

## Senate Committee: Community Affairs Committee

### QUESTION ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates 2022-2023

Outcome: 1 - Health Policy, Access and Support

PDR Number: SQ22-000300

**Question Subject:** Travel restrictions around the Biosecurity Act

**Type of Question:** Spoken, Hansard page 24, 06 April 2022

**Senator:** Alex Antic

#### Question:

Senator ANTIC: As it stands right now, I understand that, if you're an Australian citizen or a permanent resident, you can't leave Australia unless you're fully vaccinated and yet foreign citizens are able to leave at any time. What is the rationale behind this? What is the science behind this? Is this not more the sort of thing that we'd see in communist North Korea—stopping citizens leaving our country?

[...]

Senator ANTIC: Just on that, what is the science behind that decision, given that we know—I think we would all accept this—that transmission is irrelevant? When vaccinated you are effectively as infectious as you were if you were not vaccinated.

Prof. Kelly: That's not a true statement.

Senator ANTIC: That is a true statement. That's agreed to by almost all experts.

Prof. Kelly: It's not a true statement.

Senator ANTIC: What degree of benefit are you given by vaccination, in terms of dampening down your transmission, for want of a better way of putting it?

Prof. Kelly: There is evidence about that and I can provide it on notice.

Senator ANTIC: But how much? Is it one per cent, is it two per cent?

Prof. Kelly: I'll provide that on notice.

Senator ANTIC: No; you can tell me right now.

CHAIR: Senator Antic, the witness has agreed to provide it on notice.

Senator ANTIC: How can we not know the answer to that right now?

CHAIR: Please do not harass the witnesses.

Senator ANTIC: Australian citizens are being stopped from going overseas for this. It should be a fairly simple question.

Prof. Kelly: I'll provide that information on notice.

**Answer:**

Unvaccinated Australian citizens and permanent residents have been restricted from leaving Australia without a valid exemption since it was possible to be vaccinated against COVID-19 until the human biosecurity emergency period under the *Biosecurity Act 2015* lapsed on 17 April 2022.

The original intent behind restrictions on unvaccinated travellers leaving Australia (the overseas travel ban) was to moderate the volume of unvaccinated Australians traveling overseas and then seeking to return home, reducing the pressure on our quarantine capacity and health systems, as well as the risks to those individuals travelling to a country with high COVID-19 prevalence.

Based on the advice at the time from the Commonwealth Chief Medical Officer, Professor Paul Kelly, unvaccinated travellers have, and continue to, pose a risk to the community (whether in Australia or overseas) and the local hospital system as they are at higher risk of serious illness or death associated with COVID-19 and are more likely to transmit the infection to others.

Unvaccinated travellers who become unwell overseas and require further support and care on their return to Australia may continue to be a burden on Australia's health care system.

Data from the United Kingdom and Finland demonstrates that vaccines are effective in preventing onward transmission of COVID-19, however this effect is modest. Further information on the impact of the COVID-19 vaccination can be found in recent statements released by the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation. This is available at: [www.health.gov.au/committees-and-groups/australian-technical-advisory-group-on-immunisation-atagi#statements](https://www.health.gov.au/committees-and-groups/australian-technical-advisory-group-on-immunisation-atagi#statements).