcement by the Minister for Water about a temporary waiving of the toilet tax from 1 May to 31 August. Hallelujah! Finally, the minister has got his head out of the toilet and is listening to what businesses and industry have been saying. It was a problem prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. This issue cannot go away. Businesses that have no income are spending huge amounts of money on the toilet tax. They are paying for the privilege of having a toilet—not for the water that is used to flush it, but just having a toilet. It is costing them an absolute fortune. For example, the cost to have 30 toilets is \$3 551; 64 toilets, \$6 794; and 27 toilets, \$2 832. That is just to have a toilet, not for flushing it. Businesses have had to pay that tax in every bill for the last three months, but now there will be temporary relief for those businesses that qualify. Businesses that qualify for the JobKeeper payment will be able to access those funds, which will help. The problem will not go away. The occupancy rate in the north west, for example, can go from 90 or 100 per cent in the peak period down to five or 10 per cent in the non-peak period, yet those businesses still have to pay the toilet tax. They are also paying three and a half times the amount it costs for water in Perth. Not only are they paying the toilet tax, but also they are paying three and a half times the amount it costs in Perth. Yet consumers want cheap accommodation and to be provided with the same services that they expect in places like Perth. That is impossible. These businesses have been missing out—pubs, cafes and roadhouses. There have been lots of gaps.

The Minister for Tourism announced a \$14.5 million tourism recovery package, with grants of \$6 500, but businesses have to be a member of a regional tourism organisation or the Tourism Council Western Australia. Interestingly, when we asked in the other place whether the minister could provide a break-up of where the 1 600 eligible tourism businesses are located in Western Australia, we found out that 25 per cent of those 1 600 businesses are in Perth; 28 per cent are in the south west; 18 per cent are in Australia's north west, which extends from Onslow all the way up to the Kimberley; 16 per cent are in the golden outback; and 12 per cent are on the coral coast. The north of the state, which includes the Kimberley, Gascoyne and Murchison regions, and the golden outback, which includes Esperance, have been hit the hardest, yet they have the fewest members of the Tourism Council. Fewer than half of the 1 600 businesses are in the hardest hit areas. The complaints that I have been receiving—I know that the Minister for Tourism has received the same complaints because I am cc-ed into the majority of his correspondence—are about visitor centres and hotels not being eligible. A hotel or a caravan park that belongs to their industry pays a good chunk—a \$1 000 membership, for argument's sake—to become a member of the Australian Hotels Association or the caravan industry and be accredited by their association. They are not members of visitor centres, the Tourism Council WA or a regional tourism organisation, which is a \$90 membership, and they cannot apply for these funds. My electorate of North West Central has been one of the hardest hit areas during the COVID-19 pandemic and it is the same in the Kimberley. The majority of small businesses and tourism-based businesses, whether they be a tackle store —

Mr P. Papalia: Really?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Absolutely. A tackle store is part of tourism. A roadhouse is part of tourism. What upsets me the most was the Minister for Tourism's response. I cannot remember what he said, but it was along the lines of being qualified —

Mr P. Papalia: Accredited.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: No, that was not the word. It has not come to me yet. He said that they had to be a real tourism business. If they are not one of the eligible 1 600 businesses, they are not real. The majority of businesses that are hanging out for some relief have not got any relief because they are not eligible for the payroll tax benefits. Some do not get JobKeeper payments because they could not afford to pay their staff up-front before the JobKeeper payments were rolled out. A lot of businesses have missed out and to miss out yet again on a tourism recovery grant is disappointing. What is even more amazing is that those businesses have been told to apply even if they do not meet the criteria. I ask the minister to clear up which businesses can apply. On Friday, 15 March, we had a webinar hook-up with the Minister for Regional Development, during which she gave a commitment that she would look at how the government can support the businesses that have missed out, which is the majority of businesses.

Mr P. Papalia: She might have been talking about a different grants scheme.

Mrs Liza Harvey; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Dean Nalder; Dr David Honey; Mrs Alyssa Hayden; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Roger Cook

Mr V.A. CATANIA: No; it was specifically about the tourism recovery grants and the urgent need to revisit and extend the breadth and eligibility criteria of the tourism recovery package to cater for many genuinely struggling small businesses that have been penalised because they have chosen not to be a member of a regional tourism organisation or a nominated accredited program. That was the context of the conversation that we had with the Minister for Regional Development. I ask the Minister for Tourism: when will the government extend the eligibility criteria to visitor centres or make provisions for those businesses that choose to be members of the industry groups noted on the Tourism WA website as being industry partners? The minister can look at the industry website where it states “industry partners”.

Mr P. Papalia: The businesses that are eligible have to be accredited via the Australian tourism accreditation program, the eco certification program, the Star Ratings Australia program or the caravan/holiday park accreditation program, plus be an RTO or WAITOC member.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: So the minister is not going to extend the eligibility criteria?

Mr P. Papalia: Not at the moment, no. Those are the criteria.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: So there is no talk about changing the eligibility criteria after the minister has worked out whether that \$4.4 million is being used?

Mr P. Papalia: There are two programs. That is for the recovery program. There is also a business survival program.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is for \$100 000.

Mr P. Papalia: That is where we will put the greater individual grants of between \$20 000 and \$100 000.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Will it be the first quarter of 2021 when they receive those grants?

Mr P. Papalia: It probably will be, because there is a greater probity requirement around the application process. It is more comprehensive than for the other grant scheme. By the time they complete all the obligations to make their submission and are assessed, it will probably be that time, yes.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I think it would be fantastic to be able to get \$20 000 or \$100 000.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I do not disagree that it is taxpayers' money. However, the issue is that businesses need those funds now. Opening up the regional borders is fantastic. Opening up the cafe, restaurant and pub scene is what everyone wants, and that will help. The problem for businesses is trying to recover the loss of income for the last three months. That is particularly the case in the north west, once the peak tourism season ends and those businesses no longer have that potential income. I hope that changes.

Mr P. Papalia: Yes, Denham.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: And Exmouth and Coral Bay.

Mr P. Papalia: Those are in the Kimberley.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The south west has a longer season than the Kimberley.

Mr P. Papalia: I hope they have the longest season in history this year.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The fact remains that when JobKeeper finishes, there will be issues into the future. Businesses cannot recover. Any delays in opening up or changing the restrictions that are in place will have a huge effect on a lot of businesses. If an old pub or roadhouse in regional Western Australia is closed, it is very hard to get that open again because of the costs involved.

My fear is that the government's announcements are starting to become very political. We saw that yesterday with the Premier. We are seeing that now for the future. We know that the government's motivation is to suck in as much media as possible and to have the announcements come out without interruption while the Premier does his COVID-19 speeches or press conferences every day. I think people are starting to wake up to that. People are starting to wake up to the government's politicisation of the COVID-19 situation.

