

Submission to the COVID-19 Response Inquiry – Michael Skopal

My submission to the inquiry is based on my experience as a business person and private citizen. During the Covid “emergency” I was required to navigate the maze of different rules and regulations made by federal and state bureaucrats as well as local councils.

The local council responses were more humorous and inconsequential as well as demonstrating their irrelevance to our lives outside of roads, rates, and rubbish.

I returned in March 2020 from a 6 month stay in [REDACTED] to a mandatory 2 week self-isolation period at home (in [REDACTED]). As I was unwell anyway, lived on my own, was able to work from home and had friends and family able to support me with shopping and general support, I managed the logistics of my isolation.

It was in the latter period of my 2 week self isolation period that my GP instructed me to seek a covid test as I was still unwell. This was to be my first brush with the health bureaucracy that was to dominate our lives for next two years. At the [REDACTED] I had my first covid test and on completion I was told by a junior staff member that I had to isolate for a further two weeks. I explained that I had already nearly completed my two weeks required for returning overseas the individual insisted that the period had to restart because of the test, which was negative!

I made a phone inquiry but could receive no clarification on the matter of further isolation from the bureaucracy so I chose to ignore the instruction.

This was my first brush with what was to become, in my opinion, an era of health bureaucrats “drunk” with their own power, easily handed to them by our elected officials.

During the next two years my work and family commitments took me interstate, primarily to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. Fortunately I was not required to travel to [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

Nevertheless, the constant rule changes for travellers in [REDACTED] made even those trips unpredictable with extended stays required in [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. The latter was in the [REDACTED] caravan park in a tent with daytime temperatures approaching 40°C during the period.

At one point I travelled with my partner to [REDACTED] via [REDACTED] and the [REDACTED] track. When we reached [REDACTED] she departed to return to [REDACTED]. At that point there was a small outbreak of Covid in [REDACTED] so all travellers returning from anywhere in [REDACTED] including [REDACTED] had to isolate in [REDACTED] for 2 weeks.

This mandate was totally out of proportion with the risk and a complete over reaction by the [REDACTED] authorities. I did write to my local member ([REDACTED]) in protest.

Later I found my self having to go to [REDACTED] by road from a property in central [REDACTED] where I have been working for a few weeks. This trip resulted in my only being able to return to [REDACTED] if I was prepared to quarantine for two weeks.

Again a complete over reaction by the [REDACTED] authorities. [REDACTED] was functioning well and business in the city and state ran as normal yet a return home was hindered. I ended up staying for 5 months before driving back via [REDACTED].

Finally, the ultimate embarrassment as a [REDACTED] resident came towards the end of the "covid era" when friends visited me from [REDACTED]. On arrival they had to download an app to their phones and report their well being to the app.

It was a complex app as well as being overly intrusive into their lives.

These are only some of my recollections from the Covid period.

As a private citizen I felt the response between states was uncoordinated, self serving for the individual bureaucrats combined with a total disregard for personal responsibility of the country's citizens.

Confusing rules about self isolation combined with different definitions of "close contact" all lead me to believe that the rights and privileges of citizens were ignored.

I also felt very disappointed by our elected officials who failed to balance the requirements of business and personal needs of their citizens with the overzealous demands of the health bureaucracy.

I hope in future state and federal parliaments conduct themselves much better and in a far more balanced manner to allow us to make our own decisions on travel, attendance at church or other social gatherings.