

The West Australian
Thursday, April 2, 2020

PAGE 13 OPINION

How far will we go to win?

Battleground shifts to enforcing tough anti-virus measures



PETER LAW

Sydney this week offered a glimpse of what Perth's future might become if we can't slow the march of the coronavirus through our suburbs.

Australia's biggest city has emerged as the nation's COVID-19 epicentre.

It's our Wuhan. While the NSW Premier is reluctant to use the phrase "lockdown", that's exactly what Sydneysiders have experienced since Tuesday.

Footage emerged showing police driving on parkland and stopping next to sunbathers and families getting some fresh air.

It's not that they were in breach of the social distancing rules — they weren't in large groups like we saw at Bondi a week or so ago.

No, their "crime" was to be idle in a park. It's an example of how the people of NSW are now living vastly different lives to us west coasters.

Such is the scale of their outbreak, anyone in NSW who is caught outside their homes without a "reasonable excuse" can be fined up to \$11,000 or face six months' prison.

What's a reasonable excuse? Well there are 16 valid reasons for residents of our most populous State to leave their homes. These include buying food, travelling to work, taking the kids to school or child care, getting medical care, attending a wedding or funeral and exercise — just make sure you don't stop for too long.

Some argue the NSW Government has overreached and gone against the spirit of the Prime Minister's directive that no more than two people, who aren't from the same family, are out together.

WA's promising coronavirus case numbers mean we have yet to go down this dystopian path — yet.

Mark McGowan this week made it clear that premiers had formed different ideas about

the next stages of social distancing measures should look like.

While NSW and Victoria may soon enact more restrictions on their businesses and way of life, here in WA the State Government is making the most of our geographic isolation.

Within the next few days, McGowan will announce details of what he has described as a "hard border" that would shut off WA from the rest of the country.

Much like the regional closures which began yesterday, such a hard border is unprecedented and will undoubtedly cause confusion and a few headaches about how it will work.

But this is a price that is absolutely worth paying if it means more businesses can stay open, more West Australians stay in work and we retain our civil liberties.

The move is just one example of how the war on COVID-19 has in recent weeks evolved from a public health emergency to a matter of law and order.

Under the code name Operation Tide, WA Police are leading the implementation of directions and measures instigated by

the State Government to "flatten the curve".

The first ever state of emergency declaration in WA means Police Commissioner Chris Dawson now serves as the State Emergency Coordinator (SEC) — and is arguably the most powerful person in the State after McGowan.

As the SEC, Dawson has the power to order people to remain in their homes and he has in turn empowered all of his police officers to enforce his decisions.

Teams of "COVID-19 assurance vehicles" have been established by the force, equipped with personal protection equipment such as masks and gloves to deal with potentially infected West Australians.

From their base at Optus Stadium, Operation Tide's major incident team is commanding the

implementation of

Dawson's ever-growing list of "directives" that he now has authority to issue at the instruction of McGowan. Almost 30 such "directions" have been published on the WA Government website, covering everything from the ban on mass

gatherings, the shutting of Perth Zoo and gun shops to self-isolation rules for interstate and overseas arrivals.

Much of the business of Parliament this week was focused on the policing response to COVID-19, with laws set to pass that will give officers the power to issue on-the-spot fines if the directions are not followed. Under another change, Western Australians will effectively lose their right to remain silent and be obliged to provide information about their movements.

Another piece of legislation expected to sail through Parliament will empower authorities to force people who ignore orders to self-isolate to wear a tracking device.

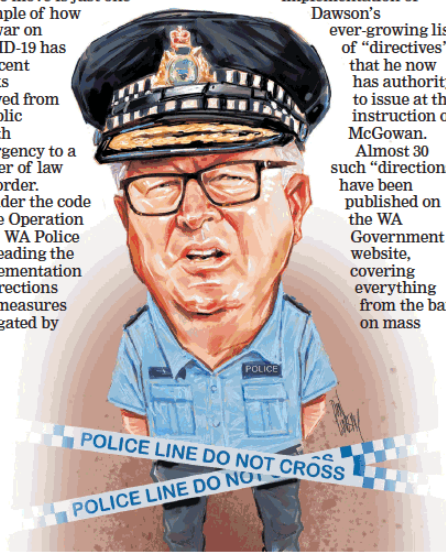
While the type of technology has yet to be confirmed, Emergency Services Minister Fran Logan told Parliament that WA was looking at a wristband-style tracker and mobile phone app similar to that used in Singapore.

Logan described how Singapore's COVID app requires individuals to have their mobile phone on them at all times. Dubbed

TraceTogether, the app is able to identify people who have been in close proximity — within 2m for at least 30 minutes — to coronavirus patients using Bluetooth technology. While use of the app is not compulsory, those who use it have to turn on the Bluetooth settings in their phones for tracing to be done.

Should a user become infected, Singapore's health authorities are able to find out which other users they have been in close contact with to identify potential cases. No final decision has been made on whether WA would use such an app, but it raises questions about how far we are willing to go to win the war on COVID-19.

Peter Law is State Political Editor



It raises questions about privacy and the price we are willing to pay in the war on COVID-19.

MORE OPINION
PLUS Alston P16-17

Rona-speak adds a new dictionary of terms to daily life

A surprise fallout from the global chaos of COVID-19 has been the need for Australians to master a new dictionary of informal terms and expressions.

Those expressions sit alongside technical terms that did not feature in our vocabulary just one month ago such as social distancing, lockdown, isolation, self-isolation, flattening the curve, contact tracing, contactless delivery and community transmission.

Think also epidemic and pandemic, incubation period, zoonotic, immunocompromised,



immunity, asymptomatic and epidemiology.

There is a case for selective use of informal "rona-speak" terms because they more powerfully highlight some of the behaviours — both good and bad — that we are witnessing in our workplaces and in the broader community.

While its origins remain unknown, "rona-speak" most likely had its roots deep in supermarkets aisles when

so-called "maggies" took control of a range of sought-after products.

Those panic buyers became known as "magpies" and items that were stripped from supermarket shelves were said to have been "maggie'd".

As the threat of COVID-19 took hold, many of us developed something that became known as "coronaphobia".

Businesses hit hard by the crisis have been urged to look for "coronopportunities" — new opportunities to deliver services — and encouraged to embrace "contactless delivery". And to keep us occupied

during downtime stints while WFH, many of us are engaging in "quaranstreaming": binge viewing during quarantine.

Younger students who are stuck at home with their parents are urged to continue their schooling via online platforms but frequently enjoy a "coronacation" — an extended break from school.

As we heed warnings many of us have become "coronavirtuous" — doing everything correctly — and some have even taken on the role of "caremongering" for others.

But we also continue to encounter "covidiot" who put

the community at risk by ignoring calls for self-isolation.

The breed of "covidiot" also extends to those with an insatiable fetish for toilet paper and a high-carb diet fuelled by a voracious appetite for pasta and other flour-based dishes — often at the expense of others scrambling to secure much-needed supplies.

Thankfully, the "covidiot" curve appears to be on the decline — a real relief because stupidity can be highly contagious.

Professor Gary Martin is chief executive with the Australian Institute of Management WA