Mr P. Papalia: We are not politicising it.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: You know what? You can get up and speak.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I urge the government to consider putting the small businesses in regional communities first.

Mrs Liza Harvey; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Kyrán O'Donnell; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Dean Nalder; Dr David Honey; Mrs Alyssa Hayden; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Roger Cook

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The government should table the health advice that says that we cannot increase the number of patrons in pubs, cafes and restaurants. Table the health advice about why we cannot open the regional borders.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Tourism!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Show everyone the truth. If the government's health advice is to take exactly the actions that the government has taken, let it rest there.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: We need to have an open inquiry into how the government is managing these things. People in regional Western Australia have been going broke because of the actions and lack of action by this government.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Tourism!

MR D.C. NALDER (Bateman) [5.48 pm]: Thank goodness we have the McGowan government to keep us safe in Western Australia! How else would we know that it is safe to travel to Albany and Margaret River, but not to Kalgoorlie, Geraldton or Exmouth? How else would we know that it is safe to cram an unlimited number of people onto public transport, but not to have more than 20 people in a bar? It is safe to have a meal and a drink in a bar or restaurant, but not to have a drink on its own. It is safe for our kids to be at boarding school, but not to go on school camps. It is safe for our kids to play on school playground equipment, but not down at the local park. It is safe to see a hairdresser, but not a beautician. It is safe for kids to co-mingle in unlimited numbers at school, but not in an exam room. It is safe for people coming into Western Australia from overseas to quarantine for 14 days and then join the general population, but not for a specified expanded rollout every 14 days when there is no community transmission. How else would we know that if it were not for this government? For goodness sake, these rules are very complex and lack a bit of logic.

Has the government fronted up with the medical advice that says that it is safe to travel to Albany, but not to Geraldton? Where is the advice that tells us that it is safe to have unlimited numbers of people on public transport, but not in a bar?

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Tourism!

Mr D.C. NALDER: Why is it safe to eat a meal and have a drink at a bar, but not have a drink on its own? For goodness sake, this government is holding back the economy when there is no community transmission. Let me remind members —

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

Mr D.C. NALDER: The member is not in his seat.

Mr W.J. Johnston: I don't have to be.

Mr D.C. NALDER: The minister is not in his seat. If he wants to interject in the chamber —

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Mines and Petroleum!

Mr R.H. Cook interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Health!

Mr D.C. NALDER: Let me remind the government that the Western Australian economy —

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Tourism, I call you for the first time.

Point of Order

Mrs Liza Harvey; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Kyrán O'Donnell; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Dean Nalder; Dr David Honey; Mrs Alyssa Hayden; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Roger Cook

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The Minister for Mines and Petroleum is standing. I know that with the COVID-19 measures, things are not normal, but to have a member on the floor of the house when another member is speaking is not right. He should be called to order and thrown out of this chamber!

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr S.J. Price): Member for North West Central, thank you. It is not a point of order.

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Point of order! He has done it again!

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Mines and Petroleum, I call you for the first and second time. Member for Bateman, carry on, please

Debate Resumed

Mr D.C. NALDER: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. Let me remind the house that the Western Australian economy was already struggling prior to the coronavirus pandemic not because of policies beyond the government's control, but because of policies that are in the control of government. Straight off the top, I can name three policies in the government's control that have adversely impacted the domestic economy. They are the increase in household charges when the Western Australian domestic economy was already struggling, the increase in electricity charges in excess of 19 per cent, and the change in regional migration and its impact on international students. Education is the fourth largest industry in Australia and contributed \$37.5 billion to the economy last financial year. The government chose to change the regional migration status. That did not have an impact on people migrating to Western Australia from overseas, but it did impact on the number of international students coming to Western Australian universities. It had a massive impact and \$750 million was stripped out of our domestic economy. Then the government implemented a scheme for a foreign buyers tax at a time when the housing industry was on its knees, and that pushed demand in the housing sector down further.

Those policies were ridiculous. Let us have a look at the outcomes. In January, before the coronavirus pandemic, we had an unemployment rate higher than the national average. We had six straight years of business investment decline—it was seven per cent last financial year. We had a mortgage default rate that was double the national average. We had a record number of households suffering mortgage stress, with their monthly income less than their monthly expenditure. There were 152 000 households suffering mortgage stress—up by 67 per cent during the term of this government. These issues in our domestic economy existed prior to the coronavirus pandemic.

There has been no community transmission and the government has started to roll out measures that suggest it is safe for the community to travel to Albany, but it then says, "Don't you dare go to Geraldton. You'll be charged. It's unsafe." The government is saying that it is safe to have unlimited numbers of people on public transport, but there cannot be more than 20 people in a restaurant or bar; it is unsafe. I am asking the government for the logic in these decisions. I want the government to explain.

Mr R.H. Cook interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Health! Member for Bateman, through the Chair, please, not through members.

Mr D.C. NALDER: What the government needs to do —

Mr R.H. Cook interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Health!

Mr D.C. NALDER: The economy has been on its knees and the minister has not been able to explain to the people of Western Australia why, other than say that it is in our community —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Health and Minister for Tourism, the member for Bateman has the floor.

Mr D.C. NALDER: We have been asking for health advice to be tabled that demonstrates why it is safer —

Several members interjected.

Point of Order

Dr D.J. HONEY: The speaker has been subject to a tirade of abuse and interjection since he has been on his feet, including from the Leader of the House, and the member for Darling Range was called for making a single comment.

Mrs Liza Harvey; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Dean Nalder; Dr David Honey; Mrs Alyssa Hayden; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Roger Cook

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr S.J. Price): Thank you, member for Cottesloe; that is not a point of order. Carry on, member for Bateman, through the Chair.

Debate Resumed

Mr D.C. NALDER: I have been asking for —

Mr R.H. Cook interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Health, I call you to order for the first time.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Tourism, I call you to order for the second time.

Mr D.C. NALDER: I have asked the government to explain the logic of why it is safe to go to Albany but not Geraldton. I have asked for that information to be tabled. I have asked the minister to explain why it is safe to have unlimited numbers of people on our public transport, but not unlimited numbers in a restaurant. I am trying to understand the logic of why one is safe but not the other.

Mr R.H. Cook interjected.

Mr D.C. NALDER: All the minister can do is try to accuse me of being a threat to Western Australia's safety when all I am asking for is an explanation of the logic of why one is safe and not the other.

Mr V.A. Catania interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for North West Central, you have had your go.

Mr D.C. NALDER: I struggle to understand why it is safe to go to a restaurant and have a meal and a drink, but it is not safe if I do not have a meal.

