



The Hon. Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister

**TRANSCRIPT
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EO&E...

PRIME MINISTER: Thanks for joining us everyone. Of course I'm joined by the Chief Medical Officer, Professor Brendan Murphy.

Today has been another successful meeting of the National Cabinet. Again I want to thank all the Premiers and Chief Ministers for the incredibly good faith way they continue to engage in the National Cabinet. The issues that we deal with are not simple. There are difficult considerations, there are a lot of trade-offs that have to be made, a lot of issues that have to be considered on the ground. Every state and territory has very different scenarios that they're facing at the moment and I do want to thank them again, very much, for the spirit in which they remain so committed to the National Cabinet process.

Having made some real progress over the past month in getting the virus under control, as reflected in the data that you have been seeing, and Professor Murphy will be taking you through some more of that data today, and also getting the key economic supports through programs like JobKeeper and Jobseeker out there and being implemented, our attention as a National Cabinet has now been turning to the road out, having worked through the road in, and that road to recovery on the other side. And importantly today at National Cabinet, we received quite extensive briefings from Dr Lowe the Governor of the Reserve Bank and Dr Kennedy, the Secretary of Treasury. At those briefings it was reinforced again to the National Cabinet, on a point that we strongly concur with, the need to synchronise our health and economic responses to the virus. We must consider these responses conjointly and understand the impacts of each, whether that's in the modelling work that we're doing, with the responses and measures we're putting in place, this has to be considered together and understood together. There was also very welcome support from the Governor for the fiscal policy responses that have been put in place by the Commonwealth and the states and territories, and you may have seen, I think it was the Grattan Institute work that was done, which outlined as a percentage of the economy, the scale of Australia's fiscal response to this crisis, which sits pretty much on top of the leaderboard around the world. They also highlighted, though, the need to ensure that on the other side of the virus, as we make our road out, that any sense of business-as-usual when it comes to the policy frameworks that we had prior to the election will need to be reconsidered on the other side to ensure that we can achieve the growth that will be necessary in our economy to get people back into work, to get our economy back on track.

It will be a different world on the other side of the virus and there'll be many challenges. And the National Cabinet has a very good appreciation of this and there has been some talk about its role on the other side of the virus and that is a discussion for another day. But between now and as we continue to work through the impact of the virus, the National Cabinet will also have on its agenda the types of things and policy measures that we can take together, working at federal and state level, to ensure we can give our economy every support and, importantly, every freedom to be able to get on and see businesses grow on the other side. And that cooperation at a federal and a state level will be very important, and there'll be a sense of urgency and, I think, of shared purpose on that front across the National Cabinet. And again, I thank them for collectively understanding that opportunity we have together.

Also, we've noted, of course, that today's unemployment rate showed only a modest change from the figures in February but we, as we all know those figures were largely based on the middle of March and that was, in particular, before we put in place the restrictions across the economy towards the back-end of March. While that figure is welcome, we know that is the best figure we're going to see for some time. We know what the expected impacts are going to be on employment and from the figures you've already seen released from Treasury and the RBA have similar views, as we've also seen in some of the IMF reporting as well. And so that is a figure which we can note but is not one that we can expect to be held going forward. And in saying that, we really do need to prepare ourselves as a country for some very sobering news on the economic front in the months ahead. I think Australians understand that, I think Australians are ready for that, but it is always difficult to receive that news. That's why it's so important that as a National Cabinet that the Australian public understand that we are working on that road out, and that we are working on that road ahead and that recovery piece that will see people getting back into work and Australia getting through this and to the other side.

The G20 met last night, the Finance Ministers and central bankers. This was an initiative that, actually, Australia recommended some weeks ago. That the finance ministers and central bankers should meet regularly. And I thank the G20 for continuing on with that practice and the Treasurer joined them last night. There is some \$8 trillion so far that has been put into government fiscal responses and other responses around the world and as I said, Australia features prominently in that. Importantly, they agreed that G20 nations would be moving to provide relief from, and deferral of payments to loans to developing countries. We have only one such loan and that is with Papua New Guinea. Most of our support, in fact pretty much all of the support that we provide in the Pacific is done through the form of grants. I spoke to Prime Minister Marape just before this press conference and let him know we'd be certainly honouring that agreement last night. We have one facility with them at the moment, some \$300 million US, that is an interest-only loan, and those payments will be deferred until the end of the year and they were obviously pleased with that decision.

Also on finance, we are advised today that markets are finding a new normal in this COVID-19 world. But that new normal and that relative stability, and everything is relative now, will depend very much on continuing to achieve a stable health outcome and Australia is well placed on that front as well as being able to set out the forward economic plans and the implementation of the measures that we're already putting in place. On bond markets, \$13 billion was raised yesterday on a syndicated offer which had some 25.8 billion of bids and that follows up the 5 billion raising just the previous week which had a coverage of over four times. And since the 20 March, some \$28 billion has been raised by the Australian Office of Financial Management. This should give Australians a sense of assurance and confidence that the significant financial commitments that we have made, we are being successful in raising those funds, on markets, some 68% on this latest syndicated offer was from domestic investors and that was dominated by banks. But we are finding ourselves in a situation where Australia's bond issuances have been well

received. That is because of the relative strength and the relative positive impression that markets have in relation to Australia.

