



SEMAPHORE

Newsletter of the Maritime Law

Association of Australia and New Zealand



“Bubble” Wobbles

As this edition of *Semaphore* was preparing to publish, New Zealand had announced a week’s suspension of quarantine-free travel with the entirety of Australia, which was due to end with some states as from 11.50pm (NZT) Sunday July 4.

Simultaneously, various different Australian cities went into lockdown to manage an increasing number of COVID-19 outbreaks.

Quarantine-free travel from NSW to New Zealand had earlier paused for three days following discovery of a recent weekend traveller from Sydney subsequently testing positive for COVID-19. However, New Zealand to NSW quarantine-free travel remained open during the period.

As a direct consequence of the weekend Sydney traveller, the Wellington region went into a six-day move into Alert Level 2, which concluded at 11.59pm on June 29.

The pause on quarantine-free NSW-New Zealand travel came into effect at exactly the same time a previous pause on quarantine-free travel with Victoria was lifted.

Since the trans-Tasman “bubble” was opened on April 19, there has been one further pause on quarantine-free travel between NSW and New Zealand and two between WA and New Zealand.

APEC Unites on COVID-19 Vaccine Steps

Meanwhile, APEC trade ministers earlier this month committed to speeding up the cross-border flow of vaccines and related goods to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

This followed a APEC Ministers Responsible for Trade Meeting which was chaired by New Zealand Minister for Trade and Export Growth Damien O’Connor.

APEC, of which Australia and New Zealand represent two of 21 members, agreed to:

- act now to speed the flow of vaccines and vaccine-related goods by eliminating trade restrictions that increase the cost of vaccines and the goods that support them
- a set of guidelines for respective Customs authorities to ensure vaccines flow through ports and airports as quickly as possible so they are not sitting idle
- remove barriers to freight and logistics services to support trade in vaccines and vaccine-related goods to help fight the pandemic

Another Half-Decade of Pandemic Measures?

However, in a recent interview with *Newsroom*, New Zealand Director-General of Health Ashley Bloomfield predicted some public health measures related to the pandemic could remain in place in his country for another three-to-five years.

“The question will be, in addition to vaccination – and this will be something for us in New Zealand to be thinking about, particularly over the next few years – what are the other measures we will need to have in place to help protect New Zealanders and help protect our healthcare system?” he reportedly said.

“I do think that, even wide vaccination as we open our borders, will need to be complemented with a level of baseline measures around gatherings, scanning and these sorts of things, and ongoing contact tracing and isolation and testing, to help reduce the burden of COVID-19 across the community – so, we’re not getting the unnecessary hospitalisations and deaths that might otherwise happen.”

The Director-General also predicted that COVID-19 vaccine passports would likely become commonplace and could be used as a launchpad for keeping other illnesses out of New Zealand.

However, Mr Bloomfield indicated the elimination strategy pursued to date by the country would have to end for its borders to be opened up to the rest of the world. While observing that sufficient New Zealanders would have been vaccinated by that time to ensure the virus could not then overwhelm the health system, his view was nonetheless that a “global zero-COVID” approach was “unlikely”.

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