



The Hon. Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister

STATEMENT

Friday 5 February 2021

NATIONAL CABINET

The National Cabinet met today to discuss Australia's COVID-19 response, the Australian COVID-19 Vaccination Policy and management of Australia's borders in the context of the emergence of new variants.

National Cabinet continues to work together to address issues and find solutions to the health and economic consequences of COVID-19.

National Cabinet also received a detailed briefing on the economic and jobs outlook by the Commonwealth Treasury Secretary Steven Kennedy outlining how the Australian economy continues to recover as we head into 2021.

The Chief Medical Officer, Professor Paul Kelly, provided an update on the latest epidemiological data and medical advice in relation to COVID-19.

There have been 28,842 confirmed cases in Australia and, sadly, 909 people have died. There are currently 9 people in hospital. More than 13.1 million tests have been undertaken in Australia.

To date Australia's existing systems built around social distancing, testing, tracing, local health responses and quarantine have effectively mitigated the broader spread of COVID-19 virus and new variants of COVID-19 into the Australian community. COVID-19 vaccines will further strengthen Australia's ability to control the virus.

Australia has done well on both the health and economic fronts compared to most countries around the world. National Cabinet noted the significant increase in COVID-19 cases in many countries and the comparative strength of Australia's effort in addressing COVID compared to most other developed economies. Globally there have been over 104 million cases and sadly over 2.2 million deaths, with around 489,000 new cases reported in the last 24 hours.

National Cabinet reaffirmed commitment to the Australian COVID-19 Vaccine and Treatment Strategy and the Australian COVID-19 Vaccination Policy, which sets out the roles and responsibilities of the Commonwealth, states and territories in rolling out COVID-19 vaccination.

National Cabinet will meet again on Friday 5 March 2021.

Australian COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy

National Cabinet received a detailed update from Adjunct Professor John Skerritt, head of the Therapeutic Goods Administration, Professor Brendan Murphy, Chair of the Science and Industry Technical Advisory Group, and the Commonwealth Chief Medical Officer, Professor Paul Kelly on the Australian Vaccination and Treatment Strategy and noted detailed roll out plans developed by states and territories for COVID-19 vaccination.

Professor Paul Kelly outlined the importance of new COVID-19 vaccines in preventing severe disease and potentially transmission. A COVID-19 vaccination program which prevents severe diseases will ensure Australia can manage the virus in the same way as we manage other common diseases in society and will change the risk environment in Australian to COVID-19.

Professor Brendan Murphy reiterated the latest guidance that the COVID-19 vaccination rollout is on track to commence in late February 2021.

National Cabinet further noted that the Commonwealth Government had entered an Advance Purchase Agreement with Pfizer/BioNTech for an additional 10 million vaccines in 2021. Australia now has access to over 150 million COVID-19 vaccine doses, with spare capacity (after Australians have been offered vaccines) to be made available for partners in the Pacific and South East Asia.

National Cabinet further welcomed the extension of the free access to COVID-19 vaccines for all visa holders in Australia. It is vital that we offer vaccines to all people living in Australia in order to achieve a maximum level of coverage for all Australians.

New Taskforce to assess the risk environment of COVID-19 in 2021

National Cabinet agreed that in order to bring together economic and health considerations and to provide increased certainty and confidence to the Australian community, all States and Territories will establish a taskforce to work together to provide recommendations to the National Cabinet about consistent and coordinated COVID-19 responses across jurisdictions in the new risk environment.

The new Taskforce will consider the changed risk indicators associated with new strains of the COVID-19, alongside the strength of risk responses to date and in the future, including most significantly the impact of the vaccine rollout commencing in late February 2021. The Taskforce will be led by the Commonwealth Secretary of Prime Minister of Cabinet Mr Phil Gaetjens and his counterparts in each state and territory.

The Taskforce will report to National Cabinet at each meeting.

Quarantine Arrangements

National Cabinet noted the update on implementation of recommendations to the National Review of Hotel Quarantine arrangements and the continuous improvement to processes and procedures surrounding hotel quarantine.

To date over 211,000 people have returned to Australia through hotel quarantine since March 2020. The system implemented under state and territory public health orders has to date successfully mitigated the broader transmission of COVID-19 into the Australian community.

National Cabinet agreed that hotel quarantine will continue to be the model used to quarantine returning Australians. The Centre of National Resilience at Howard Springs will continue to operate as an emergency national facility for quarantine as per the National Review of Hotel Quarantine undertaken by Ms Jane Halton AO PSM and agreed by National Cabinet.

To date there have been a small number of instances of COVID-19 linked to hotel quarantine in Australia. Recent positive cases of quarantine workers in Western Australia, Queensland and Victoria have to date not seen seeding events into the local community. This highlights the continuously improved hotel quarantine processes and procedures, including daily testing and mask wearing.

The Commonwealth and the Northern Territory agreed to work together on options to increase quarantine capacity through an expansion of the Centre of National Resilience at Howard Springs quarantine facility. The Commonwealth and Queensland Government will work on further defining the Queensland proposal for a bespoke facility in Toowoomba. Any other changes to quarantine arrangements would be conditional on the work undertaken by the Taskforce led by the Commonwealth Secretary of Prime Minister of Cabinet Mr Phil Gaetjens.

International Passenger Arrival Caps

National Cabinet reaffirmed a shared priority to supporting Australians to return home through increased international passenger arrival caps.

National Cabinet agreed that caps would return to pre-8 January levels in New South Wales (430 per day) and Queensland (1000 per week) as planned from 12:01am on 15 February. The current cap in Western Australia (512 per week) will remain in place pending further review. From 12:01am on 15 February the cap in Victoria will increase from 1120 to 1310 arrivals per week with additional increases to be considered, and South Australia will increase from 490 to 530 arrivals per week.

National Cabinet noted that the agreed arrangements for international passenger arrival caps would continue until 11:59pm on 30 April.

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