

**CORONAVIRUS — NATIONAL RESPONSE PLAN — VACCINATION THRESHOLD**

*Matter of Public Interest*

**THE SPEAKER (Mrs M.H. Roberts)** informed the Assembly that she was in receipt within the prescribed time of a letter from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition seeking to debate a matter of public interest.

[In compliance with standing orders, at least five members rose in their places.]

**MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [3.04 pm]: I move —

That this house records its concern over the Premier's lack of clarity in relation to the state's COVID-19 strategy when 80 per cent of the state's population is vaccinated, which has added to community confusion and anxiety, and may lead to increased vaccination hesitancy.

I move this motion in the knowledge that national cabinet has met and, according to the Prime Minister's utterances, the matter of a pathway for the future was considered in the adoption of a national plan, which I note the Premier had in his possession during question time. As we can see on this plan—it is very small compared with the Premier's version—there are four steps, from phase A, which is the current situation, to phase B, which is the vaccination transition, and then to phase C, which is the vaccination consolidation phase, and then to phase D, which is the final post-vaccination phase. In a couple of the steps on that path—that is, the transition to phase D from phase C—vaccination levels are prescribed in the plan that show the way forward in achieving that particular outcome.

It is essential to the delivery of the pathway that we achieve those vaccination rates, and that has now been agreed to in the plan by all the states and the commonwealth. It is essential for a recovery—for life as normal—that we achieve various levels of vaccination. We know that Western Australia has been blessed by, first of all, the isolation of our country as a whole and, further, our isolation from the rest of Australia across vast tracts of desert and across the waters. Very worryingly, we know that outbreaks of the Delta variant are occurring right across the country. That means that with the interconnection of our nation, whether or not we like it, through freight links and other services, the likelihood of there being an outbreak in this state increases simply because the variant is present on the continent. Darwin has recently gone into lockdown, even though the Northern Territory has had a fairly good run in preventing COVID in the past.

We cannot really rely on isolation forever. We need to have a pathway to rejoin the world at some point and those deliberations have been set out in the media statement released by the Prime Minister on 6 August. I will read a couple of quotes from that statement. It states —

All leaders reiterated the importance of Australians, especially those in vulnerable groups, to get a COVID-19 vaccination.

It goes on to state —

National Cabinet fully agreed to the four-step National Plan ... provides a graduated pathway to transition Australia's COVID-19 response from its current pre-vaccination settings focused on continued suppression of community transmission, to post-vaccination settings focused on public health management of COVID-19 is consistent with other infectious diseases.

It also states —

The National Plan will move ... to Phase B once 70 per cent of the Australian population 16 years of age and older is fully vaccinated and Phase C once 80 per cent fully vaccinated threshold is met.

It refers to the Doherty modelling —

National Cabinet agreed to further analysis under the National Plan to transition Australia's National COVID-19 Response, with the Doherty Institute to model optimisation of the public health measures and managing outbreak responses and scenarios to support vulnerable cohorts and areas with low vaccination uptake.

That all seems fairly clear. As we move forward and more people are vaccinated, the game will begin to change. Unfortunately, Western Australia has had the slowest uptake of vaccinations anywhere in the country. Figures from last week showed that the uptake rate in Western Australia sits at about 18.6 per cent of the adult population. It is against that slow rate that I believe the Premier has caused extra confusion and increased potential hesitancy because he seems to have adopted a different position from the Prime Minister and national cabinet. That has caused quite a flurry of news headlines since his first discussion, which he spoke about today on Sky News, and even in *The West Australian*. Members only have to look through the headlines over the last few days to see how much this has been an evolving situation, right through from the editorial that appeared on Sunday with further outlines of the position of both the Prime Minister and Mr McGowan, the Premier, as we have gone through this crisis. It looks as though

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both are holding to their case. One has said that at 80 per cent there will be a change to the way we conduct business, and the other does not seem to be saying that.

The Premier is shaking his head, but that is certainly what has been reported in the press. Comments attributed to the Prime Minister were reported in *The West Australian* on Monday. The article states —

Scott Morrison has rapped Mark McGowan for breaking his commitment to National Cabinet by declaring that he would pursue a zero COVID policy in WA even after the State reached an 80 per cent vaccination rate.

The Prime Minister said that National Cabinet—which included the Premier—had agreed on “three occasions” that when the country moved to phase B and achieved a 70–80 per cent vaccination rate, COVID-19 would be treated more like the flu.

“This was done in our first discussion of the national plan, it was then agreed in-principle with the targets set by the Doherty Institute, which made it very clear that once you get to 70 per cent and 80 per cent, at that level ... then you are managing the virus ...

There seems to be a fundamental disagreement between the Premier and other main players in the national cabinet. That is of great concern when we know that we want to see further people taking up the opportunity to have a vaccine. We also know that about 20 per cent of the Western Australian population are still hesitant to have a vaccine. Of that 20 per cent, approximately half—about 10 per cent—indicated that they are not going to have the vaccine.

That is the situation according to the Melbourne Institute. It publishes its figures monthly on the internet. Members can visit the website of the Melbourne Institute; it is a very reputable organisation. Figures are compiled both of the uptake and the hesitancy around COVID vaccination. For the record, I am fully vaccinated. I put it on my social media. People, go and get fully vaccinated. I would encourage everybody who can get the vaccine in Western Australia to get vaccinated. I would encourage everybody in the state to get vaccinated. I do not want to see people feel that there is a reason why they should not go and get vaccinated. We know that one of the incentives to have a vaccine was this pathway out of the current situation.

