

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened



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The Guardian (London)

January 31, 2022 Monday 8:28 PM GMT

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theguardian

Section: [AUSTRALIA](#) NEWS; Version:23

Length: 35676 words

Byline: Mostafa Rachwani and Matilda Boseley

Highlight: Scott Morrison announces packages for aged care and NDIS as anti-vaccine protesters mass outside the National Press Club; 77 Covid deaths recorded across NSW, Victoria, Queensland and South [Australia](#). This blog is now closed Gladys Berejiklian called Scott Morrison a 'horrible' and untrustworthy person in leaked texts - report Watch: Laura Tingle asks Scott Morrison if he will apologise for 'the mistakes you've made as PM' Greg Hunt accused of being disrespectful and downplaying Covid deaths in aged care Reserve bank keeps interest rates on hold and ends stimulus as economy recovers Vaccine rollout and rates tracker ; Cases and data tracker Get our free news app ; get our morning email briefing

Body

block-time published-time 7.23am GMT

What we learned Tuesday 1 February

With that, we will wrap up the blog for the evening. Here is everything that went down today:

The Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, gave an address to the National Press Club, beginning by acknowledging some of his mistakes, but [refusing](#) to outright apologise. Morrison made a series of announcements, including [pledging](#) an additional \$209m for the aged care workforce, \$666m for NDIS providers, two more years of mental health funding, a \$1.6bn " [economic accelerator](#) " and a \$2.2bn " [university research](#) commercialisation package". The address came with a [large crowd of anti-vaccine protesters](#) that massed outside the Press Club, with police blocking streets and hundreds of protesters standing on the road. The RBA [decided](#) to hold the cash rate at 0.1% again. NSW [reported](#) 12,818 new cases and 30 deaths. Victoria [recorded](#) 11,311 new cases and 34 deaths. Queensland [recorded](#) 7,588 new cases and 10 deaths. Tasmania [reported](#) 699 new cases. The ACT [reported](#) 522 new cases. South [Australia reported](#) 1,266 new cases and three deaths. The Northern Territory reported 1,122 new cases. Western [Australia recorded](#) 13 new cases. NSW will [resume](#) a limited number of non-urgent elective surgeries in private and regional public hospitals from next week. The opposition leader, Anthony Albanese, [confirmed](#) Labor would support a pay rise for aged care workers if elected. Labor's acting foreign affairs

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spokesperson, Kristina Keneally, [said](#) **Australia** has been a "bystander" to Myanmar bloodshed, a year on from the coup. Foreign affairs minister, Marise Payne, [called](#) on Myanmar's military to "halt violence against civilians and return the country to the path of democracy". The Queensland education minister

[confirmed](#) that the Citipointe Christian College has been referred to the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board after they asked students to sign a contract denouncing homosexuality.

Thanks for reading.

block-time updated-time Updated at 7.32am GMT

block-time published-time 7.03am GMT

The defence minister, Peter Dutton, has played down the idea the government could dump its \$45bn future frigates program, as a new report spelled out the problems with the huge defence acquisition.

[The Australian newspaper reported](#) today that the Hunter-class frigates would be "substantially" slower, have a shorter range than originally intended and could be vulnerable to detection by enemy vessels. The newspaper cited a defence "Engineering Team Assessment" of the frigates program, undertaken last November, as raising problems with the "immature" British design. The government's contract is with shipbuilder BAE Systems.

Dutton said the Australian government would not be scrapping the deal. He told Sky News:

"I mean unfortunately the most important part has been left out, and that is that, yes, concerns are raised, but they are being addressed."

Dutton said he and the cabinet's national security committee decided last year "that we would push back the start of this ship [build] by about 18 months and the reason that we did that was because of the lack of maturity around the design". He suggested that an early build "would have caused us dramas down the end".

He said his department had assured him that they could mitigate the weight-related risks.

Asked by Sky News whether there was a plan B, Dutton said:

No, we've looked at the plan B and we went through this project in great detail late last year. Obviously I've been very conscious of looking at all these programs. We cancelled the subs contract as you know. We've gone to a different helicopter platform because the MRhl was not performing to the standard that was assured to us, and we looked very carefully at this project and we've decided that we will proceed with it. The relationship with the UK is incredibly important. BAE is a very important partner with us.

Meanwhile there continue to be revelations about how the Australian government handled the scrapping of the French submarine contract. Here's our piece from yesterday, based on new documents obtained under freedom of information laws:

Related: [Top defence official was to report 'good progress' on French submarine project weeks before axing](#)

block-time updated-time Updated at 7.10am GMT

block-time published-time 6.47am GMT

enltrNot knowing the price of bread and milk as a politician is not unusual - but it's important when you lead a government that decided \$44 a day was enough for those without a job to live on, and constantly bang on about needing to 'live within your means'

- Amy Remeikis (@AmyRemeikis) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 6.26am GMT

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Liberal MP Angie Bell has commented on the controversial move by one of Queensland's largest independent schools to ask families to sign an enrolment contract that includes asking them to agree "homosexual acts" are immoral, listing them along with bestiality, incest and paedophilia as "offensive to God".

The "statement of faith" [required for enrolment at Citipointe Christian College](#) also includes statements that imply transgender students will be recognised only by their "biological sex" at the school - that students should identify "with the gender that God bestowed".

Bell led a group of four Liberal moderate MPs who traded their support for the religious discrimination bill in return for a commitment from the attorney general, Michaelia Cash, that LGBTQ+ students would be protected at the same time by amendments removing the ability for schools to discriminate on sexuality and gender. Cash [has since reneged on the deal](#).

Bell said:

The contract created by Citipointe Christian College contains no new developments. For many years, religious schools have preserved the ability to terminate a child's enrolment based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, marital or relationship status or pregnancy. It still does not make it okay for a child who may be struggling with mental health challenges.

Prior to the conclusion of the 2021 sitting calendar, I worked with the prime minister's office to discuss how greater protections for students who identify as part of minority groups could be implemented by repealing the exemption currently afforded to religious schools that enables a contract such as this to be enforced.

Upon my return to Canberra next week, I will continue to advocate, negotiate and discuss any possible options to ensure children are held accountable to their merit and not their sexual identity, gender identity, relationship status or pregnancy.

A child should be able to attend any Australian education institution without hinderance or judgement. The only instance in which a child should be issued a consequence in a learning environment, is when held accountable for poor choices of an academic nature such as not completing homework, breaking uniform policy or disrupting the learning of their peers.

In this matter of Citipointe Christian College, I strongly urge its leadership and board to focus on the education of children and fostering a positive environment, where every child feels safe, supported and does not fear retribution based on any of these grounds.

Bell also gave her first public account of why the deal doesn't appear to have panned out as intended:

The undertaking to repeal section 38(3) of the Sex Discrimination Act did not eventuate in consequential amendments after the legislation did not come to a vote in the House of Representatives in the final sitting of 2021.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.30am GMT

block-time published-time 6.13am GMT

The aged care services minister, Richard Colbeck, has agreed to attend the Covid committee, after [he declined to attend on 14 January](#) citing urgent Covid work only to then attend the Ashes Cricket on that day.

Colbeck will appear at the committee tomorrow (Wednesday 2 February) from 2 to 4pm alongside officials from the health department, Therapeutic Goods Administration and the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation.

The committee's chair, Katy Gallagher, has also taken issue with Scott Morrison taking credit for setting up the Covid committee at the Press Club today:

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enltrJust for the record - The Govt did not establish the [#COVIDcommittee](#) the Senate did. [#NPC](#) [#auspol](#)

- Katy Gallagher (@SenKatyG) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.17am GMT

block-time published-time 6.01am GMT

Aly has continued zeroing in on the government today, saying the cash bonus for aged care workers is "not a long term solution."

The Morrison government intends to provide two payments of \$400 to aged care workers by the end of May, but Aly wasn't buying it:

Aged care workers don't need a sugar hit of \$400 to keep them doing what they're doing.

They love what they're doing and they do it because they have a passion for it. They need better work conditions and better pay conditions.

The government can respond today to the Royal Commission into Aged Care and lift the working conditions for aged care workers now, instead of giving them a \$400 sugar hit, which of course is welcome - they do deserve that money [and] I won't argue against that - but it's not a long-term solution.

If you want aged care workers to stay in aged care, if you want our most valuable asset in [Australia](#) which is our elderly to be looked after, you need to improve their work and conditions.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.04am GMT

block-time published-time 5.42am GMT

Nationals senator Matt Canavan is on the ABC's Afternoon Briefing, defending the PM's speech earlier this afternoon (although admitting he didn't watch it):

I have seen some of the reports, though, and I think the prime minister is just simply acknowledging common sense. None of us are perfect. No government in the world has had a perfect record through what has been an amazing pandemic.

Even absent a pandemic. We all make mistakes from time to time. The key thing for any organisation, for any government, for any individual really in life is to learn from your mistakes and fix the consequences of them when you can.

Labor MP [Anne Aly](#) was much less forgiving of the PM's lack of acknowledgement of his mistakes:

After a very slow vaccine rollout, the slowness in getting the antigen tests out is testimony to the fact they haven't learned from their mistakes. They haven't learned from the mistakes exposed by the royal commission. They haven't learned from the mistakes of robodebt and quite frankly, if Scott Morrison is asking people to judge him and his leadership on whether or not he has learned from his mistakes, then it's a huge failure in that regard.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.46am GMT

block-time published-time 5.19am GMT

Gladys Berejiklian has issued a statement in response to the leaked text exchange in which she and a Liberal colleague discussed Scott Morrison.

The texts allegedly described the prime minister as a "horrible person", a "fraud" and a "complete psycho".

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"I understand there has been some commentary today concerning myself and the PM," Berejiklian said.

"I have no recollection of such messages. Let me reiterate my very strong support for prime minister Morrison and all he is doing for our nation during these very challenging times. I also strongly believe he is the best person to lead our nation for years to come."

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.27am GMT

block-time published-time 5.14am GMT

Berejiklian has 'no recollection' of messages, reiterates support for PM

The former NSW premier, Gladys Berejiklian, has responded to reports this afternoon she called the PM a "horrible person" in private text messages with a Liberal cabinet minister:

enltrStatement from Gladys Berejiklian regarding the alleged text exchange: <pic.twitter.com/CGHbAam5qp>

- Sarah Martin (@msmarto) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.26am GMT

block-time published-time 4.58am GMT

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has released retail figures for December, showing sales have slowed, but turnover was still strong.

Retail turnover dropped 4.4% in December, the biggest fall since April 2020, but it followed a 7.3% national jump in November and a 4.9% jump in October.

The ABS director of quarterly economy-wide statistics, Ben James, said figures remained above pre-pandemic levels and December's turnover was the second highest level on record, behind November.

Despite this month's fall, retail turnover remains strong, up 4.8% on December 2020, with strong consumer spending continuing post the Delta outbreak.

Victoria recorded the largest fall of any state or territory, down 8.4%, however this only partly unwinds the state's strong rise in November when it rose to a record level.

NSW spending also fell by 4.2% while WA spending dropped by 3.5%, with the NT the only state or territory reporting a rise in turnover, seeing a 3.6% increase.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.01am GMT

block-time published-time 4.34am GMT

If you'd like to watch the prime minister be asked about private messages where the former NSW premier, Gladys Berejiklian, called him a "horrible" person, you can check it out at the link below:

enltr [#Exclusive](#) : Scott Morrison has responded to a leaked text exchange between Gladys Berejiklian and a Liberal MP that slammed him as a "fraud" and "psycho". "I obviously don't agree with it. And I don't think that's my record," he said at the National Press Club. [#auspol #NPC pic.twitter.com/eQQldwhsxZ](#)

- 10 News First (@10NewsFirst) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.36am GMT

block-time published-time 4.11am GMT

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ACSA says new government payments amount to \$1 extra an hour

Paul Sadler, CEO at Aged & Community Services **Australia** (ACSA), has stepped up to respond to the Prime Minister's announcements saying he welcomes the acknowledgement of what the industry is going through but more is needed:

This one-off payment which will be happening over two payment periods in February and May is important for our workforce. But it only amounts to around \$1 per hour extra for the workers in aged care.

The headline number is \$800 but most aged care workers will not receive that because it's prorated according to whether you work full-time or part-time.

The \$800 only goes to the full-time workers and they are the minority of our aged care workforce. So from our point of view, we welcome government to the whole question of what's happening in Covid but we need to do so much more to support aged care.

Some of those things that we need to do: firstly, we need to make sure we are actually getting rapid antigen tests and personal protective equipment to all the aged care homes who need them.

The government is prioritising aged care homes that have outbreaks for the provision of rapid antigen tests. Why aren't we giving rapid antigen tests to the aged care homes that don't yet have an outbreak and are trying to stop this disease getting in?

Secondly, it's going to be really important to finish the booster program. We're nearly there. We're nearly at 100% of aged care homes... but we now need to make sure that all of the aged care residents and all our staff have access to boosters over the coming weeks.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.17am GMT

block-time published-time 4.02am GMT

WA records 13 new cases and no deaths

Western **Australia** has reported 13 new local cases and zero deaths.

The WA premier, Mark McGowan, had earlier said eight of the new cases were linked to known clusters, with five under investigation.

enltrThis is our WA COVID-19 update for Tuesday, 1 February 2022. For official information on COVID-19 in WA, visit <https://t.co/zTYXZD1B7R> <https://t.co/zv4ztWpo7p> [pic.twitter.com/cQlpCu4vb4](https://t.co/cQlpCu4vb4)

- Mark McGowan (@MarkMcGowanMP) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.08am GMT

block-time published-time 3.43am GMT

The Voices of North Sydney pro-democracy group have been complaining on social media about a poll into the Liberal-held electorate over the weekend.

Journalist and activist Margo Kingston has [published a transcript](#), confirmed by Guardian **Australia** through other recipients of the call, that shows why the group is outraged.

After some fairly neutral questions about which party or candidate is best to handle this or that issue, the poll then asks whether respondents agree with a series of propositions:

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Trent Zimmerman does a good job representing me?Independents lack experience and influence?Independents have a strong voice?A hung parliament will create instability and uncertainty at a critical time for Australia?You don't know what an Independent stands for ?Scott Morrison is doing a good job steering Australia through a crisis?Keeping your Liberal member will ensure stability ?

As you can see - the vast majority of these are pro-incumbent and anti-independent in an electorate where Liberal Trent Zimmerman has a large margin but faces a strong challenge from independent Kylea Tink.

Academic Murray Goot noted that only one of the statements is supportive of an independent, which is consistent with "message testing - the questions being an attempt to see what aspects of being an independent might make an Independent vulnerable to an attack launched on behalf of the sitting member [or]... a conscious attempt not to gather information but to spread doubt about the wisdom of voting for an independent, only partly disguised by the inclusion of one positive statement out of eight".

Psephologist Kevin Bonham told Guardian Australia the poll is "not push polling" - which refers to the practice of seeding disinformation (false claims) through something purporting to be a poll.

Bonham said:

This is a typical internal party poll where parties test messages... [In which they] try to hone their strategies for campaigning. They sometimes get very controversial because they test claims that are dubious.

It looks like the Liberal Party are honing attack lines against independents. We've asked them if they're behind the poll, which recipients said was conducted by EMRS, a company owned by the Liberal-aligned Crosby-Textor lobbying group.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.49am GMT

block-time published-time 3.41am GMT

RBA halts bond binge and removes predicted timing on rate rise

The Reserve Bank will stop its purchases of government debt to support the Australian economy from 10 February but says the move does not imply a near-term rise in the official cash rate.

At the central's bank's first meeting of 2022, [Governor Philip Lowe said](#) "faster-than-expected progress has been made towards the RBA's goals and further progress is likely", hence it was "the right time to end the bond purchase program".

However, "the Board is committed to maintaining highly supportive monetary conditions to achieve its objectives of a return to full employment in Australia and inflation consistent with the target. Ceasing purchases under the bond purchase program does not imply a near-term increase in interest rates.

"As the Board has stated previously, it will not increase the cash rate until actual inflation is sustainably within the 2 to 3% target range. While inflation has picked up, it is too early to conclude that it is sustainably within the target band."

What's notable is that the RBA has dropped its previous reference to lifting rates in 2024 or at a pinch in 2023.

Financial markets have [already been pencilling in a move by May](#) , and today's comments may encourage others to bring forward their predictions on when rates will rise.

More than a few federal Coalition MPs will be hoping the central bank can wait at least until June.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.49am GMT

block-time published-time 3.34am GMT

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So, in between that flurry of announcements, we had South **Australia** and the Northern Territory give their Covid update.

South **Australia** recorded three deaths and 1,266 new cases, with 273 people in hospital, which the premier said was the lowest it had been in some time.

The Northern Territory reported 1,122 new cases, with 132 people in hospital.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.38am GMT

block-time published-time 3.32am GMT

RBA holds cash rate at 0.1%

The Reserve Bank of **Australia** has announced it will hold the cash rate at its record low, in line with many expectations. The RBA also announced it would end its bond buying program.

enltrAt its meeting today, the Board decided to maintain the cash rate target at 10 basis points and the interest rate on Exchange Settlement balances at zero per cent. It also decided to cease further purchases under the bond purchase program - <https://t.co/xlIW5gFjt2>

- RBA (@RBAInfo) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.47am GMT

block-time published-time 3.23am GMT

New Zealand has secured the delivery of another 36m rapid antigen tests, upping the stocks to more than 55m tests for use over the next two months as the country prepares for a widespread Omicron outbreak.

A total of 123m rapid antigen tests have been ordered through to June.

The deputy prime minister, Grant Robertson, said on Tuesday:

The government is preparing for a move to phase two of our Omicron plan, where we start integrating rapid antigen tests into testing, to ensure a return-to-work programme for critical businesses.

Robertson said modelling shows that during the peak of an Omicron outbreak, the country may need to use 9m RATs a week which is equivalent to testing a quarter of New Zealand every day, or all of New Zealand twice a week.

That scale of testing will go a long way to reducing the risk of an infected person going to work and then infecting others.

The tests will be used for asymptomatic critical workers so that hospitals, supermarkets and other services can continue operating, added the associate health minister, Dr Ayesha Verrall:

The use and supply of RATs will continue to be prioritised to ensure we are protecting the vulnerable and to enable asymptomatic critical workers to return to work. These additional supplies will go a long way to ensuring those who most need a test can access one.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.34am GMT

block-time published-time 3.16am GMT

Outside the Press Club following his speech, Scott Morrison refused to answer further questions about the text message allegations raised by Network 10's Peter van Onselen.

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As he left the building and got into a waiting car, the PM refused to stop for journalists outside, waving off reporters' questions.

Protesters had assembled at the exit gate to the carpark after leaving the front of the building. Security cleared a path through the crowd, but protesters ran alongside the PM's car as it sped away.

The deputy prime minister, Barnaby Joyce, walked through the crowd himself before turning around and returning to the carpark. He told reporters he was looking for his waiting car, which had dropped him off on the road outside the Press Club.

Barnaby Joyce looking for his car as security clears a path through protestors. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

Protesters yelled abuse and insults at Morrison and Joyce as they left.

The immigration minister, Alex Hawke, also shrugged off questions about the text allegations aired by Van Onselen. Stopped by journalists on his way out of the Press club, Hawke said he wouldn't comment on the texts but called Berejiklian "fantastic".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.51am GMT

block-time published-time 3.12am GMT

Home Affairs officials have insisted the government is not "anti-encryption" while arguing tech platforms rolling out end-to-end encryption are prioritising privacy and security over public safety.

Speaking before the parliamentary inquiry on social media and online safety, Brendan Dowling, the first assistant secretary for digital and technology policy at the Department of Home Affairs, said the department is "deeply concerned that innovation in digital tools, including anonymising technology like end-to-end encryption, is not striking the right balance between the benefits and the risks of harm."

