

PRESS CONFERENCE - AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENT HOUSE*TRANSCRIPT**24 Mar 2020**Prime Minister**E&OE*

PRIME MINISTER: Good evening, everyone. I said in the Parliament that 2020, for most Australians, was going to be their toughest year and what we have seen unfold just this week has been demonstrating just that. Australians who have lost their jobs, lost hours of work. Businesses that have been forced to close their businesses. These are heartbreaking events in our nation's history and story. And I want to assure all Australians that the National Cabinet has been meeting, as the federal cabinet has been meeting, state governments also and we've considered the many, many difficult issues we are having to address. We are not unconscious of the real impacts that these measures are having on the daily lives of Australians and so we will continue to do everything we can, both as a federal government and as state and territory governments around the country to do all we can to support our people through what is going to be an incredibly difficult time. The queues that we saw outside Centrelink, the challenges and frustrations people have had in gaining access is a sheer function of the extraordinary and overwhelming demand and we will work night and day to ensure that we can get more capacity into these systems. What this reflects is the size of the need and the size of that need is demonstrated by the impacts of what the coronavirus and the many things that governments are having to do to limit its health impacts across the country and to ensure that we can protect the lives of Australians.

But our goal is to get through this together and by following commonsense rules and doing the right thing, that's how we slow the spread of this virus, and that's how we save lives. It also means that not all states, I want to stress, are in the same position. Some states, particularly in New South Wales and Victoria, are far more advanced on the progression of this virus than other states and territories. But tonight, despite the variations that do exist, there is a strong will for states and territories to seek to move together, wherever they possibly can, to ensure a consistency of application of the various rules and arrangements that we're putting in place across the country.

Tonight, we agreed to extend the restrictions that were announced on Sunday night, but to do so in a manner that was consistent with the types of measures that we announced on Sunday night. What I mean by that is there was an initial list of activities that largely went to the issues of social gatherings, particularly

in enclosed spaces, that was being done to restrict the amount of contact between people outside activities such as going to work and things of that nature. And so tonight we worked to complete that list of those types of activities that we believe were appropriate at this time to slow the spread of the virus, to ensure that we are covering all the necessary activities and business functions inside premises that should be considered at this time. And so from midnight tomorrow night all of these following activities, and they include some that I've already announced from earlier, will no longer be taking place.

Cafes I've already said but that but the takeaway that will continue. So no change to the issues around cafes. Food courts in shopping centres will not be allowed to continue. But getting takeaway from those food outlets in those shopping centres, that can continue because takeaway is able to be done. In the retail space, auction houses, gatherings together in auction rooms, that can no longer continue. Real estate auctions and open house inspections - in particular, open house inspections - that cannot continue. Outdoor and indoor markets, excluding food markets like Flemington and things like that, because that is essential to ensuring the food supply right across the country, they will be addressed specifically by states and territories in each of their jurisdictions. States and territories have very different arrangements in terms of the types of markets they have, and they'll be making those decisions specific to their states and territories.

But the point and the principle is very clear - large gatherings brought together by particular organised events are things that we are seeking to avoid and that's the principle the states and territories will be seeking to follow.

In terms of personal services where there is a lot of contact, obviously, between those providing that service in a premise and the patrons, the following now won't be able to continue: beauty therapy, tanning, waxing, nail salons and tattoo parlours and the same for spa and massage parlours. That excludes health-related services in those areas, physiotherapists, things of that nature, health-related and allied health services. Hairdressers and barber shops will continue to be able to provide those services but it is very important that they strictly manage the social distancing and limitations of the number of people in their premise. So that's four square meters per person. And on top of that, to restrict the amount of time a patron is in the premises to no more than 30 minutes and preferably less. Cinemas, nightclubs, casinos, gaming or gambling venues, all of these were included in the announcement on Sunday, as were adult entertainment venues, concert venues, theatres, arenas, auditoriums, stadiums. They were all included in what we said on Sunday evening. Amusement parks and arcades are now included. Play centres and both indoor and outdoor are also now included. Community and recreation centres, health clubs, fitness centres, yoga, barre - I hope I've pronounced that correctly, I might need some help with that. I'm not quite sure what that is, to be honest, but B-A-R-R-E for those who are looking for the specific definition. And spin facilities, saunas, bathhouses, wellness centres. Boot camps and personal

training is limited to a maximum of 10 people and the social distancing arrangements must be strictly enforced. Social sporting based activities, swimming pools. Now, I'll come back to the social and sporting based activities in a second to explain what we mean by that. That's large groups of people gathering together to play soccer in a community oval and things of that nature.