The situation now is that the Premier seems to be saying it does not matter if we get to 80 per cent, it does not matter if we get to any particular level of vaccination rate, there is no end point in the way that we are controlling the situation at the moment. The only pathway forward is one of harsh isolation whenever there is a threat situation. If we are not able to move from that position, an extra 10 or 20 per cent of people who are hesitant will not come forward and we will not be able to get to the point of herd immunity that we need to achieve in order to progress through the national pathway. People have to be assured that at some point there will be a way out of this. Coming out over the past few days to say that there is not going to be has caused a great deal of concern. It is not me who is writing all these articles; that was in one newspaper from one news outlet. There are plenty of others. Members could go to any news outlet to see that this, along with the current tragedy in Afghanistan, seems to be the main news items at the moment.

Businesses are concerned about the current controversy. I note some recent comments attributed to Chris Rodwell from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia. He cited a lack of cohesion. He has called for an assurance that the agreed vaccination level remains a critical measure. The vaccination level is a measure in the national plan. If we do not actually progress through the plan at the trigger points, the plan is not going to be worth the paper it is written on and it will not encourage people to get vaccinated. Rodwell went on to say that business has been working on the basis that when the community is safely vaccinated at 80 per cent, we are not going to be using the current approaches. Business is tiring. Many small business people are beginning to wonder whether they are going to be able to survive. Anecdotally, I talk to business people both in the city and in the regions who tell me that they are just about ready to give up and walk away; there is no point in keeping their small business going. Isolation is a tool. It has worked—it has prevented Western Australia from having a serious situation.

At every step, the National Party supported the legislation that was put through this Parliament. We supported this legislation that the government is relying on to actually put in measures that enable its policies. The government never attributes that support to us. The government falsely claims that we did not support it. If government members look at *Hansard*, at every debate throughout the past year of this Parliament we were there. We were coming to Parliament during extra sitting weeks to ensure the government had the tools that it needed to keep the state safe. What do we get for that? We get false assertions that somehow we are in bed with Clive Palmer. I have never met Clive Palmer. From the entire time I have been in politics, Clive Palmer has been running candidates against the National Party. He is certainly no friend of the National Party in this state. I do not know of any contact that he has with our party. I can assure members that if any contact were made, it would be rebuffed. Enough of the lies and enough of the confusion that the government is spreading both about our party, about the opposition, and about the national pathway forward. It is time to get back to the plan and stick to the plan.

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**DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe — Leader of the Liberal Party)** [3.16 pm]: I stand in support of this motion because the public of Western Australia deserve an explanation from this Premier on what his plan is for zero COVID cases in Western Australia in the future, if that is what he is saying. The Premier's recent comments have resulted in a lot of confusion and anxiety in our community from people desperate to see their families through to small businesses trying to understand whether they can survive this epidemic. I might say, Premier, particularly people in the tourism industry; many in some parts of the industry are doing quite well because of internal tourism, but those businesses that rely on interstate tourism are on their knees. Western Australians have made enormous sacrifices. We recognise those sacrifices during this COVID crisis. They need to have —

**Mr M. McGowan:** You're reading your speech!

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Good on you, Premier; because you cannot even read an answer at question time!

**Mr M. McGowan:** You're a quality contributor!

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** You cannot give an answer during question time without reading it. You were doing it today. In question time, you had to read out an answer to your own Dorothy Dixier! There you go, Premier; that was an insightful interjection.

As I said, Western Australians have made enormous sacrifices during this crisis and they need to know what that path forward looks like. I might say that yesterday's editorial in *The West Australian* has hit the nail on the head. It talks about the Premier's statement, which appeared to be a statement made off the cuff and which he has been backpedalling on and trying to redefine constantly over the past few days. The editorial states —

Yesterday, he —

That is the Premier —

threw a bizarre spanner in the works when he said that even when WA hits a vaccination rate of 80 per cent, he will still use the hard border measure and lockdowns to keep the COVID case count in our State at zero.

It is a fascinating concept to think about where COVID is going to go over the next few years. That was a quote from *The West Australian*. Clearly, that is what the editor of *The West Australian*—the newspaper that the government seems to rely on in other forums—believes the Premier was saying in his statement.

Several members interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Members!

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Perhaps the Premier —

**Ms S. Winton** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Wanneroo!

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Perhaps the Premier was being deliberately vague, or perhaps he was just making it up as he went along and it was not based on any particular advice that he had received. The article continues —

We understand that he feels he may need to still rely on lockdowns and border closures even at a high vaccination rate, but he owes the people of WA a clear plan on when those options will be phased out.

While the Premier's "zero cases" target is noble, in reality it's a fairytale. There is no government in the world that believes when its population hits a certain vaccination rate and life returns to "normal" there will be zero cases in the community.

If the intention is to live with COVID-19 as we live with the flu, then Mr McGowan surely appreciates we get thousands of influenza cases each year despite most people getting preventative jabs. People, unfortunately, die from influenza every year as well.