Dowling accused the tech companies of considering safety of users as an afterthought when rolling out end-to-end encryption for privacy and security reasons:

I'll start by saying that we recognise there are substantial benefits particularly to cyber security and privacy from the use of encryption. So we're not... anti-encryption or looking for vulnerabilities in encryption. But we do see that the adoption of ubiquitous encryption across more and more platforms will have serious and real implications for safety, and particularly around the proliferation of child abuse material, around the use of anonymity tools in the conduct of cybercrime.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.15am GMT

block-time published-time 3.07am GMT

enltrTakes a particular hide for the trillion-dollar-debt PM to ask where the Opposition's money will come from.

- Michael Pascoe (@MichaelPascoe01) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 3.05am GMT

National Covid-19 update

Here are the case numbers from around the country today, as states confirm at least 74 coronavirus deaths: ACT

Cases: 522Deaths: 0In hospital: 64 (one person in ICU)

NSW

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Cases: 12,818 Deaths: 30 In hospital: 2,749 (186 people in ICU)

NT

Cases: 1,122 Deaths: 0 In hospital: 132

Queensland

Cases: 7,588 Deaths: 10 In hospital: 868 (54 people in ICU)

South **Australia**

Cases: 1,266 Deaths: 3 In hospital: 273

Tasmania

Cases: 699 Deaths: 0 In hospital: 16 (one person in ICU)

Victoria

Cases: 11,311 Deaths: 34 In hospital: 851 (106 people in ICU)

Western **Australia**

Cases: 13 Deaths: 0 In hospital: 1

block-time updated-time Updated at 4.41am GMT

block-time published-time 3.04am GMT

And that brings an end to a dramatic National Press Club! Take a breather, have some tea, there was a lot to unpack there.

block-time published-time 3.03am GMT

Laura Tingle ends proceedings by asking the PM if he would debate opposition leader Anthony Albanese on the NPC stage, to which Morrison says he is pushing for an independent debating commission.

Tingle presses on:

LT: Will you do a debate, though?

SM: Of course I will. Of course I will. We'll be debating lots!

block-time published-time 3.01am GMT

enltrMorrison acting like nobody saw Omicron coming when experts spent literally months warning new variant[s] would upend everything is interesting

- Caitlin Cassidy (@caitecassidy) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 3.00am GMT

enltrOmicron changed everything in an instant the PM says today of the summer.. ?? Not entirely clear what the living with Covid plan was then if virulent variants were unanticipated [#auspol](#)

- Katharine Murphy (@murpharoo) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 3.00am GMT

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Final question, this time from Greg Brown of the Australian, who says the last election was won by Morrison because he was more popular than Bill Shorten and could "tear apart" Labor's "big" policies.

What can we expect from Morrison this year?

If you want taxes to remain low, then vote Liberal and National - don't vote Labor. Because their taxes are the opposite. They've already opened the batting on the higher taxes and they've already started that. And once they get started, you know that they can't stop when it comes to taxing you.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.01am GMT

block-time published-time 2.56am GMT

enltrIf I was PM I'd have stockpiled the shit out of all the tests, PPE, etc., even if the health advice was that they weren't the priority right now. I'd have been having daymares about a more infectious variant and 2am wake ups about not having the gear in place [#NPC](#)

- Tory Shepherd (@ToryShepherd) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 2.56am GMT

The PM is asked why his government wasn't prepared for a variant like Omicron, why they had not anticipated that RATs would be necessary in their response.

Once again, we return to comparisons:

No country did pick that. Which country did?

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.57am GMT

block-time published-time 2.49am GMT

Sam Maiden from news.com.au has asked the PM what he thinks of changing the rules that pay MPs \$291 a night to live at home, comparing the payment with the \$800 made to aged care workers.

The PM says he expects all his MPs and senators to follow the rules, only adding that "if those rules need to change", they would be changed independently.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.50am GMT

block-time published-time 2.44am GMT

enltrSo rather than respond with why lessons haven't been learned with aged care, Morrison is just quoting statistics of how many gloves the Cth bought. I suggest the actual answer is the hot vaxxed summer couldn't wait a few more weeks until oldies had their boosters.

- Paul Karp (@Paul_Karp) [February 1, 2022](#)

enltrAlmost all aged care centres have now been offered their boosters. So that's good. He nailed that bit. But it didn't answer the question.

- Paul Karp (@Paul_Karp) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.50am GMT

block-time published-time 2.40am GMT

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Reporter reads out texts he says are from Berejiklian describing PM as 'a horrible person'

OK, so we have veered a little off topic, but Peter van Onselen from Channel 10 says he has text messages between former NSW premier Gladys Berejiklian and a "current Liberal Cabinet minister":

I've got them right here. In one she describes you as "a horrible, horrible person," going on to say she did not trust you and you're more concerned with politics than people. The minister is even more scathing, describing you as a "fraud" and "a complete psycho".

Here is what the PM had to say:

Well, I don't know who you're referring to, or the basis of what you've put to me. But I obviously don't agree with it. And I don't think that that is my record.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.53am GMT

block-time published-time 2.37am GMT

Another spicy question, this time from Andrew Probyn of the ABC, who points out the PM's plummeting approval ratings, asking why Morrison was "the best person to lead the Coalition to the next election".

Here was Morrison's answer:

I have a great trust in the Australian people. I think they're very wise and I think that they're very discerning. I think that they take elections very, very seriously. Because they know the consequences. And there's a difference between answering a phone and walking into a ballot box and making a decision that has consequences. And I know from my own experience that they will weigh these things up in the months ahead.

And they'll be saying, "Who has the economic plan and economic management experience to ensure that I can stay in my job and my business can succeed?... And who has that experience and who has that understanding of the complexity of these challenges to make all of that work?" And they'll weigh that up.

And they'll wonder, with what we're seeing in the regions and the threats to our security - well, who has shown that they're able to stand up for [our] interests? Whether it's standing up to other countries in our region, standing up to the big tech companies, standing up to the banks and the energy companies.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.39am GMT

block-time published-time 2.33am GMT

PM says he won't 'pretend to you' that he goes out to buy bread, milk

Andrew Clennell from Sky News has lobbed the PM a spicy question, asking if he has "lost touch" with ordinary Australians. Clennell asks him to list the price of a loaf of bread, a litre of petrol and a rapid antigen test.

Here is what the PM has to say:

First of all, during the pandemic, you can't pay for everything. Because it all has to be paid for. Over the course of the pandemic, we've provided over \$100 billion in economic support, JobKeeper being the most significant, and that has saved businesses across this country.

And, of course... one of the things that we have to be very mindful of, Andrew, is that this thing isn't over yet. It's not over. The next variant could have any number of permutations to it. And so, when we decided to do JobKeeper, we said it's going to start and it's going to finish and people asked the treasurer and I the same question that you're asking me now. "Why are you pulling JobKeeper away?"

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

Because, that's what you do when you're responsible and running a government. You can't say yes to everybody all the time. And you have to do things which ensure that you've got your government and your bank balance as a government able to deal with the next challenge. I mean, our opponents wanted to keep it going.

Now, I'm not going to pretend to you that I go out each day and I buy a loaf of bread and I buy a litre of milk. I'm not going to pretend to you that I do that.

I'll leave those sort of things to you, mate. And you can run it. But the point is that I do my job every day to ensure that those things are affordable as they possibly can be for Australians every single day.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.37am GMT

block-time published-time 2.27am GMT

enltrSounds like the beginning of the election [#npc #auspol](#)

- Patricia Karvelas (@PatsKarvelas) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 2.26am GMT

Claire Armstrong from the Daily Telegraph has asked Morrison what makes parliament and political offices more safe for women than they were 12 months ago, a year on from the reckoning parliament faced.

Morrison begins by saying he "listened" and "reflected" on the "brave stands people have taken":

I'd say the most important thing that has happened is we now have an independent complaints mechanism. This was one of the key recommendations, and the one we have acted on. And we've done that together as a parliament.

And that, I think, assists everybody who works in that building. Not just the politicians and their staff. That process that we examined closely, that let down so many a year ago, and before, has been significantly changed. And for the better. And we have learnt from those times.

And I believe it's safer today than it was a year ago because of those changes and the brave stands that people have taken on these issues. And I've listened carefully to them and reflected on them. And will continue to work to ensure that those processes work for people.

Because if you find yourself in that situation, it's incredibly important that there are those there to help you and support you, to be able to make good decisions for you, and to address the things that you need addressed to make the place safer.

And so the independent complaints mechanism that we have put in place - and the counselling support and the other things that sit around that - I think provides an environment should, God forbid that ever happen to anyone again, that they will find a situation very different to the one Ms Higgins found herself in.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.29am GMT

block-time published-time 2.22am GMT

enltrMorrison: "secondly, if I'd had my time again I would've put the vaccination program under a military operation earlier in the year". What about the all-eggs in the AZ basket? Not ordering enough Pfizer early enough?

- Paul Karp (@Paul_Karp) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 2.22am GMT

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

enltrPrime Minister is asked if he will say sorry for the failures he outlined in his [#NPC](#) speech (and those he didn't mention). "We're all terribly sorry for what this pandemic has done to the world and to this country." [#auspol](#)

- Tamsin Rose (@tamsinroses) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 2.21am GMT

Spare a thought for policymakers and reserve bankers (see [earlier post](#))...

Is the economy running too hot (so we must curb excessive spending and lift interest rates) or at a delicate stage because of disruptions from Omicron or the next Covid variant (so we must throw more money at struggling firms and families)?

The latest data from the ABS and other sources suggest the risks lie more with the former than the latter.

Take retail sales figures for December. They fell 4.4% from November, the biggest monthly retreat since April 2020. That sounds bad, but turnover was up 4.8% on December 2020, and in dollar terms only November 2021 was bigger.

And lending data also out from the ABS also indicates confidence was high at the end of 2021. Perhaps too high.

New loans for housing rose 4.4% in December to a record \$32.8bn, which is a bit scary if you figure out how many days were "holidays". Anyway, the sum was 26.5% higher than a year earlier with loans to owner-occupiers (up 5.3%) and investors up 2.4%.

Personal finance was up a more modest 0.7% but lending for "personal investment" was up 17.4%.

Anyway, Omicron dates some of that data, hence the extra interest in more recent readings.

Among those is ANZ-Roy Morgan's consumer confidence view. Sentiment improved last week by 1.7% as (reported) Covid cases fell across most of the country. NSW snapped three weeks of falls to perk up 6.2% and WA (despite those closed borders) rose 4.3%. Victoria, though, sank 2.5% and Queensland 0.6%.

The weekly numbers can jump around a bit but a surprise was a 0.3 % fall in inflation expectations to 4.7%. "Retail petrol prices are up 7% in January, which would usually elevate inflation expectations," ANZ's head of Australian economics, David Plank, said.

The CBA, too, has picked up a rise in activity according to credit card spending behaviour.

"With this week's increase, NSW has accounted for just over 40% of the increase in spending nationally since the start of this year, much higher than its contribution during normal times," the CBA said.

That's slightly jarring given this week's appeal by NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet and Treasurer Matt Kean for more federal aid.

NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet speaks to the media. Photograph: Bianca de Marchi/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.28am GMT

block-time published-time 2.20am GMT

I'd just like to add the final interaction between Tingle and Morrison there:

LT: So you don't have to say sorry about any of those things?

SM: I think I've explained my answer fairly fully.

block-time published-time 2.18am GMT

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

OK, we're into questions, and Tingle begins with a doozy: Will the PM apologise for the many mistakes he's made as prime minister?

Here is his response:

We're all terribly sorry for what this pandemic has done to the world and to this country. These are the times in which we live. And I've set out today, I think, very clearly, the challenges that we've faced.

But I'm also very proud of Australians and what they've achieved in enabling us all to come through this despite the setbacks and the challenges that we have faced. In terms of the things - when I say we haven't got everything right - let me reflect on a couple of them for you.

First of all, as we went into this summer, we were optimistic - I was optimistic... As we went into the summer - I think we were too optimistic, perhaps.

And we could have communicated more clearly about the risks and challenges that we still faced. And I think in raising those expectations about the summer, that we heightened the great sense of disappointment that people felt. And as we had to make massive changes because of Omicron, as I said, the rapid antigen tests had only actually been approved for use by the TGA earlier in November. We'd agreed at the meeting of national cabinet about how they'd be funded and who had to go and get them.

And so we moved quickly because we hadn't anticipated that we would have a variant that resulted in the vaccine not being able to stop the transmission. We had invested so much - and Australians invested so much - in getting those vaccinations.

Secondly, on the vaccination program, if I had my time over, I would have put it under a military operation from the outset and not later in the year.

... We'd had the goal of ensuring that everyone who wanted a vaccine could be offered one by October - for the record, that was achieved on the 25th of October.

In the aged care sector, we knew - well, I should say we learnt - that the interface between the aged care sector and the public hospital system was blurred. And so, when the storms of Covid hit, that created some real challenges.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.22am GMT

block-time published-time 2.13am GMT

PM announces \$2.2bn 'university research commercialisation package'

So the PM wraps up with one final announcement, a \$2.2 billion investment into research and universities:

Our \$2.2 billion university research commercialisation package will focus the considerable research power, our smartest minds of our universities, on **Australia**'s national economic priorities.

And as we drive down unemployment, we're also driving up the creation of new products and new companies here in **Australia**. Backing our best researchers and their ideas to ensure **Australia**'s economy roars back even stronger in the future, with leading-edge manufacturing at its core.

We make stuff here. We make it really well. And we're gonna keep making it under our government.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.15am GMT

block-time published-time 2.11am GMT

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

enltrSo it's 1pm, when the speech is supposed to wrap up to allow for questions...and we haven't got to the manufacturing announcement yet

- Sarah Martin (@msmarto) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 2.10am GMT

enltrHome Affairs in the social media inquiry: "We're deeply concerned that innovation in digital tools, including anonymising technology like end to end encryption, is not striking the right balance between the benefits and the risks of harm"

- Josh Taylor (@joshgnosis) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 2.08am GMT

PM announces \$1.6bn 'economic accelerator'

The PM has continued on this topic, talking about his "Trailblazer Universities Program", and announcing a \$1.6 billion program to encourage research to get to "later stages of development":

This will see eligible universities undertake reforms, including to intellectual property arrangements, and provide clear promotional pathways for academic researchers, engaging in commercialisation activities.

Now, the first step is underway. There are eight university proposals short-listed to share in \$243 million of investment, working closely with industry partners. And regions are going to do great in this program.

They really are. Funding of \$30 million will see participating universities partnering with the CSIRO to access specialist equipment, enabling researchers to prototype and test technologies at scale.

Today, I'm announcing the cornerstone of the government's new approach to turning great Australian ideas into commercial success, a \$1.6 billion program called **Australia**'s economic accelerator. In driving commercialisation, the key policy challenge surrounds the so-called valley of death, where early-stage research is frequently not progressed to later stages of development because of the risk and uncertainty about commercial returns.

It will allow Australian innovators to access funding opportunities for each stage of their project, provided they can continue to prove project viability and, importantly, commercial potential.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.12am GMT

block-time published-time 2.06am GMT

Next, the PM is talking about his "modern manufacturing strategy" that he wants to "take to the next level":

We're doing that by fusing it with greater investment in our world-class university research capabilities. Our modern manufacturing strategy has set out clear principles to build new sources of growth and scale in six key areas where **Australia** has significant comparative advantage, strategic interests, and the capacity to harness new opportunities.

Medical products. Food and beverage. Recycling and clean energy. Resources technology and critical minerals processing. Defence industry. And space.

To date, we have committed over \$312 million in funding to boost manufacturing capability and supply-chain resilience, leveraging \$677 million more in private-sector investment.

We now need to better link and leverage our world-class research sector to boost these efforts. 85% of Australian research is rated, officially, at or above world standard. Yet we continue to under-perform frustratingly in achieving commercialisation outcomes.

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

We need to shift the focus from citations to commercial success. We need to accelerate the forging of linkages between Australian industry and Australian university researchers.

We need to develop a new breed of research entrepreneurs here in Australia, so they can create the new products, the new companies and, most importantly, the new jobs.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.08am GMT

block-time published-time 2.03am GMT

Ok, now Morrison is listing out the five point economic plan he will be taking into the election (I have a feeling we'll be hearing these again):

Firstly, keeping taxes low and cutting red tape to drive investment and enabling Australians to keep more of what they earn, as we promised.

Secondly, investing in the infrastructure and skills development, and growing our workforce, to meet the demands of a growing economy.

Thirdly, delivering the affordable, reliable energy that Australian businesses, and especially regional economies, need to power their futures ahead, while reducing our emissions to achieve net zero by 2050, and reducing household electricity bills.

Fourthly, making Australia a top-10 data and digital economy by 2030.

And fifthly, securing our sovereign manufacturing capability, unlocking a new generation of high-wage, high-skill, high-tech jobs.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.04am GMT

block-time published-time 2.00am GMT

More financial stats now, including 300,000 people assisted into home ownership in the past three years, an estimated \$245 billion in additional household savings, and an 8% drop in energy bills, reportedly saving households \$128 a year.

We are passionate about getting Australians into jobs. And we have the experience, we have the track record, and we have the economic plans that back this up.

Jobs change lives. They change families. They change communities. They give Australians purpose and independence. They free them from the clutches of welfare and dependence.

And they do the heavy lifting on transforming the budget also. I believe we can now achieve an unemployment rate with a "3" in front of it this year. Our goal is to achieve this in the second half of 2022.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.02am GMT

block-time published-time 1.57am GMT

Next, Morrison has just gone through a whole heap of unemployment figures, including youth unemployment dropping to its lowest levels since 2008, with unemployment at 4.2%, and with more than 1 million women in work.

And as my colleagues know, nothing puts a bigger smile on my face than hearing that young people are getting into jobs.

block-time published-time 1.54am GMT

PM commits \$666m for NDIS providers, two more years of mental health funding

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

The PM continues, listing off two new announcements, including a boost for NDIS services providers, and adding two more years to the government's commitments to mental health funding:

To ensure the viability of the NDIS providers, we provided more than \$666 million in advance payments and made changes to allow eligible NDIS providers to claim a payment to support their disability workers to be vaccinated against Covid-19.

Strong health resilience built through a once-in-a-century pandemic.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.56am GMT

block-time published-time 1.51am GMT

Police have requested vehicles move on from the front of the Press Club, and several quickly did. Around a dozen cars and trucks remain, including one van from which protesters are making speeches.

The PA is now playing a stream of Morrison's speech from inside the building, with one protester giving comments after each sentence, as the crowd boos and jeers. Other protesters are now intensifying their verbal abuse of journalists standing behind the police line.

Hundreds of protesters camped in parks and public areas around Parliament House on Monday night. On Tuesday morning, Guardian **Australia** counted more than 300 cars parked in public areas, with the majority setting up tents, camper vans or swags.

ACT police told Guardian **Australia** they have "moved on" protesters who "set up unauthorised campsites in the area".

"The community is reminded camping or parking vehicles is prohibited in the Parliamentary Triangle and on NCA managed land without a permit," a police spokesperson said.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.53am GMT

block-time published-time 1.51am GMT

PM announces additional \$209m for aged care workforce

And we have the first actual announcement from the PM, who announces an additional \$209m to support aged care workers :

And that's why I'm announcing today the government is providing, again, a further \$209 million to support the aged care workforce to continue to care for older Australians through this pandemic.

This is a responsible commitment that build on the \$393 million already provided over three payments to 234,000 aged care workers earlier in the pandemic. It worked.

