

6 December 2023

Re: Submission for COVID-19 Response Inquiry

To the panel,

I provide the following account of my experiences and recommendations relating to the following area of review:

International policies to support Australians at home and abroad (including with regard to international border closures, and securing vaccine supply deals with international partners for domestic use in Australia).

I am an Australian citizen living in [REDACTED] since [REDACTED] with my husband and son, who are also Australian citizens. We are settled in [REDACTED]

My dad, [REDACTED] passed away [REDACTED] in [REDACTED]. My husband, son and I were unable to get a flight back to [REDACTED] until [REDACTED] as a direct consequence of the **flight caps** imposed on flights to Australia from overseas during the pandemic.

Because of the imposition of these flight caps, we **missed my dad's funeral** and instead had to watch it on livestream. I was unable to be with my family – in particular, [REDACTED] – at this time of sudden and intense grief, and unable to properly deal with my own grief.

Still to this day, I feel a twinge of anger and rage at the memory of sitting on my couch in [REDACTED] watching the funeral of my dad in [REDACTED]. I ask you to draw on your reserves of compassion to truly think about what that experience was like for me. My country, the place I was born and lived for [REDACTED] and where I hold citizenship, the place that [REDACTED] and cared for him throughout his life as an Australian citizen, shut me out and prevented me from saying a proper goodbye.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, my experience could have been very different in the absence of flight caps. My husband, son and I could have taken a flight to [REDACTED] straight away and completed two weeks' quarantine in time for us to attend the funeral, which was held [REDACTED] after my dad died, and be with my family at this time of grief.

To finally get on a flight to [REDACTED] after my dad died and share it with only [REDACTED] other people was truly dispiriting. What is the point and meaning of citizenship if one cannot enter their country freely?

I completely understand why quarantine was required at this stage of the pandemic – indeed, we quarantined on our return to [REDACTED] in a hotel that we chose from a pre-approved government list and booked at our own expense. The [REDACTED] system was not perfect, but there was sufficient availability of hotel rooms for us to arrive at the time of our choosing.

Recommendation

This is my recommendation for the Australian government for future pandemics: **do not impose flight caps** and impede citizens' rights to enter their country. Instead, **devise a quarantine system based on adequate supply of hotel rooms, or provide for home quarantine.**

I implore you to treat all Australian citizens with respect during future pandemics – those who are in Australia, as well as those who are overseas.

I implore you to restore my faith, and the faith of thousands of other Australian citizens who found themselves in similar situations, that our country respects its people and shows compassion to all during troubled times.

With best regards,

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