The article goes on to point out —

... we don't have all our freedoms. There are still families separated and people who can't visit loved ones. Hotel quarantine for international travellers (many who are West Australians abroad just wanting to come home) is extraordinarily tough.

And then there is travel for work—such as starting a job or broadening your career in the hope of bringing those vital expertise back to WA.

That is the cruelty of where we are at the moment. The confused message we hear from the Premier has given no-one any certainty or clarity. Are we facing this for one, two, three, four, or 10 years? As the editorial points out, even if everyone in Australia were vaccinated, people would still catch COVID and, tragically, some percentage of those people would die from it. If the Premier's target is zero deaths from COVID then we will never open up.

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Whatever the situation is, the Premier needs to clearly articulate it, and not articulate it from a conversation he has with himself in the privacy of his own home, but based on a conversation with the community in Western Australia.

The Premier sits on national cabinet and it agreed on the transition plan. The Premier has been part of those discussions and had the opportunity to include his input in them. On 30 July, an ABC news article was titled, “WA Premier Mark McGowan says state reserves the right to lockdown, announces new measures to turn away COVID-19 ships”. It states that the Premier said we will “enact lockdowns after national cabinet agreed on vaccination targets” at the national cabinet meeting. The article continues to quote the Premier —

“When we hit the 80 per cent mark, lockdowns would only be for unusual circumstances in specific locations, but 80 per cent vaccination is very high,” ...

That does not refer to locking down the whole state. It refers to very specific targets but, suddenly, we hear about lockdowns continuing for the entire state. If the Premier has agreed that lockdowns would be only for “unusual circumstances in specific locations” what has changed in the last week? Was the Premier’s change in decision based on health advice? If so, was that the same health advice that he received before he attended the national cabinet meeting? For the transparency of this chamber and the people of Western Australia, I would like the Premier to table the advice that he based his last comments on and the advice he received before he attended national cabinet. It appears there has been a shift in the Premier’s statements from the July article I read out to the statement he made a few days ago.

The Premier has indicated that he is seeking to have zero cases of COVID in Western Australia, even after an 80 per cent vaccination rate. That has caused a lot of confusion and anxiety in the community. I will reinforce this for thousands of small businesses. We understand that the state economy, in some ways, has done well out of COVID. Because some expatriates have returned home and because we have kept tourism at home, some particular industries have done very well. However, I will reinforce again that a number of particular industries—those businesses that rely on interstate tourists—are on their knees. We have had communication with them that when they heard the statements from the Premier, they were saying, “Why don’t we give up now, because this is never going to end? Based on what the Premier said, we’re never going to see an end to these lockdowns interstate.”

As I said, the Premier needs to have a clear and honest conversation with Western Australians about what his plan is and it needs to be clear. It cannot be this never–never in which we are sitting here waiting with bated breath, asking, “What’s the thought bubble for the Premier on any particular day? Is it really based on medical advice, or is it his own advice? Does he intend to keep up the hard borders forever?” If he does intend to do that he should say it, or is the Premier saying that he intends to use hard borders until we reach phase D of the COVID plan? I have a copy of the *National plan to transition Australia’s national COVID-19 response*, which the Premier agreed to, and was part of, in national cabinet. Phase D, “Final Post-Vaccination Phase” reads —

Manage COVID-19 consistent with public health management of other infectious diseases.

...

- Minimise cases in the community without ongoing restrictions or lockdowns
- Live with COVID-19: management consistent with influenza or other infectious diseases
- Allow uncapped inbound arrivals for all vaccinated persons, without quarantine; and

...

- Allow uncapped inbound arrivals for all vaccinated persons, without quarantine;

That is the plan and the Premier, as a member of national cabinet, agreed to it—or we were led to believe he agreed to it. Suddenly, it sounds as though we are hearing a different story. Is it the Premier’s intention that when we reach phase D we will not have border restrictions and the types of lockdowns that we have seen in the past in Western Australia? Is it the Premier’s intention that we will reach a point of “Freedom Day” as it was described in the United Kingdom, and has been used as a pejorative term ever since, given the outcomes there? If it is his plan, the Premier should let us know.

More importantly, this is not a decision for just the Premier or just the Deputy Premier; Minister for Health to make. It is a mature conversation that has to be had with the people of Western Australia. As I have said, all the experts in this area have said one thing consistently; that is, that the COVID virus will continue around the world for decades. It is not like polio. We will not see elimination of the COVID virus by vaccination. It will continue to mutate and infect people. It will infect people who have had the COVID vaccine and, as I said, some people who have had the COVID vaccine and are infected will, unfortunately, die. If we have a zero-death policy, in effect, in the foreseeable future, we will not open our borders at all.

**Ms A. Sanderson:** Nonsense; complete nonsense!

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**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Member, you will have your chance.

That is not what national cabinet agreed, which the Premier was part of; that is, once we reach phase D, we will not have the interstate restrictions that we have seen.

**Ms A. Sanderson:** You weren't there.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** On the history of border closures, it is funny because I hear a lot of history in this place, but unfortunately, I will not have time to go through it.

Several members interjected.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I know that members are disappointed but I want to allow the excellent Leader of the Opposition to make her contribution to this debate as well.

**MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Opposition)** [3.28 pm]: I rise to support the motion that was moved by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. This is really an opportunity for the Premier to tidy up some of the commentary that has emerged over the weekend. I do not think it is unreasonable, from the opposition's perspective, to ask for it to be done in this place where members are accountable to the people who they were elected by and to put on the official record of *Hansard*. Although there may have been a number of media conferences and subsequent questions during which the Premier thinks he has explained this, there is still clearly confusion in the community. From our perspective, we are trying to understand exactly how the Premier's plan and the state government's plan interlinks with what national cabinet has agreed to and what the state has agreed to at national cabinet. The minister sitting behind the Premier quite rightly said that we were not there. No; we were not, and so we rely on clear communication from the Premier and the state government to articulate what the outcomes of national cabinet are and how that then translates to Western Australia and what other issues or measures will be put in place to complement or step outside those agreements. I do not think that is unreasonable and that is the position that has been articulated by a number in the business community and more broadly, as we move around our electorates, since that commentary was made.

This is an opportunity and a time for the Premier to try to resist what we have seen in question time already, which was to deflect and bring in the conversation about Clive Palmer and other issues, and simply give us and the community some clarity on that commentary, specifically around the zero target even when we reach 80 per cent of community vaccination. I am happy to be corrected so that everyone understands what the national COVID response plan is that we are working to. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition and other members have talked about vaccine hesitancy. We have a poor rate of vaccination in Western Australia, particularly in regional Western Australia, and so anything that blunts, deters or causes apathy in our community when we need people to go out with some serious urgency and get the jab is of concern. It is a matter of public importance and that is why this motion has been brought to the house today.

Phase C of the *National plan to transition Australia's national COVID-19 response*, does in fact—the Premier quite rightly referred to this—state “highly targeted lockdowns” only. I agree with that, and that is what the business community and others have anticipated; they have read the plan. Amongst other measures listed in the plan, we cannot see a reference to a target of zero, what that means and how we achieve that. Based on the record that we have used so far, how we achieve that is to lock down the state in its entirety, or whole regions in their entirety. If that is how we intend to go forward, we need to be up front with the community, because there is some degree of fatigue. Members can imagine that if there is not a glimmer of hope coming at the end of this process and clarity around —

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Deputy Speaker!

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Minister!

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** How does the Premier plan to clear up what has clearly emerged as a point of contention over the past 24 or 48 hours? He cannot avoid it; it is on the front page of the paper, in the editorial, and every media outlet is asking those questions. Therefore, this issue has not been conflated by the opposition. These questions are being asked by the media and members and key stakeholders in our community because they want to understand where this has come from. This issue had not been spoken off prior to this; and, if it has, it has not been specifically said in that way.

I do not want to go back down the tired line of the Clive Palmer attacks and other politicisation, because, quite clearly, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has put on record that we have no interest in supporting anything that Clive Palmer has to do in relation to the attacks on Western Australia. I have said it publicly in this place and outside this place: we do not support what Mr Palmer is doing. He is a serial pest. He should use his money to invest in trying to sort a way out of this mess that we find ourselves in, nationally and internationally. He should add his dollars to medical research or find something else to do with his time. We have no truck with somebody who

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is behaving in that way. Therefore, please do us all a favour, Premier, and leave that to the side and clear up what has emerged as a result of his commentary over the weekend. We want to go out and work with the community to make sure that it clearly understands what we are all aiming for, what that target is and how we can all help to achieve it. We want nothing more than to see our community transition through this national plan. Although we have amazing freedoms here in Western Australia, I do not think that is necessarily quite true. There are many people in our community who have restricted freedoms and there are restrictions on the ability for businesses to operate, and they want to know when zero target COVID at 80 per cent vaccination might become a reality for them.

What is the health advice sitting behind the target that the Premier is basing his decisions on, and what health advice is he seeking as we go into those conversations to transition to that final phase? Surely the Premier is taking that information into those discussions at a national cabinet level. If he is not, please, illuminate us! We do not sit in national cabinet. These are the questions that we get asked. These are the questions that we see being asked in the community. Now is the opportunity for the Premier to put answers on the record. We ask in a genuine way, because we are trying to understand where this particular statement has come from and what it means, more than just the news grab and livestream press conferences, so that businesses and the community can plan and understand what we are trying to get to.

**MR M. MCGOWAN (Rockingham — Premier)** [3.35 pm]: It is apparent to me today that some things never change. From March of last year through to March of this year, the government, myself and the Minister for Health had to endure shocking undermining and criticism—it was constant—from the Liberal Party and Nationals WA members. That is what happened all throughout last year, every day. Every day, Liza Harvey or Zak Kirkup or members of the opposition were standing out the front saying, “The government’s got it wrong.”

**Dr D.J. Honey** interjected.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Did you not see the advertisements in the election campaign, my friend?

**Dr D.J. Honey** interjected.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Honestly! The greatest contribution of the Leader of the Liberal Party would be to resign. That is the best thing that he could do for the Liberal Party, and everyone in the Liberal Party knows it, because he is an embarrassment to the Liberal Party.

**Dr D.J. Honey** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Leader of the Liberal Party!

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The Liberal Party of Australia, which has ruled this country for most of the last 70 years, is embarrassed about you, sitting there on your own! There is one Liberal MP in this house, sitting there on your own, and you need to look in the mirror as to why—just a loser!