We're doing it again. In coming months, two bonus payments of up to \$400 each will be paid to aged care workers, including those providing direct care, food or cleaning services.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison at the National Press Club in Canberra. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.54am GMT

block-time published-time 1.49am GMT

enltrProtestors outside the National Press Club are listening to Scott Morrison deliver his speech inside the venue. They've come carrying a mix of signs, some anti vaccination and some anti media. Other random signs too. One protestor has a Trump flag. [@abcnews pic.twitter.com/NsjCNGB5iZ](https://abcnews.pic.twitter.com/NsjCNGB5iZ)

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

- Nour Haydar (@NourHaydar) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 1.48am GMT

We're back to comparing to other countries (I am now unsure if we should or shouldn't be doing this), this time in discussion of **Australia**'s health response to Covid:

Our health response has ensured that our health and aged care system has stood up to the global pandemic where, in so many other countries we know around the world, it collapsed. More than 40,000 lives have been saved in this country when compared to the death rate from Covid in other countries just like **Australia**.

We have one of the lowest death rates from Covid in the world, including from Omicron. We have one of the highest vaccination rates in the world - more than 93% of Australians aged 16 and over are fully vaccinated.

And since the pandemic began, our government has committed an additional \$40 billion to support **Australia**'s health response to the pandemic - more than Medicare and the PBS in any given year.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.51am GMT

block-time published-time 1.46am GMT

The PM has continued, saying he didn't engage in "petty fights" with state premiers, and stood by his largely consistent position that the states have had most of the responsibility during the pandemic:

You must also focus on what you can control and what you're responsible for. A good example is respecting the constitutional responsibilities of the states and the commonwealth under our federation.

The pandemic did not suspend the constitution or the federation. It did not change what the states and commonwealth have always been responsible for. They didn't get any more powers. They didn't get any less.

And I have always sought to put the national interest first by seeking to work together with the premiers and the chief ministers through the national cabinet, and not engage in petty fights. That wouldn't have helped anyone. My job was to keep everybody in the room working together.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.49am GMT

block-time published-time 1.44am GMT

So, moments after saying we should compare pandemic responses to reflect on how good we supposedly have it, Morrison now says we should not compare to other responses because **Australia** is "different":

Everywhere is not the same. We are constantly engaged with experts and governments around the world to share experience, data, and information. And they've learnt from us, I can tell you.

But that doesn't mean that what is done elsewhere is always the right solution for our conditions or circumstances here in **Australia**.

Australia has many differences with the rest of the world. Our regulatory authorities. Our seasons. Our health and social security systems. Cut-and-paste doesn't cut it in a pandemic.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.46am GMT

block-time published-time 1.42am GMT

The PM has now shifted to discussing the Omicron response, first reiterating that testing "was always free":

The unprecedented surge in cases caused by Omicron changed everything. It was like dealing with a completely new virus. The medical advice to government on the use of rapid antigen tests changed. And so did our response.

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

And so, since then, the government contracted 78 million rapid antigen tests to help meet significant new demands in the states and the territories and the private sector.

Over 652,000 concession card holders have already accessed over 2.7 million free rapid antigen tests through the community pharmacy concession card holder program, which commenced just over a week ago.

The government is also delivering 10 million rapid antigen tests to support state and territory clinics.

And our own area of responsibility, around 8 million tests have already been provided to aged care facilities with the purchasing of those tests beginning back in August of last year.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.44am GMT

block-time published-time 1.40am GMT

Morrison has said he wants to share some of the "lessons" he's learnt over the past three years, and launches into a defence of the "balance" needed to be struck in pandemic responses:

Firstly, you've always got to focus on getting the balance right. From the outset of the pandemic, I have said our twin goals have been to save lives and to save livelihoods.

This is how we protect our Australian way of life. And I have always sought to balance our health objectives with our broader societal and economic wellbeing.

We must respect the virus, but we must not live in fear of it. You must be prepared to listen to that advice, but also to take the decisions that strike the right balance. Because it is we who have been trusted with those decisions.

He adds a second, where he says it is important to be "practical":

The virus does not care what your political views are. It writes the rules about how it behaves. And we must then write our rules about how we respond. And these rules must be flexible.

They will change. There is no set-and-forget in a pandemic like this. There are times when you have to pull back. And there are times when you have to push forward.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.42am GMT

block-time published-time 1.38am GMT

Morrison immediately adds that situations overseas have been worse, but says it was "fair enough" that some have asked of him to improve the government's response to the series of crises he listed:

The fact that far worse outcomes have been experienced overseas - which we know - well, that gives some important perspective.

But it doesn't soften the blow. And it's fair enough that this disappointment leads you to ask, " Couldn't YOU have done more? Couldn't this have been avoided? After all, aren't you responsible?" I get that.

For me as prime minister, accepting this responsibility means asking yourself and challenging yourself every single day with those same questions. And I can assure you I do. I haven't got everything right. And I'll take my fair share of the criticism and the blame.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.40am GMT

block-time published-time 1.36am GMT

The PM says it has been "crushing" to have visited towns "devastated" by storms, floods or fires:

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

It's been crushing to visit towns and homes devastated - often with Jen - by storms, ravaged by flood or fires, to walk across barren pastures, to see the queues outside Centrelink or testing centres, to see the empty shops and restaurants, as we saw in Cairns earlier over the weekend.

To see the lives and livelihoods of Australians disrupted through no fault of their own and through circumstances well beyond theirs and our control, often. So I understand and I acknowledge the frustration, especially with how this global pandemic has played out over this past very difficult summer.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.38am GMT

block-time published-time 1.35am GMT

The PM begins by reflecting on the past three years, listing fires, pandemics and recessions, saying young people have "never know anything like it".

The past three years have been some of the most extraordinary that our nation has ever experienced. Younger generations have never known anything like it. The succession of natural disasters from drought to flood, fires, pestilence, a once-in-a-century global pandemic, the recession - it has pushed our country to the very limits.

Our way of life has been completely turned upside-down. For so many Australians, I know it's been exhausting financially, physically, emotionally. And when we thought we might just be breaking free, the rains have come, the cyclone has hit, or a new and completely different strain of the virus - like Omicron - has come and changed all the rules.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.37am GMT

block-time published-time 1.33am GMT

PM begins Press Club address

The president of the NPC, Laura Tingle, introduced the PM by saying she anticipated he had a "veritable smorgasbord of announcements" to make today.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.34am GMT

block-time published-time 1.28am GMT

Back at the Press Club protest, trucks are blasting their air horns and demonstrators are waving upside-down Australian flags. A small number of protesters are drinking beer from cans and smoking what appears to be marijuana, while others have shouted abuse at journalists standing outside the building.

As has become common at anti-vaccine protests in [Australia](#), demonstrators are singing "The Voice" by John Farnham. They're also singing along to their own version of Pink Floyd's "Another Brick In The Wall", with lyrics related to vaccination which I won't subject you to.

Chants of "remove ScoMo" have rung out just minutes before the prime minister is due to address the Press Club. Other speakers on a PA system are loudly sharing debunked conspiracy theories about vaccines. The crowd appears to be growing.

Earlier, only a smattering of protesters had been on the lawns outside Parliament House, in a far cry from the dramatic scenes on Monday. More than a dozen federal police officers were standing guard at parliament's front doors, and main roads around the building were closed off, in anticipation of further protests. They have not yet eventuated, with most demonstrators now at the Press Club.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.31am GMT

block-time published-time 1.22am GMT

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

Good afternoon, Mostafa Rachwani with you this afternoon, and a quick thanks to Matilda Boseley for expertly navigating us through the morning's news. The PM is due shortly, and we will bring you all the updates from that and everything else happening around the country.

block-time published-time 1.19am GMT

With that, I shall hand you over to the amazing Mostafa Rachwani to bring you all the update's from the prime minister's National Press Club address and all the rest of the afternoon's news.

block-time published-time 1.18am GMT

Popular science podcast, Science Vs, is the latest to take a stand against Spotify's reluctance to take strong action against Joe Rogan for airing unchallenged Covid-19 misinformation, with staff at the Spotify-owned podcast announcing they would not release new episodes except ones counteracting misinformation on Spotify.

Science Vs host and executive producer, Wendy Zukerman, tweeted out the letter she and editor Blythe Terrell sent to Spotify chief executive, Daniel Ek, on Tuesday, explaining their reasoning. They said:

Rogan's show leaves the audience with a skewed and inaccurate view of the Covid-19 vaccines. And Spotify has done little to address this.

On Sunday, Spotify published its Platform Rules, but we do not think they go far enough. Until Spotify implements stronger methods to prevent the spread of misinformation on the platform, we will no longer be making new Science Vs episodes, except those intended to counteract misinformation being spread on Spotify.

enltrScience Vs editor [@blytheterrell](#) and I just sent this email to the CEO of Spotify. pic.twitter.com/aAmZnkA1uU

- Wendy Zukerman (@wendyzuk) [January 31, 2022](#)

The pair said content moderation can be hard, but Spotify has a responsibility to do more, especially now that Spotify acknowledges its position in the tech world has moved from being simply a music platform to a publisher of exclusive content.

Science Vs started out in 2015 as a podcast by [Australia's](#) ABC, before it was purchased by US-based podcasting network Gimlet Media, which was bought out by Spotify in early 2019 for US\$230m.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.20am GMT

block-time published-time 1.17am GMT

Citipointe Christian College referred to accreditation board over anti-LGBT contract

The Queensland education minister has confirmed that the Citipointe Christian College has been referred to the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board after they asked students to sign a contract denouncing homosexuality and bisexuality and promising to conform to the roles of their biological gender.

enltrNEW: Queensland Education Minister Grace Grace says Citipointe Christian College has been referred to the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board over student contracts rejecting homosexuality and asking them to commit to specific gender roles.

- @MartySilk (@MartySilkHack) [February 1, 2022](#)

You can read more about the situation below:

Related: [Queensland school requires families to denounce homosexuality during enrolment](#)

block-time published-time 1.11am GMT

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

enltrAnother day at the office ? [@PressClubAust](#) ? pic.twitter.com/PftTa4AFqL

- Laura Tingle (@latingle) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 1.11am GMT

enltrThe Prime Minister has arrived at the [@PressClubAust](#) through a crowd of protesters [@9NewsAUS](#) pic.twitter.com/RhAIHCJTGI

- Jonathan Kearsley (@jekearsley) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 1.02am GMT

Anti-vaccine protests mass outside the National Press Club

A large crowd of anti-vaccine protesters has massed outside the National Press Club in Canberra, where the prime minister, Scott Morrison, is shortly to give a speech. Police have blocked off streets all around the area, but a dozen cars and trucks had already parked outside the building, blocking the main road.

Hundreds of people - nearly all maskless, many brandishing signs critical of vaccines and vaccination mandates - are now standing on the road or perched on the back of the vehicles. A large line of police is standing between the protesters and the front door to the building.

Many demonstrators are displaying flags or signs supportive of Donald Trump or the United [Australia](#) party.

Morrison's office says "at this stage" the speech will be going ahead. The deputy PM, Barnaby Joyce, has just arrived, walking through a side entrance.

block-time updated-time Updated at 1.05am GMT

block-time published-time 1.01am GMT

Our fantastic science reporter Donna Lu is looking to speak to Australians living with long Covid.

You can email her at Donna.Lu@theguardian.com

enltrI'm keen to speak to Australians living with long Covid. If you're happy to share your experiences, or know someone who might be, please get in touch. My DMs are open, or email: Donna.Lu@theguardian.com

- Donna Lu (@donnadlu) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 12.53am GMT

Some very normal scenes coming out of Canberra this morning:

enltrThis is the anti-vaccine scene directly outside the National Press Club, where Scott Morrison is to make a speech in an hour. Trucks and cars parked right in front, hundreds of people, Trump flags, big line of cops Nearby roads now blocked but these cars got in beforehand pic.twitter.com/noUNi1MSDK

- Josh Butler (@JoshButler) [February 1, 2022](#)

enltrJust walked past a protester wearing, I swear to god, a tinfoil hat

- Josh Butler (@JoshButler) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 12.52am GMT

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

D'Ath has labelled the federal government's response to the aged care situation as "a bit cheeky," saying Morrison's government is claiming to have the Covid situation in aged care under control when "behind closed doors, they're turning to the states and territories and saying: 'Hey, can you sort this out for us?'"

The Queensland health minister says in the last seven days "there's been 26 separate requests for emergency assistance from the Commonwealth to supply residential aged care facilities with PPE and rapid antigen tests"

- @MartySilk (@MartySilkHack) [February 1, 2022](#)

She also stated: "Too many aged care residents are passing away who have not been offered a booster."

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.56am GMT

block-time published-time 12.51am GMT

'Slap in the face': Queensland's health minister slams federal aged care bonuses

The Queensland health minister, Yvette D'Ath, has labelled Morrison's proposed \$800 aged care worker bonus payments a "slap in the face to staff to these facilities and to all the families and loved ones out there".

She says the federal government should instead be taking action on the recommendations made by the royal commission.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.53am GMT

block-time published-time 12.46am GMT

enlr [#exclusive](#) First picture emerges of **Australia's** largest warship "stranded" in Tonga. HMAS Adelaide at anchor on Sunday as crew worked under trying conditions to fix a massive power failure on board pic.twitter.com/j7vf7onQB5

- Andrew Greene (@AndrewBGreene) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 12.43am GMT

Foley has been asked whether Victoria is considering resuming non-urgent elective surgery, after NSW announced some elective surgeries will resume in a staged capacity from Monday 7 February.

Yes, every day, including today, we consult with both private hospitals and the public hospital sector around just where the situation is when it comes to when it will be appropriate to turn back on elective surgery.

He apologised for the disruptions and delays, but said the pause was necessary.

Like many other jurisdictions, like in fact all other jurisdictions, measures of reductions and deferrals of elective surgery have been put in place. Our friends in New South Wales, where the initial outbreak of Omicron peak is coming off, have always been about two weeks or so ahead of ourselves.

Foley said changes in NSW applied only to private hospitals and some regional hospitals.

It's not a return to normal operations. We are in the process of having similar discussions.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.46am GMT

block-time published-time 12.42am GMT

Just jumping back to Victoria for a moment.

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

Foley has been asked why the government hasn't consulted the state's chief health officer on whether a third Covid-19 vaccine dose should be mandated.

Mandates are one of the tools of driving vaccination rates and are a key feature right across the country in 2021 in making us one of the most vaccinated communities on the planet. And in that regard, the process, as we all know, is pretty straightforward.

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisations considers what constitutes being fully vaccinated. They're going through that process. All the states and territories are contributing to that and in the very near future, from my discussions with officials, we would expect the Australian Technical Advisory Group to advise the national cabinet on that outcome. And once that advice has been given then the states and territories will go about the process of consultation as we have in previous times to drive those vaccination rates up.

Foley says "in the context of 2022 and the Omicron variant" he expects "fully vaccinated" will come to mean three doses of a vaccine.

For people who are immunosuppressed and other at-risk groups, it will be four doses, he says.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.44am GMT

block-time published-time 12.40am GMT

Queensland chief health officer, Dr John Gerrard, is providing additional details about those Covid deaths now.

Sadly, we have 10 deaths to report today. That is 10 people who died having had a Covid test around the time of their death.

That includes two people in their 70s, four in their 80s, and four in their 90s.

Of these, two were unvaccinated, eight had received two doses of vaccine and none had received boosters.

Of these 10, eight had come from aged care facilities. We have recorded 107 deaths among aged care residents since the wave began after 13 December.

That is 107 deaths out of the 200 that we have had recorded since the beginning of the Omicron wave in mid-December.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.41am GMT

block-time published-time 12.37am GMT

Queensland records 10 Covid deaths and 7,588 new cases

The Queensland premier is speaking now and has confirmed the state has recorded another 10 Covid deaths, eight of whom were in aged care.

They also had an additional 7,588 new cases.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.41am GMT

block-time published-time 12.32am GMT

enltrScenes outside the National Press Club in Canberra ahead of a speech by Prime Minister Scott Morrison details LIVE [@9NewsAUS](https://www.9news.com.au/news/queensland/queensland-records-10-covid-deaths-and-7588-new-cases/9news-live) at 11:30 pic.twitter.com/Li8Wy827Eb

- Jonathan Kearsley (@jekearsley)

[February 1, 2022](#)

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

block-time published-time 12.24am GMT

If you're in south-eastern Queensland, you don't need to check our blog to know you're in [the midst of a heatwave](#) that has at least [a day to run](#).

One consequence of the heat and humidity (and perhaps more people working from home) is that demand for electricity is high, given so many air conditioners will have been running days and nights lately.

Planners have seen these weather-related strains on the grid coming for some days, and now the market operator AEMO has deemed fit to warn of a possible "lack of reserve" later today.

enltrAEMO is forecasting LOR2 and LOR3 conditions in Queensland this afternoon, signalling a significant shortage in reserves compared to pre-determined requirements. If required, AEMO will activate 'out of market' reserves through the Reliability & Emergency Reserve Trader mechanism. [pic.twitter.com/KUdChJlrTe](https://twitter.com/KUdChJlrTe)

- AEMO (@AEMO_Energy)

[January 31, 2022](#)

To be clear, there are no actual shortfalls yet that would prompt suppliers to switch off some unhappy customers. AEMO has a couple of tricks up its sleeve, such as triggering its reserve system that includes some users agreeing to reduce their demand and receive compensation.

It's only about a week since [AEMO noted summer had been going swimmingly](#) as far as the national electricity market was concerned, with the La Niña-influenced season keeping conditions relatively damp and mild. No reserve backup had been needed by the end of December.

(Melbourne, mind you, just matched its record of the most days in a month of 30C, so things did start to heat up in some key population centres.)

Today or even tomorrow might test Queensland's supplies, especially if one of those ageing coal-fired power stations drops out. Sweaty fingers will be crossed all over Queensland that doesn't happen.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.29am GMT

block-time published-time 12.22am GMT

enltrThe [@BOM_au](#) has issued a Severe Weather Warning for HEAVY RAINFALL for people in North East Pastoral and parts of North West Pastoral districts. For more information visit: <https://t.co/BuU3rJXFbk> [pic.twitter.com/W2YGEJspGD](https://t.co/W2YGEJspGD)

- SASES (@SA_SES)

[February 1, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 12.15am GMT

enltrA severe weather warning is current for [#LordHowelsland](#) for abnormally high tides over the coming days in the morning. It recorded a high tide of 2.629m this-morning, the highest since 1998. Stay up to date with the latest warnings at <https://t.co/Ss766eSCrL> [pic.twitter.com/6lqCiXFoXo](https://t.co/6lqCiXFoXo)

- Bureau of Meteorology, New South Wales (@BOM_NSW) [February 1, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 12.14am GMT

ACT records 522 new Covid cases

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

The ACT has recorded another 522 new Covid infections overnight. There are now 64 Covid-positive people in hospital and one person in the ICU. They currently require ventilation.

enltrACT COVID-19 update (1 Feb 2022) ?? COVID-19 vaccinations Aged 5-11 years (1 dose): 69.4% Aged 12+ (2 doses) 98.6% Aged 18+ (3 doses): 49.0% New cases today: 522 (326 PCR and 196 RAT) Active cases: 3,750 (2,442 PCR and 1,308 RAT) Total cases: 36,403 (27,813 PCR and 8,590 RAT) pic.twitter.com/oO71GN2hIT

- ACT Health (@ACTHealth)

[February 1, 2022](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.23am GMT

block-time published-time 12.10am GMT

The Victorian health minister, Martin Foley, is holding a press conference in Melbourne. The state has recorded 34 Covid deaths and 11,311 new infections but hospitalisations are trending down.

Foley:

We are seeing currently 851 people in Victorian hospitals with Covid-19, that is down from yesterday's figure of 873 and is also below the rolling seven day average of 925. Yesterday we had 102 people in ICU and today we have 106 people in intensive care as of 6am this morning, so an increase of four. But in regards to people on ventilators, we have 30 people on ventilators... down from 33 yesterday.

Of the 34 deaths, Foley says 13 were within the last two days, with the remainder previous fatalities that have just been reported to the Victorian authorities.