Mrs A.K. Hayden interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Darling Range, I call you to order for the first time.

Mr D.C. NALDER: I am trying to understand the logic of why it is not safe to go to a restaurant or a bar and just have a drink; why do I have to have a meal as well? I am trying to understand the logic of why one is safe and not the other. That is all I am trying to understand. It is restricting our economy from opening, although we have had no community transmission of the virus. As I said, our domestic economy was on its knees prior to the coronavirus outbreak. The longer we take, if there is not a justifiable, commonsense, practical application of logic, the worse our position will be moving forward and it will challenge our ability to get businesses up and running in Western Australia. That will make it more difficult for all Western Australians. If the rules make it safer for Western Australians, by all means apply them, but I am asking for the logic of why one element is unsafe yet another element is safe. I do not understand the logic and I have not seen any explanation of why it is safe for me to go to a bar and have a meal and a drink but not safe for me to go to a bar and have a drink. What is the logic? The minister tells me it is health advice but why is it safer for me to be able to have a meal and a drink but not have a drink on its own? Why is that the government's position? The government is telling people what to do. What are the rules?

Everyone in my community has been saying that the government was doing a fantastic job but, in the last three weeks, that has changed. People are getting frustrated because they do not understand the logic of the decisions the government is making. The government is saying that it is health advice, but people are saying that that does not make sense. It does not make sense. I am asking the government to explain, because these things are having a massive impact on our economy. I remind members that our domestic economy was already in deep trouble prior to the coronavirus breaking out. The policies that the government implemented before the coronavirus pandemic were having an adverse impact on our domestic economy. The government has failed to address that. Government members are now trying to accuse me of making Western Australia unsafe. I am not doing that. I am trying to get the minister to explain why one element is safe and another is unsafe, because it does not seem to follow any logic whatsoever.

Our domestic retail economy was already struggling prior to the coronavirus outbreak. In January, we saw record numbers of businesses and retail businesses shutting down. We know that the housing industry is struggling. House prices have been declining since 2014. Nearly one in five properties in Western Australia with a mortgage are in negative equity. Compared with 2006, when 83 000 residences were sold, 41 000 residences were sold in 2019. The figure has been going down. In 2013, it was still above 70 000 residences in 12 months. If we look at things like stamp duty revenue, we can see that it has gone from close to \$2 billion on residential stamp duty down to just over \$720 million in the last financial year. The government must admit that there are some challenges. I fear that it will blame every issue in the domestic economy on the coronavirus when I am pointing out that our domestic economy had massive issues prior to the coronavirus breaking out.

Mrs Liza Harvey; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Dean Nalder; Dr David Honey; Mrs Alyssa Hayden; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Roger Cook

I have highlighted that some things have been deemed safe and unsafe, yet I am questioning that logic and would like an explanation. After dinner, the Minister for Health has the opportunity to get to his feet and explain it. If he can explain the logic, I will go, “Fantastic; you’re doing a great job” but at the moment, I cannot understand why it is safe for me to go to a bar and have a meal and a drink but not have a drink on its own.

Several members interjected.

Mr D.C. NALDER: None of the member’s shouting across the chamber provides an explanation. The minister will have an opportunity to get to his feet and explain the logic to me because that has been absent, and that is what community members are putting to me is absent in the explanation from government. That is why they are frustrated.

Sitting suspended from 6.00 to 7.00 pm

MRS A.K. HAYDEN (Darling Range) [7.01 pm]: I rise to support the motion before us about the mishandling of the lifting of the COVID-19 restrictions, which is causing unnecessary economic harm to our small businesses, and job losses across the state. The Minister for Health is well aware that we have a massive jobs crisis. Small businesses have closed and tourism operators have been forced to shut. Some of the businesses that were forced to shut had 30 years of experience in building and developing those businesses, so we need to be mindful of our language. At the beginning of this pandemic, this government handled itself very well. On behalf of one of my constituents, I have to throw out to the Minister for Health that they think he is doing an exceptional job. If they were not a Liberal voter, they would vote for him, but they cannot bring themselves to do it. They said that if the minister wanted to swap sides, they would be more than happy to vote for him!

Mr R.H. Cook: That’s a very good offer!

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: They said that the minister is handling this very well and asked me to pass it on to him.

What is not being handled well is the language that is going out. Right at the very beginning, the tourism industry asked this government, as it shut our borders, our businesses and industries, not to tell people not to come here or to cancel their holiday. It asked that the government use the language “postpone” the holiday rather than “cancel”. Right from the beginning, this government and the Premier did not use the right language to support these tourism industries and small business operators, who were forced to shut down through no choice of their own.

The first thing that came out, on 25 March, was a plea from the Tourism Council of Western Australia titled “Postpone, Don’t Cancel, Your Holiday in WA”. Sadly, that was ignored. What did that do to our tourism operators, who are still struggling to stay afloat and still do not know when they will be able to start operating? That took every last cent out of their bank accounts to pay refunds. Instead of people being asked to hold that deposit and wait until post-COVID-19 to enjoy their holiday and the wonderful experiences in WA, those operators had to pay back all those deposits. All the regions were shut down, which stopped them from getting any local visitors to their doors. Then there were restrictions that shut down our restaurants, hotels, pubs and small businesses.

The government started its message by saying that it would create an island within an island. We have discussed that before in this place. That message was to enable WA to operate as closely to normal as possible. We have done the island within the island. We have had an amazing track record containing COVID-19 and we have had no community spread, yet we have not removed any of the rigid restrictions. We are now slowly starting to peel them back but they are being peeled back at a rate that is not viable. The government is saying that a cafe or restaurant can open with a maximum of 20 people per session in the venue, regardless of the size of the venue, but people cannot go to the bar and order a drink. Venues like the Jarrahdale Tavern do not have wait service. People order at the bar, get their drinks at the bar and take them to their table. That business would have to employ more people to serve fewer meals. That is not viable, so it has chosen not to reopen its doors. The government told people to support their small businesses by booking lunch or dinner and enjoying the restaurant and dining experience, but many businesses have remained closed since the Monday that the government made that announcement because they are waiting for the capacity to be increased to be viable. We live in a community that has had no community transmission. We have contained the virus within the hospital system and within self-isolation. We keep hearing from the Premier and the government that we are doing a great job: “Well done, WA. You’re doing an awesome job, yet we still don’t trust you and we’re still not going to lift the restrictions.”