You can see what we're trying to do. We're trying to limit the gathering of people in large numbers that can relate to the transmitting of the virus through those social interactions which are not considered necessary.

Galleries, museums, national institutions, historic sites, libraries, community centres, youth centres, local government, non-essential facilities, libraries and swimming pools, community facilities such as community halls, clubs, RSLs, PCYCs, I mean, many of those are already included in what I announced on Sunday night and of course places of worship. On places of worship and other similar type venues, there has been a very difficult decision we've had to make tonight in relation to weddings and in relation to funerals. Now, weddings can continue to be conducted where it is just the couple, the celebrant and the witnesses. That's no more than five people. And the four square metre rule has to be observed within the venue in which that's taking place. But large gatherings for weddings, sadly, won't be possible under these new arrangements. And sadly also - and I know this will be very difficult - funerals to no more than 10 persons observing the rules around the four square metre rule and social distancing practices. Particularly on these types of activities, this is not an easy decision. Where we've already found, and Dr Murphy can speak to this, some of the events that have been some of the major transmitting events, it has been exactly these types of events, particularly weddings. And that is why, regretfully, we have to be able to put these arrangements in place.

Now, these are the rules and arrangements that are applied when it comes to the strict enforcement of these arrangements and that will come in from midnight tomorrow night and states and territories will be moving tomorrow to put those arrangements in place. Now, there are some also very important further rules that we want people to follow, just like the 1.5 metre rule, just like washing your hands and coughing into your elbow and doing those straightforward things. And that is to stay at home unless it's absolutely necessary that you go out. Going out for the basics, going out for exercise, perhaps with your partner or family members, provided it's a small group. That's fine, but going outside and going out and participating more broadly in the community, unless you're shopping for basics or there are medical needs or you're providing care or support to another individual in another place, going to work and where you cannot work from home. So that is encouraged, strongly encouraged, to work from home where you can do that. Visits to your premises, to your house, to your residence, should be kept to a minimum and with very small numbers of guests. We don't want to be overly specific about that. We want Australians to exercise their common sense. So that means barbecues of

lots of friends or even family, extended family coming together to celebrate one year old birthday parties and all these sorts of things, we can't do those things now.

These will be significant sacrifices, I know. We've all been to those events as extended families and gatherings and gathering together in that way, even around the large family table in the family home when all the siblings get together and bring the kids, these are not things we can do, now. All of these things present risks and they obviously present them to the elderly members of our families as well, who we need to protect.

House parties where someone wants to now have the social events, not at clubs and venues like that, but to organise a party at someone's home, it's, the states and territories will particularly be looking at that one and be considering whether they will put specific measures in place that could lead to that being an offence for those who've organised those types of events.

Outdoors, do not congregate together in groups. Now, the medical experts panel have made suggestions about how that can be managed. It's very difficult to put a number on it. But the point about it is this - if you're gathering together in a group, say, 10 people together outside in a group, that's not Ok. We've got to move people on. It's not a hard and fast rule. I say it only for illustrative purposes. The point is that you should only be going outside of your home to go to those essential things that I've talked about, not to go out and congregate together in groups. We need you to stop doing that. That is not going to help. If we do all of these things then we are going to be able to put greater pressure on slowing the rate of the spread of this virus, which particularly in New South Wales and Victoria has been growing at a much more rapid rate than other places and the numbers in Queensland have been similarly affected.

