

**NCC****National
COVID-19 Commission
Advisory Board**

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Statement by the Chair to the Senate Select Committee, COVID-19

11 August 2020

Thank you Chair for the opportunity to report back to this Inquiry.

I would like to make a brief statement to update you on the Commission.

Since we last appeared, the Prime Minister has announced the Commission is moving into a new stage as the National COVID-19 Commission (NCC) Advisory Board, with a sharpened focus on a business-led economic recovery.

We have been tasked to provide advice to Government from a business and industry perspective to help shape the plan for Australia's economic recovery.

We will engage with the Prime Minister and other Ministers, key government agencies, as well as Premiers and Chief Ministers' departments in the course of our work.

We work within government processes, as one of many sources of advice to the Government's plan for recovery.

Included in this shift has been the addition of six new Commissioners, bringing a wealth of knowledge and networks across the areas of finance, resources and infrastructure, regional Australia, small business and workforce issues.

As the Prime Minister has said, the Commission was set up at the start of the pandemic to assist and be an important channel of advice and channel of action to help the Commonwealth Government deal with difficult problem-solving tasks that were arising because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I have previously provided an update on this work to the Committee, as well as our work with businesses to help them re-open safely as restrictions changed.

Most recently, we have again moved into a troubleshooting mode, working alongside other parts of the Commonwealth, including the National Coordination Mechanism, to assist with the practical challenges presented by restrictions to manage Victoria's recent outbreak.

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We need to take what is occurring in Victoria and elsewhere as a prompt that we need to go back and look at the way we have configured our workplaces, look at the way we are communicating with employees and their families to make sure that everyone understands what is required to keep this virus under control. That includes communicating in employees' first language, where language barriers exist.

In parallel, we are focusing on Australia's recovery. In particular we are looking at reform ideas to support small to medium-size enterprises (SMEs), tourism and regional Australia.

We will also be providing advice in other areas as directed by the Prime Minister, where a business and industry perspective is requested.

We recognise that some parts of the economy will take longer to recover than others, compounded by restrictions to bring any outbreaks under control as they occur.

Supporting impacted businesses is an immediate priority, and there is a whole-of-government effort on this. Equally important is a focus on those sectors that are able to operate or can recover quickly, to set them up for a rapid return to growth, to accelerate our economic recovery and support Australians into jobs.

The coronavirus has impacted all of us - individuals, businesses and the community - and it will continue to be a significant challenge for our way of life.

We remain focused on building business and community confidence, in line with health advice.

There is no doubt that for as long as the virus is here, and until we have a vaccine, it's going to be challenging for all of us and our families, and like everyone I am heartened by the advice that National Cabinet received last Friday about the fast pace of progress on development of a vaccine.

I am sure that we can meet these challenges. We saw signs of recovery in June, before the reintroduction of restrictions from the Victorian outbreak. This, and the many conversations I have with business leaders and owners, gives me confidence that we can work our way through this; that we can recover our livelihoods and find opportunities for growth and resilience into the future, as we learn to live with the virus and control outbreaks.

Thank you.