Western Australians are not children and the tide is turning. At the very beginning, everyone was keen and eager to listen to the government and our Prime Minister and to wait for their advice. The advice changed by the hour and everyone appreciated the decisions that were being made. But the government will now be judged on how it gets out of this, on how it peels back the restrictions that are no longer required and on how it enables the economy to restart. Let us remember that pre-COVID-19 we had the highest cost of living and the highest mortgage stress, people were out of work and businesses and retail were struggling. That was all before —

Several members interjected.

Mrs Liza Harvey; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Kyrán O'Donnell; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Dean Nalder; Dr David Honey; Mrs Alyssa Hayden; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Roger Cook

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: Do members really think I am making this up? Was the cost of living not through the roof? Had this government not increased the cost of living by \$850 a year?

Several members interjected.

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: We have had a massive downturn in the retail and business sectors. If the Minister for Small Business does not know that, he is not talking to the industry. Does the minister know how I know that he is not talking to the industry? It is because people in the industry are now talking to me. People in the industry gave the minister some leniency in the first two weeks but now they are saying, “We’ve had enough because our minister cannot stand up for us. Our minister does not have the backbone to sit around the cabinet table and stand up for our small business operators and our tourism operators.” That is what they are saying. When the minister says that is a load of rubbish, all he is doing is proving that he does not know his portfolio.

I will go on to talk about language. Tourism Council WA was asked to send the message that people should postpone but not cancel their holiday in WA. But the government went out there and said, “Do not come to WA. We do not want you.” The government then raised hope by announcing the tourism fund assistance package, which will help only 1 600 operators who are linked to certain organisations. I can tell the minister right now that the businesses in the Perth hills, the Kimberley and Margaret River are all ringing me and saying, “We were so excited about this announcement but when we read the fine details, there was nothing in it for us.” There are small business operators who cannot afford to join Tourism Council Western Australia or the regional tourism organisation, but they have joined their local visitor centre or the Perth Hills Vignerons Association. They have joined their own industry associations and spent money on marketing their businesses in their region. Yet in this place last week the minister said, “We are delivering funding for real tourism operators.”

Mr P. Papalia: I did not say that.

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: The minister should look at *Hansard*; he did. He said, “We are supporting real tourism operators.” The government did a song and dance, saying it was going to bring music back to the Perth hills and it was going to bring tourism back, but it has turned its back, walked away and ignored the businesses there, and, let me tell the minister, they are not happy. They are not happy because the government is promising hope and delivering misery.

I turn to international students. Other states are looking forward at how they are going to get out of COVID-19. People are looking for leadership, and this government does not have it. How do we get out of COVID-19? Other states understand the value of international students. WA currently has 50 000 international students living and being educated here, and they contribute \$2 billion to our economy and create 10 000 jobs. At a time when we need jobs, this government needs to be forward planning on what we are going to do on international students post-COVID-19. The pipeline to get international students here in Perth is 12 to 18 months. If the government is not planning that now, we have no chance of getting people here in a year or a year and a half when we are going to need them. What did we hear in the chamber today? The Premier said, “I have not turned my mind to international students”, and it is not even on his agenda. In Western Australia, we have the opportunity right now. The silver lining of this awful pandemic is that we will be starting with a clean slate come the end of COVID-19, and we have an opportunity to re-create our state, re-create our reputation and become the tourism leader of Australia. What we have managed to do in this state in protecting our community from COVID-19 will be the very thing that international visitors consider when they pick their next holiday. We are not out on the front foot right now advocating that we want their business. If we want mums and dads in the Philippines, Singapore, China or Korea to send their children to WA, we need to be telling them that story now, not telling them that we do not want them.

The minister’s language around supporting business and supporting tourism has been extremely poor. I want to explain why the minister needs to start changing his language. I got an email from a gentleman a couple of weeks ago and then I got a second email. I have to say that I am quite concerned. I have gone back to him and told him that if he needs to talk to anyone, to let me know and we could get him in touch with people. His name is Justin and he is from a sports travel business. As members know, travel was the first thing shut down, and we all understand why. I am going to read his story, because I do not think this is being considered when decisions are being made on lifting restrictions. They are small decisions such as, as the Leader of the Opposition said, people being able to go to the hairdresser but not go and get their nails done. People can go to a boxing class, but they cannot go to a spin class. A gentleman in Applecross—the member for Bateman might want to check it out—has two spin classes, and two doors down the road is a boxing studio and a gym. They can open and he cannot, and they are taking his customers away. When restrictions are made that confuse our business owners, it is really difficult for them to understand that. When the language coming out of this place is that the government is simply not willing to help, that it is simply not interested in the future of our economy, our businesses and our international students, it is a concern. I am about to run out of time, but I am quickly going to read the email. He follows up on another email. The email says —

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As a Small business and Sole Trader in the Travel and Tourism Industry, we have been the first industry hit ... Every day that our WA border continues to be unjustifiably closed ... from the rest of our country, it is directly affecting our ability to trade and its crushing my business, which is our sole income to support of family of seven.

Why is our Premier insisting on maintaining border closure with no clear date of reopening, when our Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Professor Paul Kelly (WHO IS A WESTERN AUSTRALIAN!) says there is NO JUSTIFIED MEDICAL REASON for anymore ongoing border closures? Not only is this becoming illegal and unconstitutional, it is a betrayal to every Australian Citizen residing in Western Australia. We are one nation, and with no more risk to public health and safety, we have the right as Australian Citizens to freely move and trade between our states ...

Noting the time, I will not have time to read it all, but he highlighted in red —

I am asking you as my representative to please continue to put harder pressure on the WA Premier to come to reason and open our State Border to ALL states!

He also wrote —

We have a world class health system that is meant to shield lives —

And it is —

AND livelihoods simultaneously, together, and we cannot peg one against the other, it is damaging and dividing our State and nation. Instead, our business, along with a multitude of others, are being placed on the conveyor belt heading toward destruction and ruin. The damage has already begun.

I know the Premier is getting these letters, because they have told me that they have written to him or sent him emails. How can we stand by and let these small businesses stand alone and without any support? The Broome Chamber of Commerce and all the business operators up there have said that this is their peak time. They have asked the government to please not make them try to survive through a peak season without any income, as they know that they will not make it to the other side if that happens. A lady had a go at me on Twitter for talking about Broome and not about the Kimberley. I had to correct myself, so I want to just give her a plug. The Kimberleyland Waterfront Holiday Park is in a great location—I checked out the website. She owns a caravan park but she cannot get people through her doors. She has invested and spent money on her asset, which she still has to insure, maintain and look after, yet she cannot get anyone through the door.

We are living in a First World country with the best health system. The fact that we have fought COVID-19 so well proves that. Creating an island within an island has enabled us to operate as normally as possible. I ask the government to please allow our businesses to operate as normally as possible. There is no reason that the playgrounds in the community cannot be played on when playgrounds in schools can be. Businesses and the community are starting to get confused. I am asking the government to change its language. It needs to start explaining to people that it cares. It needs to start explaining to them that it has a recovery pathway forward and that it will be there by their side and walk with them every step of the way to help them through this.