Now, on schools, we had another important discussion, the medical expert advice on schools has not changed. It is safe to send your children to school. Tomorrow, I'll be meeting - and there have been discussions today between the Education Minister, Dan Tehan, and the education national unions- and I'll be meeting with them tomorrow to discuss a set of arrangements that we would like to proceed with that, importantly, keep schools open. That also will protect those teachers and other staff who are working in schools and to work through those issues to ensure we can put acceptable arrangements in place to ensure that children get taught. I said this the other day. This is incredibly important. It's going to be a tough year in 2020 and one of the things I don't want to have yielded up is a year of a child's education, which is so important. We need to work so hard together to try and ensure that those kids get that education and that is not lost to this virus. And so I look forward to meeting with the Australian Education Union tomorrow and to have that conversation and to see how we can come together and agree how we can continue to deliver that while doing that safely for those who work in schools. And of course, for the kids themselves, as we know, the medical advice is that kids can safely go to

schools. Under the arrangements we've already put in place we've seen the number of students attending schools reduce significantly, and that actually assists in observing the other issues around social distancing that are applying more broadly across the community. So we can do this. We can work this out. And so that would mean ensuring that schools in those states that haven't already ended the term, which is only in Victoria, that we would be able to continue to keep those schools open up to the end of the term. But I would anticipate that for several days prior to the end of the term, there will need to be some pupil free days while the teachers and the school staff work on the projects they've already been pursuing on extending distance learning. And so that will be an important job for those educators to be doing as we go into the term break. Schools, we agree, across the country would need to reopen on the other side of the term break because it won't be a holiday. It won't be a school holiday, given the arrangements I've just outlined to you. They will reconvene after the term break and there will be a mixture of both distance learning and where parents choose to keep their children at home, then there will be the learning that is there for them to undertake, and the parents would be needing to take responsibility for ensuring that their children are engaged in that. For all those workers who need to send their children to school, that's why the school needs to remain open.

Now, if you ask me who is an essential worker? Someone who has a job. Everyone who has a job in this economy is an essential worker. Every single job that is being done in our economy with these severe restrictions that is taking place is essential. It can be essential in a service, whether it's a nurse or a doctor or a school teacher or a public servant who is working tonight to ensure that we can get even greater capacity in our Centrelink offices, working till 8 o'clock under the new arrangements, in the call centres, these are all essential jobs. People who are stacking shelves, that's essential. People earning money in their family when another member of their family may have lost their job and can no longer earn, that's an essential job. Jobs are essential and every one who has one needs to be able to keep doing their job. And that means they will need to continue to be able to send their children to school for an education, for an education at that school. So I look forward to having those discussions tomorrow and I'm sure there will be a common sense of purpose in ensuring that we can meet these objectives and keep the nation functioning and providing the necessary education for children, the protection that is necessary for staff and to keep Australia running.

Now, before I go to Professor Murphy, there are one or two other things I have to mention. The National Security Committee Taskforce that works on the coronavirus also met this afternoon, this evening. And we have previously had a 'do not travel' warning on Smart Traveller in terms of all overseas travel. That will turn into a ban using the biosecurity powers that were afforded to us by the Governor-General through the Minister for Health. Now, the numbers of Australians going overseas has reduced dramatically and there will be exceptions to these rules which will be set out in the directive that will be

provided. But this would include people involved in aid work in the Pacific and the support that we're providing. It may involve compassionate travel and essential travel for employment, things of that nature, but the number of people and the number who are coming, sorry, who are leaving Australia now is very, very low. But still, it strikes me on those numbers that there are people defying that advice and still looking to go overseas on leisure travel. They can't do it because when they come home, that's when they put Australians at risk. I had hoped that would have been fully complied with and I've got to say, Australians have been pretty good about it. But we need to put that arrangement in place.

Also, we're putting in place arrangements that will make it an offence and we'll be able to seize at the border those who've engaged in profiteering by bringing together and making large purposes of various supplies in Australia and seeking to export them overseas. Now, it doesn't relate to normal commercial legal activities, but we have been able to seize at the border - and the Minister for Home Affairs can speak more to this - quantities of materials that were seeking to be sent overseas and that is not helping Australia. That is not consistent with doing the right thing. And there'll be penalties in enforcement and we'll be able to seize those, that equipment and that can include medical supplies and include personal protective equipment and that will be seized and redeployed to it's best use here in Australia.