Turning to the health issues considered today, we remain in, formally, after receiving advice to the, again from the AHPPC, in what we describe as the suppression phase. We are not in an eradication mode. Nor are we in the other mode which would just see some sort of herd immunity approach. These are not the approaches that we are following in Australia. We are not in the Sweden end, nor are we at the New Zealand end, when it comes to how we are approaching things. And our data and our experience shows that, in that phase, we are doing relatively very well. Particularly over countries that are using even more extreme forms of lockdown. But we can't overstate this success. There is a high number of internationally-acquired cases and that means that we need to look at the numbers in that context. But it is pleasing to know that it is estimated more than half of those who've contracted the coronavirus in Australia have actually overcome it, and that is also good news in terms of the actual number of people currently suffering from the coronavirus. On the road out, there are important metrics, important benchmarks that we were advised today by the AHPPC that will inform the National Cabinet's decisions about the easing of restrictions when that is deemed possible. And the most important of those is what's called the effective reproduction rate. Now I'm not going to give you a lecture on that, I will let Professor Murphy do that and take you through what that means and how that works. But there is some encouraging signs on that front. And we need to hold our performance in relation to the effective reproduction rate and we're looking at that by state. That is the most important way to look at how we're tracking in relation to those statistics. So in order to understand how and when we can move, then those metrics are important to give us a guide.

But we agreed today, on the basis of the advice and it's something I've been talking about for a few days, there are three things we need to get in place. The first of those is a more extensive surveillance, or sentinel as it's called, testing regime. So beyond just those who are symptomatic. If we are to move to a different phase when it comes to the restrictions we need an even broader testing regime than we have at this point. Now we have one of, if not the most, extensive testing regimes in the world today but we need to do even better than that to ensure that we can have greater confidence that when we move to a lesser restriction environment, then we can have confidence that we'll be able to identify any outbreaks very, very quickly and respond to them. The second part of that is ensuring that we have an even greater tracing capability than we have now. Now, I want to commend the state governments. This has been the real heavy lifting they have been doing over the last several weeks in really boosting their capability to trace cases. They are a team of Sherlock Holmes' out there at the moment and they are doing a fantastic job of tracking down these cases. But we need to lift that to an industrial capability and we need to do that using technology and we need to do that as soon as we possibly can and we will be needing the support of Australians. If we can get that in place, if we can get our tracing capability up from where it is, then that is going to give us more options and Australians more freedoms. The third area is that we need a local response capability. We're seeing this in part now in north-western Tasmania where we have an outbreak, the Australian Defence Forces, the AUSMAT teams, working together with state authorities have been moving very quickly to contain that outbreak. And there will be other outbreaks in other parts of the country and in all states and territories, we need that ability to move very fast to be able to lock down an outbreak where it occurs and to ensure that it does not transmit more broadly within the community. If we are going to move to an environment where there are fewer restrictions then you need these three things in place.

The National Cabinet agreed today that we will use the next four weeks to ensure that we can get these in place. And the baseline restrictions that have been set some weeks ago will remain in place until we're

able to achieve those three goals. We'll be reviewing that in the next four weeks. A positive thing to say is that we've often found ourselves, as we have now, in a better place, ahead of time. If we're able to achieve that, well and good. But we want to be very clear with Australians that the baseline restrictions that we have in place at the moment, there are no plans to change those for the next four weeks. In terms of states that have gone beyond the baseline restrictions, and that includes how they may be enforcing measures, or there are some restrictions that are put in place in some states and not in others, those states will take the advantage over the next few weeks and they will make their own decisions whether they want to change any of those arrangements on their own circumstances. So I would refer you to the individual states and territories where they may choose to do that over the next few weeks. One of those areas which we will be considering again on Tuesday is the issue of elective surgery. There is a bit more work to do on that but we'll be considering elective surgery next Tuesday.

And finally on the health issues, on six months. We've often talked about what is the six months, when does it start, when does it end. This is the June and September quarter. I've always considered the six months the period in which we've been operating and will be operating these lifeline measures in the economy, which is JobSeeker with the JobSeeker supplement, and JobKeeper. They run for those six month periods. We have bought that time to find the road out. Now, whether we do or not, no other country has at this point. But this is our goal. To ensure that we can get the economy at a level which will not require those extreme levels of income support and the economy will be able to support people on those incomes in a self-sustaining way. We have bought that time for six months and we intend to use it wisely. We would expect that there will be restrictions in some form or another running over that entire six month period but the degree of those and how much they can be relaxed or changed over that period, well, that will very much depend on the circumstances, the health and the economic advice at the time.

On schools, you will have - you should have - a list of seven principles that have been agreed today in relation to schools and the advice that was adopted from the medical expert panel on protections and practices that can be employed in schools to support those environments. This is a state and territory issue. I want to make this really clear. The Commonwealth does not run public schools, state schools. They are run by state governments. They set the policy, they set the rules. All states and territories are operating within the principles that we've set out here in these seven statements, and rather than go through them with you because I know you want to get to questions, they're there before you. They'll be posted and secondly, there is a lot of very helpful, I think, instructions and advice from the medical expert panel for schools that deal principally with the safety of teachers and other staff. The health advice has always been consistent, that this virus behaves very different with children than it does with adults and for children, the health advice has been very clear, that schools are a safe place for students to be. I think where the confusion arises is that for teachers they are more likely, teachers are more at risk in the staffroom than they are in the classroom, when it comes to how the health advice plays out and the impact of this virus on children as opposed to teachers. That means that we need to have proper arrangements in place for teachers and other staff in schools, obviously, to protect their work environment. But at the same time, that doesn't lead to the same rules applying for students because they have a different level of risk. So that is the advice of the medical expert panel and that is contained in the principles and in the advice that is tabled today.