I understand that we are going to lose some businesses—that is going to happen—but we still have unnecessary restrictions in place when states around the country that have had far more cases than we ever had are lifting their restrictions. Why are we still restricting a venue to only 20 people when it could easily sit 100 people while still adhering to the COVID-safe guidelines and social distancing? What will happen is that we will get through the next month but businesses will have shut their doors. The JobKeeper payment, which has been keeping them going and keeping people employed, will stop. They will be looking at what the state government has provided as a back-up plan to help them recover. Right now, they are not seeing one. If they can see a glimmer of hope, they will hang in there. They will remortgage their house, sell their car or do whatever it takes to hang onto their business, but they are not seeing a glimmer of hope. We need to make sure that the restrictions that are in place are not just standing on the hose of our operators.

It is the government's responsibility to make sure that our economy ticks over and that the biggest employer and the backbone of WA—our small businesses—are protected so that they can continue to give Western Australian mums and dads and their kids a job. There are a lot of people in Darling Range who are surviving on the JobKeeper allowance. They work in a jewellers or a hotel. If the businesses do not take those staff back on when JobKeeper stops, those people will be out of jobs and not able to pay the rent. They are already in mortgage stress. They are already paying huge cost-of-living fees that the government implemented. Times were tough prior to COVID-19; times are even tougher now. The bandaid of JobKeeper is keeping the economy alive, but this will come back to haunt us for months and months to come if the government does not have a plan in place or lift the restrictions now, so that the businesses that are around to employ and operate can open and remain open. If they cannot open now, we

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are going to see the loss of more businesses and jobs. We are going to lose skillsets and talent within our tourism sector. We are going to lose experience that will never be replaced because we are simply limiting the ability of those businesses to operate. I would understand it if the medical advice was that we should keep these restrictions in place. We keep asking the government to show us that medical advice but it has not done so.

The liquor restrictions came in to help maintain the health of Western Australians. Nobody wants people to suffer from alcohol abuse, but the government missed the flood of unlimited alcohol deliveries to everyone's front door that were coming in from over east. It took the government a month to work it out and then do a backflip: "Well done, Western Australians. You all drank responsibly so we are going to open it up." That was not the case. The government knew that it was hurting our mum-and-dad wineries, cideries, microbreweries and the like, and our local liquor stores. We have to start supporting our small businesses and tourism operators. The government needs to show them that it has their back. It needs to change its language to show them that it has a path to recovery. It needs to give them some hope and a reason to keep investing, to keep going into debt and to continue cashing in their super and mortgaging their home. Give them a reason for getting themselves into the biggest debt they have ever been in because this government will show them the light at the end of the tunnel by providing a proper recovery plan and removing the restrictions that are stopping them from opening for business, earning money and employing Western Australians.

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Small Business) [7.21 pm]: I thank members for the opportunity to discuss this really important matter, which is almost identical to a private member's motion two weeks ago. The first thing I said then, and I will say it again now, is what a tragedy it has been, and continues to be, to have witnessed and been part of this incredibly terrible situation we have confronted in dealing with the threat of COVID-19 in not only Western Australia, but also across the nation and around the world, and witnessing the terrible impact it has had on so many people. It is a terrible tragedy and a horrible thing. It is nowhere near as painful as witnessing a person dying from the disease, and some 103 families around the country are grieving the loss of a loved one as a consequence of this disease. But, short of that, it has inflicted pain and hurt upon people's livelihoods. People have lost their jobs, and small businesses and even large businesses have been massively impacted. It has been a terrible thing to have to confront. The government thinks about that every single day of this crisis. Every one of our responses have been made fully cognisant of the challenge confronted by people.

Having said that, it is incredibly disappointing to witness the last few hours of debate in this place. We have witnessed the complete abandonment of any sense of responsibility or duty to encourage and maintain public confidence in the best health system and health advice in the world, and in Australia the best governance response of anywhere on the planet. For the opposition to intentionally undermine that in a cheap, weak effort to garner some sort of attention at this time is incredibly embarrassing and disappointing. I have to acknowledge that most of the Leader of the Opposition's speech had some semblance of being reasonably responsible. We had a bit of a discussion about some of her questions and they were quite reasonable, but in the end she felt the need to join some of her colleagues, including the member for Bateman, whose contribution was appalling. It was just disgraceful. The same applies to the member for Darling Range; she was almost as bad as the member for North West Central, the worst in the Parliament. We heard all these contributions when the Western Australian and the Australian public —

Mrs A.K. Hayden interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I was called twice during a contribution from one of the opposition members, Deputy Speaker. If I am not accepting interjections, I am quite happy for you to provide me with protection.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am here if you need me.

Mr P. PAPALIA: At the outset, quite rightly, this crisis was frequently portrayed as a war. It is very similar to a war in terms of the threat and the scale and the impact it is having on everyone and the requirement for a national, coordinated, collaborative response—and we have witnessed an exceptional response. Having had some experience of actual war, I can say that war does a couple of things: firstly, it gives an opportunity for good leadership. Fine, strong, honest leadership rises to the top and is exposed during times of war. Conversely, weak, failed leadership, and people who are self-interested and incapable of accepting responsibility in duress are also exposed. What we have witnessed this evening and, I fear, over the last couple of days; in fact, probably a little longer now, is the opposition abandoning any pretence of leadership—joining the Missouri Militia.

An opposition member: The federal opposition.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Some of their behaviour has been embarrassing too, but nowhere near as embarrassing as that of members opposite in joining the effort to undermine the trust the Australian people have rightly placed in their combined governance system led by the Prime Minister and the national cabinet. They are acting on the best health advice in the world, rightly rewarded with the trust of the Australian people. However, a concerted effort has been made by weak, failed leaders to undermine that trust, at a time when trust is essential. The one thing we can do for

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small business and everyone in the state is to continue to defend Western Australia against COVID-19 within a strong, hard state border to prevent community spread from entering our state from Victoria and New South Wales where, undoubtedly, there is community spread. Holding the hard border and opening up more of our community for the economy is the best thing we can do. That is the fastest thing we can do to help those small businesses, member for Darling Range; the fastest thing we can do to create jobs and return people to work, member for Bateman.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Mr P. PAPALIA: That is the best possible thing we can do. We need to maintain the border. We are in phase 2 of emerging from the COVID measures. We entered phase 2 at the same time most other states entered phase 1. We have the most liberalised measures in the country right now. Do not talk to me about what will happen next Monday in New South Wales or in Victoria in two weeks and claim that somehow they are in front of us. Western Australia never shut its schools. We allowed parents to continue to work. We did not shut our construction sites. Victoria shut down the building industry. We never shut mining, as members heard from the Premier, despite urging by some of those weak leaders who have been calling for us to relinquish our borders.