So with those changes, there was still a lot more that we needed to deal with tonight, but we knew we needed to report tonight and the National Cabinet will meet again tomorrow evening at the same time to work through a series of other issues, which includes a further consider of possible measures down the track. So we're well-prepared should we have to move to that stage, and the thresholds that would be necessary to move to those other arrangements. We'll also consider the issue of leases that I've flagged earlier, that will be considered and there'll be other matters that have been raised by Premiers and Chief Ministers that we'll address as we go forward as well. So I apologise for the length. It's been a busy night and hopefully that's been very clear. But Dr. Murphy?

PROFESSOR BRENDAN MURPHY, CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER: Thanks, Prime Minister. I'll be brief. We are very worried about the rate of rise in the number of cases of coronavirus in Australia, particularly over the last few days. It is a very, very steep growth and it's very concerning. Still, a significant proportion of those new cases are returned travellers or contacts of returned travellers and before I talk a bit about social distancing, I want to emphasise again that we are really serious now about a return traveller. You leave the airport, you go home and stay there for 14 days and the states and territories will be checking on you. We will not tolerate anybody putting the community at risk as a return traveller. People coming back from some countries, and you know which ones they are, have a high risk now of carrying the coronavirus and they are the people who've largely led to the spread of the virus in our community over recent weeks. So return travellers, please stay at home. Don't go anywhere on

the way from the airport or the cruise ship or wherever you're from. We've been materially hit by people from a cruise ship in the last few days as well. So that is so important. And the other important thing is that if you're identified as a contact of a case and you're told that by the state and territory public health official and you're told to isolate for 14 days, you must isolate. You must not go to the chemist when you've been told you've got the disease. Some people have been doing things like being told they're a positive case and going into the chemist or the supermarket on the way home. If you're isolating because you're a positive case or you're isolating because you're a contact, you go home and you isolate and you obey those rules. That is a really, really important part of the control.

Now, the other part of the control is this social distancing. And that relates to the fact that we do have some community transmission cases that aren't clearly contacts that have appeared in small pockets, particularly in New South Wales, in Sydney, but tiny pockets in other states. That's why we introduced those very restrictive measures from yesterday that were announced on Sunday night. But because of the great rise in cases, we felt it was very important to recommend that those restrictive measures be well articulated and made clear and to some extent tightened, because we have to get people to take this seriously. We have to change the way we interact as human beings in our society for quite a long time. This virus will be with us for some time. We have to all think about avoiding any unnecessary interactions where you are close to someone and could place them at risk. These measures are really draconian. We know that. But if we are going to control community transmission, we have to stop the capacity of this virus from spreading from person to person. And I have said many times, it is a long haul and that's why we are keen to keep society functioning but keep society safe. Thank you, Prime Minister.

PRIME MINISTER: Thank you. I just want to be very clear about something I said before - shopping centres remain open. I was referring to the food courts in the shopping centres. Shopping centres, retail premises in shopping centres, they will remain open unless they're the ones that I've mentioned about beauty therapy, tanning, waxing, etc. Those premises, because they're personal services premises, they will obviously not be able to remain open. So I want to be very clear. The shopping centres remain open. In each of the retail premises, there will need to be displayed, to assist patrons, how many people can be inside that enclosed area in that shop at any one time. That's just observing the four square metre rule, I would hope many retail premises were already doing that. I want to be very clear - shopping centres remain open. There's no need to rush out to shopping centres or the food stores or any of these. They will continue to remain open and you should go and get things as you need them. Thank you. Phil?

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, my question, you are now strongly advising people to stay in their homes unless, you know, the need for exercise or going out for essential reasons. At the same time, the shopping centres are open. Is now just inevitable we're going to move to closing down retail as well?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, hopefully this is not necessary, Phil. Hopefully that putting in place the unnecessary gatherings of people and also within our own homes and our residences by not having those gatherings in our homes of lots of people, dinner parties with 10 friends and all these sorts of things. No, we can't do them any longer. If we do all the things that Dr. Murphy has outlined and these other quite strict measures we've put in place about other areas of social gathering and not having that community game of football down on the lawn on a Sunday afternoon in the park and things like this, stopping all those things we believe will have a really significant impact, we would hope, on the spread of the virus. But it is important for people to go to the shop. It is important to go to the shopping centre. It is important that they get access to these normal services. It's important for them because they need it. It's also important for our economy that it continues to operate and function as much as possible. So I don't leap to that conclusion, Phil. What we will do is put these measures in place and should the information change and the advice change, then we should contemplate at that time. But I do note in a lot of the commentary in both in the public and others, that there seems to be a great wish to go to that point. Well, be careful what you wish for on something like that. Be very careful because that will need to be sustained for a very long time. And that could have a very significant and even more onerous impact on life in Australia and we should seek to try and avoid that where it is possible. But if it is necessary for health reasons, ultimately, well those decisions will be taken the time. Andrew?