We send our deepest condolences and best wishes to those families and communities in this time of grieving.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.12am GMT

block-time published-time 12.09am GMT

Okay, it's time to hear from the Victorian health minister, Martin Foley, with his Covid-19 update for the day.

He has kicked things off by chatting about a new initiative to get vulnerable children across the state vaccinated.

We know we don't want any members of our community left behind when it comes to the vaccination program. The [new] program targeting disadvantaged communities, kids with disabilities, kids in out-of-home care programs, kids in the justice program and their families need the support to go that little step extra so as to make sure that we get the highest possible vaccination rates for the communities and those that find it the hardest to access services.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.11am GMT

block-time published-time 11.57pm GMT

enltrMinor Flood Warning - Advice for Snowy River downstream of McKillops Bridge. You should Stay Informed. For more info: [#vicfloods](https://t.co/XVUiesqkUj)

- VICSES News (@vicsesnews)

[January 31, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 11.55pm GMT

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

enltrProtesters from the bottom camp are en route to the National Press Club where they believe Scott Morrison will be speaking. Some are discussing changing the date of **Australia** Day to today, the "day we take this country back" pic.twitter.com/jlqPZeBZWm

- whatsdoinmedia (@whatsdoinmedia) [January 31, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 11.54pm GMT

enltrit's starting already - ahead of Scott Morrison making a speech at the Press Club in a few hours <https://t.co/bNfQgzZY1j>

- Josh Butler (@JoshButler) [January 31, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 11.54pm GMT

Tasmania records 699 new Covid cases

The Tasmanian numbers are in and the state has recorded 699 new Covid-19 infections.

There are still 16 people in hospital in the state and one in the ICU.

block-time published-time 11.48pm GMT

I've got a bit more detail out of the latest dump of donations data, just released by the Australian Electoral Commission. Empire Energy, a firm exploring for gas in the Beetaloo Basin, made \$65,000 worth of donations.

The majority went to the Liberal party's Northern Territory branch, which received \$40,000, while Labor got \$25,000. Empire has been the [main beneficiary](#) of a federal program designed to incentivise fracking and gas exploration in the Beetaloo Basin, receiving \$21m in three grants [announced in July last year](#).

Empire gave the Liberal party \$27,000 later that month. The rest of the money was donated in three instalments in November, January and April. A [Senate inquiry has previously probed](#) the company's connections with the Liberal party, revealing that it paid for a party fundraiser to inspect its operations in the NT.

The company has previously denied that its connections to the Liberal party played any role in it receiving the grants, saying it "followed due and proper process at all times".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.52pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.45pm GMT

Reporter:

We can circle back to the hydrogen argument, do you have a horizon or some sort of expectation when you think green hydrogen could be economically viable?

Angus Taylor:

We have been very clear on the pathway for hydrogen. Since we launched the technology investment roadmap 18 months ago or so, we said we are targeting getting below \$2 per kilogram.

The reason why getting below \$2 per kilogram is so important is because as you get down to that level, you are getting the parity with alternatives and you are not raising the cost of electricity for Australians. That is so important.

We do know that we are expecting to see blue hydrogen getting towards that level sooner than green. Over the course of this decade, we expect that to be the case for blue hydrogen. Green will take longer. We have laid that out very clearly in our plan.

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

We will start to see a shift towards \$2 by the end of the decade, it will take potentially longer to get down to that parity level and we have laid [that] out in a very clear chart in the long-term strategy which I encourage all to look at.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.51pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.42pm GMT

The Reserve Bank of [Australia](#), the country's central bank, emerges from its summer slumber with its first board meeting for 2022 today. It's something of a luxury among central bankers to take January off, but this is 'Straya, after all.

Anyway, the RBA is not expected to lift the official case rate from its record low 0.1% annual rate but today's meeting is likely to provide more of a hint of when that first-in-a-decade hike might occur.

Markets, with all their self-interested wisdom, [are tipping the first move](#) by May or June, assuming the rise is to 0.25%. Private economists are predicting August, but these are guesses, which is why what RBA Governor Philip Lowe actually says today will be examined closely. (And tomorrow's National Press Club address.)

Until late last year, Lowe had been touting 2024 as the time to start "normalising" interest rates. But with more and more signs of a strong economic recovery, 2023 was started geing mentioned in RBA dispatches.

Last week, too, [we've had inflation figures that the RBA looks at](#) rising at their fastest pace since 2014, and a week before that, [the lowest jobless rate](#) in more than 13 years. Not to mention central banks globally moving to lift lending rates.

In anticipation of today's RBA meeting, a few headline writers have also got a bit twitchy, declaring the central bank had "put an end to economy stimulus". They mean the bank has stopped buying government bonds, another aspect of its support for activity during the Covid pandemic.

Back at [the last RBA meeting in December](#), the bank said it would continue to buy government securities (a move that keeps interest rates lower, longer) at the rate of \$4bn a week " until at least mid-February 2022 ".

So technically, the bank buying has a couple of weeks to run - unless the RBA formally ends it today. If it does run another fortnight, the \$8bn it will buy would bring the total to about \$350bn - not a small addition when you figure the RBA started the bond binge with \$16bn in holdings.

While borrowers on variable rates will be keenly following today's hints and punditry, those with a longer-term view might wonder how the RBA is going to unwind its accumulation of about one-third of government debt in just two years.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.49pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.41pm GMT

Now, I know what you are thinking: "Gosh, I really wish I could hear politicians talking about green hydrogen a little more this morning."

Well, you are in luck!

Here is the energy minister, Angus Tayl or, having a chat about the old hl:

We heard a moment ago they couldn't answer the question as to what the cost of hydrogen would be... We want to see hydrogen going into this generator but in a way that is economic, commercial and technically feasible. That is what we will continue to work with, to achieve this in the coming years.

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

But forcing it in any way is going to cost other taxpayers for electricity consumers, it doesn't make economic sense. We have seen time and time again that Anthony Albanese and his team are not economically coherent. He has never held an economic portfolio. It shows up because affordable, reliable energy is crucial to all Australians. A project that delivers a return, as we said in the business case, 4% is crucial for taxpayers.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.50pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.32pm GMT

The federal government has quietly agreed to allow the importation of unapproved rapid antigen tests for personal use amid shortages of approved kits.

Even the kits approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration have varying degrees of accuracy, and the TGA is [currently reviewing](#) the effectiveness of the 23 tests approved for detecting Omicron. Low sensitivity on tests could mean people receive negative results even though they are infectious, and go on to spread the virus.

The agriculture, water and environment department's website was updated on 12 January with new rules for imported tests. Up to three months' supply of the unapproved tests can be brought into the country as long as they meet various conditions including "does not contain bee pollen", and are commercially prepared and packaged for testing humans.

You can read the full report below:

Related: ['Free for all': Coalition agrees to importation of unapproved rapid antigen tests](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.34pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.20pm GMT

enltrThe Canberra anti-vaccine protest "convoy" has set up camp in a park near the National Library. Numbers have swelled overnight - I counted 200+ cars/trucks/vans in this area alone, with more out of sight down the park, and more arriving regularly. They plan more picketing today [pic.twitter.com/BFqt0cEzOr](#)

- Josh Butler (@JoshButler) [January 31, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 11.14pm GMT

We will be hearing from the Queensland leaders for a Covid update in just over an hour.

enltrQueensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk, Education Minister Grace Grace, Health Minister Yvette D'Ath and Chief Health Officer Dr John Gerrard will hold a press conference at 10:30am (QST)

- @MartySilk (@MartySilkHack) [January 31, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 11.13pm GMT

Albanese says Labor would support aged care pay rise

Anthony Albanese has confirmed Labor would support a pay rise for aged care workers if elected.

Reporter:

Does Labor support an increase in the hourly rate?

Albanese:

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

If I was prime minister, we would make a submission to the Fair Work Commission supporting an increase in pay for aged care workers. Yes, we would.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.41pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.11pm GMT

Reporter:

Craig Kelly has been targeting this area quite intensely. How do you plan to counter that?

Albanese:

Well, Craig Kelly, of course, was hand-picked by Scott Morrison to be the member for Hughes when he didn't have the support of his own party locally. What we will do is we'll continue to point out that a vote for Craig Kelly or a vote for One Nation is a vote for Scott Morrison.

If you actually want to change the country, if you want a country that stands up for workers' security. If you want a country that supports same job, same pay for coalminers. If you want a country with better living standards, cheaper childcare, that defends Medicare - and can I say happy birthday, Medicare on today - of course, done by federal Labor.

And what we've seen from this Government is a continuing undermining of Medicare. Craig Kelly has voted for all of that. He's voted for all of that.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.13pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.07pm GMT

You might be asking yourself, "Why is Anthony Albanese in Kurri Kurri this morning?" Well, it's because yesterday, Labor confirmed they would support Snowy Hydro building a new power plant in the Hunter Valley if it wins the upcoming election, but only on the condition that the plant should be powered entirely by green hydrogen, instead of gas, by 2030.

He was asked about the role hydrogen will play, but ended up mostly talking about the NBN:

One of the things about this site is that some of the hydrogen can be sourced from solar that could be constructed on site. There are a range of proposals to do just that, and the site is an appropriate one to be able to feed into and ensure that it is green hydrogen. There is a difference between green and blue hydrogen.

We're about the best case, and Labor always does this. I was the communications minister at the end of our time in government and I well recall a debate that occurred then over something called the National Broadband Network... and we were rolling out fibre to every home and business. And the [new] government said - don't worry about that, we'll just go with old technology, we'll go back to copper. And they bought enough copper with your money, taxpayer money, to wrap around the world, not once, but twice!

And as a result, you have a flawed multimodal system whereby you have some people getting first grade and some people getting third and fourth grade that just doesn't work. What they've had to do is go back and retrofit, and we've said we'll add more than a million homes to that if we're elected, because, frankly, you need to use the best technology.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.10pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.59pm GMT

If you want to read more about all of these political donations, the amazing Nick Evershed has created this interactive chart for you to trawl through at your leisure.

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

Related: [Australian political donations: search the data to see who is giving money to the Liberal and Labor parties](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.00pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.56pm GMT

We're still trawling through the political donations. You'll be pleased to know minor parties also got a cut of the action:

Katter's **Australia** party received two \$100,000 donations from the Firearms Dealers Association Qld Inc and the Shooters Union Qld Pty Ltd. Duncan Turpie, a professional gambler and maths genius, gave \$110,000 to the Greens, including their Queensland and Tasmanian branches.

The Trustee for St Baker Family Trust gave \$165,000 to the two major parties, including the LNP in Queensland. Trevor St Baker is an Australian businessman with interests in power plants.

Other big donations by individuals included:

Scott Edwardes, a lawyer and WA Liberal candidate at the state election, gave \$224,000 to the party. Charles Bass, miner and tech investor, gave \$216,000 to the major parties in WA.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.59pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.55pm GMT

Oooh, new political metaphor alert! Albanese is bringing out the big guns, suggesting Morrison care less about driving the car (I think the car is **Australia**) and more about the "bumper sticker" on the back.

What's more, [the Morrison government] have failed to back Australian manufacturers who want to produce more rapid antigen tests right here. [We need] a future made in **Australia**, making things here for **Australia**'s resilience. We cannot remain a country that's at the end of the supply chain. We need to make more things here, and that's why part of my big commitment, which is consistent with today's announcement here, is I want a future made in **Australia** and I want us to buy Australian, to support Australian jobs and Australian industry and Australian resilience.

This government talks about overseas interference. Well, it leaves us totally vulnerable and older Australians today are very vulnerable. Older Australians and those people who are healthcare workers in the aged care sector. Aged care workers want, are desperate, to have the products to look after their residents.

Scott Morrison's just desperate to get their votes. And a cash payment that does nothing to lift the wages of aged care workers beyond the next federal election campaign is an appalling response from a government that never has its hands on the steering wheel, just as always, the bumper sticker and the ad at the back of the car. What we need is a government that actually leads.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.57pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.52pm GMT

Okay, let's jump over to Kurri Kurri, NSW where the opposition leader, Anthony Albanese, is speaking. And by "speaking", I do very much mean "slamming Scott Morrison's aged care worker bonus payment announcement".

Let's listen in:

I think people will wake up this morning and say that Scott Morrison has presided over an aged care system where the federal government is the funder, the regulator of aged care in this country. And where we have 20,000 active cases for residents or workers in the aged care sector, at a time when Scott Morrison says the solution to that is one-off payments, cash payments in the lead-up to an election.

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

Scott Morrison is trying to buy the support of aged care workers. What aged care workers want him to do is to buy rapid antigen tests and PPE for them. Scott Morrison knows that the aged care sector is in a crisis. He doesn't have to listen to us. Mike Baird, the former Liberal premier of New South Wales, has called for the defence force to be brought in to make beds.

We know that aged care residents are sitting in bed without being able to be showered. In some cases without being fed, and with open sores that aren't being tended to as a result of a crisis that could have been foreseen, and indeed, was, by the prime minister and the health minister, who were talking about rapid antigen tests being available as far back as August last year.

But other countries were placing orders for rapid antigen tests in December of 2020 and early 2021. This Government made its first order in January.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.54pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.37pm GMT

More than a quarter of aged care staff say their workplace is not giving them free rapid antigen tests, with nearly 20% reporting they've had to find and buy their own kits before working.

Trade unions have lashed the prime minister, [Scott Morrison](#), and the Coalition over the findings of the new survey from the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Foundation, saying it was "an indictment on this government" that aged care workers were forced to dip into their own pocket for RATs.

"The Morrison government is simply refusing to learn the most basic lessons of this crisis and continues to make the same mistakes. The tools to defeat and control the virus - vaccines, PPE and RATs - must be free and accessible to all people," said the Australian Council of Trade Unions president, Michele O'Neil.

You can read the full report below:

Related: [One in five aged cared workers in Australia are paying for workplace rapid antigen tests, union survey shows](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.52pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.26pm GMT

In case you were curious, here is the full statement on these newly announced aged care worker bonus payments.

enltr\$800 bonus to support **Australia's** Aged Care workforce [#auspol pic.twitter.com/PfkcdJGWml](#)

- Political Alert (@political_alert) [January 31, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 10.22pm GMT

Pratt Holdings is biggest political donor in 2020-21

The Australian Electoral Commission has just released financial disclosures for 2020-21, revealing that Anthony Pratt's Pratt Holdings Pty Ltd was the biggest donor that year.

Pratt Holdings gave \$1.3m in 2020-21, almost all of it to various branches of the Liberal Party, but there was one \$10,000 donation to NSW Labor. The next biggest donors were:

Silver River Investment Holdings Pty Ltd - which gave \$650,000 to right-wing lobby group Advance **Australia**. Cartwright Investment Corp Pty Ltd - which gave \$350,000 to Advance **Australia**. The National Automotive Leasing and Salary Packaging Association, which gave \$150,000 each to the Labor and Liberal parties. William Nitschke, who gave \$300,000 to the Great **Australia** Party, which is former One Nation senator Rodney

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

Culleton 's new political party.The Pharmacy Guild of [Australia](#), which gave \$295,000 roughly evenly split between Labor and Liberal branches.Meriton Property Services, which gave \$285,000 to the Liberal Party, the bulk of it (\$200K) to the NSW Liberals.The Australian Hotels Association of NSW, which gave \$260,000 in total to the Liberals, Nationals and Labor.

Miners and energy companies were also prominent in the list of donors:

Woodside Energy Ltd gave \$232,000 to the Liberals, Nationals and Labor.Mineral Resources gave \$222,400 to the Liberals, Nationals and Labor in Western [Australia](#).

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.26pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.21pm GMT

Craig Kelly has signalled the [United Australia party](#) could throw a political lifeline to incumbent MPs prepared to break ranks and support two new private members' bills he will bring forward during the final sitting weeks of parliament.

The UAP plans to put all sitting members of parliament last on its how-to-vote cards in the coming federal election - a strategy prompting significant anxiety among Morrison government MPs, given the [Coalition](#) was the primary beneficiary of preference flows in the 2019 election.

But Kelly, the former maverick Liberal and now UAP leader, says his party's "pox on all your houses" strategy could well change depending on where MPs line up in the final sitting weeks.

You can read the full report below:

Related: [Craig Kelly floats preference offer for Coalition MPs who break ranks in parliament](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.22pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.09pm GMT

Victoria records 34 Covid deaths and 11,311 new infections

Tragically it's been a particularly deadly day for Victoria as well, the state recording 34 Covid-19 deaths along with 11,311 new cases.

There are now 851 Covid-positive people in hospital, 106 of those now in the ICU.

enltrWe thank everyone who got vaccinated and tested yesterday. Our thoughts are with those in hospital, and the families of people who have lost their lives. More data soon:
[#COVID19Vic #COVID19VicData pic.twitter.com/FddWRsDgKU](https://t.co/OCCFTAtS1P)

- VicGovDH (@VicGovDH) [January 31, 2022](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.14pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.06pm GMT

As temperatures soared last week, Cass Willcocks's rental apartment in inner [Melbourne](#) quickly became "unlivable".

"It's gotten to the point where the tiles in my kitchen are hot, I try to put moisturiser on and it's hot. Everything in my apartment is literally baking and I feel like I'm suffocating," she said.

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

"I pay \$395 a week for an apartment that's basically unlivable. I've had to go work from my friend's kitchen table in the air conditioning because I can't concentrate. I'm barely sleeping."

Willcocks's blackout curtains and a borrowed portable air conditioner were barely making a dent - a thermometer on her fridge showed the temperature inside her Thornbury apartment reached 36C on the evening of 25 January. There were three more days of above-average temperatures and warm nights ahead.

You can read the full report below:

Related: [*'My apartment is literally baking': calls for minimum standards to keep Australia's rental homes cool*](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.15pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.05pm GMT

Greens deputy leader Larissa Waters appeared on ABC radio earlier this morning calling for political donations to be capped at \$1,000 per year.

There's a real perception - and I think it's a reality - that you get what you pay for. That's why these big fossil fuel companies should not be allowed to buy the policy outcomes that suit their profits, particularly in a climate crisis...

We've seen more than \$100m of corporate donations to both of the bigger parties since 2012... We are seeing an Americanisation of our political system, with massive money getting outcomes. It's legalised corruption.

We think all [political] donations should be capped to \$1,000 a year because we don't think big money should be running the show. We think an outright ban is appropriate on coal and gas companies because they've got a track record of trying to influence policies.

She also stated she was hopeful about the minor party's prospects in the upcoming election, (although, like, what else is she going to say?)

I think we've got a great chance of winning a whole swathe of additional seats. We'll likely be the biggest third party the country's ever seen again, with the voters' permission.

Greens senator Larissa Waters. Photograph: Sam Mooy/Getty Images

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.11pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.03pm GMT

We already know the NSW numbers for today but here is the official graphic.

enltrNSW COVID-19 update - Tuesday 1 February 2022 In the 24-hour reporting period to 8pm last night: - 95.4% of people aged 16+ have had one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine - 94% of people aged 16+ have had two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine pic.twitter.com/oENkVCAdrt

- NSW Health (@NSWHealth) [*January 31, 2022*](#)

block-time published-time 9.49pm GMT

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) is extremely concerned that many nurses and carers are still being forced to pay for their own rapid antigen tests (RATs) to go to work in aged care homes.

According to the preliminary findings of a new national survey being conducted by the ANMF, almost one in five aged care nurses and carers paid for their own RATs, despite the government promising back in August 2021 to commence rolling out RATs to residential aged care facilities to protect workers, residents and their families. Over 770 health and aged care workers have so far participated in the survey, with preliminary findings showing:

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1 in 5 participants report needed to buy their own RATs; 27% report "poor" to "very poor" testing experience.

ANMF federal assistant secretary, Lori-Anne, Sharp said:

Aged care is in crisis. Chronic understaffing across the system has been exacerbated by the pandemic, with care staff unable to provide elderly residents with the quality care they need.