**Dr D.J. Honey:** You’re just abusive. A Premier resorting to emotional abuse.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Well, you are. The sooner you resign, the better off the Liberal Party will be, and everyone knows it.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Premier, just wait, please.

Leader of the Liberal Party, you had your say and for the majority of your contribution, this side was in silence. Give the Premier the opportunity to respond. Carry on, Premier.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Everyone knows it, Mr Deputy Speaker.

We had to endure criticism all last year. The health minister, myself, Commissioner of Police, Chief Health Officer, head of Health, senior public servants and the Public Sector Commissioner met every day for hours on end. Every day, we dealt with all these issues over the course of last year. It was a highly stressful and difficult. What did we achieve? We achieved the best outcome Australia and probably the world, bar some islands in the middle of the Pacific. What did we get? We got criticism the whole time, up until the state election campaign. Then members opposite stopped for a few months and now they start again with this undermining, carping and criticism. What is their central complaint? Members opposite say, “Oh, it’s all terrible!” Their argument is that what is going on is terrible. I tell members opposite: go to New South Wales—there they will see terrible. Go to New South Wales and ask people if they would like an economy without restrictions, all the freedoms that people have in Western Australia. We have the strongest economy in the nation, probably the world, here in Western Australia. That is what we have, but all we cop is criticism!

As I said earlier today, our success in this state has allowed the commonwealth, through revenue generated here, to support New South Wales. That is a good thing because we are all Australians! We are supporting and helping New South Wales—not that, I suspect, the press corps in New South Wales really appreciates it, but that is what is occurring here. This state is supporting that state, as we should as Australians. We have teams of contact tracers currently on the phones helping New South Wales. We have contact traced more people in New South Wales than

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we have in Western Australia! Western Australian Department of Health and public sector employees have done more contact tracing for New South Wales than they have in Western Australia. That is what we have done for the other states of Australia, in particular New South Wales, and that will continue. But I cannot cop members of the Liberal Party, National Party and the Sydney press corps saying that we would somehow be better off to be like New South Wales.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** Who is saying that?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Melissa Price said that today. She said it is far better to have that arrangement; it is far better to have the virus flow into Western Australia. That was the central thesis of her article today—it is far better for that to happen.

I do not want this state to get in the position of what is happening in New South Wales, and that is what we will fight to prevent.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** Who does?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** You should listen to your arguments. The Leader of the Liberal Party is constantly saying that it is all terrible here. He is always saying it is all terrible here.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I tell you what: when you talk about small business, where would you rather be—here or in New South Wales, here or in Victoria or here or in anywhere else in the world? You would rather be here. We have the strongest retail figures in the country. We have the strongest business confidence in the country. We have the strongest consumer confidence in the country. That is our outcome. We have the highest participation rate in the workforce. We have the greatest job creation in Australia. That is the record of Western Australia over the last 18 months and beyond. That is what we have achieved, and all we get is criticism for it.

I did an interview last Thursday with a guy from Sky News. Down the camera, I said words to the effect that I would prefer not to have COVID. That created this massive furore. I will repeat it again: I would prefer not to have COVID. That is my preference. Somehow that was interpreted as some egregious, shocking statement. I would prefer not to have COVID. I am perplexed as to why it resulted in this outrageous outpouring of anger from members of the Liberal Party, from commentators, from right-wing Twitter activists and from conservative journalists from Sydney. I would prefer not to have COVID. What a statement! As I said then, parts of the national plan allow for lockdowns that are restricted or targeted. That is what I said. I said it constantly. If we go to the national plan, it does allow for that. It is in black and white. I read some of the articles. I found that the journalists and some of the commentators had not read that plan. When I made that statement, they did not know, and then they said, “This is outrageous that he is saying that.” Look at the plan; it is all there: phase B and phase C—70 per cent of the eligible population having had two doses; and 80 per cent of the eligible population having had two doses. It is right there. It refers to targeted vaccinations or restricted vaccinations. That is what I said.

**Mr V.A. Catania** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for North West Central.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I said what is in the agreed plan. I am actually following the plan. This is the plan that we followed. Then I said that as part of our toolbox, we would keep the capacity to put in place border restrictions—and I stand by that. At the meeting of the Premiers and the Prime Minister on 30 July, I said that that was Western Australia’s position. I might add that I came out of that meeting and did a full press conference and said that that was our position. That was on 30 July—17 days ago. I said it publicly. I have said it constantly actually. No-one noticed until Sunday that I said that. But I stand by that. We went to the High Court to assert this right. When I started my political career 24 and a half years ago, I never expected that one day I would be in the High Court fighting Clive Palmer to put a border in place for Western Australia, but there you go—strange things happen.

**Mr S.A. Millman:** Clive Palmer and the Liberal Party.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Yes—Clive Palmer and the Liberal Party.

Of course we want that capacity because it gives us the opportunity to protect ourselves if necessary. If you think small business does not want it, think again. If you think Western Australians do not want that capacity, think again, because they do. They know what has happened in New South Wales and Victoria. New South Wales had the outbreak. It came here. We did not know it had an outbreak. A poor lady was in a cafe in Bondi, she acquired the virus, she came here, and we had an outbreak. We then put up a border with New South Wales. Thank goodness we did that. Can members imagine what would have happened if we did not? Then we locked down and we eliminated the virus in Western Australia.