Mrs A.K. Hayden interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Darling Range!

Mr P. PAPALIA: Some people, in their own self-interest, are pursuing the pathway that the member chose to explore this evening. For some reason those people would like us to relinquish what we have gained in security, which is what will enable us to move further ahead. It will be done in a phased, considered manner on the advice of the Chief Health Officer.

Several members interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Unlike members opposite, I have met Paul Kelly. I know him. Unlike the Premier, I know him! He is a good man.

Mr D.C. Nalder: The singer?

Mr P. PAPALIA: No, although I have met him too! I have met the doctor, the Deputy Chief Medical Officer. Collectively, tourism ministers received a briefing by him in the early days of COVID-19. He is a good man. When he talks about not having given advice about the internal state borders, that is because he is the Deputy Chief Medical Officer of Australia. He gives advice to the federal government about its borders and measures. The Chief Health Officer of Western Australia, our health authorities and our advisers look at our specific circumstances. It does not require an epidemiologist to tell us that if there is evidence of community spread in New South Wales and Victoria but not in Western Australia, it might be a pretty good idea to retain a hard border with those states. I can guess why the Premier of New South Wales is advocating for dropping borders. There is a Labor government in Queensland and an election coming up. The New South Wales Liberal government would like to help out the Liberal opposition in Queensland, and it is creating havoc. It would like to try to get a few people down from Queensland.

The best thing we can do is keep our economy strong. We never shut down. We did not do that because the Premier stood up to people who wanted to shut down the mining industry, wanted to shut down construction and wanted to close the schools. He stood fast with the Prime Minister and ensured that that did not happen. We are better placed than other states because of that. As we are coming out, we are already in front. The opposition talks about measures to get the economy going, but we did not stop it. We are now stepping further ahead and the next phase is coming. The Premier has already announced that on Thursday, at 23.59 hours, all intrastate borders, except the Kimberley and the biosecurity regions, will come down. Member for Darling Range, people can travel. On 5 June, subject to the federal government lifting its biosecurity measures, the Kimberley will be open, with some protections retained for remote Aboriginal communities. But travel within our state will be opening up. Do members know why the Chief Health Officer has been comfortable to make that recommendation to the government? It is because of our hard border with the east. That means there is a control over the extent of risk that he is willing to accept. He is able to accept the risk of moving Western Australians throughout the state. He is able to accept the risk —

Mr A. Krsticevic interjected.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I got called twice, Deputy Speaker, and I was far less robust in my interjections than the member for Carine.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am sure you were not naughty at all, minister.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I was. There was a hard man in the chair at the time. He also called the member for Cannington twice. Unbelievable.

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The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Probably with good reason. Member for Carine, could you please stop interjecting. Go ahead, minister.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Seriously, it is a reasonable thing. When we say that it is on advice, it is quite literal. The member for Kalgoorlie asked, “Did the Chief Health Officer say you couldn’t go to Esperance, but you could go to the south west?” Yes! Believe me, everyone in cabinet wanted to ask for as much as we possibly could to lift restrictions. We are not doing it because we like it. It might make members opposite feel good to rant about it, but do they really think there is any benefit for government to constrain the economy, to prevent people from opening their businesses? Honestly. Does the member for Darling Range seriously think I am getting a kick out of that?

That is the last thing we want to do. There is a reason why I disagree with the opposition about reopening the state border. I believe that the best thing we can do is hold the hard state border and then, once we can convince the Chief Health Officer that because of the hard border he has only to assume a degree of risk as opposed to the much greater risk of having thousands of people coming here from the other side of the country—which he does not know about and where we suspect that there is community spread—it will enable him to stretch and endorse further measures. The opposition needs to understand this: we are not making up the rules. If we were, they might be a little more exciting! The truth is that we are doing what we can do and we are doing it in a measured and steady way.

I find it disappointing when members opposite stand in here and criticise. I understand why; they are having a crack, and fair enough. I am not so much worried about bruising people’s egos as I am about undermining the community’s confidence in the health advice, because it is the best advice in the world. It has served us well to date, and it will serve us well as we move out of the COVID-19 crisis. We do not want to move into a position in which there is another significant outbreak, everyone gets smashed again, and we lose everything we have managed to achieve. We take advice and act on it in a steady, considered fashion and we are trying to get more and more of our businesses back up and running and more people back to work so we do not have to give them grants from the taxpayers’ purse. As the Treasurer has repeatedly informed us, all of our spend accounts for something like nine per cent of the state’s economy. Even if we were to double it and blow the budget —

Mr A. Krsticevic: It’s 11 per cent.

Mr P. PAPALIA: No, I think it is nine per cent.

Mr B.S. Wyatt: Ten or 12 per cent!

Mr P. PAPALIA: Ten or 12; there we go!

Even if we were to double it, we would never replace all the loss; we cannot. Sadly, we cannot do that. The best we can do is to get people back to work and get businesses open, and I promise we will do everything we can to promote our regions and tourism operators, firstly to Western Australians. The moment it is safe and we are enabled by the health advice to do so, we will be poised to go after the rest of the national market and interstate travel. But right now, the best thing we can do is get Western Australians back to work within the safety of our borders.

MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Minister for Health) [7.37 pm]: Deputy Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. It is a hard one, I know; this is a difficult debate. I have often said to the member for Dawesville that being in government during a crisis of this sort is really hard, but it is probably harder for the opposition; I get that. It is a tough space to be in. We are all on team WA and we all have to stay on team WA. As I think the member for Carine said, we are basically a victim of our own success in going for elimination, not suppression. I beg to differ. We have been remarkably successful, but our aim is not to eliminate risk; it is to manage risk. This is, I think, a point that the member for Bateman failed to seize on or to navigate in a contribution that was, I must say, unusually robust for him! He usually comes into this place with a lot more facts and figures and, I should say, makes a more considered contribution!

This is about managing risk, and it is a public health risk. It is a risk management strategy that, as the Minister for Tourism just said, has put us amongst the world leaders. People say that Australia is the best place in the world to be at the moment; the best place in Australia to be at the moment is Western Australia. From that perspective, I understand that people are finding it hard to walk the fine line between being on team WA and making sure that we can contribute to the debate. Apparently I have been condemned tonight under this motion. I would like to thank the members for Kalgoorlie and Vasse for their condemnation. If that is the worst condemnation I am going to endure in my political career, I am happy!