One aged care nurse commented in the survey that:

I worked directly caring for Covid-19 positive residents (six positive of 15 residents on my floor) and was not tested over five shifts as my employer had run out of RATs as they were waiting for a supply from the commonwealth government.

block-time updated-time Updated at 9.56pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.44pm GMT

enltrFOR CANBERRA PEOPLE: The first fog ?? of the year on February the first.. And yep planes can't land and are returning to original airports. pic.twitter.com/5u37ZabZMu

- Julian Abbott ?????? (@JulianBAbbott) [January 31, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 9.36pm GMT

The high court should overturn a landmark decision finding Aboriginal Australians cannot be aliens because it threatens to confer "political sovereignty on Aboriginal societies", the Morrison government has argued.

Government lawyers made the claim in an appeal, warning that [the Love and Thoms](#) decision barring the deportation of Aboriginal non-citizens threatened the principle that Aboriginal sovereignty did not survive the colonisation of **Australia**.

In submissions lodged on Friday, the commonwealth also argued that Aboriginal people's spiritual connection to the land does not create a "special relationship" to the commonwealth.

You can read the full report below:

Related: [Aboriginal spiritual connection to land no bar to deportation, Morrison government says](#)

block-time published-time 9.28pm GMT

Marise Payne calls on Myanmar military to 'return the country to the path of democracy'

The foreign affairs minister, Marise Payne, has called on Myanmar's military to "halt violence against civilians and return the country to the path of democracy". In a statement issued on the first anniversary of the military coup, Payne said its actions on 1 February 2021 had denied the will of the people.

Since that time, the military has inflicted horrific violence, trampled basic freedoms and triggered humanitarian, security, health and economic crises across the country. **Australia** condemns the use of violence against civilians and other serious human rights violations. We urge the military to exercise restraint and to release all those arbitrarily detained, including Australian Professor Sean Turnell.

Payne called on the military "to allow immediate and unimpeded access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all people in need" and to "engage meaningfully in inclusive dialogue for a peaceful return of Myanmar to the path of democracy".

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As [we reported earlier](#), human rights group and the Labor opposition have strongly criticised the Australian government for failing to implement any additional sanctions against Myanmar military figures or their business interests in the year since the coup.

Payne's statement is silent on the prospect of new sanctions. But the minister called on the international community "to prevent the flow of arms into Myanmar, to suspend all operational support to the military and its representatives, and to cease the provision of arms, enabling materiel and technical assistance".

She said **Australia** would "provide humanitarian assistance to those most in need and remains committed to working with regional and international partners in response to these crises".

block-time updated-time Updated at 9.30pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.27pm GMT

The NSW premier Dominic Perrottet has already been out and about this morning discussing the return of students to state school's this morning.

It is an incredibly important day for our state and an exciting day...

And I want to particularly thank our teachers who have done an amazing job over the course of the last few weeks in getting our schools ready to open day one, term one.

I know that many parents are anxious. I know that many parents are also excited to have their kids back in the classroom. But this is incredibly important as we move through 2022, as we move back to normal, that we have our students back at school.

We know that many children have lost a quarter of their time in face-to-face learning over the last two years as a result of the pandemic. There could be nothing more important, not just for our student's educational outcomes, for social outcomes, for mental health outcomes, is for kids to get back in school.

NSW premier Dominic Perrottet. Photograph: Bianca de Marchi/AAP

block-time updated-time Updated at 9.31pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.23pm GMT

NSW records 30 Covid deaths and 12,818 new cases

NSW chief health officer Dr Kerry Chant has confirmed the state has recorded another 30 Covid deaths and 12,818 new infections.

There were 2,749 people with the virus with 183 in ICU and 70 requiring ventilation.

block-time published-time 9.14pm GMT

ABC News Breakfast host Lisa Millar:

Greg Hunt yesterday suggested that of the deaths that we have seen and there has been several hundred in January just since the start of this year, that 60% of those are receiving palliative care. Do you accept that?

Shadow aged care minister Clare O'Neil:

I find that disgracefully offensive. I mean, what is Greg Hunt saying that these people were going to die anyway? That is a disgusting comment.

What is the reality here is that this sector was already in crisis, through Omicron, this is the worst crisis this sector has experienced in 40 years.

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

Wound management is not being taken care of. Vulnerable people are sitting in soiled pads because there is literally no one to come and help them. People are not getting enough to eat. Staff cry to me on the phone and tell me that it's like a war zone where they are working at the moment.

The government is in the middle of this crisis - this tells you everything about their priorities - instead of dealing with this crisis, instead of going to the parliament and asking questions about this, the aged care minister Richard Colbeck went to the cricket... he spent not one day at the cricket, but three days at the cricket.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.15pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.10pm GMT

O'Neil:

A pay rise that lasts up until the next election is a cynical political ploy, because we know this plan... will not do anything more than hold this thing together by a thread.

The truth is that the aged-care sector - the average experience of a person in aged care today is one of neglect.

The royal commission told us that. Two-thirds of residents today are malnourished, literally starving under the care of their own government.

Scott Morrison has this shoddy political fix that he has put forward, yet the real answer to this problem lies in part in supporting the workers who have gone to the Fair Work Commission to ask for a pay increase.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.12pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.08pm GMT

While speaking to ABC News Breakfast shadow aged care minister Clare O'Neil has labelled the government's newly announced aged care bonus payments are "an act of cynical politicking that I thought would have even been beyond Scott Morrison".

The truth is that we have a crisis in aged care that has been eight years in the making.

Scott Morrison has cut aged-care funding personally as treasurer twice. One of the first actions of the incoming government was to cut the wages of aged-care staff and now we are expected to believe that this is going to make a difference?

If Scott Morrison gave a stuff about aged-care workers he would be doing something more than giving them a pay rise that only lasts up until the next election. I mean, come on.

Shadow aged care minister Clare O'Neil. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.14pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.00pm GMT

Power outage hits Tonga relief vessel

An Australian naval ship which had been supplying critical aid to tsunami-ravaged Tonga has suffered a major power outage, reports AAP. The defence department confirmed that HMAS Adelaide, which docked in the Pacific island nation last week, had lost power during the operation. A defence spokesperson said back-up power had been activated aboard the vessel to restore essential systems.

The situation is being closely monitored and the safety of the ship and the embarked forces remains our highest priority...

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The power outage has not affected **Australia**'s ability to support requests from the government of Tonga to assist their recovery efforts.

The ship departed from Brisbane and arrived in Tonga last week, carrying critical relief including medical and humanitarian supplies as well as helicopters, following the January 15 underwater volcanic eruption and tsunami. Defence said civilian specialists are on route to conduct an assessment of the affected systems of the HMAS Adelaide.

HMAS Adelaide docked at Nuku'alofa, Tonga, last Thursday, after carrying disaster relief and humanitarian aid supplies. Photograph: POIS Christopher Szumlanski/AP

block-time updated-time Updated at 9.07pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.57pm GMT

enltrOn the Kate Jenkins report: "A number of those recommendations have already been implemented and it will be responded to in due course... I can't guarantee when it will be." - [@SenatorHume](#) , Minister for Superannuation and the Digital Economy

- RN Breakfast (@RNBKbreakfast) [January 31, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 8.57pm GMT

The minister for superannuation and the digital economy, Jane Hume, has denied that these newly announced aged care worker bonus payments are an election bribe.

She was just speaking now with ABC radio.

We provided the aged care workforce with a bonus payment back in 2020 in recognition of the increased demands on their time they faced.

She indicated that the prospect of a \$5 per hour pay rise across the industry (a proposal currently before the Fair Work Commission) may be unsustainable.

A \$5 per hour increase would dramatically increase the cost of an aged care workforce. We want to make sure this is a sustainable system going into the future...

The decision for a pay rise is not for government but one for the Fair Work Commission and it's making that decision now.

block-time published-time 8.52pm GMT

The [Sydney Morning Herald is reporting](#) that the presumed Liberal candidate for Warringah has pulled out as the party's NSW branch descends into preselection turmoil.

According to them, barrister Jane Buncle, [withdrew her nomination on Monday night](#) , adding yet another stress to the party after the state executive rejected a motion that would have granted special powers to endorse three prominent sitting Morrison government MPs without the need for plebiscites

Guardian **Australia**'s Anne Davies has been reporting heavily on this over the last few weeks, but basically, the prime minister's office sponsored a motion that asked the state executive to bypass the preselection process in North Sydney, Farrer and Mitchell - effectively saving the careers of the moderate faction leader, Trent Zimmerman, the environment minister, Sussan Ley, and the immigration minister, Alex Hawke.

You can read the full report below:

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Related: [Liberal preselection turmoil grows as NSW executive refuses to pass Morrison plan to bypass members](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.58pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.37pm GMT

enltr. [@BOM_SA](#) has issued a Severe Weather Warning ?? for HEAVY RAINFALL ??? For people in North East Pastoral & parts of North West Pastoral districts. Issued 4:34am Tuesday, 1 February 2022 <https://t.co/BuU3rJXFbk> [pic.twitter.com/cdGvJCA0cb](https://t.co/cdGvJCA0cb)

- SASES (@SA_SES) [January 31, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 8.32pm GMT

Australia a 'bystander' to Myanmar bloodshed, a year on from coup

The Morrison government's failure to impose sanctions against Myanmar junta figures sends a message that **Australia** is a "mere bystander to authoritarian backsliding in our region", according to the Labor party.

With today marking one year since Myanmar's military seized power in a coup, the opposition today joined with human rights activists in urging the Australian government to act to stop the flow of money to the junta.

Labor's acting foreign affairs spokesperson, Kristina Keneally, said at every stage of the crisis in Myanmar, the government had "acted too late and done too little to demonstrate **Australia**'s opposition" to the coup and to the "the killing of over a thousand innocent civilians". She said:

The Morrison-Joyce government's refusal to act over the past year sends precisely the wrong message - that **Australia** does not care and that we are mere bystanders to authoritarian backsliding in our region ... We join calls from the Australian Council of Trade Unions, Human Rights Watch and the Australian Council for International Development, as well as many other NGOs, for targeted sanctions against the Tatmadaw and linked entities. Mr [Scott] Morrison and the foreign minister must use this anniversary to finally act - and stand up for democracy in our region.

A protester holds up a poster featuring detained civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi during a demonstration against the military coup in February 2021. Photograph: Facebook/AFP/Getty Images

Elaine Pearson, the **Australia** director of Human Rights Watch, said **Australia** needed to take coordinated actions together with like-minded governments "to help deprive the military of its revenue sources and to maximise pressure on the junta to end its campaign of terror":

This is the one-year anniversary of the coup and I think it sends a terrible message that **Australia** has failed to implement any new targeted sanctions against the coup leaders or any of the business interests.

Pearson said the Australian government had repeatedly expressed its grave concerns, but "actions speak louder than words". She said the government should target the oil and gas revenue flowing to the junta. Citing Woodside Petroleum's [announcement last week that it would leave](#) Myanmar, Pearson added:

When Woodside is taking stronger action on human rights than the Australian government, I think that's a cause for concern.

Earlier this month the foreign affairs minister, Marise Payne, and the defence minister, Peter Dutton, joined with their British counterparts in calling on the Myanmar military "to immediately cease violence against civilians; engage in constructive, inclusive dialogue; end the targeting of legitimately elected leaders; and release all those arbitrarily detained, including Australian Professor Sean Turnell".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.48pm GMT

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

block-time published-time 8.31pm GMT

NSW to resume some elective surgeries

New South Wales will resume a limited number of non-urgent elective surgeries in private and regional public hospitals from next week, the government will announce on Tuesday.

The government announced on 7 January that non-urgent elective surgery would be suspended as hospitalisations rose following the Omicron wave of infections.

At the time the premier, Dominic Perrottet, said surgeries would resume from the middle of February.

But while the government is confident that hospitalisation numbers have plateaued, on Tuesday the premier will announce some elective surgeries will resume in a staged capacity from Monday 7 February.

The plan will see non-urgent elective surgery requiring an overnight stay returning to 75% capacity in private hospitals, and up to 75% of pre-pandemic levels at some public hospitals in regional and rural NSW.

Perrottet said in a statement:

The reintroduction of non-urgent elective surgery will be done in a phased manner to balance the ongoing potential need for extra capacity in our hospitals and the need for people in NSW to access their elective surgeries as quickly as possible...

We recognise the effect these necessary restrictions have had on the lives of people requiring non-urgent elective surgery and I want to assure them we will be doing everything possible to return to full capacity in all of our hospitals as soon as possible.

The NSW government has been [using private hospitals to deal with the surge in Covid-19 hospitalisations during the Omicron wave](#), and the health minister, Brad Hazzard, said that would continue for non-urgent elective surgery to ensure equity of access.

Our hospitals remain under pressure due to Covid-19 so only our public hospitals that are in a position to resume non-urgent elective surgeries without compromising their ability to care for Covid-19 patients and patients with other medical conditions will do so.

The latest Bureau of Health Information report released in December revealed that waves of Covid-19 outbreaks had seen [the elective surgery waitlist in NSW rise to more than 92,000 people](#) before the most recent suspension.

Last week the government flagged a resumption of some elective surgeries as hospitalisations and ICU presentations remained within the best-case scenarios projected by the state's health department.

"Hospitalisation numbers have certainly plateaued, as we said last week... we do think that in the coming week we will start to see them drop," deputy health secretary Susan Pearce said last week.

NSW premier Dominic Perrottet meets with medical intern graduates at the Royal North Shore hospital in Sydney last week. Photograph: Gaye Gerard/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.51pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.28pm GMT

Good morning

Good morning everyone, It's Matilda Boseley here and, like always, there is plenty to chat about today so let's jump in.

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

Prime minister Scott Morrison is under fire today after union leaders labelled his newly announced aged care bonus payments as "too little, too late".

Ahead of a major speech at the National Press Club this afternoon, Morison promised two pre-election bonus payments worth up to \$800 for aged care workers, but Health Services Union Gerard Hayes says the industry wants accountability for the slow residential care vaccine roll-out, not "trinkets".

Trinkets are not required when diamonds are needed...

From day one, they have not understood aged care, they have never understood the rollout of the vaccine, they haven't understood the booster shots, and they have never understood the workforce crisis we are facing - and they never complied with the outcomes of the royal commission.

Heading over to NSW, and elective surgery is set to return to all private hospitals and regional public health facilities on 7 February.

Any elective procedures that required a stay overnight in the hospital were paused during the Omicron surge, but as case numbers slowly retreat these will be allowed to resume at 75% capacity.

However, public metropolitan hospitals will keep focusing on treating Covid patients and emergency surgery recipients for now.

Speaking of NSW, thousands of students across the state are heading back to classrooms today as state schools restart across the state, putting the government's Covid-safe education plan to the test.

Strict anti-virus protocols have been implemented including improved ventilation, vaccinations, mask-wearing, twice-weekly RATS, and the segregation of year groups, but with daily cases still in the tens of thousands, many are fearful the start of the education year could spark numerous outbreaks.

OK! With all of that out of the way, why don't we get cracking on the day's news?

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.26pm GMT

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With that, we will wrap up the blog for the evening. Here is everything that went down today: The Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, gave an address to the National Press Club, beginning by acknowledging some of his mistakes, but refusing to outright apologise. Morrison made a series of announcements, including pledging an additional \$209m for the aged care workforce, \$666m for NDIS providers, two more years of mental health funding, a \$1.6bn "economic accelerator" and a \$2.2bn "university research commercialisation package". The address came with a large crowd of anti-vaccine protesters that massed outside the Press Club, with police blocking streets and hundreds of protesters standing on the road. The RBA decided to hold the cash rate at 0.1% again. NSW reported 12,818 new cases and 30 deaths. Victoria recorded 11,311 new cases and 34 deaths. Queensland recorded 7,588 new cases and 10 deaths. Tasmania reported 699 new cases. The ACT reported 522 new cases. South **Australia** reported 1,266 new cases and three deaths. The Northern Territory reported 1,122 new cases. Western **Australia** recorded 13 new cases. NSW will resume a limited number of non-urgent elective surgeries in private and regional public hospitals from next week. The opposition leader, Anthony Albanese, confirmed Labor would support a pay rise for aged care workers if elected. Labor's acting foreign affairs spokesperson, Kristina Keneally, said **Australia** has been a "bystander" to Myanmar bloodshed, a year on from the coup. Foreign affairs minister, Marise Payne, called on Myanmar's military to "halt violence against civilians and return the country to the path of democracy". The Queensland education minister confirmed that the Citipointe Christian College has been referred to the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board after they asked students to sign a contract denouncing homosexuality. Thanks for reading. The defence minister, Peter Dutton, has played down the idea the government could dump its \$45bn future frigates program, as a new report spelled out the problems with the huge defence acquisition. The Australian

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newspaper reported today that the Hunter-class frigates would be "substantially" slower, have a shorter range than originally intended and could be vulnerable to detection by enemy vessels. The newspaper cited a defence "Engineering Team Assessment" of the frigates program, undertaken last November, as raising problems with the "immature" British design. The government's contract is with shipbuilder BAE Systems. Dutton said the Australian government would not be scrapping the deal. He told Sky News: "I mean unfortunately the most important part has been left out, and that is that, yes, concerns are raised, but they are being addressed." Dutton said he and the cabinet's national security committee decided last year "that we would push back the start of this ship [build] by about 18 months and the reason that we did that was because of the lack of maturity around the design". He suggested that an early build "would have caused us dramas down the end". He said his department had assured him that they could mitigate the weight-related risks. Asked by Sky News whether there was a plan B, Dutton said: No, we've looked at the plan B and we went through this project in great detail late last year. Obviously I've been very conscious of looking at all these programs. We cancelled the subs contract as you know. We've gone to a different helicopter platform because the MRHl was not performing to the standard that was assured to us, and we looked very carefully at this project and we've decided that we will proceed with it. The relationship with the UK is incredibly important. BAE is a very important partner with us. Meanwhile there continue to be revelations about how the Australian government handled the scrapping of the French submarine contract. Here's our piece from yesterday, based on new documents obtained under freedom of information laws: Liberal MP Angie Bell has commented on the controversial move by one of Queensland's largest independent schools to ask families to sign an enrolment contract that includes asking them to agree "homosexual acts" are immoral, listing them along with bestiality, incest and paedophilia as "offensive to God". The "statement of faith" required for enrolment at Citipointe Christian College also includes statements that imply transgender students will be recognised only by their "biological sex" at the school - that students should identify "with the gender that God bestowed". Bell led a group of four Liberal moderate MPs who traded their support for the religious discrimination bill in return for a commitment from the attorney general, Michaelia Cash, that LGBTQ+ students would be protected at the same time by amendments removing the ability for schools to discriminate on sexuality and gender. Cash has since reneged on the deal. Bell said: The contract created by Citipointe Christian College contains no new developments. For many years, religious schools have preserved the ability to terminate a child's enrolment based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, marital or relationship status or pregnancy. It still does not make it okay for a child who may be struggling with mental health challenges. Prior to the conclusion of the 2021 sitting calendar, I worked with the prime minister's office to discuss how greater protections for students who identify as part of minority groups could be implemented by repealing the exemption currently afforded to religious schools that enables a contract such as this to be enforced. Upon my return to Canberra next week, I will continue to advocate, negotiate and discuss any possible options to ensure children are held accountable to their merit and not their sexual identity, gender identity, relationship status or pregnancy. A child should be able to attend any Australian education institution without hinderance or judgement. The only instance in which a child should be issued a consequence in a learning environment, is when held accountable for poor choices of an academic nature such as not completing homework, breaking uniform policy or disrupting the learning of their peers. In this matter of Citipointe Christian College, I strongly urge its leadership and board to focus on the education of children and fostering a positive environment, where every child feels safe, supported and does not fear retribution based on any of these grounds. Bell also gave her first public account of why the deal doesn't appear to have panned out as intended: The undertaking to repeal section 38(3) of the Sex Discrimination Act did not eventuate in consequential amendments after the legislation did not come to a vote in the House of Representatives in the final sitting of 2021. The aged care services minister, Richard Colbeck, has agreed to attend the Covid committee, after he declined to attend on 14 January citing urgent Covid work only to then attend the Ashes Cricket on that day. Colbeck will appear at the committee tomorrow (Wednesday 2 February) from 2 to 4pm alongside officials from the health department, Therapeutic Goods Administration and the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation. The committee's chair, Katy Gallagher, has also taken issue with Scott Morrison taking credit for setting up the Covid committee at the Press Club today: Aly has continued zeroing in on the government today, saying the cash bonus for aged care workers is "not a long term solution." The Morrison government intends to provide two payments of \$400 to aged care workers by the end of May, but Aly wasn't buying it: Aged care workers don't need a sugar hit of \$400 to keep them doing what they're doing. They love what they're doing and they do it because they have a passion for it. They need better work conditions and better pay conditions. The government can respond today to the Royal Commission into Aged Care and lift the working conditions for aged care workers now, instead of giving them a