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, there does seem to be something really incongruous about the fact that life as we know it should stop, that we should not be going out in groups, not be playing football in the parks, not be going to the shops unless absolutely vital. And yet you're encouraging kids to go to school. My question to you, Professor Murphy, aren't schools now human petri dishes for a virus? What would you do if there is an outbreak at a school? Does it close down or just keep going to get through the children's population? And Prime Minister, separately, are you encouraging schools that have closed their doors to students to reopen after the break, after the holiday break?

PRIME MINISTER: I'll make two points and I'll ask Dr. Murphy to speak on the other matter. I think it's very important, Andrew, that media don't use that sort of alarmist language. I don't think it helps. I would encourage more modest language on these sorts of issues, particularly based on the medical advice that you've heard from us day after day on this issue. So I would encourage a more measured way of talking about these issues, because I think that can cause unnecessary alarm amongst parents. Secondly, you'd have to remind me of the question now, of the second question.

JOURNALIST: Will you be encouraging...

PRIME MINISTER: Oh, on individual schools, yes. I believe, and the position of the National Cabinet, is that schools should remain open and they can provide distance learning for those parents that wish their children to remain at home. But importantly, for those parents who have jobs who need to send their children to school for their learning because they can't stay at home with them because they need to be at work. These are nurses. They're doctors, they're people who are working at Centrelink, people doing very important jobs. I mean, even just in the last few days, we have had impacts on our workforce in some of those areas in the public service, which is compromising our ability to do those things. Now, we're responding to it. But what we don't need is arrangements that we put in place which compromised the society's ability to function and to deliver important services, whether that's aged care, whether it's education, whether it's driving a tram or providing public transport. We need to keep Australia running, consistent with the health advice that's been provided. And on the health advice, I'd provide you to Dr. Murphy.

PROFESSOR BRENDAN MURPHY, CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER: Thanks, Prime Minister. So I think, as I said on Sunday night, Andrew, there is no evidence that we have major transmission amongst school children. We don't know whether that might occur. We do know that children do not, in general, get symptomatic disease. So I think that analogy is inappropriate. Of course, if there were an outbreak in a school, you would close the school until you'd sorted out who are the direct contacts and you would quarantine all of those contacts. And of course, we need to do measures to protect vulnerable teachers, because older teachers with chronic disease shouldn't be in schools. And that's part of the discussion the Prime Minister's going to have with the education unions. We've got to protect any vulnerable people in our community. We do not see children, fit, healthy children, as vulnerable people with this virus and schools can do a lot of things to make them a safe place to be with good hygiene, they are already adapting in many ways with reduced classrooms because some parents are choosing to keep their children at home. And we think a well-supervised, well-structured classroom is probably a safer place than many children roaming the community, which they would probably do if they weren't at school.

JOURNALIST: In terms of the offences that you were mentioning for those gatherings, what could they... are the states that they indicate a real willingness to go ahead? And do we have the Police resources for something like that to be really adequately policed and monitored and executed?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, there are two parts to the enforcement, which is a matter for the states and territories, and there'll be opportunities, I'm sure, for media to put those questions to the States and Territories and the Premiers as they'll be marshalling those resources and deploying them as part of their responsibilities. There is the actual legal position itself, which means that if something has happened, there'll be the opportunity to follow that up. But in