I know that people over east say that you cannot deal with Delta. It was Delta. It came to Perth. We went into lockdown and we dealt with it. For some reason, no matter how many times we say that, it does not penetrate.

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New South Wales does not get it. We did it. My good friend Steven Marshall in South Australia followed exactly the model we put in place. He did exactly the same thing and he eliminated Delta. In Queensland, my good friend Annastacia Palaszczuk did exactly the same thing, and now Queensland has been Delta-free for some period of time. That is what has occurred. We can do that because we act quickly. We might put a border arrangement in place to prevent the seeding of infections again. Victoria tried. It put the border in place, it locked down and it is bumping along at about 20 cases a day, most of whom are in some form of isolation and can be traced. New South Wales did not. Where is it? The entire state is locked down, it has over 450 cases a day and people are dying every single day. That is not the model I want to follow. I know that might be hard for some people to comprehend. That is not the model I want to follow.

Several members interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Members!

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** The Liberals and the Nationals WA supported Clive Palmer at the height of the pandemic and it would have resulted in catastrophic outcomes, and everyone in Western Australia knows it.

**Mr R.S. Love** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Deputy Leader of the Nationals, you had your say when you started this. Let the Premier respond.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I support the national plan. We are following the national plan. That is what I have said. The fundamental problem here is that people do not understand what is in it. They are assuming a number of things are in it that are not in it. That is what is happening.

**Mr R.S. Love:** That is why there are restrictions. It says so in the plan.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Did the Deputy Leader of the Opposition see what we did on Friday? Let me answer that. What did we do on Friday, which Clive Palmer is now taking us to the High Court over? We actually said that vaccinated people can return from New South Wales. We are the first state to actually implement a form of that. We are the first state to actually do it. The Prime Minister came out and endorsed it the other day, and then the opposition comes up with some convoluted reasoning to say that somehow we are not adhering to the plan. The Prime Minister came out and said that it is a good thing. Queensland has now put it in place. I guarantee that South Australia and other states will put it in place to protect themselves against infection from New South Wales. We are following the plan that was outlined. Everything I have said is consistent.

I say again that I would prefer not to have COVID. It is not a controversial statement. The New South Wales Premier today said that she would love not to have COVID. I am just waiting for the outrage. Where is the outrage from the Sydney press gallery? This is what the New South Wales Premier said yesterday, and I quote: “I would love to have a situation of zero cases of community transition.” She said she was striving to get as close to that as possible, stating that since day one of the outbreak —

... we’ve said we want to get as close to that number as possible ...

“And that is ... what we’re striving for, let me make that very clear.

That is very similar to what I have said. Where is the outrage? Why is everyone not castigating her for saying she does not want COVID? Where are they? Why are the opinion piece writers of the daily broadsheets in Sydney not saying that that was an outrageous statement? They are not. Why would that be? Why are they ignoring the statement of the Liberal Premier of New South Wales but attacking the Western Australian Labor Premier? Let us think about that. I think we all know the answer to that question.

Of course, it would have been great if the New South Wales government had adopted that attitude on 20 June, but unfortunately it did not. Now the entire country is paying the price of that inaction by the New South Wales government. If people disagree with my statement that I would prefer not to have COVID, they should say so. Does anyone disagree with that statement that I would prefer not to have COVID? I challenge anyone: is that an unreasonable thing to say—I would prefer not to have COVID? I am attacked on a few things in the motion. Firstly, I am attacked on vaccine uptake. We are behind. I think we are probably about the same as Queensland, but we are behind particularly New South Wales and Victoria. I was asked this question today at the press conference: why is that? The commonwealth has given them hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of additional doses of Pfizer above their population share.

**Mr R.S. Love:** We’ve been behind the whole time.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Hold on, member. Secondly, obviously—comprehend this—when there are significant outbreaks, people are going to rush to get vaccinated. That is human nature. If we want to get people vaccinated here, we have to work hard to do it, and we are working very hard every day to do it. We opened a whole new vaccination



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centre yesterday and we are rolling out a blitz; there are all sorts of initiatives. I even saw advertisements at the footy the other day. We are doing everything that we can to get people vaccinated. One thing I do not want to do is to have an outbreak to encourage people to get vaccinated. That is actually one thing I do not want to do. Imagine, people in Sydney are lining up to get vaccinated because the virus is everywhere. Does that not stand to reason? We do not have the virus, therefore, perhaps there is not the same urgency in people's minds around this. But I also say this: we supported the rollout of additional vaccines to those other states. It is galling and somewhat stupid to criticise us for not having the same vaccination rate as another state that has had hundreds of thousands, if not millions, more doses than we have received. How can people criticise us for that? We do not have the virus here. Every single day I support New South Wales getting more vaccines.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** You didn't in July.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Honestly, just resign!

