

CORONAVIRUS — INTERSTATE BORDER RESTRICTIONS

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

I refer to the government's decision to keep WA's border with the east closed as it continues to successfully contain the spread of COVID-19. Can the Premier outline to the house the health advice as to why the state border needs to remain closed and what will need to happen before consideration can be given to reopening interstate travel?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I thank the member for Forrestfield for the question. Throughout the pandemic over the last three months, we have been guided by the advice of Western Australia's Chief Health Officer, Dr Andrew Robertson, and that has not changed. I meet or speak with Dr Robertson every single day, as does the Minister for Health. The health advice that we have received has been outstanding, and as a consequence the state has been a beneficiary, with very low levels of infection. The advice from the Chief Health Officer—he has been very aware of the impact on things across the state—has been based on long historical experience of dealing with pandemics around the world, with historic examples going back many years.

As I said, as a state and as a people, we have been highly effective in controlling the COVID-19 outbreak in Western Australia. The border arrangements have not only reduced the number of cases of COVID-19 coming from interstate, but they have also helped drive down the rate of the spread of the virus in Western Australia. We have three active cases in Western Australia, all directly related to travellers to the state. In other states—in particular, New South Wales and Victoria—we are seeing continued COVID-19 outbreaks. There have been about 83 new reported cases in those states in the last seven days. Although we have had very few, if not any, in the last week, New South Wales and Victoria have identified 83 new cases and have obviously seen various areas of community spread. I was advised today that one case was a traveller from Melbourne to Sydney.

We are very keen to ensure that we do not allow the spread of the virus, both from interstate and overseas, into Western Australia. We have accepted the advice of Dr Andy Robertson during this pandemic. His advice was published yesterday. That advice was very clear: the interstate border is an important weapon in Western Australia's arsenal to protect our people from potential infection from New South Wales and Victoria. Other states have done something similar, particularly Queensland, South Australia, the Northern Territory and Tasmania. I think it has been relatively effective in all those jurisdictions as well, certainly in the case of South Australia and the Northern Territory. The western two-thirds of Australia have had better outcomes than other parts of the country.

Four days ago, we announced a range of relaxation measures, which were more generous and comprehensive than what other states had put in place, and we also started lifting our internal borders within Western Australia. We have not lifted all of them as yet, even though I know it is difficult for many people across the regions. When we have the confidence that it is the time to do it, that is when we will do it. I do not think that will be too far away. Just a moment ago, I read the advice of the Chief Health Officer. I know that many people, like the opposition leader, have been calling for the lifting of the interstate border. We are not going to do that at this point. When we think the time is right and there are low levels of spread or no community spread in the eastern states, that is the time to lift the interstate border restrictions, and we will not be doing it before then.