This is an important debate, and we ask that people stay with team WA because it has served us well to date, and it will continue to serve us well.

We understand that members opposite, like us, feel the confidence that is emerging in the Western Australian community today. People see low evidence of the disease and think that we can move, and move quickly, but around

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the world at the moment there are so many good reasons why we should be very careful with this process. Just look at South Korea's second wave of the disease, and the deaths and sickness resulting from that.

We are coming out of this particular phase of the pandemic, but we must do it gradually. Public health is a three-legged stool. The first leg is a health component. Going into a pandemic, the health component is the largest aspect of it. The second leg is the social component, which is the extent to which people can be led and the extent to which the community can be kept onside to put these measures in place. That is still very high; we are succeeding in that. The third leg is the economic component: how many of the measures in place is the community and the economy prepared to endure in order to overcome the health issues? We understand that this is a very fine line that we have to continue to tread, and we need everyone's help in order to do it. We need people to stay with team WA.

Let us go to a few of the key issues. The Leader of the Opposition raised the issue of vaccine versus treatment. I know there is a lot of social media about a vaccine, but it ain't coming any time soon. She referred to the Spanish flu pandemic. It took 15 years to develop a vaccine for Spanish flu. The fastest a vaccine has ever been produced for a communicable disease was the Ebola vaccine, and that took five years. That is in the history of the world. If we were to do this by Christmas, that would be lightning speed—it would blow them out. But there are some exciting things going on with treatments. If we can stop people becoming acutely ill and dying, then treatment itself may be the proxy vaccine that we have into the future. We really just have to try to get to that space. I would love to think that by the end of this year we will have treatments that are effective in stopping people from dying. That would be a really important place to get to.

There was a lot of discussion in the opposition's contribution about the interstate borders. It is true that Professor Paul Kelly said that there is no advice on interstate borders from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee. The AHPPC is a national body. It is silent on the issue of interstate borders, but it said that each of the states can form their own view on interstate borders, and we did form a view about that. We formed a very hard view. That hard view has allowed our mining industry to continue to operate. It has allowed our primary industries to continue to operate. It has allowed Western Australia to keep its economy ticking over as best it can during a pandemic. It has kept our construction industry open. It has kept a whole swathe of areas of our economy ticking over, albeit slowly, so that in the meantime we can hold as many people in jobs for as long as we can. The opposition says that we do not care about the economy. The hard borders are about the economy. They are about making sure that we continue to enjoy a good stream of revenue from our iron ore industry.

It is important that we continue to keep our resources industry ticking over. But what the AHPPC is emphatic about is the gradual way we should ease restrictions. The proposition from the opposition tonight is that we should ignore that, and not accept the advice that the way to ease restrictions is to manage the risk, slowly take measures, sit back, see the response from those actions and then take more action. The AHPCC spoke emphatically about that.

On 8 May, the national cabinet met to discuss options for the easing of restrictions. That other chap who is on team WA, Prime Minister Scott Morrison, brought down a statement from the national cabinet. He basically said that we need to get Australians back to work in a COVID-safe environment and get the economy back to a more sustainable level. The national cabinet's goal is to have a sustainable COVID-19-safe Australia by July 2020.

Mr D.C. Nalder interjected.

Mr R.H. COOK: Member for Bateman, please be patient.

I understand the pain that is out there. We understand that people are doing it tough, but at the moment we are talking about July. The Roadmap to a COVIDSafe Australia is a three-step pathway for the easing of restrictions and it was endorsed by the national cabinet on 8 May. On 8 May, the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee and the national cabinet recommended that a minimum of three weeks should occur between steps to assess the impacts of changes, to track processes against agreed proceeding conditions, to determine the pace of moving through these steps and for making any further decisions. It also said that the states can do this at their own pace. That is where Western Australia has been, in the words of the member for Carine, aggressive. Let me go through what is happening in each of the states because the opposition keeps saying that Western Australia needs to be moving faster.

Mr A. Krsticevic: You follow some of the principal advice but you ignore other principal advice.

Mr R.H. COOK: No, member, we do not. There is a bunch of advice from the AHPPC that says that the states can cast their own measures in terms of that. We are all doing a three-step process; ultimately, it will probably be a four-step process. We have already taken step 2. Since 27 April, we have seen the limit for gatherings raised from two to 10, and to now to 20; cafes and restaurants have reopened for up to 20 patrons, with the four-square metre rule; we have opened up regional travel; and we have had the successful return of kids to schools in Western Australia. Almost no other state has had full enrolment, or turn up, of their schoolkids.

Let us look at the other states. Take the Australian Capital Territory, for instance. On 6 June, it will go to 20 people per venue. In the next phase, one presumes three weeks later, it will go up to 50 people. By the end of next week,

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the ACT will be up with us, and its figures are pretty much the same as ours. Let us look at South Australia. From next week, South Australia will go to 80, with 20 per room now. We already allow up to 20 per room, continuing to observe the four-square metre rule.

Mr A. Krsticevic: Is it 20 per room? If a venue has five rooms, do they get 20 each room?

Mr R.H. COOK: No, we have 20 per venue, but 20 per room. South Australia is contemplating going to 80 per room at the end of June. Western Australia is already enjoying a lot of these conditions.

Queensland will go to 50 per room at the end of June and then, potentially, up to 100 per room in July. Sometime next week, New South Wales is going to go to 50 per room; and Victoria is going to go to 20 per room. Victoria has not even caught up with us yet. Then, on 22 June, Victoria will be looking to go to 50 per room.

When opposition members say we have to do more, we have already done more than the rest of Australia, and that includes South Australia, which arguably has had better numbers than Western Australia. Western Australians are enjoying the most generous easing of restrictions throughout nearly all the country. We set the Northern Territory aside from that because it is a special case.

From that perspective, the member says we must do more. But easing restrictions is like throwing balls up into the air. We have to decide how many balls to throw up to make sure that we can catch all of them if the situation comes about that we need to pull restrictions back. The member for Darling Range referred to how heartless and evil the measures we have put in place for small business are. I would like the Member for Darling Range to imagine what it would be like if off the back of her rhetoric we gave those businesses false hope and then there were more outbreaks of the disease. We would have to go back to them and say, “We said that you could open but we now have to ask you to close down again.” No-one wants that. Look at South Korea and what happened to them. South Korea had what the Leader of the Opposition proposes—that is, not seating, but standing in a hotel environment. One superspreader went through a bar district in the city and, as a result, there was a nationwide second-wave outbreak of the disease. Please, let us not get too robust in our language without understanding that this stuff is a delicate balance between the economic and social impacts and making sure that we keep people as safe as possible. Member for Bateman, it is not about safety; it is about risk management, which is the reason we say that it is not safe yet for people to use shared equipment in gyms. We are saying that it is okay to do classes in a supervised area in gyms without using shared equipment or using minimal shared equipment. That is the reason we are saying that it is okay to sit down in a pub and have a meal and a drink, but it is not okay to continue to mingle in a pub like people would if there were no seating arrangements. This is about understanding how the disease spreads within the community.