The National Cabinet also agreed the COVID-19 operational plan for people with disability, and that builds on the \$1 billion in financial assistance for NDIS providers to support increased costs and to maintain business viability, particularly over this period. I also note that as we are seeking over the next four weeks and beyond to move to a different phase, after that period that we will be seeking and I will be raising this with the Opposition at our regular meeting with the leaderships of both the Opposition and the

Government this evening, that we will be looking to have a trial week of Parliament in May and that would be returning to the normal business of Parliament. That would not be the Parliament coming together to consider necessarily COVID-19 related measures but if there are such measures that need to be considered, then of course they can be. But we want to send a very clear message that we are well ahead of where we thought we might be at this point and that would mean that we might be able to - I would say will be able to - move to having the Parliament meet again on a regular basis. But obviously we just need to trial how that is going to work. We will have to work, obviously, within the new arrangements that we were able to establish a few weeks ago. There are a lot of logistical issues we have to overcome, there are not many flights running now which will make it difficult, but there are also some border closure issues for a number of states which also have to be resolved and I am sure we will be able to deal with that through the National Cabinet as well. But it is important that Parliament goes about that work and where we are in a position to do so, and I definitely think we will be, then I look forward to Parliament being able to resume and continue to do the legislative work that it does. But I would stress this to people at home - just because the Parliament isn't meeting does not mean your members of Parliament are not working very hard every single day. You would have seen them, the support they are providing in the community on COVID-19. Of course, the Ministers and the Government have been extremely busy on the COVID-19 response and so politicians and members of Parliament are working very hard for their communities. Another part of their work is, obviously, the legislative work that is done here in Parliament and we would envisage coming back in the trial week sometime in May and it is my hope that we might then be able to establish a pattern beyond that which is workable.

So, just before I handed over to Professor Murphy, the more we do the right thing now, the easier it will be in the long-term for everybody. We still have a difficult road ahead of us at this point, despite the successes that Australians have achieved in the weeks that we have just gone through. The more we keep it under control, the more we all enlist in the sorts of things we need to do to help those who are tracing the virus and identifying it and reacting to it. If there are outbreaks, well, the more we might be able to at some point turn to easing those restrictions. We have stayed ahead of it, we've got to keep ahead of it, we can't allow our patience to wear off. I know it's a very anxious thing for Australians and when they see the really good results, they go well can't we all just go back to how it was? None of us would like that more than any of us here. But let's look to the experience of what has happened overseas. If you ease off too quickly too early, then you end up making the situation even worse and I don't just mean in the health terms. If you move too early and the health response gets out of control, then the economic consequences will be even worse. And so we need to keep it finely balanced, that is what we are seeking to do, and I will ask Professor Murphy now to take you through his report and the numbers, which again I find very encouraging. Thank you. Professor Murphy.

PROFESSOR BRENDAN MURPHY, CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER: Thanks, PM. So today we have 6,457 cases. Unfortunately, 63 people have lost their lives due to COVID-19. We've got 42 people still on ventilators across the country. So we've got to remember that there are some people who suffered gravely with this disease.

As the PM said, our numbers are looking very encouraging at the moment. We've had less than 50 cases a day over the last few days. Many of those cases are returned travellers or contacts, but, as before, there are small numbers of community-acquired cases where a source is not known. As I have said on many occasions, this disease can spread rapidly undetected for, very easily and we've seen that in other countries of the world. In fact we have seen a small outbreak in north-west Tasmania recently - where very rapidly - a large number of cases appeared over the course of a few days. It has been expertly handled by the Tasmanian health authorities, in an exemplar way of bringing an episode under control. But as the

PM has said, if we relax the distancing measures that are stopping or reducing that community transmission, that will inevitably lead to some more outbreaks of community transmission. Unless we are prepared as a nation to detect those outbreaks really early, and get on top of them, and control them, and isolate the cases, and quarantine the contacts, we could end up with large community outbreaks that could lead to situations like we've all seen every night on the nightly news in high income countries with good health systems, like the USA and the UK. We cannot afford to do relaxation until we have a public health system which is so finely tuned that it can detect and respond to any outbreak. That is the message that we gave to the National Cabinet today. Like anybody, AHPPC is very keen to see some of these distancing restrictions removed, but we are not confident just yet that we have a public health system that is so completely prepared that we can guarantee to government that we will be able to deal with any outbreak. Our public health system is one of the best in the world. And I will show you some data on that in a minute. But we just have to hold the course while we get ourselves completely ready so that we can live through these next difficult months together. What I'm going to do now is show you some of the modelling, as we've agreed. We are going to be showing all of the modelling that the University of Melbourne modelling team working for AHPPC and the Commonwealth Department are doing and they're going to release a paper this afternoon using some early Australian data and I think you've all got a handout showing these slides. So we will just go through it.

So what we are showing you now is some modelling that is based on real Australian data and this is the sort of information we are going to use to understand this epidemic as it progresses over the next months. We are going to start using a concept of 'nowcasting' instead of forecasting which is able to use current data to identify what's happening at the moment and what's likely to be projected to happen in the next fortnight. We will be able to review the effectiveness of our current measures and be prepared to respond to future changes. Can we have the next slide?

So you have all seen these graphs and you can see the flattening of the curve and you can see the progressive drop in numbers of new cases. A very gratifying outcome but, again, one about which we cannot be complacent. Next slide.

So, two measures we are looking at today. One is a model that was developed by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine to assess countries on the effectiveness of symptomatic case detection, this uses a model which you can get in the paper when it's published this afternoon to show how likely it is that a given country is actually detecting its cases. And as you will see as we come to this, we are doing very well and that's probably one of the major reasons we have done so well in controlling the early phases of this pandemic. The other bit of data we are going to show is the Prime Minister referred to the effective reproduction numbers - you are all now familiar with the R_0 , the basic reproduction number of the virus and we think it is about two and a half for the coronavirus, but the effective reproduction number is the number of people each case infects after we have mitigate and control it. Obviously if we get that below one we can control and reduce the outbreak. So it's a very good measure of our mitigation and control strategies. Next slide.

