

CORONAVIRUS — HEALTH MODELLING —OMICRON VARIANT

27. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Premier:

Noting that at a briefing to the opposition on 10 February, the Chief Health Officer confirmed only preliminary Omicron modelling had been provided to government and further consideration was needed of updated Omicron modelling and seeding impacts.

- (1) Has the Premier received the updated modelling referred to by the Chief Health Officer?
- (2) Has this modelling been considered by government?
- (3) Will consideration of this modelling be the trigger for the government to finally dispense with the chaos and confusion, and provide the date to reopen the Western Australian border?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

- (1)–(3) The answer to that is no and no, to the best of my knowledge. Over February, as we said, we will consider all the circumstances with a view to setting a new date to bring down the hard border. I just want to repeat to the Leader of the Opposition the reasons that we did what we did. When we announced the initial date on 13 December, we set it for 5 February. We did that so we could get to very high levels of double-dose vaccination. On 13 December, Omicron, as a variant, was relatively new and the indications were that it was less severe. But we learnt, after 13 December, over the subsequent month or so, that although it is less severe, its transmissibility is extraordinary, and that changed everything. It basically meant that hospitalisations in the east and the number of people dying grew by massive amounts. That was the fact. We did not know that was going to occur.

When I announced on 13 December that 5 February was the date, I put in a caveat. I said it was subject to an emergency or a catastrophe. I happen to think thousands of people dying in the eastern states is an emergency and a catastrophe. Members opposite might think differently, but I actually think Australian lives are important and Western Australian lives, especially for us here, are important. That is why we considered all the facts, we watched what was occurring over east and we said on 30 January, in light of the commitment that we had made—if there was an emergency or a catastrophe—that we would be deferring opening on 5 February. I think that is entirely reasonable.

I am actually shocked that there is a big debate going on about saving lives. I am shocked that saving lives is somehow not an important consideration. I am amazed by this. I am amazed the opposition is asking these questions. Saving Western Australian lives is important, and we should be trying to do that—and jobs. I outlined to members opposite before what Omicron has done to the economies of South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria. It has absolutely devastated them.

We are watching, and the review will take into account a whole range of things. One is our vaccination rates. I just saw a report online that our vaccination rates now exceed New South Wales. That is extraordinary. We did not have the big outbreaks and lockdowns that New South Wales had for months and months, the federal bailout packages of billions and billions of dollars or numerous deaths. We did not have that. Those are the things that drive vaccination. We took tough action. We mandated vaccines for a range of people and for people to go into certain premises because what was our alternative to get vaccination rates up? That has caused some people to be unhappy with us as a government. Personally, it has caused me considerable grief. But we did what we had to do. You do what you have to do in these positions. So, watch the vaccination rate; that will be part of it, along with the kids' vaccination rate and the fact that infections in the eastern states appear to be declining. Opening at the peak of the outbreak, back in early February, obviously, was a bad idea, but it appears to be declining. That is another factor that we will take into account, and any other relevant considerations. All of that will happen, and we expect to get to an outcome later this month so we can set a new date with a state that is far better prepared to open and to allow free travel between states than it would have been on 5 February.