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\$400 sugar hit, which of course is welcome - they do deserve that money [and] I won't argue against that - but it's not a long-term solution. If you want aged care workers to stay in aged care, if you want our most valuable asset in Australia which is our elderly to be looked after, you need to improve their work and conditions. Nationals senator Matt Canavan is on the ABC's Afternoon Briefing, defending the PM's speech earlier this afternoon (although admitting he didn't watch it): I have seen some of the reports, though, and I think the prime minister is just simply acknowledging common sense. None of us are perfect. No government in the world has had a perfect record through what has been an amazing pandemic. Even absent a pandemic. We all make mistakes from time to time. The key thing for any organisation, for any government, for any individual really in life is to learn from your mistakes and fix the consequences of them when you can. Labor MP Anne Aly was much less forgiving of the PM's lack of acknowledgement of his mistakes: After a very slow vaccine rollout, the slowness in getting the antigen tests out is testimony to the fact they haven't learned from their mistakes. They haven't learned from the mistakes exposed by the royal commission. They haven't learned from the mistakes of robodebt and quite frankly, if Scott Morrison is asking people to judge him and his leadership on whether or not he has learned from his mistakes, then it's a huge failure in that regard. Gladys Berejiklian has issued a statement in response to the leaked text exchange in which she and a Liberal colleague discussed Scott Morrison. The texts allegedly described the prime minister as a "horrible person", a "fraud" and a "complete psycho". "I understand there has been some commentary today concerning myself and the PM," Berejiklian said. "I have no recollection of such messages. Let me reiterate my very strong support for prime minister Morrison and all he is doing for our nation during these very challenging times. I also strongly believe he is the best person to lead our nation for years to come." The former NSW premier, Gladys Berejiklian, has responded to reports this afternoon she called the PM a "horrible person" in private text messages with a Liberal cabinet minister: The Australian Bureau of Statistics has released retail figures for December, showing sales have slowed, but turnover was still strong. Retail turnover dropped 4.4% in December, the biggest fall since April 2020, but it followed a 7.3% national jump in November and a 4.9% jump in October. The ABS director of quarterly economy-wide statistics, Ben James, said figures remained above pre-pandemic levels and December's turnover was the second highest level on record, behind November. Despite this month's fall, retail turnover remains strong, up 4.8% on December 2020, with strong consumer spending continuing post the Delta outbreak. Victoria recorded the largest fall of any state or territory, down 8.4%, however this only partly unwinds the state's strong rise in November when it rose to a record level. NSW spending also fell by 4.2% while WA spending dropped by 3.5%, with the NT the only state or territory reporting a rise in turnover, seeing a 3.6% increase. If you'd like to watch the prime minister be asked about private messages where the former NSW premier, Gladys Berejiklian, called him a "horrible" person, you can check it out at the link below: Paul Sadler, CEO at Aged & Community Services Australia (ACSA), has stepped up to respond to the Prime Minister's announcements saying he welcomes the acknowledgement of what the industry is going through but more is needed: This one-off payment which will be happening over two payment periods in February and May is important for our workforce. But it only amounts to around \$1 per hour extra for the workers in aged care. The headline number is \$800 but most aged care workers will not receive that because it's prorated according to whether you work full-time or part-time. The \$800 only goes to the full-time workers and they are the minority of our aged care workforce. So from our point of view, we welcome government to the whole question of what's happening in Covid but we need to do so much more to support aged care. Some of those things that we need to do: firstly, we need to make sure we are actually getting rapid antigen tests and personal protective equipment to all the aged care homes who need them. The government is prioritising aged care homes that have outbreaks for the provision of rapid antigen tests. Why aren't we giving rapid antigen tests to the aged care homes that don't yet have an outbreak and are trying to stop this disease getting in? Secondly, it's going to be really important to finish the booster program. We're nearly there. We're nearly at 100% of aged care homes... but we now need to make sure that all of the aged care residents and all our staff have access to boosters over the coming weeks. Western Australia has reported 13 new local cases and zero deaths. The WA premier, Mark McGowan, had earlier said eight of the new cases were linked to known clusters, with five under investigation. The Voices of North Sydney pro-democracy group have been complaining on social media about a poll into the Liberal-held electorate over the weekend. Journalist and activist Margo Kingston has published a transcript, confirmed by Guardian Australia through other recipients of the call, that shows why the group is outraged. After some fairly neutral questions about which party or candidate is best to handle this or that issue, the poll then asks whether respondents agree with a series of propositions: Trent Zimmerman does a good job representing me? Independents lack experience and influence? Independents have a strong voice? A hung parliament will create instability and uncertainty at a critical time for Australia? You don't know what an

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

Independent stands for ? Scott Morrison is doing a good job steering Australia through a crisis? Keeping your Liberal member will ensure stability ? As you can see - the vast majority of these are pro-incumbent and anti-independent in an electorate where Liberal Trent Zimmerman has a large margin but faces a strong challenge from independent Kylea Tink. Academic Murray Goot noted that only one of the statements is supportive of an independent, which is consistent with "message testing - the questions being an attempt to see what aspects of being an independent might make an Independent vulnerable to an attack launched on behalf of the sitting member [or]... a conscious attempt not to gather information but to spread doubt about the wisdom of voting for an independent, only partly disguised by the inclusion of one positive statement out of eight". Psephologist Kevin Bonham told Guardian Australia the poll is "not push polling" - which refers to the practice of seeding disinformation (false claims) through something purporting to be a poll. Bonham said: This is a typical internal party poll where parties test messages... [In which they] try to hone their strategies for campaigning. They sometimes get very controversial because they test claims that are dubious. It looks like the Liberal Party are honing attack lines against independents. We've asked them if they're behind the poll, which recipients said was conducted by EMRS, a company owned by the Liberal-aligned Crosby-Textor lobbying group. The Reserve Bank will stop its purchases of government debt to support the Australian economy from 10 February but says the move does not imply a near-term rise in the official cash rate. At the central's bank's first meeting of 2022, Governor Philip Lowe said "faster-than-expected progress has been made towards the RBA's goals and further progress is likely", hence it was "the right time to end the bond purchase program". However, "the Board is committed to maintaining highly supportive monetary conditions to achieve its objectives of a return to full employment in Australia and inflation consistent with the target. Ceasing purchases under the bond purchase program does not imply a near-term increase in interest rates. "As the Board has stated previously, it will not increase the cash rate until actual inflation is sustainably within the 2 to 3% target range. While inflation has picked up, it is too early to conclude that it is sustainably within the target band." What's notable is that the RBA has dropped its previous reference to lifting rates in 2024 or at a pinch in 2023. Financial markets have already been pencilling in a move by May, and today's comments may encourage others to bring forward their predictions on when rates will rise. More than a few federal Coalition MPs will be hoping the central bank can wait at least until June. So, in between that flurry of announcements, we had South Australia and the Northern Territory give their Covid update. South Australia recorded three deaths and 1,266 new cases, with 273 people in hospital, which the premier said was the lowest it had been in some time. The Northern Territory reported 1,122 new cases, with 132 people in hospital. The Reserve Bank of Australia has announced it will hold the cash rate at its record low, in line with many expectations. The RBA also announced it would end its bond buying program. New Zealand has secured the delivery of another 36m rapid antigen tests, upping the stocks to more than 55m tests for use over the next two months as the country prepares for a widespread Omicron outbreak. A total of 123m rapid antigen tests have been ordered through to June. The deputy prime minister, Grant Robertson, said on Tuesday: The government is preparing for a move to phase two of our Omicron plan, where we start integrating rapid antigen tests into testing, to ensure a return-to-work programme for critical businesses. Robertson said modelling shows that during the peak of an Omicron outbreak, the country may need to use 9m RATs a week which is equivalent to testing a quarter of New Zealand every day, or all of New Zealand twice a week. That scale of testing will go a long way to reducing the risk of an infected person going to work and then infecting others. The tests will be used for asymptomatic critical workers so that hospitals, supermarkets and other services can continue operating, added the associate health minister, Dr Ayesha Verrall: The use and supply of RATs will continue to be prioritised to ensure we are protecting the vulnerable and to enable asymptomatic critical workers to return to work. These additional supplies will go a long way to ensuring those who most need a test can access one. Outside the Press Club following his speech, Scott Morrison refused to answer further questions about the text message allegations raised by Network 10's Peter van Onselen. As he left the building and got into a waiting car, the PM refused to stop for journalists outside, waving off reporters' questions. Protesters had assembled at the exit gate to the carpark after leaving the front of the building. Security cleared a path through the crowd, but protesters ran alongside the PM's car as it sped away. The deputy prime minister, Barnaby Joyce, walked through the crowd himself before turning around and returning to the carpark. He told reporters he was looking for his waiting car, which had dropped him off on the road outside the Press Club. Protesters yelled abuse and insults at Morrison and Joyce as they left. The immigration minister, Alex Hawke, also shrugged off questions about the text allegations aired by Van Onselen. Stopped by journalists on his way out of the Press club, Hawke said he wouldn't comment on the texts but called Berejiklian "fantastic". Home Affairs officials have insisted the government is not "anti-encryption" while arguing tech platforms rolling out end-to-end encryption are prioritising

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privacy and security over public safety. Speaking before the parliamentary inquiry on social media and online safety, Brendan Dowling, the first assistant secretary for digital and technology policy at the Department of Home Affairs, said the department is "deeply concerned that innovation in digital tools, including anonymising technology like end-to-end encryption, is not striking the right balance between the benefits and the risks of harm." Dowling accused the tech companies of considering safety of users as an afterthought when rolling out end-to-end encryption for privacy and security reasons: I'll start by saying that we recognise there are substantial benefits particularly to cyber security and privacy from the use of encryption. So we're not... anti-encryption or looking for vulnerabilities in encryption. But we do see that the adoption of ubiquitous encryption across more and more platforms will have serious and real implications for safety, and particularly around the proliferation of child abuse material, around the use of anonymity tools in the conduct of cybercrime. Here are the case numbers from around the country today, as states confirm at least 74 coronavirus deaths: ACT Cases: 522 Deaths: 0 In hospital: 64 (one person in ICU) NSW Cases: 12,818 Deaths: 30 In hospital: 2,749 (186 people in ICU) NT Cases: 1,122 Deaths: 0 In hospital: 132 Queensland Cases: 7,588 Deaths: 10 In hospital: 868 (54 people in ICU) South Australia Cases: 1,266 Deaths: 3 In hospital: 273 Tasmania Cases: 699 Deaths: 0 In hospital: 16 (one person in ICU) Victoria Cases: 11,311 Deaths: 34 In hospital: 851 (106 people in ICU) Western Australia Cases: 13 Deaths: 0 In hospital: 1 And that brings an end to a dramatic National Press Club! Take a breather, have some tea, there was a lot to unpack there. Laura Tingle ends proceedings by asking the PM if he would debate opposition leader Anthony Albanese on the NPC stage, to which Morrison says he is pushing for an independent debating commission. Tingle presses on: LT: Will you do a debate, though? SM: Of course I will. Of course I will. We'll be debating lots! Final question, this time from Greg Brown of the Australian, who says the last election was won by Morrison because he was more popular than Bill Shorten and could "tear apart" Labor's "big" policies. What can we expect from Morrison this year? If you want taxes to remain low, then vote Liberal and National - don't vote Labor. Because their taxes are the opposite. They've already opened the batting on the higher taxes and they've already started that. And once they get started, you know that they can't stop when it comes to taxing you. The PM is asked why his government wasn't prepared for a variant like Omicron, why they had not anticipated that RATs would be necessary in their response. Once again, we return to comparisons: No country did pick that. Which country did? Sam Maiden from news.com.au has asked the PM what he thinks of changing the rules that pay MPs \$291 a night to live at home, comparing the payment with the \$800 made to aged care workers. The PM says he expects all his MPs and senators to follow the rules, only adding that "if those rules need to change", they would be changed independently. OK, so we have veered a little off topic, but Peter van Onselen from Channel 10 says he has text messages between former NSW premier Gladys Berejiklian and a "current Liberal Cabinet minister": I've got them right here. In one she describes you as "a horrible, horrible person," going on to say she did not trust you and you're more concerned with politics than people. The minister is even more scathing, describing you as a "fraud" and "a complete psycho". Here is what the PM had to say: Well, I don't know who you're referring to, or the basis of what you've put to me. But I obviously don't agree with it. And I don't think that that is my record. Another spicy question, this time from Andrew Probyn of the ABC, who points out the PM's plummeting approval ratings, asking why Morrison was "the best person to lead the Coalition to the next election". Here was Morrison's answer: I have a great trust in the Australian people. I think they're very wise and I think that they're very discerning. I think that they take elections very, very seriously. Because they know the consequences. And there's a difference between answering a phone and walking into a ballot box and making a decision that has consequences. And I know from my own experience that they will weigh these things up in the months ahead. And they'll be saying, "Who has the economic plan and economic management experience to ensure that I can stay in my job and my business can succeed?... And who has that experience and who has that understanding of the complexity of these challenges to make all of that work?" And they'll weigh that up. And they'll wonder, with what we're seeing in the regions and the threats to our security - well, who has shown that they're able to stand up for [our] interests? Whether it's standing up to other countries in our region, standing up to the big tech companies, standing up to the banks and the energy companies. Andrew Clennell from Sky News has lobbed the PM a spicy question, asking if he has "lost touch" with ordinary Australians. Clennell asks him to list the price of a loaf of bread, a litre of petrol and a rapid antigen test. Here is what the PM has to say: First of all, during the pandemic, you can't pay for everything. Because it all has to be paid for. Over the course of the pandemic, we've provided over \$100 billion in economic support, JobKeeper being the most significant, and that has saved businesses across this country. And, of course... one of the things that we have to be very mindful of, Andrew, is that this thing isn't over yet. It's not over. The next variant could have any number of permutations to it. And so, when we decided to do JobKeeper, we said it's going to start and it's

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going to finish and people asked the treasurer and I the same question that you're asking me now. "Why are you pulling JobKeeper away?" Because, that's what you do when you're responsible and running a government. You can't say yes to everybody all the time. And you have to do things which ensure that you've got your government and your bank balance as a government able to deal with the next challenge. I mean, our opponents wanted to keep it going. Now, I'm not going to pretend to you that I go out each day and I buy a loaf of bread and I buy a litre of milk. I'm not going to pretend to you that I do that. I'll leave those sort of things to you, mate. And you can run it. But the point is that I do my job every day to ensure that those things are affordable as they possibly can be for Australians every single day. Claire Armstrong from the Daily Telegraph has asked Morrison what makes parliament and political offices more safe for women than they were 12 months ago, a year on from the reckoning parliament faced. Morrison begins by saying he "listened" and "reflected" on the "brave stands people have taken": I'd say the most important thing that has happened is we now have an independent complaints mechanism. This was one of the key recommendations, and the one we have acted on. And we've done that together as a parliament. And that, I think, assists everybody who works in that building. Not just the politicians and their staff. That process that we examined closely, that let down so many a year ago, and before, has been significantly changed. And for the better. And we have learnt from those times. And I believe it's safer today than it was a year ago because of those changes and the brave stands that people have taken on these issues. And I've listened carefully to them and reflected on them. And will continue to work to ensure that those processes work for people. Because if you find yourself in that situation, it's incredibly important that there are those there to help you and support you, to be able to make good decisions for you, and to address the things that you need addressed to make the place safer. And so the independent complaints mechanism that we have put in place - and the counselling support and the other things that sit around that - I think provides an environment should, God forbid that ever happen to anyone again, that they will find a situation very different to the one Ms Higgins found herself in. Spare a thought for policymakers and reserve bankers (see earlier post)... Is the economy running too hot (so we must curb excessive spending and lift interest rates) or at a delicate stage because of disruptions from Omicron or the next Covid variant (so we must throw more money at struggling firms and families)? The latest data from the ABS and other sources suggest the risks lie more with the former than the latter. Take retail sales figures for December. They fell 4.4% from November, the biggest monthly retreat since April 2020. That sounds bad, but turnover was up 4.8% on December 2020, and in dollar terms only November 2021 was bigger. And lending data also out from the ABS also indicates confidence was high at the end of 2021. Perhaps too high. New loans for housing rose 4.4% in December to a record \$32.8bn, which is a bit scary if you figure out how many days were "holidays". Anyway, the sum was 26.5% higher than a year earlier with loans to owner-occupiers (up 5.3%) and investors up 2.4%. Personal finance was up a more modest 0.7% but lending for "personal investment" was up 17.4%. Anyway, Omicron dates some of that data, hence the extra interest in more recent readings. Among those is ANZ-Roy Morgan's consumer confidence view. Sentiment improved last week by 1.7% as (reported) Covid cases fell across most of the country. NSW snapped three weeks of falls to perk up 6.2% and WA (despite those closed borders) rose 4.3%. Victoria, though, sank 2.5% and Queensland 0.6%. The weekly numbers can jump around a bit but a surprise was a 0.3 % fall in inflation expectations to 4.7%. "Retail petrol prices are up 7% in January, which would usually elevate inflation expectations," ANZ's head of Australian economics, David Plank, said. The CBA, too, has picked up a rise in activity according to credit card spending behaviour. "With this week's increase, NSW has accounted for just over 40% of the increase in spending nationally since the start of this year, much higher than its contribution during normal times," the CBA said. That's slightly jarring given this week's appeal by NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet and Treasurer Matt Kean for more federal aid. I'd just like to add the final interaction between Tingle and Morrison there: LT: So you don't have to say sorry about any of those things? SM: I think I've explained my answer fairly fully. OK, we're into questions, and Tingle begins with a doozy: Will the PM apologise for the many mistakes he's made as prime minister? Here is his response: We're all terribly sorry for what this pandemic has done to the world and to this country. These are the times in which we live. And I've set out today, I think, very clearly, the challenges that we've faced. But I'm also very proud of Australians and what they've achieved in enabling us all to come through this despite the setbacks and the challenges that we have faced. In terms of the things - when I say we haven't got everything right - let me reflect on a couple of them for you. First of all, as we went into this summer, we were optimistic - I was optimistic... As we went into the summer - I think we were too optimistic, perhaps. And we could have communicated more clearly about the risks and challenges that we still faced. And I think in raising those expectations about the summer, that we heightened the great sense of disappointment that people felt. And as we had to make massive changes because of Omicron, as I said, the rapid antigen tests had only actually been

