

## Consul-General of Japan in Sydney's Newsletter

### No. 11 Australia's Response to Coronavirus

25 March 2020

Now the whole world is facing the challenge of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). To ensure the safety of the 37,000 Japanese residents under its jurisdiction as well as the many temporary Japanese visitors, the Consulate-General of Japan in Sydney is currently working with other Japanese missions in Australia and Australian Government organisations, among others, to gather information which will affect Japanese nationals, such as Australian measures to deal with COVID-19, and to distribute this information widely in the Japanese language.

The situation is changing day by day. Yesterday, in light of travel restrictions imposed by Australia and countries around the world and the wide-spread reduction and cancellation of international flights, we sent out a consular email advising Japanese who need to return home soon to Japan, and temporary visitors from Japan such as tourists, to consider leaving Australia as soon as possible.

In this newsletter, I would like to explain the measures that Australia has taken up to this point in time to deal with COVID-19, and to share with you some of what I have felt while going about my work.



**The Australian Department of Health's national campaign to counter the novel coronavirus (COVID-19)**

Mid-March was the turning point when the Australian Government began announcing the series of bold measures it decided to take, one after the other. On 13 March (Fri.), the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), which comprises the leaders of the federal and all state and territory governments, decided to establish a National Cabinet. The following day (Sat. 14 March) the Australian Department of Health quickly released a national campaign to counter the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

On 15 March (Sun.), the historic first sitting of the National Cabinet was held, and at Prime Minister Morrison's media conference held immediately afterwards, he announced that from midnight (12am) that same day, all people who arrived from overseas into Australia would have to self-isolate for 14 days.

On 17 March (Tue.), the National Cabinet again met, and at the morning media conference on 18 March (Wed.), a series of important measures was announced including that Australians were recommended not to travel overseas and that schools would remain open.

On 19 March (Thu.), at the prime ministerial media conference held directly after the National Cabinet meeting, it was announced that from 9pm (AEDT) on 20 March (Fri), apart from Australian nationals and permanent residents and their immediate family members, all people would be prohibited from entering the country.

On 22 March (Sun), the Prime Minister announced at his daytime media conference that all unnecessary domestic travel should cease. The same evening, the Prime Minister gave another media conference announcing that the National Cabinet had decided on new measures, including bars and pubs would have to close, and restaurants and cafés would only be able to take-out or delivery.

On 24 March (Tue), again straight after National Cabinet met, the Prime Minister gave a media conference announcing that further facilities would be closed and he requested that people avoid group activities, avoid being outside unnecessarily, and that BBQs and other parties not be held at private homes with visitors kept to the smallest number possible.

At the series of National Cabinet meetings, decisions and announcements were also made regarding economic and social measures to avoid negative impacts of the COVID-19 situation. A diverse range of information has been made available in an easy to understand format on the federal government's dedicated website about COVID-19.

NSW Premier Berejiklian and NT Chief Minister Gunner have also given regular media conferences about the National Cabinet. They have announced details of specific measures for NSW and the NT, such as the operation of schools and access (border) restrictions.

It is unprecedented for the federal, state and territory leaders and ministers to hold such regular meetings and make such regular decisions and announcements. It is likely that this type of decision-making and announcements will continue.



**Sydney's Bondi Beach closed (picture taken on 22 March)**

As I followed the series of decisions and announcements, what has made a particularly strong impression on me is the solid basic strategy underlying the Australian Government's efforts and how this has been communicated.

At the beginning of his media conference on 18 March (Wed.), Prime Minister Morrison said that COVID-19 was “a once in a hundred year type event” not seen since the end of World War 1, and he stated the importance of taking measures that were “scaleable” and “sustainable” over the next 6 months or longer. He also responded that there was no point taking strict short-term measures and then have the virus flare up again when the measures were relaxed.

At the start of his media conference on 19 March (Thu), he described the need for everyone to have a strategy to “build a bridge” from now to six or more months ahead, and that during that period, there would be unavoidable negative impacts on Australian life and the economy. He stated his government’s intention to implement a series of measures to enable a restart at the end of the COVID-19 crisis.

Again, at the start of his media conference on 20 March (Fri), the Prime Minister stated his belief that if everyone played their part, Australia and Australian society would be able to survive, and by riding out the difficulties of the next six or more months, emerge stronger than ever.

On 22 March (Sun.) during his midday media conference, Prime Minister Morrison referred to the large number of people who had gathered at Bondi Beach in Sydney two days previously and emphasized that it was “not okay” to do so and that “[the COVID-19 situation] is deadly serious”. At his media conference that evening, he said that social distancing was “one of our most important weapons” and implored people to observe it strictly.

The following day (23 March, Mon.), NSW Premier Berejiklian and NT Chief Minister Gunner both gave media conferences about the situation in their own state and territory, and they spoke earnestly and sincerely about the necessity of taking strict measures so that there would be no regrets when looking back in the future.



**Just before dawn at Rose Bay, Sydney, on 18 March**

As I have listened to such messages coming from Australian leaders and observed the situation and reactions in Japan and the rest of the world, I have realized the following: in the case of the COVID-19 situation, even as we gather knowledge from around the world, it is important that each country formulates its own appropriate strategies, while at the same time engaging in effective communication with the public as measures are implemented.

In these circumstances, as Prime Minister Morrison stated, it is important that we all play our own part. The actions of each and every one of us can save a life and support the economy.

I will do my utmost and play my part so that Japan and Australia, including Japanese residents in Australia, and the whole world can overcome the current difficulties and create that bridge to a world after COVID-19, where a new dawn awaits. I hope you will find the links below useful.

## Website links

Australian Government Covid-19 Website

<https://www.australia.gov.au/>

Prime Minister of Australia Website (Press conference transcript, media statement, etc.)

<https://www.pm.gov.au/>

New South Wales Government Covid-19 Website

<https://preview.nsw.gov.au/covid-19>

Northern Territory Government Covid-19 Website

<https://coronavirus.nt.gov.au/>

Latest information on Covid-19 in Japan (Prime Minister's Office, Consulate-General of Japan in Sydney)

<https://japan.kantei.go.jp/>

[https://www.sydney.au.emb-japan.go.jp/itprtop\\_en/index.html](https://www.sydney.au.emb-japan.go.jp/itprtop_en/index.html)

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