terms of house parties and gatherings like that, well, it is not uncommon for police to be turning up at noisy parties in the suburbs. That's a fairly common Saturday night. Hopefully there'll be far less reason for them to do that, given the strong message that we've sent about those types of gatherings and they can - it's not just at night either, by the way. It's during the course of the day, just to be really clear about that. And so in taking these decisions, states and territories are very aware of their responsibilities of how they need to take actions to enforce these measures. So I'll refer you to them about how they will achieve that. But they haven't taken these decisions - and I want to stress, these are decisions that are being taken by the State and Territory Premiers and Chief Ministers with myself as the Prime Minister who convenes the National Cabinet, these are not decisions being made by the Federal Cabinet and instructed to the States and Territories. That's not how the National Cabinet works. These are decisions being taken together, heads of governments, to form these views. And in these areas in particular, it is the states and territories that have the lead and the primacy and so they are coming together and setting these in place. Brett and then over the back.

JOURNALIST: Just to clarify when the travel ban kicks in, is that immediate or is it midnight tomorrow?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, people shouldn't be doing it right now. That's the advice. So no one should be getting on a plane and going overseas. We've been making that point for some time. The direction is being worked on overnight and as soon as that direction is signed off by the Health Minister, it will come into force then and that will happen tomorrow.

JOURNALIST: Just a second question, to be frank, some of the most distressing interviews I've done in a while today with people at Centrelink who were trying all night with children who aren't in school. They've lost their jobs. They don't know how they're going to pay the rent, in tears in the gutter, trying to use the website, the phone system crashed. They feel as though when they needed the Government most, the Government wasn't there for them. Are you sorry about that and what is the Government going to do to make sure that that capacity is there for those Australians?

PRIME MINISTER: We are deeply sorry about this. I mean, we've gone from 6,000 to 50,000 to 150,000 all in the space of, a matter of, day. And tonight, they're working to boost it again. I would say to Australians, yes, we are terribly sorry, but at the same time, we are asking Australians, even in these most difficult of circumstances, to be patient. Everyone is doing their best. What we're dealing with is unprecedented. No system is built to deal with the circumstances and events that we are now facing as a nation. And I would urge people as difficult as it is, work with us. We are working to get this up as high and as far as we can. But we have had a multiple, many, many, many times over what is normally expected from this system. And it was already upgraded and it's been upgraded again and it will be upgraded again. Opening hours for the call centres have been extended, no resource is being spared to ensure that we

can get these systems in place. But the support is there. It will get to you. And it is dated from when you've expressed that intent. And that's all registered and that's taken care of. So even if it takes a few more days to get the arrangements sorted out, it will go back to the time from when you needed it. And we'll work those, through those issues together and it deeply distresses me as I know it does the Ministers and the Secretary of the Department and all the people who are working there trying to get this as good as they possibly can because they want to get that support to Australians. I want to get that support to Australians. And we're going to do our very best to get there.

JOURNALIST: PM on Sunday the National Cabinet received advice from 22 health experts, and lawyers, a bunch of other, across the Group of Eight universities. The Chief Medical Officer had commissioned. That advice was to launch an immediate and hard line lockdown that would be very costly, but would flatten the curve immediately and then get Australia out of an economic recession in a quicker fashion. Why was that advice dismissed, and what was the discussion of that advice?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, that was not recommended.

DR MURPHY: That, there was a group of university academics who convened and provided a diverse range of opinions. It certainly wasn't a unanimous view. There were-

JOURNALIST: It was a majority.

DR MURPHY: Yes- And that was not necessarily- they were selected on the basis of their interests in this area. And that that opinion, like the opinion of many external experts, was considered by the very large and complex process that we undertook with the Communicable Disease Network of Australia, which is the primary expert advisory group, and the AHPPC with another half a dozen academic experts in that, and that that position was very seriously considered. But as I said then, and I have said tonight, any measures we place, we believe need to be for the long haul. The idea that you can put measures in place for four weeks and suddenly stop them and the virus will be gone is not credible. So we are very keen to put as restrictive measures in place without completely destroying life as we know it. If Australians all do the right thing with these measures and do exactly what the Prime Minister has said and behave completely differently and practise distancing at every point that will achieve the outcomes that we want and we haven't even seen yet what the early implementation of our measures will be. But make no mistake that if there is widespread community transmission, we may have to introduce some harder measures.