So this is showing across Australia the symptomatic case detection rate and according to this model, which will be published today, we are detecting in a model sense only - we could be detecting 100% of all cases - but they're estimate is we're detecting, within the margins of error of this model, about 92% of all symptomatic cases. And you will see that there are different predictions for each state. These are showing four states here but they are all very high. Next slide.

These are the other states. All of our states and territories have a very high symptomatic case detection rate. What that tells you is that our testing regiment, our surveillance regiment, is highly effective. And to show you that more starkly we will look at the next slide - you see it's very hard to read, people on TV probably can't see it, but right down at the bottom of the slide is Australia which is ranked highest in this model of all of those countries in its symptomatic case detection rate. The estimates are showing that we are the most likely country in the world in this modelling - of the countries shown here - to be detecting our symptomatic cases. And they're estimates showing that Australia has an estimate of 84% on this model. So that was very reassuring about our public health surveillance. Next slide.

And this is the effective reproduction number that I talked about before. And we are showing it here for all states. You can see there that South Australia and Tasmania, the other states have dropped off the bottom there, but you can see Tasmania, down the bottom there is showing a little kick up and we expected to see that because of that little outbreak in Burnie. That shows how sensitive this measure is. That will drop away very quickly as that outbreak is brought under control. You can see in the other three states there, New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia, that the effective reproduction rate is well below one, showing that the epidemic is reducing. Next slide.

And this is showing Victoria and Western Australia again below 1. So what we are showing here is the measures that are being used to monitor the outbreak on our real Australian data, the measures that we've got to reassure us that our public health surveillance is good and our response measures are good. But as I said earlier, our public health response has to get even stronger if we are going to be able to relax distancing and take us through this pandemic with the least amount of social disruption but the best possible public-health control. Thanks PM.

PRIME MINISTER: Thanks Brendan, we'll start on this side this time, Mal did you want to go first? Or? I was just going to move across so?

JOURNALIST: Thanks PM. Could you elaborate on what you are saying that we won't be able to return to the old days in terms of I think you were saying in terms of fiscal policy? That there were going to have to be changes there? Or have I misinterpreted that?

PRIME MINISTER: No I was talking about general policy settings at both a state and federal level. On the other side of this virus and leading on the way out we are going to have to have economic policy measures that are going to have to be very pro-growth, that is going to enable businesses to employ people, that is going to enable businesses to invest and businesses to move forward. Our government sees business at the centre of the economy. We do not see government at the centre of the economy. In the middle of an emergency crisis such as this of course government to protect Australia's sovereignty must step in with these emergency measures, but going forward we need to see a revitalisation of the private sector economy and that means we need policy settings at both the state and federal levels that'll encourage that growth and that'll encourage that employment and encourage that investment and there will be an opportunity I think for federal and state governments to work together and, initially and potentially beyond as part of a National Cabinet process to do that. Now, Commonwealth Government, Federal Government will be doing it's thing there'll be a Budget in October, and equally the states will be doing what they need to do, but there was a very clear message from the economic advisors this morning, particularly Dr Lowe, and that is, that if we thought that we can just grow the economy under the old settings then we need to think again.

JOURNALIST: You say in your principles that with the teachers and schools, that you want to ensure the health and safety of teachers, at a practical level how is that actually going to work particularly when maybe a lot of students might actually go back to school in term two?

PRIME MINISTER: Particularly given? I missed the last part?

JOURNALIST: When students actually go back to school in term two, if we do see a lot of students go back?

PRIME MINISTER: Look I'm going to ask Dr, Professor Murphy to talk about the advice, that the medical expert panel had given to schools they are releasing today, I think we need to appreciate that because of the term structure that is so different for different states, that there is going to be some variation, and that's understandable. But effectively what you're seeing in Victoria this week, is what you are seeing in New South Wales just a week ago, as they are coming into the term break. And Queensland is coming back I think next week, and states will move at different times. I think what you see in these principles is an understanding that of course, face-to-face learning in a classroom on campus that is the best way to deliver education, that is an obvious statement, but at times like this then alternative models are being used, principally to protect the safety of teachers, in this environment, and so these models will be used for a time, but, ultimately, at some point we'd obviously like to get back to that other arrangement, that's certainly what the Federal Government's view is and we will continue to work with everybody to that end but states will have to set their own rules around that, but we need to be very clear as states and territories have, this is not a health issue for kids, this is a health issue for those who are working at schools, and as I said they are more likely to be at risk in the staff room then they are in the classroom. Brendan?

PROFESSOR MURPHY: So as the PM said, the most important thing is to protect teachers, so we have recommended that older teachers and teachers with chronic disease not be working in the classroom but we are also recommending that there is a range of measures that teachers can take to reduce the risk, so clearly right across the school environment reducing the size of groups, teachers can practice social distancing with each other, we know that children don't seem to be transmitting this virus to any great extent in schools, but clearly some children have picked up this virus, a small number, mostly in the family, so we are recommending that teachers practice good distancing particularly with other adults but also some distancing in the classroom, that children practice very good hygiene, and there's a whole range of measures that will be released this evening in how to make a school safer.

PRIME MINISTER: It's practising good hygiene, it's all of these issues. And as I said, they set out their first aid arrangements, it is a pretty exhaustive list so you'll have that very very shortly.

Just hang on, I'm working around the room, everyone will get a go. Yep?

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, Winston Peters flagged a more relaxed border arrangement between New Zealand and Australia on television this morning, he called it a trans-Tasman bubble, how far have those arrangements gone, and is that how you imagine border control as well being loosened over time, New Zealand first and then staggered by a country to country basis?

