

McKay's letter defence prompts outrage

Alexandra Smith
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NSW Labor leader Jodi McKay says she did not know she was signing a letter to help a child sex offender, which has prompted outrage from one of her MPs who has been supporting the victim's family.

Ms McKay was forced to address the revelations in a caucus meeting yesterday, after it emerged she signed a "letter of support" for a Tamil man who was attempting to obtain an Australian visa.

The man had previously pleaded guilty to two counts of indecently assaulting a child, who he met at a western Sydney train station when the girl was on her way to school.

Ms McKay said the letter was "a standard form letter" simply addressed to "whom it may concern" and was not sent to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, which was hearing the man's visa appeal. Rather, it was provided to church groups who had been supporting the former refugee, she said.

Several Labor sources said Prospect MP Hugh McDermott, who has been offering support to the girl's family "was absolutely filthy" about the "shocking error of judgment".

The family lives in Mr McDermott's electorate and he has told colleagues they have been "traumatised" by what their daughter went through.

Mr McDermott, who several Labor sources confirmed raised the issue in caucus, declined to comment. Ms McKay has maintained she knew nothing about the man's convictions when she provided the letter, and she felt for the girl's family.

"I feel a great deal of empathy for the family of the victim, who had no expectation this matter



Jodi McKay says she did not know the letter was for a child sex offender. Photo: Kate Geraghty

would be politicised and must be feeling dreadful over the reminder of what they have suffered," Ms McKay said.

"In providing a cover note for my constituent I was doing exactly what MPs always do.

"We are all here to serve our communities and in this instance I was simply helping my constituent bundle together several letters on the matter."

While one senior Labor MP said Ms McKay had "shown leadership and strength" in agreeing to be interviewed by radio broadcaster Ray Hadley about the issue, others said her handling of the revelations was a "train wreck".

The Tamil man, who arrived by boat from Sri Lanka in 2012, was convicted in 2017 of two counts of indecent assault of a

13-year-old girl in western Sydney and was sentenced to 12 months' jail. After his sentence, the former refugee was taken to Villawood Immigration Detention Centre and later applied for a bridging visa while awaiting a Federal Court decision on a protection visa.

Police Minister David Elliott seized on the revelation, saying: "I think she has to go."

Musicians' plea as live figures hit new low

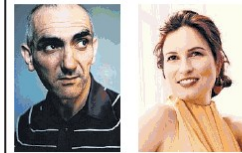
Martin Boulton

The collapse of Australia's live music industry, which is operating at less than 4 per cent of pre-COVID levels, has led artists and music workers to call on the federal government for an extension of the JobKeeper subsidy.

Artists such as Bernard Fanning, Missy Higgins, Midnight Oil, Sarah Blasko, Holy Holy, and Jenny Morris, the chair of the Australasian Performing Rights Association (APRA), are among more than 3500 industry names who have signed an open letter asking for urgent support, with lockdowns, border closures and audience restrictions continuing to devastate the live music industry.

The letter calls for an industry-specific wage subsidy in the event JobKeeper is not extended and was emailed to PM Scott Morrison, Treasurer Josh Frydenberg and Arts Minister Paul Fletcher.

"Each time there is another COVID-19 cluster or a quarantine breach, any plans to trade again are halted," the letter reads. "Musicians, sole traders, venues, clubs,



Paul Kelly and Missy Higgins are among the signatories.

festivals, music businesses and the industry remain out of work.

"Billions of dollars for hospitality and tourism generated from Australian music remains stifled. We are an industry in crisis."

Startling new figures released yesterday by APRA and AMCOS (Australasian Mechanical Copyright Owners Society) reveal Australian live music is operating at less than 4 per cent compared to this time last year, and there has not been a single national tour by any Australian artist since March.

Nightclubs remain closed, live music venues that are open are operating at an average of 30 per cent capacity and any music festivals being staged can only go ahead with significantly reduced capacity.

"Extending JobKeeper, or providing an industry-specific wage subsidy package, will keep the show on the road," the letter states. "This doesn't just make cultural sense, it makes economic sense. The arts and entertainment sector contributes around \$15 billion per year in GDP, employing close to 200,000 highly skilled Australians."

Others who signed the letter, including Courtney Barnett, Archie Roach and Paul Kelly, say it is impossible for the music industry and live entertainment sector to "properly restart" in the face of ongoing restrictions and future lockdowns.

Opera Australia to lose
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QUARANTINE, BORDER STAFF

NSW able to vaccinate all key workers within three weeks

EXCLUSIVE

Rachel Clun
Health reporter

NSW quarantine and essential border workers will have their first coronavirus vaccines within three weeks, with the state set to receive more than 14,000 doses a week of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine.

Australia's vaccine rollout begins around the country on Monday after the first delivery of 142,000 Pfizer vaccines landed in Sydney earlier this week.

The states and territories will receive 50,000 doses, divided on a proportional basis taking into account the number of hotel quarantine workers, essential healthcare staff and aged care workers and residents in each jurisdiction.

NSW has 6500 people working in the quarantine system each week and the state will get weekly deliveries of 14,000 doses, according to a senior government source who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The government source said the doses would be enough to cover all quarantine and border workers within two to three weeks.

It's more than double the initial 6000 weekly doses state government sources believed NSW was set to receive. Health sources were under the impression as late as Monday that the state would be given that lower amount.

But the government source said all states and territories had been informed, and NSW had the latest figures in writing.

The NSW government and health

Israel's rollout a beacon of hope for Australia
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authorities have been pushing the federal government for a larger share of the vaccines for quarantine workers considering the state shoulders the greatest burden of returning overseas travellers.

Victoria will receive 11,000 to 12,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine as the state prepares to end its "circuit breaker" lockdown.

NSW Health and the state government would not confirm the latest figures when approached late yesterday.

As well as quarantine workers, border staff, the first phase of the vaccine program includes aged care residents, aged care staff, and

essential health care workers. The federal government will use 30,000 Pfizer doses to begin vaccinating aged care workers and residents.

Mr Hunt said on Monday it was up to states to decide which groups from phase 1a would take priority.

"They have indicated - and we generally support it - that the greatest immediate risk is the border quarantine process," he said.

It comes as research commissioned by the federal Department of Health has found 86 per cent of Australians believe the coronavirus vaccines will help protect vulnerable people.

More than 4000 people were polled on their attitudes to the vaccines, with the majority (71 per cent) saying they would choose to have a COVID-19 vaccine by October.