PRIME MINISTER: And the National Cabinet acts and receives the advice of the medical expert panel, which is not the group you're referring to. That is the medical expert panel, which Dr Murphy convenes. And their collective consensus view is what is put to the National Cabinet.

Now I promised here earlier, then we're over there, and then we're up the back and then Michelle. Yep. And then we'll go around for one, maybe one more.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, many Australians watching at home would think that there is an inherent mixed message that 10 people can go to a boot camp, but you're saying only 5 people can go to a wedding. How do you explain that contradiction? And there are calls from Tony Abbott, amongst many others, saying that it is inevitable that we have to go to a shut down, is it not better to do it now, it is very conflicting rules. It's very complicated rules for Australians to get across?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, no I don't think it's that complicated to understand that only the direct participants in a wedding, in an enclosed venue, that would be a necessary restriction. I think that's fairly straightforward. I think people can follow that quite, quite plainly.

What we're saying is people shouldn't group together when they're outdoors. Now, what we're talking about of people up to 10 for a training, that is a business, that is someone's livelihood. And you're saying that I should turn their livelihood off and I'm not going to do that lightly. And if it's not believed to be necessary based on the medical expert advice, I'm not going to be cavalier about people's jobs and their businesses. Where possible the National Cabinet together is going to try and keep Australia functioning in a way that continues to support jobs and activity in our economy, which is not going to compromise the health advice that we're receiving. And so, no, I don't think we should rush to that sort of scenario. I think you could rush to failure in that sort of scenario. You could rush to causing great and unnecessary harm because understand this, this country is not dealing with one crisis. We're dealing with two crises. We're dealing with a health crisis that has caused an economic crisis. And I am very concerned about the economic crisis that could also take a great toll on people's lives, not just their livelihoods, the stresses that that will put on families. The things that can happen when families are under stress. I'm as concerned about those outcomes as I am about the health outcomes of managing the outbreak of the coronavirus. And it is a delicate task for the National Cabinet to balance those two. Lives are at risk in both cases. And so the National Cabinet won't just rush on the sense of an opinion of inevitability. We will calmly consider the medical advice that is put to us and weigh those things up and make sensible decisions as leaders. I will not be cavalier about it, and neither will other Premiers and Chief Ministers.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, Michaelia Cash has announced mutual obligations for welfare will be suspended for just one week while the website gets back up. You've outlined a very wide range of businesses that are going to be shut down. Can you explain how that's sustainable to still require mutual obligation after that week? And how will it work with jobseekers being required to make job applications with so much of the economy off line?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, if those arrangements needed to be extended, then they will. I mean, we are working in a very flexible environment and we're in a position to take further decisions. What we also want to encourage people to do, is right now, I'm looking to hire 5,000 people, 5,000 people to ensure that we can get the support into our social services system so people can get the benefits and we can upgrade the systems and we can roll that out. There are other places in retail shops, in supermarkets and places like this. There's logistics arrangements that need to be done. In manufacturing, we're producing masks and sanitizer and things like this, important services. We need people to go and work in those jobs and we're going to encourage people to do just that. But we will be very sensitive on the mutual obligation issue. It's a matter that is regularly discussed by Cabinet Ministers and we will seek to ensure that it has worked in a compassionate way for people in those circumstances.

Yes, sorry, thank you, a question up the back?

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister on house parties...

PRIME MINISTER: Yep.

JOURNALIST: The social distancing measures have been in place for a while now. As sad as it probably is to everyone in this room, it is pretty clear that not every Australian is watching or reading the news. What are you going to do so that all of these changes that are happening almost day by day now is actually explained to Australians in a way that they will understand and receive it? Minister Hunt mentioned today that text messaging would start, is that happening? When is that happening? How are you going to ensure that even though individually these things might be easy to explain, en masse this is a lot for the public to take in and they are clearly not getting it?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, we all have a job to do in that, you included, the media included. And our public information campaign continues to grade up every single day. It's on bus shelters. People are still catching buses and walking down the street. It's on social media. The official messages that are being put out need to be shared amongst your friends and that will continue, the public advertising, whether it's on television or radio or the many other means of communication, it is all being deployed and it is all being increased. The text messaging, yes, that will be coming very, very soon. Very soon. And we'll be using all of those devices to get that message out. But I think it's pretty clear that most people, if not every person in this country, would know that the coronavirus is having an impact on our country and on the lives of Australians. I mean, it's hard to avoid when you look at the Centrelink queues and not understand that something very serious is going on. So I would encourage Australians to seek out that information from the trusted sources. We've got time, I think, for one more. Phil? Oh, sorry, Michelle hasn't had one, then we'll finish with Phil.