PRIME MINISTER: Well that's, we are aware of their interest in that, it has not got much beyond that, I mean New Zealand at the moment has been in a state of even more extreme lockdown, there in New Zealand, that has been their process. So we are aware of that but we are not at present contemplating any border changes at the moment, we will obviously work closely with New Zealand, we have all along,

and our measures have largely mirrored each other, New Zealand decided to go a lot further but I'd note that the outcomes we are getting are actually on a per capita basis actually better than what is happening in New Zealand, that is not a criticism that is just to say that while following different practices, where we've pitched it has managed to get as good if not a better outcome.

Yep here, I'm sorry we'll go to the back and then, no no, you're next- go ahead?

JOURNALIST: Will the government bail out Virgin?

PRIME MINISTER: I will give the same answer I have given to this question each and every time, and that is, we as a government, appreciate the value of two competitive, viable airlines in the Australian economy, we are in a very unusual period at the moment but that is a good outcome to have in the Australian economy, that any responses that the Commonwealth government is going to have will be done on a sector wide basis, and that's the way we will continue to pursue those issues, I'm aware that there are many market-based options that are currently being pursued, and I would wish those discussions every success.

JOURNALIST: PM, Professor Murphy, the actuaries Institute has done some modelling, they estimate that there might be 20,000 cases in Australia, and if broader testing was used including random samples those numbers might be found, would you have a response to that?

PROFESSOR MURPHY: My, our sense is that is unlikely, we can't be absolutely sure, one of the challenges is that it's pretty clear now there are some asymptomatic cases of COVID-19 that don't present for testing. But we have done some pretty broad scale testing in a lot of states now, South Australia is testing everybody with respiratory illness, New South Wales has broadened it's testing, Victoria's broadened its testing, we have existing, what we call Sentinel surveillance which has been going for weeks, a range of general practices which test every single person with respiratory illness, we are testing every unusual pneumonia in every hospital, if we had that level of undetected cases I think we would have found it by now, but we were definitely going to broaden our testing and surveillance and that is the reason we want to put broader surveillance in before we relax our measures but I think that estimate is likely to be too high.

PRIME MINISTER: I'd refer you to two numbers, when you look at Australia's positive test rate on those tests which is one of the most comprehensive in the world, is a positive test rate of 1.7%, you compare that to Sweden at 14%, or even Japan at 8.5%, I think that gives you an idea of the level of precision we are currently getting, the other one I refer you to is the rather morbid statistic of the fatality rate which is at just under 1% at the moment. Now when you look at the mortality rates you are seeing elsewhere in the world, I mean the UK you are seeing that rate up at almost 13%. And in other countries like Spain it's over 10%, France, over 13%, in the Netherlands it's 11%, they have a population of 17 million. One thing I think we can be very sure of in Australia and this is why I think Professor Murphy said in the courtyard the other day, the one set of numbers we do believe is Australia's. And that is because we, I think we are pretty confident, particularly, sadly where there have been fatalities, when they have been COVID related, sadly overseas I don't think they can have that same level of confidence.

Phil?

JOURNALIST: PM, just back to your comments on business as usual on economic policy on the other side of this and the need to drive business productivity and the investment, does that mean we can expect

from the Federal perspective at least to see changes, the lowering of taxes that are seen as impediments like corporate taxes and changes to IR laws and things like that? Is that what, would we be looking in that sphere?

PRIME MINISTER: I think it would be premature to speculate on that at this point Phil, I think the advice from the governor and the advice from Treasury, is very much that we couldn't expect the high levels of growth if we were to continue with similar sort of policy settings, so that is something we are going to be examining very very closely and I want to do it very closely with the states and territories because they have a big role to play in all of this as well. I mean one of the things that the transport and infrastructure ministers are working on right now, I think they're meeting now, led by the Deputy Prime Minister is how we can get some of these projects going again, I mean one of the areas of the economy which hasn't been restricted is our construction sector, I mean in New Zealand they have shut the construction sector down. And the construction sector, I want to see more roads built, I want to see more bridges built, I want to see more roads fixed, I want to see those things happening now. Because that will be good for the economy, it will be good for employment, and it can be done in a COVID economy, that is one of the things that the Transport Ministers in particular are working on at this very moment.

Okay I'll start at the front and go to the back?

JOURNALIST: Just on schools, you've said it's very jurisdictional, are there just differing views from state to state on what should be done in this sector in their own jurisdictions and on childcare, is anything changing in this, you said we are ahead of where we thought we would be, parliament will resume sooner rather than later, is childcare going to resume sooner rather than later and what does that mean for the funding the government has put in place, that's meant to last for six months?

PRIME MINISTER: I'll start with the second one first. Childcare, the arrangements we put in place for childcare, or universities, or private hospitals, JobSeeker, JobKeeper, these are all on this six month timeframe I mentioned before, and that's over the June and September quarters and you can anticipate they will stay in place for that period of time. In terms of schools and the views of individual jurisdictions, well I think the principles we have released today and agreed summarise the general position that all the schools should be following in each jurisdiction, but of course there will be differences, take the Northern Territory for example, in the Northern Territory they will be back next week and back exactly according to normal, there have been virtually no cases, I think there have been actually no cases for some time now in the Northern Territory. So they are doing that from next week I understand, more broadly and in Victoria, you know the arrangements there, I know in New South Wales they are working on a range of different options about how they might come back and Western Australia the same, in South Australia as they went into the break they had attendances of 50 per cent and at one point up to 80 per cent, so I think you are seeing differences between states about how parents are engaging, how schools are acting, and I would expect to continue to see that. Because schools are delivered at a state and territory level, but these principles I think set out quite clearly what the priorities are and where we would like to ultimately be.

Sam?

JOURNALIST: The principles you outlined here, I think we all accept the fact that your position on schools is really clear, the principles are clear as mud, they are full of the sort of poly waffle language we have come to know and love from COAG,

PRIME MINISTER: Sam that's unlike you.