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approved for use by the TGA earlier in November. We'd agreed at the meeting of national cabinet about how they'd be funded and who had to go and get them. And so we moved quickly because we hadn't anticipated that we would have a variant that resulted in the vaccine not being able to stop the transmission. We had invested so much - and Australians invested so much - in getting those vaccinations. Secondly, on the vaccination program, if I had my time over, I would have put it under a military operation from the outset and not later in the year.... We'd had the goal of ensuring that everyone who wanted a vaccine could be offered one by October - for the record, that was achieved on the 25th of October. In the aged care sector, we knew - well, I should say we learnt - that the interface between the aged care sector and the public hospital system was blurred. And so, when the storms of Covid hit, that created some real challenges. So the PM wraps up with one final announcement, a \$2.2 billion investment into research and universities: Our \$2.2 billion university research commercialisation package will focus the considerable research power, our smartest minds of our universities, on Australia's national economic priorities. And as we drive down unemployment, we're also driving up the creation of new products and new companies here in Australia. Backing our best researchers and their ideas to ensure Australia's economy roars back even stronger in the future, with leading-edge manufacturing at its core. We make stuff here. We make it really well. And we're gonna keep making it under our government. The PM has continued on this topic, talking about his "Trailblazer Universities Program", and announcing a \$1.6 billion program to encourage research to get to "later stages of development": This will see eligible universities undertake reforms, including to intellectual property arrangements, and provide clear promotional pathways for academic researchers, engaging in commercialisation activities. Now, the first step is underway. There are eight university proposals short-listed to share in \$243 million of investment, working closely with industry partners. And regions are going to do great in this program. They really are. Funding of \$30 million will see participating universities partnering with the CSIRO to access specialist equipment, enabling researchers to prototype and test technologies at scale. Today, I'm announcing the cornerstone of the government's new approach to turning great Australian ideas into commercial success, a \$1.6 billion program called Australia's economic accelerator. In driving commercialisation, the key policy challenge surrounds the so-called valley of death, where early-stage research is frequently not progressed to later stages of development because of the risk and uncertainty about commercial returns. It will allow Australian innovators to access funding opportunities for each stage of their project, provided they can continue to prove project viability and, importantly, commercial potential. Next, the PM is talking about his "modern manufacturing strategy" that he wants to "take to the next level": We're doing that by fusing it with greater investment in our world-class university research capabilities. Our modern manufacturing strategy has set out clear principles to build new sources of growth and scale in six key areas where Australia has significant comparative advantage, strategic interests, and the capacity to harness new opportunities. Medical products. Food and beverage. Recycling and clean energy. Resources technology and critical minerals processing. Defence industry. And space. To date, we have committed over \$312 million in funding to boost manufacturing capability and supply-chain resilience, leveraging \$677 million more in private-sector investment. We now need to better link and leverage our world-class research sector to boost these efforts. 85% of Australian research is rated, officially, at or above world standard. Yet we continue to under-perform frustratingly in achieving commercialisation outcomes. We need to shift the focus from citations to commercial success. We need to accelerate the forging of linkages between Australian industry and Australian university researchers. We need to develop a new breed of research entrepreneurs here in Australia, so they can create the new products, the new companies and, most importantly, the new jobs. Ok, now Morrison is listing out the five point economic plan he will be taking into the election (I have a feeling we'll be hearing these again): Firstly, keeping taxes low and cutting red tape to drive investment and enabling Australians to keep more of what they earn, as we promised. Secondly, investing in the infrastructure and skills development, and growing our workforce, to meet the demands of a growing economy. Thirdly, delivering the affordable, reliable energy that Australian businesses, and especially regional economies, need to power their futures ahead, while reducing our emissions to achieve net zero by 2050, and reducing household electricity bills. Fourthly, making Australia a top-10 data and digital economy by 2030. And fifthly, securing our sovereign manufacturing capability, unlocking a new generation of high-wage, high-skill, high-tech jobs. More financial stats now, including 300,000 people assisted into home ownership in the past three years, an estimated \$245 billion in additional household savings, and an 8% drop in energy bills, reportedly saving households \$128 a year. We are passionate about getting Australians into jobs. And we have the experience, we have the track record, and we have the economic plans that back this up. Jobs change lives. They change families. They change communities. They give Australians purpose and independence. They free them from the clutches of welfare and dependence. And they do the heavy lifting on transforming the budget also. I believe we can now

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achieve an unemployment rate with a "3" in front of it this year. Our goal is to achieve this in the second half of 2022. Next, Morrison has just gone through a whole heap of unemployment figures, including youth unemployment dropping to its lowest levels since 2008, with unemployment at 4.2%, and with more than 1 million women in work. And as my colleagues know, nothing puts a bigger smile on my face than hearing that young people are getting into jobs. The PM continues, listing off two new announcements, including a boost for NDIS services providers, and adding two more years to the government's commitments to mental health funding: To ensure the viability of the NDIS providers, we provided more than \$666 million in advance payments and made changes to allow eligible NDIS providers to claim a payment to support their disability workers to be vaccinated against Covid-19. Strong health resilience built through a once-in-a-century pandemic. Police have requested vehicles move on from the front of the Press Club, and several quickly did. Around a dozen cars and trucks remain, including one van from which protesters are making speeches. The PA is now playing a stream of Morrison's speech from inside the building, with one protester giving comments after each sentence, as the crowd boos and jeers. Other protesters are now intensifying their verbal abuse of journalists standing behind the police line. Hundreds of protesters camped in parks and public areas around Parliament House on Monday night. On Tuesday morning, Guardian [Australia](#) counted more than 300 cars parked in public areas, with the majority setting up tents, camper vans or swags. ACT police told Guardian [Australia](#) they have "moved on" protesters who "set up unauthorised campsites in the area". "The community is reminded camping or parking vehicles is prohibited in the Parliamentary Triangle and on NCA managed land without a permit," a police spokesperson said. And we have the first actual announcement from the PM, who announces an additional \$209m to support aged care workers: And that's why I'm announcing today the government is providing, again, a further \$209 million to support the aged care workforce to continue to care for older Australians through this pandemic. This is a responsible commitment that build on the \$393 million already provided over three payments to 234,000 aged care workers earlier in the pandemic. It worked. We're doing it again. In coming months, two bonus payments of up to \$400 each will be paid to aged care workers, including those providing direct care, food or cleaning services. We're back to comparing to other countries (I am now unsure if we should or shouldn't be doing this), this time in discussion of [Australia's](#) health response to Covid: Our health response has ensured that our health and aged care system has stood up to the global pandemic where, in so many other countries we know around the world, it collapsed. More than 40,000 lives have been saved in this country when compared to the death rate from Covid in other countries just like [Australia](#). We have one of the lowest death rates from Covid in the world, including from Omicron. We have one of the highest vaccination rates in the world - more than 93% of Australians aged 16 and over are fully vaccinated. And since the pandemic began, our government has committed an additional \$40 billion to support [Australia's](#) health response to the pandemic - more than Medicare and the PBS in any given year. The PM has continued, saying he didn't engage in "petty fights" with state premiers, and stood by his largely consistent position that the states have had most of the responsibility during the pandemic: You must also focus on what you can control and what you're responsible for. A good example is respecting the constitutional responsibilities of the states and the commonwealth under our federation. The pandemic did not suspend the constitution or the federation. It did not change what the states and commonwealth have always been responsible for. They didn't get any more powers. They didn't get any less. And I have always sought to put the national interest first by seeking to work together with the premiers and the chief ministers through the national cabinet, and not engage in petty fights. That wouldn't have helped anyone. My job was to keep everybody in the room working together. So, moments after saying we should compare pandemic responses to reflect on how good we supposedly have it, Morrison now says we should not compare to other responses because [Australia](#) is "different": Everywhere is not the same. We are constantly engaged with experts and governments around the world to share experience, data, and information. And they've learnt from us, I can tell you. But that doesn't mean that what is done elsewhere is always the right solution for our conditions or circumstances here in [Australia](#). [Australia](#) has many differences with the rest of the world. Our regulatory authorities. Our seasons. Our health and social security systems. Cut-and-paste doesn't cut it in a pandemic. The PM has now shifted to discussing the Omicron response, first reiterating that testing "was always free": The unprecedented surge in cases caused by Omicron changed everything. It was like dealing with a completely new virus. The medical advice to government on the use of rapid antigen tests changed. And so did our response. And so, since then, the government contracted 78 million rapid antigen tests to help meet significant new demands in the states and the territories and the private sector. Over 652,000 concession card holders have already accessed over 2.7 million free rapid antigen tests through the community pharmacy concession card holder program, which commenced just over a week ago. The government is also delivering 10 million rapid antigen tests to support state

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and territory clinics. And our own area of responsibility, around 8 million tests have already been provided to aged care facilities with the purchasing of those tests beginning back in August of last year. Morrison has said he wants to share some of the "lessons" he's learnt over the past three years, and launches into a defence of the "balance" needed to be struck in pandemic responses: Firstly, you've always got to focus on getting the balance right. From the outset of the pandemic, I have said our twin goals have been to save lives and to save livelihoods. This is how we protect our Australian way of life. And I have always sought to balance our health objectives with our broader societal and economic wellbeing. We must respect the virus, but we must not live in fear of it. You must be prepared to listen to that advice, but also to take the decisions that strike the right balance. Because it is we who have been trusted with those decisions. He adds a second, where he says it is important to be "practical": The virus does not care what your political views are. It writes the rules about how it behaves. And we must then write our rules about how we respond. And these rules must be flexible. They will change. There is no set-and-forget in a pandemic like this. There are times when you have to pull back. And there are times when you have to push forward. Morrison immediately adds that situations overseas have been worse, but says it was "fair enough" that some have asked of him to improve the government's response to the series of crises he listed: The fact that far worse outcomes have been experienced overseas - which we know - well, that gives some important perspective. But it doesn't soften the blow. And it's fair enough that this disappointment leads you to ask, "Couldn't YOU have done more? Couldn't this have been avoided? After all, aren't you responsible?" I get that. For me as prime minister, accepting this responsibility means asking yourself and challenging yourself every single day with those same questions. And I can assure you I do. I haven't got everything right. And I'll take my fair share of the criticism and the blame. The PM says it has been "crushing" to have visited towns "devastated" by storms, floods or fires: It's been crushing to visit towns and homes devastated - often with Jen - by storms, ravaged by flood or fires, to walk across barren pastures, to see the queues outside Centrelink or testing centres, to see the empty shops and restaurants, as we saw in Cairns earlier over the weekend. To see the lives and livelihoods of Australians disrupted through no fault of their own and through circumstances well beyond theirs and our control, often. So I understand and I acknowledge the frustration, especially with how this global pandemic has played out over this past very difficult summer. The PM begins by reflecting on the past three years, listing fires, pandemics and recessions, saying young people have "never know anything like it". The past three years have been some of the most extraordinary that our nation has ever experienced. Younger generations have never known anything like it. The succession of natural disasters from drought to flood, fires, pestilence, a once-in-a-century global pandemic, the recession - it has pushed our country to the very limits. Our way of life has been completely turned upside-down. For so many Australians, I know it's been exhausting financially, physically, emotionally. And when we thought we might just be breaking free, the rains have come, the cyclone has hit, or a new and completely different strain of the virus - like Omicron - has come and changed all the rules. The president of the NPC, Laura Tingle, introduced the PM by saying she anticipated he had a "veritable smorgasbord of announcements" to make today. Back at the Press Club protest, trucks are blasting their air horns and demonstrators are waving upside-down Australian flags. A small number of protesters are drinking beer from cans and smoking what appears to be marijuana, while others have shouted abuse at journalists standing outside the building. As has become common at anti-vaccine protests in Australia, demonstrators are singing "The Voice" by John Farnham. They're also singing along to their own version of Pink Floyd's "Another Brick In The Wall", with lyrics related to vaccination which I won't subject you to. Chants of "remove ScoMo" have rung out just minutes before the prime minister is due to address the Press Club. Other speakers on a PA system are loudly sharing debunked conspiracy theories about vaccines. The crowd appears to be growing. Earlier, only a smattering of protesters had been on the lawns outside Parliament House, in a far cry from the dramatic scenes on Monday. More than a dozen federal police officers were standing guard at parliament's front doors, and main roads around the building were closed off, in anticipation of further protests. They have not yet eventuated, with most demonstrators now at the Press Club. Good afternoon, Mostafa Rachwani with you this afternoon, and a quick thanks to Matilda Boseley for expertly navigating us through the morning's news. The PM is due shortly, and we will bring you all the updates from that and everything else happening around the country. With that, I shall hand you over to the amazing Mostafa Rachwani to bring you all the update's from the prime minister's National Press Club address and all the rest of the afternoon's news. Popular science podcast, Science Vs, is the latest to take a stand against Spotify's reluctance to take strong action against Joe Rogan for airing unchallenged Covid-19 misinformation, with staff at the Spotify-owned podcast announcing they would not release new episodes except ones counteracting misinformation on Spotify. Science Vs host and executive producer, Wendy Zukerman, tweeted out the letter she and editor Blythe Terrell sent to Spotify chief executive, Daniel Ek, on Tuesday,

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explaining their reasoning. They said: Rogan's show leaves the audience with a skewed and inaccurate view of the Covid-19 vaccines. And Spotify has done little to address this. On Sunday, Spotify published its Platform Rules, but we do not think they go far enough. Until Spotify implements stronger methods to prevent the spread of misinformation on the platform, we will no longer be making new Science Vs episodes, except those intended to counteract misinformation being spread on Spotify. The pair said content moderation can be hard, but Spotify has a responsibility to do more, especially now that Spotify acknowledges its position in the tech world has moved from being simply a music platform to a publisher of exclusive content. Science Vs started out in 2015 as a podcast by Australia's ABC, before it was purchased by US-based podcasting network Gimlet Media, which was bought out by Spotify in early 2019 for US\$230m. The Queensland education minister has confirmed that the Citipointe Christian College has been referred to the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board after they asked students to sign a contract denouncing homosexuality and bisexuality and promising to conform to the roles of their biological gender. You can read more about the situation below: A large crowd of anti-vaccine protesters has massed outside the National Press Club in Canberra, where the prime minister, Scott Morrison, is shortly to give a speech. Police have blocked off streets all around the area, but a dozen cars and trucks had already parked outside the building, blocking the main road. Hundreds of people - nearly all maskless, many brandishing signs critical of vaccines and vaccination mandates - are now standing on the road or perched on the back of the vehicles. A large line of police is standing between the protesters and the front door to the building. Many demonstrators are displaying flags or signs supportive of Donald Trump or the United Australia party. Morrison's office says "at this stage" the speech will be going ahead. The deputy PM, Barnaby Joyce, has just arrived, walking through a side entrance. Our fantastic science reporter Donna Lu is looking to speak to Australians living with long Covid. You can email her at Donna.Lu@theguardian.com Some very normal scenes coming out of Canberra this morning: D'Ath has labelled the federal government's response to the aged care situation as "a bit cheeky," saying Morrison's government is claiming to have the Covid situation in aged care under control when "behind closed doors, they're turning to the states and territories and saying: 'Hey, can you sort this out for us?'" She also stated: "Too many aged care residents are passing away who have not been offered a booster." The Queensland health minister, Yvette D'Ath, has labelled Morrison's proposed \$800 aged care worker bonus payments a "slap in the face to staff to these facilities and to all the families and loved ones out there". She says the federal government should instead be taking action on the recommendations made by the royal commission. Foley has been asked whether Victoria is considering resuming non-urgent elective surgery, after NSW announced some elective surgeries will resume in a staged capacity from Monday 7 February. Yes, every day, including today, we consult with both private hospitals and the public hospital sector around just where the situation is when it comes to when it will be appropriate to turn back on elective surgery. He apologised for the disruptions and delays, but said the pause was necessary. Like many other jurisdictions, like in fact all other jurisdictions, measures of reductions and deferrals of elective surgery have been put in place. Our friends in New South Wales, where the initial outbreak of Omicron peak is coming off, have always been about two weeks or so ahead of ourselves. Foley said changes in NSW applied only to private hospitals and some regional hospitals. It's not a return to normal operations. We are in the process of having similar discussions. Just jumping back to Victoria for a moment. Foley has been asked why the government hasn't consulted the state's chief health officer on whether a third Covid-19 vaccine dose should be mandated. Mandates are one of the tools of driving vaccination rates and are a key feature right across the country in 2021 in making us one of the most vaccinated communities on the planet. And in that regard, the process, as we all know, is pretty straightforward. The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisations considers what constitutes being fully vaccinated. They're going through that process. All the states and territories are contributing to that and in the very near future, from my discussions with officials, we would expect the Australian Technical Advisory Group to advise the national cabinet on that outcome. And once that advice has been given then the states and territories will go about the process of consultation as we have in previous times to drive those vaccination rates up. Foley says "in the context of 2022 and the Omicron variant" he expects "fully vaccinated" will come to mean three doses of a vaccine. For people who are immunosuppressed and other at-risk groups, it will be four doses, he says. Queensland chief health officer, Dr John Gerrard, is providing additional details about those Covid deaths now. Sadly, we have 10 deaths to report today. That is 10 people who died having had a Covid test around the time of their death. That includes two people in their 70s, four in their 80s, and four in their 90s. Of these, two were unvaccinated, eight had received two doses of vaccine and none had received boosters. Of these 10, eight had come from aged care facilities. We have recorded 107 deaths among aged care residents since the wave began after 13 December. That is 107 deaths out of the 200 that we have had recorded since the beginning of the

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Omicron wave in mid-December. The Queensland premier is speaking now and has confirmed the state has recorded another 10 Covid deaths, eight of whom were in aged care. They also had an additional 7,588 new cases. If you're in south-eastern Queensland, you don't need to check our blog to know you're in the midst of a heatwave that has at least a day to run. One consequence of the heat and humidity (and perhaps more people working from home) is that demand for electricity is high, given so many air conditioners will have been running days and nights lately. Planners have seen these weather-related strains on the grid coming for some days, and now the market operator AEMO has deemed fit to warn of a possible "lack of reserve" later today. To be clear, there are no actual shortfalls yet that would prompt suppliers to switch off some unhappy customers. AEMO has a couple of tricks up its sleeve, such as triggering its reserve system that includes some users agreeing to reduce their demand and receive compensation. It's only about a week since AEMO noted summer had been going swimmingly as far as the national electricity market was concerned, with the La Niña-influenced season keeping conditions relatively damp and mild. No reserve backup had been needed by the end of December. (Melbourne, mind you, just matched its record of the most days in a month of 30C, so things did start to heat up in some key population centres.) Today or even tomorrow might test Queensland's supplies, especially if one of those ageing coal-fired power stations drops out. Sweaty fingers will be crossed all over Queensland that doesn't happen. The ACT has recorded another 522 new Covid infections overnight. There are now 64 Covid-positive people in hospital and one person in the ICU. They currently require ventilation. The Victorian health minister, Martin Foley, is holding a press conference in Melbourne. The state has recorded 34 Covid deaths and 11,311 new infections but hospitalisations are trending down. Foley: We are seeing currently 851 people in Victorian hospitals with Covid-19, that is down from yesterday's figure of 873 and is also below the rolling seven day average of 925. Yesterday we had 102 people in ICU and today we have 106 people in intensive care as of 6am this morning, so an increase of four. But in regards to people on ventilators, we have 30 people on ventilators... down from 33 yesterday. Of the 34 deaths, Foley says 13 were within the last two days, with the remainder previous fatalities that have just been reported to the Victorian authorities. We send our deepest condolences and best wishes to those families and communities in this time of grieving. Okay, it's time to hear from the Victorian health minister, Martin Foley, with his Covid-19 update for the day. He has kicked things off by chatting about a new initiative to get vulnerable children across the state vaccinated. We know we don't want any members of our community left behind when it comes to the vaccination program. The [new] program targeting disadvantaged communities, kids with disabilities, kids in out-of-home care programs, kids in the justice program and their families need the support to go that little step extra so as to make sure that we get the highest possible vaccination rates for the communities and those that find it the hardest to access services. The Tasmanian numbers are in and the state has recorded 699 new Covid-19 infections. There are still 16 people in hospital in the state and one in the ICU. I've got a bit more detail out of the latest dump of donations data, just released by the Australian Electoral Commission. Empire Energy, a firm exploring for gas in the Beetaloo Basin, made \$65,000 worth of donations. The majority went to the Liberal party's Northern Territory branch, which received \$40,000, while Labor got \$25,000. Empire has been the main beneficiary of a federal program designed to incentivise fracking and gas exploration in the Beetaloo Basin, receiving \$21m in three grants announced in July last year. Empire gave the Liberal party \$27,000 later that month. The rest of the money was donated in three instalments in November, January and April. A Senate inquiry has previously probed the company's connections with the Liberal party, revealing that it paid for a party fundraiser to inspect its operations in the NT. The company has previously denied that its connections to the Liberal party played any role in it receiving the grants, saying it "followed due and proper process at all times". Reporter: We can circle back to the hydrogen argument, do you have a horizon or some sort of expectation when you think green hydrogen could be economically viable? Angus Taylor: We have been very clear on the pathway for hydrogen. Since we launched the technology investment roadmap 18 months ago or so, we said we are targeting getting below \$2 per kilogram. The reason why getting below \$2 per kilogram is so important is because as you get down to that level, you are getting the parity with alternatives and you are not raising the cost of electricity for Australians. That is so important. We do know that we are expecting to see blue hydrogen getting towards that level sooner than green. Over the course of this decade, we expect that to be the case for blue hydrogen. Green will take longer. We have laid that out very clearly in our plan. We will start to see a shift towards \$2 by the end of the decade, it will take potentially longer to get down to that parity level and we have laid [that] out in a very clear chart in the long-term strategy which I encourage all to look at. The Reserve Bank of Australia, the country's central bank, emerges from its summer slumber with its first board meeting for 2022 today. It's something of a luxury among central bankers to take January off, but this is 'Straya, after all. Anyway, the RBA is not expected to lift the official case rate from its record