JOURNALIST: Could I take you to the question of border. There's a lot of credible...

PRIME MINISTER: Did you say border or order?

JOURNALIST: Border, people coming in. There's quite a lot of credible anecdotal evidence that the checks there, although people are being given material, are not very stringent in some cases. Are you putting any more resources and effort into that, given that the people coming in now must be very high risk?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I wouldn't make the second assumption about high risk. That's not the advice we've had. In some cases there are high risk groups that are coming through and they are identified by the Australian Border Force in terms of how they manage those arrivals. All those who are arriving, and the numbers arriving are falling each day, all of them are required to go into self isolation by public health order at a state level. They're required to do it. It's the law and that's where they need to go and that's where they need to transfer to immediately, not to go via the shops, not to pop in and see a friend on the way home and not to go and go for a wander around the park. You go straight home and you self isolate for 14 days. That is the law and that is the major protection that we have and that applies to everybody, every Australian returning citizen or resident. And , yes, more resources are being put in, Michelle. Phil?

JOURNALIST: PM, hundreds of thousands of people have lost their jobs and small business operators who don't know how they're going to pay rent. What progress, if any, has been made tonight on trying to ease people's rent bill? Waive them, lift land taxes and whatever?

PRIME MINISTER: Sure. A lot of progress has been made over the course of today and over the course of this week, we'll be looking to hopefully finalise some measures. This is obviously a complicated issue because you've got a tenant, you've got a landlord, you've got creditors and all of those issues and you need to solve for the entire chain that's there. The states, working together with the Treasurer, have done some excellent work today and there's more work to be done on that. It will be considered tomorrow night at the National Cabinet. And as a first pass, talk to work through that issue and it will be considered again. But it does involve both the Commonwealth and the States working together. The States have the legislative authority when it comes to tenancies, both commercial and residential and the Commonwealth has other incentives and levers that it can pull to support and enable that chain of businesses and individuals who are caught up in that process where people are under rental stress. Of course, rental assistance also goes to those who have found themselves out of work and on the jobseeker payment. That's one of the many other payments they can get access to, like family tax benefits and other payments that can help them in those circumstances. But rent payments, how much people are paying on their energy bills, is another area that we're working with the energy companies and we've already seen some concessions on that, which we welcome. On top of that, it's mortgage relief, which you've seen the banks already move on and I think that's another important area. And the work that has been done by the Treasurer with the banks and in that area in

particular, both whether it's for small businesses or others, I think is really good work to try and reduce the pressures that otherwise are falling on people at this incredibly difficult time. We spend every minute of every day seeking to identify every possible burden or harm that is falling to people in these difficult circumstances and to ensure that we can do something, working with the states, to provide some remedy to that. But equally, the same time is being spent on ensuring that we get respirators and that we get personal protective equipment manufactured, that we have enough hand sanitizer. I mean, we currently have I - and I'll end on this - we have one of the highest testing rates in the world. One of the highest testing rates in the world now. The last number I had before coming in here and going to the National Cabinet early this evening was 147,000 tests and we've been able to secure supply of hundreds of thousands of more tests into Australia. Testing is critical to how we manage the coronavirus and its impact, as is the contact tracing. And we're doing a lot of effective work there about how digital methods can be also used to assist in identifying contacts and to be able to shut those issues down as was practised in Singapore. And so those delivery methods are also being looked at by the Commonwealth and we're making a lot of progress there. But to fight this fight, there are so many tools that we have to use. But the people we need most are Australians listening, being patient, carefully understanding the things we're asking of them. We know it is a massive change to our lives, but if we do it and we do it consistently and we do it patiently and understandingly, then we will get through this. Thank you very much.

PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA
The Hon Scott Morrison MP