**Dr D.J. Honey** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Leader of the Liberal Party!

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Apparently, vaccine hesitancy is my fault. People have said that there is hesitancy here. I did not create it. One reason for hesitancy is all the stories that appeared about AstraZeneca. I did not order AstraZeneca. I did not manufacture it. I had no say over it. I continue to encourage people to get AstraZeneca, particularly if they are in the 60 years and older age category; and, if below that age group, on the advice of their GP. I encourage people to do it. I did not create the hesitancy, but somehow it is my fault. Somehow the fact that we do not have COVID, which, obviously, if we had it, would drive up vaccination levels, is my fault. The counterargument is that we should have COVID and, therefore, people would get vaccinated. If that is the argument, which appears to be Melissa Price's argument, then it is a stupid and dangerous argument.

The member also made another point. He needs to read the national plan. What it has in other bits of it, of course, as part of the Doherty report, is a recommendation that when we get to 70 and 80 per cent vaccination rates, we put in place restrictions—the two-square-metre rule in cafes, restaurants, bars and venues. It also recommends that we put in place limits on the stadium and at major events, such as allowing half capacity; restrictions on people going to work; and, also, compulsory mask wearing. That is what is recommended. I told national cabinet that I am not keen on that, but that is what the Doherty report recommends. If we get to vaccination levels of 70 and 80 per cent and we open our borders and remove from our toolbox all the measures available to us, the pressure will come on to put in place those other measures.

These are difficult questions, but I want to say that I am not keen on putting in place restrictions on what is the freest and most successful community in the world; therefore, I am keen to keep the virus out. That has caused national furore among pretty self-serving people over east and their acolytes here in the Liberal and National Parties. Frankly, I am unapologetic for wanting to keep the virus out. It is my preferred option to not have the virus.

**Dr D.J. Honey** interjected.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I will say it again: I am unapologetic for keeping the virus out, and my preferred option is not to have the virus come in. My preferred option for Western Australia is never to get to the position that New South Wales is in.

**MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Minister for Health) [3.53 pm]:** We will soon be discussing amendments to the Dog Act; today, we see the dogs returning to their vomit. Last year, those opposite took every opportunity to carp, be negative and undermine our efforts in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic. Today, we also see what happens when you lie down with dogs. If opposition members decide to support the eastern states Berejiklian fan club in the media and step away from supporting the people of Western Australia, they will be in more trouble than the Liberal Party was in in March 2021. The WA public will once again turn its back on them, once again reject their negativity and once again reject their constant carping and negative attitudes towards the Western Australian effort around COVID.

As the Premier just pointed out, one thing that seems to be missing from this debate is an analysis of what phases C and D require. The Doherty report recommends a reimposition of the restrictions from which we currently are free. For all those businesses, particularly in hospitality, tempted by the siren song that somehow an 80 per cent vaccination rate will take us to a new place in time, I say that it will take Western Australians backwards. It will mean fewer people at the stadium, more mask wearing and a return to the two-square-metre rule. That is what is being proposed on the east coast. Therefore, I suggest people take a good hard look at what the Doherty report recommended.

**Mr R.S. Love:** So you don't agree with the national plan?

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I agree with the national plan; I do not agree with the opposition's analysis of it.

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**Mr R.S. Love** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Deputy Leader of the Opposition!

**Mr S.A. Millman** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member!

**Mr R.H. COOK:** Western Australians overwhelmingly support our approach to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Mr R.S. Love:** We don't know what it is because apparently you don't agree with the national plan now.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I think the WA public begs to differ. According to a True Issues survey by JWS Research in *The Australian Financial Review*, in February 2021, 80 per cent of the Western Australian public supported the Western Australian government's response to COVID-19. In August, it was 78 per cent—so pretty much the same number. Let us look at what happened in other states and to other governments. In July 2020, 66 per cent of the public supported the Morrison government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic; in February 2021, it was 56 per cent; and, in August 2021, it was 38 per cent. I think the Western Australian public is sending the opposition a message: support the strong leadership the Premier is providing and actually get behind Western Australia's efforts to keep the COVID-19 pandemic under control.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** What is your threshold to go to phase D?

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Leader of the Liberal Party, you have had your say. I have warned you enough; I call you for the first time.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** We do not know what the future holds. In March 2021, we did not know what the Delta strain would do to the community. We did not know what was going to happen in relation to our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but we did know what worked for the Western Australian community—that is, a resolute response and making sure that we keep on top of this virus so that we keep Western Australians safe, keep our economy open and keep away from the restrictions that we are so free from.

I am drawn to the comments of Michael Ryan, executive director of the World Health Organization's health emergencies program, who has over 30 years' experience in the management of infectious diseases. He said —

Be fast. Have no regrets. You must be the first mover. The virus will always get you if you don't move quickly ... if you need to be right before you move, you will never win. Perfection is the enemy of the good when it comes to emergency management ... The problem in society we have at the moment is everyone is afraid of making a mistake; everyone is afraid of the consequence of error. But the greatest error is not to move; the greatest error is to be paralysed by the fear of failure.

What we saw in New South Wales was a failure to act, and act swiftly. I know it might be tempting for the eastern states media and for those opposite to support that approach, but I again draw members' attention to what was said by JWS Research—that is, in February this year, 65 per cent of New South Wales people supported the Berejiklian government's response to the COVID pandemic. That is down to just 49 per cent today.

I suggest to those opposite: stick with the government. Stick with our response. Stick with the Western Australian public. Stick with Premier McGowan. What we have done so far has taken us to a good place. Yes, we would prefer there was no COVID-19 in the community. That is our measure. Through ongoing work around the vaccines, we will be in a position to stay on top of this disease. But let us stop the carping, stop the negativity and stop the undermining and for once and for all get on board with the Western Australian community.

**MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Police)** [4.00 pm]: It appears as though the Premier's observation on the weekend that he would prefer not to have COVID shook a few trees. Apparently, it was an extraordinary statement. When those trees were shaken, a few things fell out of them. We had tinfoil hat wearers. We had conspiracy theorists. We had COVID deniers. Among them, we had some fellow travellers from the Liberal and National Parties, most notably the federal member for Durack and Minister for Defence Industry. She came out of her bunker in Canberra to pen an opinion piece for *The West Australian*. She also leapt into the opportunity to make an appearance on talkback radio in Perth. I found that all quite extraordinary. It was in many ways a bit of a relief. I did not know that we still had federal Liberal ministers in Western Australia. I was a bit worried about them. I was beginning to consider whether we should put out a "persons at risk" notification with the police to see whether we had to go to search for them. Whether they are in protective custody or not, I am not sure; it seems as though some of them definitely are. So, it was a relief in some ways to see that Melissa Price is alive and well!

What is concerning is that she believes that as a Western Australian and as the Minister for Defence Industry for Australia, her greatest priority is to criticise the Western Australian government for its measures to keep this state safe. This is at a time when we are still waiting, some 18 months after the promised delivery date, for a decision on full-cycle docking. The minister responsible for that, more than any other minister in the federal government,

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could not bring herself to give us an answer on that, but she could write a one-page opinion piece for *The West Australian* criticising the government of Western Australia for not being as bad as New South Wales, and calling on us to adopt the measures of other states.

She also could not find it within herself to make a comment, when she went on live radio, about when our defence industry in Western Australia will receive any sort of indication—just an answer—on the full-cycle docking issue. Instead, she took the opportunity to defend the performance of the New South Wales government. It is beyond doubt that the New South Wales government has failed. An important date for Western Australia is 27 June. That was the last time our state went into lockdown. Western Australians know what a proper lockdown looks like. The entirety of Perth and Peel was locked down. On that date, we had three COVID cases sourced from the Bondi cluster. That included a woman who had gone to Bondi and inadvertently brought it back here. We had three cases and we went into lockdown. On the same day, New South Wales had 30 Delta variant COVID cases. New South Wales had what it termed a lockdown in four local government areas: the inner-city CBD of Sydney, Woollahra, Waverley and Randwick. The rest of the city was untouched by restrictions. In those places, the restrictions consisted of some things that we might expect, but the lockdown had some interesting parts. People could go on a pub crawl, so long as they stayed outside. People were allowed to go to hospitality outlets, but they were not allowed to drink standing up. The four-square-metre rule was in place, but hospitality outlets were open. Retail shops were open. As we saw, incredible criticism was focused on the fact that retailers were allowed to operate when they were not providing food or essential services, and people were allowed to just window-shop. All those things were happening when New South Wales had 30 cases on 27 June. That was an abject failure. What New South Wales did is not the model that we should follow. Melissa Price is wrong. She defended the Premier of New South Wales and said it was outrageous that anyone would criticise her.

What is happening in New South Wales is terrible. I feel for the people of New South Wales. They are stuck with that government. That is the greatest sense of devastation that they must be confronting. They are relying on that government to get them out of this. I hope the members of the New South Wales government can find it within themselves to do the right thing.

What we do not need in Western Australia is advice from the other side of the country about how to deal with a COVID outbreak. What we certainly do not need is people from this state joining them.

*Division*

Question put and a division taken, the Acting Speaker (Ms R.S. Stephens) casting her vote with the noes, with the following result —

Ayes (5)

Mr V.A. Catania  
Ms M.J. Davies

Dr D.J. Honey  
Mr R.S. Love

Mr P.J. Rundle (*Teller*)

Noes (44)

Mr S.N. Aubrey  
Mr G. Baker  
Ms L.L. Baker  
Ms H.M. Beazley  
Dr A.D. Buti  
Mr J.N. Carey  
Ms C.M. Collins  
Mr R.H. Cook  
Ms L. Dalton  
Mr M.J. Folkard  
Ms K.E. Giddens

Ms E.L. Hamilton  
Ms M.J. Hammat  
Ms J.L. Hanns  
Mr T.J. Healy  
Mr W.J. Johnston  
Mr H.T. Jones  
Ms E.J. Kelsbie  
Ms A.E. Kent  
Dr J. Krishnan  
Mr P. Lilburne  
Mr M. McGowan

Ms S.F. McGurk  
Mr D.R. Michael  
Mr K.J.J. Michel  
Mr S.A. Millman  
Ms L.A. Munday  
Mrs L.M. O'Malley  
Mr P. Papalia  
Mr S.J. Price  
Mr D.T. Punch  
Mr J.R. Quigley  
Ms M.M. Quirk

Ms A. Sanderson  
Mr D.A.E. Scaife  
Ms R.S. Stephens  
Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski  
Dr K. Stratton  
Mr C.J. Tallentire  
Mr D.A. Templeman  
Mr P.C. Tinley  
Ms C.M. Tonkin  
Ms S.E. Winton  
Ms C.M. Rowe (*Teller*)

Question thus negatived.