

Treasurer says end of Covid cash nigh

JAMES MORROW
FEDERAL POLITICAL EDITOR

THE federal Government is preparing to turn off the taps on Covid-19 disaster relief payments as the economy begins its transition back to normal.

On Wednesday, Treasurer Josh Frydenberg (pictured) will announce that the temporary payments will begin to taper off once a state or territory hits the milestone of double vaccinations for 70 per cent of its over-16 population.

Individuals will at that point have to reapply each week that a Commonwealth "hotspot" definition remains in place to prove that they are eligible to keep receiving the payment.

Once a jurisdiction that is also considered a "hotspot" hits the 80 per cent milestone, the payment will be tapered down over two weeks.

In the first week after their state hits 80 per cent, workers will receive a flat \$450 if they have lost more than eight hours work. In the second week of the tapering, the payment will drop to \$320 for those who have lost more than eight hours work.

Those on income support will receive \$100 the first week and nothing the second.

The move will bring to an end a program that has paid out around \$9.25 billion to more than two million individuals across the country.

The overwhelming bulk of those funds, amounting to \$6.26 billion, flowed to over one million residents of NSW who had their income cut by the ongoing Delta outbreak.

"The Morrison government has provided more than \$13 billion in direct business and household support in response to the Delta outbreak alone," Mr Frydenberg said.

"As restrictions ease, the economy is well positioned to bounce back. Today's announcement about the winding down of the Covid disaster payment will provide businesses and households with the certainty they need to plan for the future."



Gladys' go-slow plan has

Dragging the chain on state in pain

JANET FIFE-YEOMANS,
LACHLAN LEEMING, KAITLYN
HUDSON O'FARRELL

THE state's road map out of the pandemic has been slammed as a moving at a snail's pace with businesses and the tourist-starved regions left confused and angry.

Travel to regional NSW has been pushed back from having 70 per cent of the population double-vaxxed to the 80 per cent threshold while brides have been left in tears with a cap on wedding numbers to just 50 participants until the 80 per cent vaccination rate is hit.

Group bookings for Melbourne Cup lunches and early Christmas parties have been cancelled because of the continuing cap on 20 people per group dining together.

Small Business Australia executive director Bill Lang slammed the "glacial movement to opening up".

"Our political leaders need to understand that business owners and their staff cannot continue to wait," he said.

"Many have been unable to trade for 19 months.

"Small Business Australia is urging governments to allow fully vaccinated businesses to trade with those who are fully vaccinated. If it is safe for them to do so at 80

per cent, then why is it unsafe for them to trade with each other now?"

The beleaguered hospitality sector was also continuing to feel the brunt of the slow approach to normality with the Australian Hotels Association's John Green highlighting the crippling effect the 25 per cent indoor capacity limits at 70 and 80 per cent would have on smaller venues.

The cap on 20 people per group dining in has already had a "massive impact" with cancellations, Mr Green, NSW Director of Liquor and Policing, said.

"Venues were taking group bookings for Melbourne Cup lunches, early corporate Christmas celebrations, and many have been scrapped." Indoor hospitality now has to wait until December 1 to have 50 per cent capacity, he said.

The comments came as Ms Berejiklian yesterday defended her road map, while still labelling some elements as being "conservative".

"We've made decisions based on what is safe for our citizens, and we're happy to lead the way," she told the ABC yesterday.

That was cold comfort for Navarro venues senior managing director Giovannino Navarra, who said the flow-on effect was already causing

Premier Gladys Berejiklian at Tuesday's press conference. Picture: Adam Yip

No fines for businesses letting in unvaxxed customers

JAMES O'DOHERTY

BUSINESSES are unlikely to face fines if they let unvaccinated people inside their venues, the NSW Health Minister says.

Under the reopening road map, people will need to demonstrate their vaccination status to enter venues such as restaurants and pubs.

But hospitality operators are unlikely to face fines if a patron lies about their vaccination sta-

tus to gain entry. "The venue is unlikely at this point to be fined, it's not on the agenda at this point," Health Minister Brad Hazzard said.

"At this stage that's not part of the public health orders."

Police Commissioner Mick Fuller earlier said that officers won't be actively checking vaccination status at venues.

"We will not be walking through restaurants and cafes and pubs checking if people are

double vaccinated," he told 2GB. Mr Hazzard said police will have "no choice but to enforce" vaccination rules for patrons.

NSW reported 863 new cases on Tuesday, fewer than Victoria's 867.

Seven more people died in NSW, including two people who contracted the virus in hospital.

There were 1155 people in hospital with Covid on Tuesday, including 213 in intensive care. Hospitalisation rates are slightly

lower than predicted in modelling commissioned by the state government, with authorities hopeful that there won't be as much pressure on the system next month as was predicted.

The state surpassed Italy on first-dose vaccination rates for over 16s on Tuesday, with 86.2 per cent of people having received at least one dose.

The amount of people 16 and over fully vaccinated grew to 61.7 per cent.

Mr Hazzard's message to businesses that they are unlikely to be fined for letting in unvaccinated patrons seemed at odds with statements from Premier Gladys Berejiklian, who said on Monday that business owners would face similar compliance requirements as they did before the Delta lockdown.

Currently, businesses are required to take "reasonable steps" to ensure people have checked in using QR codes.



Brad Hazzard.

industries screaming to reopen



Co-owner of The Vinyl Room, Esna Lee, says square-metre caps mean she can't afford to reopen on December 1. Picture: Sam Rutty

chaos for wedding bookings. "The phone calls coming in from the brides, they're crying they have to move their dates six or seven months down the track," he said.

Mr Navarro said remaining restrictions, including the 50-person cap on weddings until 80 per cent vaccination is reached, could lead to operators missing out on bookings until next year, with few weddings booked around Christmas.