Mrs A.K. Hayden: Minister, do you think the disease is out in the community now? Is that why we can't have these increases in numbers?

Mr R.H. COOK: No, member; I think we have the disease exactly where we want it, so we can ease the restrictions. That is the reason we have already eased the restrictions that we have. As I said, the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee says that we must ease restrictions and then wait. I know that is hard, and I know it is even harder for many of the businesses that we represent. They do not want to wait; they want to keep moving forward. But the last thing we want to do is give them the green light, only to have to again give them the red light. We need to continue to make sure that we do these things in the right way and in a manner that is as safe as possible and ensures that we lock in these gains so that we can move to a COVID-safe economy. Again, a COVID-safe economy is not a COVID-free economy; it is an economy in which we manage the disease, not try to eliminate it.

It is important that we take the opportunity to assist these businesses to maintain their livelihoods as best we can between now and when we can get people back through their front doors. That is the reason why the commonwealth government brought out JobKeeper and JobSeeker; they are playing an important role in sustaining businesses. That is the reason why we brought in our \$1.8 billion economic and health relief packages to support businesses, households, private hospitals and community groups and to boost the response by health and frontline services. It is the reason we have our \$14.4 million package to support the tourism industry and tourism jobs, with a \$10.4 million tourism recovery fund and \$4 million of tourism business survival grants. It is the reason we have passed the Western Australian Future Fund Amendment (Future Health Research and Innovation Fund) Bill to make sure that we have the resources to continue to drive the research that will ultimately find a treatment and cure. In addition, we have provided \$3 million in funding to specific health and medical research programs and associated infrastructure. We have provided a \$1.5 million support package for WA artists, developed by the Art Gallery of Western Australia's board and foundation. We have \$12 million in community sporting and recreation facilities fund grants that have been brought forward to allow projects to commence sooner for local governments and not-for-profit sport and recreation and community groups to improve local sporting facilities as part of the COVID-19 recovery plan, and a \$111.6 million investment to continue critical regional programs and projects.

Mrs Liza Harvey; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Dean Nalder; Dr David Honey; Mrs Alyssa Hayden; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Roger Cook

We have our eyes firmly on recovery, which will not only benefit the community, under the watchful eye of the Chief Health Officer, but also make sure that the economy comes out of this stage of the pandemic stronger and better.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr R.H. COOK: That is the reason the Premier appointed Sharyn O'Neill as our recovery controller, supported by the State Recovery Advisory Group. The group includes representatives from business, industry, not-for-profit organisations, UnionsWA, the public sector, local government and the community. Each state government minister will lead an industry stakeholder roundtable discussion to support the development of the state recovery plan and the impact statement. The importance of the recovery plan is to make sure that we are ready as we slowly bring the Western Australian economy out of this stage of the COVID-19 crisis. This is about making sure that we have the jobs ready for people to take up and that we have the projects ready for them to work on. I note that members are coming back into the chamber to discuss the planning reform legislation, which will be a huge shot in the arm for projects that we need to get going in Western Australia. We not only need to get economic activity going, but we also need to ensure that Western Australia has a new future and a new way of doing things so that we can come out better and stronger and look towards a brighter future as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sharyn O'Neill will be working right across government and industry to ensure that we get buy-in from all sectors of the community to ensure that we have the right combination of planning and stimulus and the right regulatory and policy frameworks that will allow us to move forward better than ever. These people understand that we have to be with team WA. These people understand that we have to work together and that if we do not do this together, we will not get through it. If we stand apart, we will not have the sort of measures in place that have made us so successful to date. If we continue to make political pointscoring rather than working together the order of the day, we will not make gains. Remember, Western Australia is a commodity-based economy. We know from literature around the world that commodity-based economies will come out of this pandemic the strongest. We are the ones that will be able to provide a bright future for Australia. We already drive the economy, and we have to make sure that the driver's seat for the economy is in Western Australia. We will not do that if we do not pull the community together and work together to make sure that as one we have the plans in place to make this happen. The level of cooperation in this chamber—and, to a lesser extent, in the other place, but definitely in this place—has been outstanding in dealing with COVID-19-related legislation. From that perspective, I invite members to reflect on what we have achieved as a chamber by working together. Some of the contributions from members tonight suggest that we have forgotten some of that capacity. We have the capacity to work together. We have the opportunities to make sure that as a state we can work together.

I commend the Prime Minister's statement of 8 May; clearly, he understands that we need to work together. Clearly, those involved in the national cabinet process understand that we need to continue to find consensus and move forward. That does not mean that we will not disagree. It does not mean that the Premier will not have the odd stand-off with other Premiers about points of difference. We do not expect members to agree with us on everything but, please, let us turn down the volume and the rhetoric from the member for Bateman and let us turn down the tone from the member for Darling Range.

Mr P. Papalia: The member for North West Central.

Mr R.H. COOK: I neglected to mention the member for North West Central. We know his usual contribution to this place, and we will not worry about that!

Let us look at how we can continue to work together to move through this. We are in phase 2. Other states would give their eyeteeth to be in phase 2. Let us see what we can do in phase 3. We are working with the Chief Health Officer at the moment to see how we can continue to open the economy. But we have to continue to open the economy in a way that is safe, or as safe as can be, while making sure that we keep an eye on the virus, and also an eye on jobs. We can strike that balance, and I think we will.

I understand that we are heading towards the end of phase 2 and that, as a result, people are getting impatient. We are now continuing to see low numbers of infection. That gives us confidence. The COVID DETECT program will hopefully give us more confidence that we are on top of this virus. As a result of our test, trace and isolate process, we will be able to continue to be confident that we can move forward and take bolder steps. As we look to phase 3, we want to ensure that Western Australia continues to lead the nation in keeping Western Australians as safe as possible, and also that we put the state on a trajectory to increase our prosperity and to continue to create jobs. I invite the opposition to join us in working on that consensus, and in making sure that Western Australia is the most successful state in managing the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to be the most successful state as we move forward.

That is pretty much all I have to say. However, I will say one last thing. I am sorry that I denied the Treasurer an opportunity to speak tonight. I know that he was busting his gut to get in here to make his contribution.

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 27 May 2020]

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Mrs Liza Harvey; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Mr Vincent Catania; Mr Dean Nalder; Dr David Honey; Mrs Alyssa Hayden; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Roger Cook

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.