JOURNALIST: They do accept that the states are in charge so what are parents to make of this? Do you accept as Victoria has proposed that it is a risk to have parents doing drop off and moving around the state, how soon will your own children be going back to school, and what is your response to Malcolm Turnbull's book where he claims that you are a Machiavellian plotter and that the finance Minister Mathias Cormann didn't think you were not up to the job?

PRIME MINISTER: On the last point, I am not interested in any distractions, I'm focused on the safety and health of Australians, and I think that's what you'd expect me to say and it's certainly my position.

I don't share your rather cynical view about the principles Sam, I really don't. In terms of these principles what we are setting out is that of course, you want in the best of arrangements for children to be able to be taught at school by professional teachers. That's the clear objective we would all want, sorry?

JOURNALIST: That's not in the principles though?

PRIME MINISTER: It is. It's principle 1. It says, our schools are critical to the delivery of high quality education for students and to give our children the best possible start in life. Our education systems are based on the recognition that education is best delivered by professional teachers to students in the classroom on a school campus. Principle 1.

JOURNALIST: [inaudible] say that flexible and distance learning?

PRIME MINISTER: well it says, that it is accepted that during the Covid-19 crisis, alternative flexible remote delivery of education services may be needed. Now that's not going to be happening in the Northern Territory, as I just said. So I think this does provide a very clear objective of where you're seeking to get to, now in relation to drop-offs and pickups, we actually, I agree with the Victorian Premier I think we do have to be very careful about the interaction between parent on drop-offs and pickups because that's where the potential infection occurs, but those things can be accommodated they can be addressed, I don't think that's not something beyond the wits of most parents and schools, I mean at the drop-off at my own children's school you are not allowed to get out of the car, you are not allowed to see the principal who is there, the kids get out, I can't even go around to the boot and get their bags out, they have to do that themselves, so there is no contact between any adult and that was before Covid-19. In relation to my own kids that you ask about Sam, I want my own kids to go back to school and to be taught in a classroom by a teacher. That's what I want to see happen, and when a school in New South Wales that they go to can deliver that for them then I will happily have them back there in a heartbeat, that's what I want them to do, I don't want them to just go and sit at a school hall and look at the Internet, I want them to go to school and learn and be taught by a teacher in accordance with principle 1 of these principles, and when that's on offer I will certainly have them there in a heartbeat, whether they are sitting in a school hall or sitting at home at the moment, the outcome is going to be the same, I would prefer obviously for my own children, as I was having them attend school up until the last week before school break because the Internet arrangements they put in place meant there was no difference between them learning at school and learning in the classroom. Regretfully, they were no longer getting classroom teaching at that school. That's what I'd like to see happen again.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, you mentioned the road out, no decision for another four weeks as to when those restrictions might be eased, you set a 6-month timeline until the end of the September quarter for

the economic material. Can you elaborate on what you think the road out looks like? What your strategy might be for easing what and when? And can you switch that economic lifeline support off after six months if you haven't achieved what you set out to achieve?

PRIME MINISTER: I think the six month timeframe gives us a ticking clock basically on this lifeline and it gives us a clear goal to work towards to ensure that we find that road out with restrictions eased ideally, and for the economy to lift to a level of activity where people's wages and incomes can be supported again, where they can get the hours, where they can get the days, where they can be back working again and be in a position to support themselves and not relying on JobKeeper or JobSeeker or things of that nature. That is the timeframe that we have bought through those economic supports, so you have got to work backwards from there. There will be I imagine baseline levels of restrictions that will be changed over that period of time, just like we are saying in about a month from now there will be some changes to the baseline restrictions that we put in place a few weeks ago. That is what I was just about to get to. So when we hit a trigger basically on this RF (reffer) provision, that statistic, when we get to that and when we have got in place the broader testing regime for surveillance, the automated contract regime in place, and we have scaled up our capacity to respond to outbreaks, that is what we are looking to do in the next four weeks - build that up and then what the states and territories and ourselves are working on, on what you would call high-value, low risk economic activities that we will be able to start to open up more of.

JOURNALIST: Is that going out of the road the same way you came in effectively? Is it working backwards?

PRIME MINISTER: In broad terms I don't think that is an unfair assumption but the specifics of it are being worked through. I think it will be some time. I think social distancing, the washing of the hands, the doing of those things, that is something we should do until we find a vaccine. Those sorts of things, the 1.5m, being conscious of your distancing with each other, that is something we will live with this for the foreseeable future, but when it comes to the specific economic restrictions that have been put in place, well after the next month then there will be the opportunity to review that and potentially make some changes if we meet those other benchmarks. But within the next four weeks, states and territories that went further than those baselines both in enforcement and with some additional measures of their own, they have indicated today that they will be reviewing those in the meantime. As I said, next week on Tuesday we will consider the issue of elective surgery, which could see some immediate return in that area which would be very positive and I have already talked about schools.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, aren't you effectively describing aggressive test, trace, isolate and when you're happy that that is working, we're on the road out?

PRIME MINISTER: Yes.

JOURNALIST: That's it?

PRIME MINISTER: I think that is a good summary Tim. That is exactly what the advice has been and what our own sort of policy view I think has been as my Cabinet here federally as well as the Chief Ministers and Premiers, you have got to have the assurance that you can deal with outbreaks because they will happen and that could be a bumpy road on occasion. You can't rule out increasing, potentially restrictions at some point if things got a bit out of control because the virus writes its own rules. It doesn't work to our rules. But getting those protections in place - and I want to stress this about the automated contract tracing - you have heard about the fact that we are working on a tracing app that people can be involved in and there are still some issues that we have to work through on that, the privacy issues on that are

being worked through very thoroughly, but the more people we have that ultimately take that up, when we are in a position to launch it, the better the tool we have, and the more able we are to be able to get down that road back.