In the bush, the delay to regional travel has heaped more pain on businesses reliant on tourism.

Angela Myles, vice-president of Business Mudgee, told The Telegraph: "It definitely will make things tougher."

"Mudgee as a region is very reliant on tourism. A lot

of our business and industry completely rotates around tourists, from Sydney in particular," Ms Myles said.

She said businesses in the bush were torn between being safe and surviving without tourists for another month.

Nightclubs are also facing a tough test when they reopen on December 1: they will only be allowed one reveller for every four square metres, compared to two square metres for pubs and clubs.

Esna Lee, a co-owner of late night Cronulla institution The Vinyl Room, said the rules will prevent her from opening the doors altogether.

"I can't open with the four square metre rule - that means 25 per cent capacity for me, so I can't even afford to pay security guards for the

queues (outside the club)," she said.

She said nightclubs just wanted to be treated the same as other hospitality venues.

Even brothel owners are bewildered after being classed as "personal services" last year and able to open along with hairdressers and beauty parlours - but are now redefined as "intimate services" and unable to reopen until December 1. "What is the new health imperative or the science behind redefining us as an intimate services and leaving us unable to open until December 1 along with nightclubs?" sex worker advocate Julie Bates said.

When Melbourne hits 80 per cent full vaccinations the city will allow sex service premises to have a capacity of

up to 150 people. "So to clarify, I can go and get a tattoo with someone in close proximity to my face, I can have my eyelash extensions done and I can even take 10 of my favourite people back to my house but what I can't do is enter a sex services premises regardless of any vaccination status," brothel owner Ash Burgess said.

Infectious diseases expert Professor Peter Collignon said a slower approach to opening up freedoms was better but that depending on how vaccination levels and Covid infection rates progress, the dates for opening up could be brought forward.

"There could be signs that instead of December 1, we can open in the middle of November," he said.

Banana bungler in a ban backflip

JAMES MORROW
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QUEENSLAND Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk has been slammed as a hypocrite for failing to lock down the Sunshine State in the face of rising case numbers after spending months criticising NSW for being too soft on the virus.

As the state notched up six new cases from two clusters, former Queensland premier Campbell Newman said that this was the "ultimate test" for Palaszczuk, who had been looking forward to hosting the NRL Grand Final in a Covid-free Brisbane this weekend.

"If the Premier was being consistent she would go into lockdown overdrive, everything would be shut down and there would be no NRL grand final in Brisbane," said Newman, now running as a Senate candidate for the Liberal Democrats.

"That's what should happen, but it won't," he predicted.

Palaszczuk has been one of NSW's most strident critics and since July has kept a hard southern border maintained not just by police but an army of robotic health bureaucrats tasked with refusing even the most compassionate exemption requests.

As NSW's current outbreak spread earlier this year, Palaszczuk demanded the state do more to stop it.

"NSW needs to have a clear plan for containment," Palaszczuk told reporters on August 13. "It's encroaching north, it's encroaching south, it's now in the ACT."

"We need to hear very clearly from NSW what their clear plan is for containment... it's absolutely imperative that NSW contains this virus."



Anastacia Palaszczuk.

This is not the first time the Queensland government has been accused of inconsistency.

Palaszczuk was accused of hypocrisy in August for allowing NRL wives and girlfriends to fly into the state while at the same time her government barred ordinary Queenslanders from returning home, saying the hotel quarantine system was full.

More than 132,000 people also signed a Change.org petition asking Border Force not to grant the Queensland premier an exemption to go to Tokyo for the Olympics when she was at the same time locking people out of her own state.

Bizarrely, last week Palaszczuk slammed the idea that ordinary Australians would even want to travel overseas.

"Well, where are you going to go? Are you going to go to India?" she said. "In Tokyo, you have to sit in Perspex screens with masks on, and if you remove your mask you can't talk while you're eating."

Newman predicted Palaszczuk would try to keep the state open through the Grand Final before plunging the state into lockdown.

"I would predict we will be subject to a lockdown immediately after the game is over," he said.

EDGE OF LOCKDOWN

THERE are fears two new Covid-19 cases in northern NSW could plunge Byron Bay and surrounds back into lockdown hours after freedom was restored.

NSW Health on Tuesday evening confirmed two cases at Byron Bay and Kyogle, with contact tracing under way.

"We will provide more information as soon as it is available, including any exposure venues of public concern," NSW Health said in a statement.

It came just hours after Health Minister Brad Hazzard announced Byron Shire would be freed from its seven-day lockdown at midnight on Tuesday.



Byron Bay.

Widow's grief over quarantine suicide

GREG STOLZ

THE grieving widow of a Brisbane aeronautical engineer who took his own life in hotel quarantine believes he may still be alive had he been allowed to isolate at home.

The woman is demanding answers from Queensland Health after her badly depressed husband, 53, committed suicide at the Novotel Brisbane Airport hotel.

Police found the respected former RAAF aeronautical engineer turned aerospace consultant dead with self-inflicted injuries in the bathroom of his hotel room early Monday night.

A suicide note was believed to have been discovered at the scene. The man was understood to have been on his second day of hotel quarantine after returning from visiting relatives in Canberra.

His wife said he had been suffering major depression after his twin brother died of cancer last year and his mother was also diagnosed with the disease, but believes being forced into hotel quarantine may have "pushed him over the edge".

She said he had been planning to return to Queensland after Canberra came out of its protracted lockdown, but came back unexpectedly after

telling her he was trying to get an exemption to home quarantine.

"He did suffer from depression but we didn't expect this to happen - it's a shock," she said. "With his mental health, he shouldn't have been put into hotel quarantine."

"People who are depressed shouldn't be put in hotel quarantine. In my mind that was a factor that may have pushed him over the edge."