Michelle?

JOURNALIST: Can I take you to the issue of debt and deficit, which particularly worries some of your own supporters. Would you anticipate being able to set out before the next election a roadmap to deal with those issues into the future?

PRIME MINISTER: Well there will be a Budget in October and that Budget in October I think will begin that very process that you are referring to. Debt and deficit concerns me greatly and my concern about debt and deficit is based on the fact that I have been part of a government for six years that has worked incredibly hard to get the Budget back into balance and a growth in debt reduced from 30 per cent to 0 in the space of that six years, so when you go through that process you are particularly sensitive to the issues of increased debt and deficit.

JOURNALIST: So tackling it early rather than later?

PRIME MINISTER: We will have a plan to deal with it, just like we have had a plan to deal with it for the last six years, and I think Australians can take some comfort and confidence from that, that as a government we have already demonstrated our ability to deal with debt and deficit in the past, but you will recall that for almost all of that period of time, this is a time when we went to record levels of health and education spending. This was a time when we went to engage in the biggest recapitalisation of our defence forces and growing us to 2 per cent of GDP in defence spending that is the highest level we have seen, and turns it around from pre- Second World War levels when we came to government, so what we will do is ensure that we will be growing that economy to support our Budget and to ensure we have the right settings in place around living within our means as a Budget to deliver the right outcome to get the debt and deficit under control.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, regarding that mobile phone app you are developing, can you confirm that for those who have downloaded it it will require the phone to capture the numbers of anyone who they spend more than 15 minutes with over a rolling period? It will require those to be collected, and will you consider less privacy intrusive options such as the model advanced by Google and Apple?

PRIME MINISTER: well I would contend that that model that you suggested would be less invasive I would suggest that your thesis is incorrect. I would.

JOURNALIST: Well the Google and Apple one uses beacons.

PRIME MINISTER: And I think the permissive option around a trace app that enables people to elect to do exactly the same thing that you are proposing, the Google and the Apple proposal does exactly the same thing, it is just that it is not a consent based model. The trace app which has been put in place in Singapore is a consent based model and the reason we are not quite ready yet is we are still working through ensuring that it meets the privacy protections, robust and up to a standard that we believe is necessary for the Australian context and that is what the Attorney General in particular is working on right now. It is a complex area, but it is a tool that Australia will need if we are to pursue the road out of this that we would like to pursue.

We'll go right up the back and then we'll come to you.

JOURNALIST: PM in addition to the elective surgery that you are going to be reviewing, might you also include IVF procedures? That has been a concern for parents who have been told, well prospective parents who have been told they can't do that and, if I may, a technical question for Professor Murphy. About a week ago you started publishing recovery data. Do we actually have a nationally standardised way to determine when a person is considered recovered? Is that being applied by every state and territory?

PRIME MINISTER: I will let Brendan deal with both of them actually because that was the intention.

PROFESSOR MURPHY: Yes, I think IVF is definitely something that would be considered an elective procedure and something that was paused during the elective surgery cessation and it is something that the state and territory health departments will be considering along with the other range of elective activities. It is very important if we do restart elective activity that we only do it through the confines of our available PPE supplies so it would have to be fairly gentle because we have to ensure we have enough protective equipment. So that modelling is being done at the moment. At the moment recovery, we have stopped doing clearance testing after people have recovered, so a recovery - people are allowed out of isolation, two weeks after diagnosis if they have been completely symptom-free for 72 hours and we are making an assumption in our modelling that people who are released from isolation are now recovered. There is no longer - unless you are a healthcare worker - in some states we are doing tests to make sure that you're not still carrying the virus. So we are working towards a nationally consistent algorithm to determine recovery at the moment.

PRIME MINISTER: Hang on, I'll go to Brett and then,

JOURNALIST: PM just to, you sort of opened today by saying that the states and territories agreed that there's a need to synchronise the health and economic response. There will still be a lot of parents tonight who won't know whether they should send their children to school. Are you frustrated that there isn't that synchronisation in terms of education? And to both of you the big announcement today in terms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities testing and care, can you perhaps elaborate on how important it is in those communities where you have said you have been most worried about Covid-19 taking hold?

PRIME MINISTER: I will let Brendan deal with the second part of that. Look on the first part of it. I wouldn't agree with your assessment of how I would feel about it. The principles I think do set out very clearly what we all agree and what we are all sort of working towards. Parents should follow the instructions that are being provided by state premiers and their state education ministers. And for the arrangements put in place - see if you are going to school in Victoria there is only one person you need to listen to, and that is the Premier of Victoria. As to what you are doing in Victoria, likewise in New South Wales you should listen to what, the Premier of New South Wales. You don't get the choice to go to Victoria one day and New South Wales another, even if you live in Albury-Wodonga, but if you are living in the Northern Territory it is what the Chief Minister is saying and they have different arrangements again. We are a big enough country with very different geographic and different case scenarios that are occurring in the states and territories for there to be some differences, but those differences I think all accord with the principles that we have set out today. So I think it is very clear that the medical expert advice is - children are safe to go to school, but there are issues within each state about the delivery of education, which they have

had to take into account, which means that they will be operating on slightly different bases, but consistent with these principles.

Oh sorry, on the Indigenous issue.

PROFESSOR MURPHY: So we have from the outset of this pandemic, we have been very concerned about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, they are a high risk group, if, particularly in remote communities if this virus got in it could do significant damage. So we've had from the outset a community owned and informed strategy, which is unlike other communities, perhaps with the exception of aged care, it is focused around keeping out the virus out at all costs, which is why many of those communities have set up very strict isolation and prevention of people coming in, but also programs to health screen and check people who might have to come in and work in those communities. Clearly there is now a broadened testing program. We will be using what we call remote testing kits that can go into communities and we have used them in sexually transmitted infection diagnosis in the past. We are getting the test kits to be able to have mobile testing, but the key issue is to prevent the virus getting into those communities at all costs.

JOURNALIST: Why has Australia not trying to eradicate the virus given our progress has been so strong and if we are not at the New Zealand end of the scale yet, is it possible we will get there at some point in future?

PRIME MINISTER: As we observed today and Professor Murphy will touch on this, as well, a by product of the approach we are taking may well be what you say, that could well happen. But the eradication pathway involves an approach which would see even more economic restrictions than are currently in place and that is not seen to be, a wise, in our view, trade-off in how we are managing the two crises that we are facing, the economic one and of course the health one. Now we are doing well on the health one and I want to do better on the economic one. So the suppression strategy which we have been following, that's basically what we have been following for about a month, I think that has sat well within the groove of Australia's ethos and how we live and what we would hope. I think it is rubbing at the edges a bit in parts of the country, and that is understandable. We like our freedoms, we like to be able to do what we want to do. We like having a barbecue, we like going out, we are very social beings Australians and we really miss it and we miss our kids being able to get together and go to school and be with their friends, and we miss all of that. But the suppression path is the best Australian path. As I have said throughout this, the solutions we are putting in place are the right solutions for Australia. We are not looking to copy anyone. We have the right plan for Australia.

Brendan?

PROFESSOR MURPHY: Yeah so it's quite possible we could eradicate the virus in some parts of the country. We've had some states have had no cases for some days and small numbers of cases all imported. We are on the same trajectory as New Zealand which is aiming for eradication and if we achieve complete lack of transmission and no cases that would be great. But we don't know then whether there are asymptomatic cases circulating. You cannot relax your surveillance and control mechanisms because you have for a period of time not detected new cases for a period of time. Essentially there is not a lot of difference between an aggressive suppression strategy and an eradication strategy, with the exception that we don't feel the need to hold the country very seriously in lockdown until we have no cases. But if that happens, with the measures we are doing now, that would be fantastic.

PRIME MINISTER: Yep, last question.

JOURNALIST: Am I allowed two because I waited until the end?

PRIME MINISTER: Been so patient, like all Australians.

JOURNALIST: Just following on from Brett's question, if things progress as anticipated by National Cabinet, when would it be business as normal, do you think, in terms of going back to school for families in every state? And just one question on JobKeeper as well, we are hearing reports of employers asking workers to give back some of their JobKeeper payment. Is there a penalty for employers that rip their workers off?

PRIME MINISTER: Yep, I'm going to follow, I can't tell you the precise penalty of the top of my head, and I'm happy to get that to you, but that sort of behaviour where that's occurring by employers that is disgraceful and it's illegal, and they should be reported to the police and the ATO, to ensure that can be followed up, it's not on, it is really appalling behaviour. We will move quickly on that, and so we will seek the cooperation on that as we do on any other law and order issue when it comes to those matters, I would expect over the next month or so and into May and I know each of the states are looking into different arrangements, I mean, Victoria has only just come back, they have set the arrangements for going back now and that is fair enough, Queensland will go back next week and New South Wales after that, and New South Wales, Western Australia, South Australia have a bit more time to how they will conceive what they might do in a few weeks' time, ACT the same. As I said, Northern Territory has already made its decision for when they go back, but the principles we have set out today I think, not just what they agree to but there is an aspiration attached to them which I think is important, I don't think anyone wants to see us not have schools operating like they used to of course you want to get back to that, I believe all states and territories will be taking the right decisions they believe are appropriate to get them back to that point, how long that will take, well we may see better things on that front by, in May some time, the same time we might see the Parliament come back, I think that is an indicator of us trying to get back on to at least to some form of new normal when it comes to this it won't be like it was before but our experience over the next few months will be very much that iterative step-by-step, there won't be just one day when it goes back to how it was before, that's just not how this is going to work. It's going to be step by step, there is going to be some trial and error, this is completely uncharted territory, no country in the world has worked this out yet, I know Germany today they've outlined their schools will be coming back for May, there are changes and we will see how they are planning that, I know France is looking at different issues, so we will all work together and we will all find a way through.

Just before we finish I know there has been some commentary about the World Health Organization, now of course Australia is always going to consider where we put our funds and we always want value for money and those things are always under review, and indeed what I announced at the Lowy Institute, that we were reviewing how we are engaging with all these organisations that included the WHO, I should stress, and that's a process that's been going on for these many months since then, and there is a report coming back very soon. And while I have had my criticisms of the WHO as have many other leaders, and I think they are very valid criticisms, we have got to remember also, while they may have had a few poor outings lately there are also some very important work they have been doing and I do want to make reference to it. The WHO has responded in our Pacific family here to over 300 requests from the Pacific, 68 shipments of PPE to 20 countries and territories, over 35 deployments to countries assisting Fiji in particular with their testing capability, establishing Covid-19 isolation facilities in Timor-Leste, this is the same WHO that was there in the Samoa measles outbreak of last year, the polio outbreak in PNG in 2018 and they do work in the Western Pacific on eliminating measles, rubella and tetanus, maintaining high

levels of polio vaccination, the safety of essential medicines and vaccines, eliminating mother to child transmission of HIV and hepatitis and preventing diabetes and hypertension. So look I know they have had their criticism and frankly I think it has been quite deserved and of course we are frustrated but they do important work, they do do important work, and they do important work here in the Pacific and we will keep working with them but it won't be uncritical.

Thanks very much.

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