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low 0.1% annual rate but today's meeting is likely to provide more of a hint of when that first-in-a-decade hike might occur. Markets, with all their self-interested wisdom, are tipping the first move by May or June, assuming the rise is to 0.25%. Private economists are predicting August, but these are guesses, which is why what RBA Governor Philip Lowe actually says today will be examined closely. (And tomorrow's National Press Club address.) Until late last year, Lowe had been touting 2024 as the time to start "normalising" interest rates. But with more and more signs of a strong economic recovery, 2023 was started being mentioned in RBA dispatches. Last week, too, we've had inflation figures that the RBA looks at rising at their fastest pace since 2014, and a week before that, the lowest jobless rate in more than 13 years. Not to mention central banks globally moving to lift lending rates. In anticipation of today's RBA meeting, a few headline writers have also got a bit twitchy, declaring the central bank had "put an end to economy stimulus". They mean the bank has stopped buying government bonds, another aspect of its support for activity during the Covid pandemic. Back at the last RBA meeting in December, the bank said it would continue to buy government securities (a move that keeps interest rates lower, longer) at the rate of \$4bn a week "until at least mid-February 2022". So technically, the bank buying has a couple of weeks to run - unless the RBA formally ends it today. If it does run another fortnight, the \$8bn it will buy would bring the total to about \$350bn - not a small addition when you figure the RBA started the bond binge with \$16bn in holdings. While borrowers on variable rates will be keenly following today's hints and punditry, those with a longer-term view might wonder how the RBA is going to unwind its accumulation of about one-third of government debt in just two years. Now, I know what you are thinking: "Gosh, I really wish I could hear politicians talking about green hydrogen a little more this morning." Well, you are in luck! Here is the energy minister, Angus Taylor, having a chat about the old hl: We heard a moment ago they couldn't answer the question as to what the cost of hydrogen would be... We want to see hydrogen going into this generator but in a way that is economic, commercial and technically feasible. That is what we will continue to work with, to achieve this in the coming years. But forcing it in any way is going to cost other taxpayers for electricity consumers, it doesn't make economic sense. We have seen time and time again that Anthony Albanese and his team are not economically coherent. He has never held an economic portfolio. It shows up because affordable, reliable energy is crucial to all Australians. A project that delivers a return, as we said in the business case, 4% is crucial for taxpayers. The federal government has quietly agreed to allow the importation of unapproved rapid antigen tests for personal use amid shortages of approved kits. Even the kits approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration have varying degrees of accuracy, and the TGA is currently reviewing the effectiveness of the 23 tests approved for detecting Omicron. Low sensitivity on tests could mean people receive negative results even though they are infectious, and go on to spread the virus. The agriculture, water and environment department's website was updated on 12 January with new rules for imported tests. Up to three months' supply of the unapproved tests can be brought into the country as long as they meet various conditions including "does not contain bee pollen", and are commercially prepared and packaged for testing humans. You can read the full report below: We will be hearing from the Queensland leaders for a Covid update in just over an hour. Anthony Albanese has confirmed Labor would support a pay rise for aged care workers if elected. Reporter: Does Labor support an increase in the hourly rate? Albanese: If I was prime minister, we would make a submission to the Fair Work Commission supporting an increase in pay for aged care workers. Yes, we would. Reporter: Craig Kelly has been targeting this area quite intensely. How do you plan to counter that? Albanese: Well, Craig Kelly, of course, was hand-picked by Scott Morrison to be the member for Hughes when he didn't have the support of his own party locally. What we will do is we'll continue to point out that a vote for Craig Kelly or a vote for One Nation is a vote for Scott Morrison. If you actually want to change the country, if you want a country that stands up for workers' security. If you want a country that supports same job, same pay for coalminers. If you want a country with better living standards, cheaper childcare, that defends Medicare - and can I say happy birthday, Medicare on today - of course, done by federal Labor. And what we've seen from this Government is a continuing undermining of Medicare. Craig Kelly has voted for all of that. He's voted for all of that. You might be asking yourself, "Why is Anthony Albanese in Kurri Kurri this morning?" Well, it's because yesterday, Labor confirmed they would support Snowy Hydro building a new power plant in the Hunter Valley if it wins the upcoming election, but only on the condition that the plant should be powered entirely by green hydrogen, instead of gas, by 2030. He was asked about the role hydrogen will play, but ended up mostly talking about the NBN: One of the things about this site is that some of the hydrogen can be sourced from solar that could be constructed on site. There are a range of proposals to do just that, and the site is an appropriate one to be able to feed into and ensure that it is green hydrogen. There is a difference between green and blue hydrogen. We're about the best case, and Labor always does this. I was the communications minister at the end of our time in government and I well recall a debate that

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occurred then over something called the National Broadband Network... and we were rolling out fibre to every home and business. And the [new] government said - don't worry about that, we'll just go with old technology, we'll go back to copper. And they bought enough copper with your money, taxpayer money, to wrap around the world, not once, but twice! And as a result, you have a flawed multimodal system whereby you have some people getting first grade and some people getting third and fourth grade that just doesn't work. What they've had to do is go back and retrofit, and we've said we'll add more than a million homes to that if we're elected, because, frankly, you need to use the best technology. If you want to read more about all of these political donations, the amazing Nick Evershed has created this interactive chart for you to trawl through at your leisure. We're still trawling through the political donations. You'll be pleased to know minor parties also got a cut of the action: Katter's Australia party received two \$100,000 donations from the Firearms Dealers Association Qld Inc and the Shooters Union Qld Pty Ltd. Duncan Turpie, a professional gambler and maths genius, gave \$110,000 to the Greens, including their Queensland and Tasmanian branches. The Trustee for St Baker Family Trust gave \$165,000 to the two major parties, including the LNP in Queensland. Trevor St Baker is an Australian businessman with interests in power plants. Other big donations by individuals included: Scott Edwardes, a lawyer and WA Liberal candidate at the state election, gave \$224,000 to the party. Charles Bass, miner and tech investor, gave \$216,000 to the major parties in WA. Oooh, new political metaphor alert! Albanese is bringing out the big guns, suggesting Morrison care less about driving the car (I think the car is Australia) and more about the "bumper sticker" on the back. What's more, [the Morrison government] have failed to back Australian manufacturers who want to produce more rapid antigen tests right here. [We need] a future made in Australia, making things here for Australia's resilience. We cannot remain a country that's at the end of the supply chain. We need to make more things here, and that's why part of my big commitment, which is consistent with today's announcement here, is I want a future made in Australia and I want us to buy Australian, to support Australian jobs and Australian industry and Australian resilience. This government talks about overseas interference. Well, it leaves us totally vulnerable and older Australians today are very vulnerable. Older Australians and those people who are healthcare workers in the aged care sector. Aged care workers want, are desperate, to have the products to look after their residents. Scott Morrison's just desperate to get their votes. And a cash payment that does nothing to lift the wages of aged care workers beyond the next federal election campaign is an appalling response from a government that never has its hands on the steering wheel, just as always, the bumper sticker and the ad at the back of the car. What we need is a government that actually leads. Okay, let's jump over to Kurri Kurri, NSW where the opposition leader, Anthony Albanese, is speaking. And by "speaking", I do very much mean "slamming Scott Morrison's aged care worker bonus payment announcement". Let's listen in: I think people will wake up this morning and say that Scott Morrison has presided over an aged care system where the federal government is the funder, the regulator of aged care in this country. And where we have 20,000 active cases for residents or workers in the aged care sector, at a time when Scott Morrison says the solution to that is one-off payments, cash payments in the lead-up to an election. Scott Morrison is trying to buy the support of aged care workers. What aged care workers want him to do is to buy rapid antigen tests and PPE for them. Scott Morrison knows that the aged care sector is in a crisis. He doesn't have to listen to us. Mike Baird, the former Liberal premier of New South Wales, has called for the defence force to be brought in to make beds. We know that aged care residents are sitting in bed without being able to be showered. In some cases without being fed, and with open sores that aren't being tended to as a result of a crisis that could have been foreseen, and indeed, was, by the prime minister and the health minister, who were talking about rapid antigen tests being available as far back as August last year. But other countries were placing orders for rapid antigen tests in December of 2020 and early 2021. This Government made its first order in January. More than a quarter of aged care staff say their workplace is not giving them free rapid antigen tests, with nearly 20% reporting they've had to find and buy their own kits before working. Trade unions have lashed the prime minister, Scott Morrison, and the Coalition over the findings of the new survey from the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Foundation, saying it was "an indictment on this government" that aged care workers were forced to dip into their own pocket for RATs. "The Morrison government is simply refusing to learn the most basic lessons of this crisis and continues to make the same mistakes. The tools to defeat and control the virus - vaccines, PPE and RATs - must be free and accessible to all people," said the Australian Council of Trade Unions president, Michele O'Neil. You can read the full report below: In case you were curious, here is the full statement on these newly announced aged care worker bonus payments. The Australian Electoral Commission has just released financial disclosures for 2020-21, revealing that Anthony Pratt's Pratt Holdings Pty Ltd was the biggest donor that year. Pratt Holdings gave \$1.3m in 2020-21, almost all of it to various branches of the Liberal Party, but there was one \$10,000 donation to NSW Labor. The next biggest donors were: Silver River

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Investment Holdings Pty Ltd - which gave \$650,000 to right-wing lobby group Advance [Australia](#). Cartwright Investment Corp Pty Ltd - which gave \$350,000 to Advance [Australia](#). The National Automotive Leasing and Salary Packaging Association, which gave \$150,000 each to the Labor and Liberal parties. William Nitschke, who gave \$300,000 to the Great [Australia](#) Party, which is former One Nation senator Rodney Culleton's new political party. The Pharmacy Guild of [Australia](#), which gave \$295,000 roughly evenly split between Labor and Liberal branches. Meriton Property Services, which gave \$285,000 to the Liberal Party, the bulk of it (\$200K) to the NSW Liberals. The Australian Hotels Association of NSW, which gave \$260,000 in total to the Liberals, Nationals and Labor. Miners and energy companies were also prominent in the list of donors: Woodside Energy Ltd gave \$232,000 to the Liberals, Nationals and Labor. Mineral Resources gave \$222,400 to the Liberals, Nationals and Labor in Western [Australia](#). Craig Kelly has signalled the United [Australia](#) party could throw a political lifeline to incumbent MPs prepared to break ranks and support two new private members' bills he will bring forward during the final sitting weeks of parliament. The UAP plans to put all sitting members of parliament last on its how-to-vote cards in the coming federal election - a strategy prompting significant anxiety among Morrison government MPs, given the Coalition was the primary beneficiary of preference flows in the 2019 election. But Kelly, the former maverick Liberal and now UAP leader, says his party's "pox on all your houses" strategy could well change depending on where MPs line up in the final sitting weeks. You can read the full report below: Tragically it's been a particularly deadly day for Victoria as well, the state recording 34 Covid-19 deaths along with 11,311 new cases. There are now 851 Covid-positive people in hospital, 106 of those now in the ICU. As temperatures soared last week, Cass Willcocks's rental apartment in inner Melbourne quickly became "unlivable". "It's gotten to the point where the tiles in my kitchen are hot, I try to put moisturiser on and it's hot. Everything in my apartment is literally baking and I feel like I'm suffocating," she said. "I pay \$395 a week for an apartment that's basically unlivable. I've had to go work from my friend's kitchen table in the air conditioning because I can't concentrate. I'm barely sleeping." Willcocks's blackout curtains and a borrowed portable air conditioner were barely making a dent - a thermometer on her fridge showed the temperature inside her Thornbury apartment reached 36C on the evening of 25 January. There were three more days of above-average temperatures and warm nights ahead. You can read the full report below: Greens deputy leader Larissa Waters appeared on ABC radio earlier this morning calling for political donations to be capped at \$1,000 per year. There's a real perception - and I think it's a reality - that you get what you pay for. That's why these big fossil fuel companies should not be allowed to buy the policy outcomes that suit their profits, particularly in a climate crisis... We've seen more than \$100m of corporate donations to both of the bigger parties since 2012... We are seeing an Americanisation of our political system, with massive money getting outcomes. It's legalised corruption. We think all [political] donations should be capped to \$1,000 a year because we don't think big money should be running the show. We think an outright ban is appropriate on coal and gas companies because they've got a track record of trying to influence policies. She also stated she was hopeful about the minor party's prospects in the upcoming election, (although, like, what else is she going to say?) I think we've got a great chance of winning a whole swathe of additional seats. We'll likely be the biggest third party the country's ever seen again, with the voters' permission. We already know the NSW numbers for today but here is the official graphic. The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) is extremely concerned that many nurses and carers are still being forced to pay for their own rapid antigen tests (RATs) to go to work in aged care homes. According to the preliminary findings of a new national survey being conducted by the ANMF, almost one in five aged care nurses and carers paid for their own RATs, despite the government promising back in August 2021 to commence rolling out RATs to residential aged care facilities to protect workers, residents and their families. Over 770 health and aged care workers have so far participated in the survey, with preliminary findings showing: 1 in 5 participants report needed to buy their own RATs; 27% report "poor" to "very poor" testing experience. ANMF federal assistant secretary, Lori-Anne, Sharp said: Aged care is in crisis. Chronic understaffing across the system has been exacerbated by the pandemic, with care staff unable to provide elderly residents with the quality care they need. One aged care nurse commented in the survey that: I worked directly caring for Covid-19 positive residents (six positive of 15 residents on my floor) and was not tested over five shifts as my employer had run out of RATs as they were waiting for a supply from the commonwealth government. The high court should overturn a landmark decision finding Aboriginal Australians cannot be aliens because it threatens to confer "political sovereignty on Aboriginal societies", the Morrison government has argued. Government lawyers made the claim in an appeal, warning that the Love and Thoms decision barring the deportation of Aboriginal non-citizens threatened the principle that Aboriginal sovereignty did not survive the colonisation of [Australia](#). In submissions lodged on Friday, the commonwealth also argued that Aboriginal people's spiritual connection to the land does not create a "special

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relationship" to the commonwealth. You can read the full report below: The foreign affairs minister, Marise Payne, has called on Myanmar's military to "halt violence against civilians and return the country to the path of democracy". In a statement issued on the first anniversary of the military coup, Payne said its actions on 1 February 2021 had denied the will of the people. Since that time, the military has inflicted horrific violence, trampled basic freedoms and triggered humanitarian, security, health and economic crises across the country. **Australia** condemns the use of violence against civilians and other serious human rights violations. We urge the military to exercise restraint and to release all those arbitrarily detained, including Australian Professor Sean Turnell. Payne called on the military "to allow immediate and unimpeded access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all people in need" and to "engage meaningfully in inclusive dialogue for a peaceful return of Myanmar to the path of democracy". As we reported earlier, human rights group and the Labor opposition have strongly criticised the Australian government for failing to implement any additional sanctions against Myanmar military figures or their business interests in the year since the coup. Payne's statement is silent on the prospect of new sanctions. But the minister called on the international community "to prevent the flow of arms into Myanmar, to suspend all operational support to the military and its representatives, and to cease the provision of arms, enabling materiel and technical assistance". She said **Australia** would "provide humanitarian assistance to those most in need and remains committed to working with regional and international partners in response to these crises".

The NSW premier Dominic Perrottet has already been out and about this morning discussing the return of students to state school's this morning. It is an incredibly important day for our state and an exciting day... And I want to particularly thank our teachers who have done an amazing job over the course of the last few weeks in getting our schools ready to open day one, term one. I know that many parents are anxious. I know that many parents are also excited to have their kids back in the classroom. But this is incredibly important as we move through 2022, as we move back to normal, that we have our students back at school. We know that many children have lost a quarter of their time in face-to-face learning over the last two years as a result of the pandemic. There could be nothing more important, not just for our student's educational outcomes, for social outcomes, for mental health outcomes, is for kids to get back in school. NSW chief health officer Dr Kerry Chant has confirmed the state has recorded another 30 Covid deaths and 12,818 new infections. There were 2,749 people with the virus with 183 in ICU and 70 requiring ventilation. ABC News Breakfast host Lisa Millar: Greg Hunt yesterday suggested that of the deaths that we have seen and there has been several hundred in January just since the start of this year, that 60% of those are receiving palliative care. Do you accept that? Shadow aged care minister Clare O'Neil: I find that disgracefully offensive. I mean, what is Greg Hunt saying that these people were going to die anyway? That is a disgusting comment. What is the reality here is that this sector was already in crisis, through Omicron, this is the worst crisis this sector has experienced in 40 years. Wound management is not being taken care of. Vulnerable people are sitting in soiled pads because there is literally no one to come and help them. People are not getting enough to eat. Staff cry to me on the phone and tell me that it's like a war zone where they are working at the moment. The government is in the middle of this crisis - this tells you everything about their priorities - instead of dealing with this crisis, instead of going to the parliament and asking questions about this, the aged care minister Richard Colbeck went to the cricket... he spent not one day at the cricket, but three days at the cricket. O'Neil: A pay rise that lasts up until the next election is a cynical political ploy, because we know this plan... will not do anything more than hold this thing together by a thread. The truth is that the aged-care sector - the average experience of a person in aged care today is one of neglect. The royal commission told us that. Two-thirds of residents today are malnourished, literally starving under the care of their own government. Scott Morrison has this shoddy political fix that he has put forward, yet the real answer to this problem lies in part in supporting the workers who have gone to the Fair Work Commission to ask for a pay increase. While speaking to ABC News Breakfast shadow aged care minister Clare O'Neil has labelled the government's newly announced aged care bonus payments are "an act of cynical politicking that I thought would have even been beyond Scott Morrison". The truth is that we have a crisis in aged care that has been eight years in the making. Scott Morrison has cut aged-care funding personally as treasurer twice. One of the first actions of the incoming government was to cut the wages of aged-care staff and now we are expected to believe that this is going to make a difference? If Scott Morrison gave a stuff about aged-care workers he would be doing something more than giving them a pay rise that only lasts up until the next election. I mean, come on. An Australian naval ship which had been supplying critical aid to tsunami-ravaged Tonga has suffered a major power outage, reports AAP. The defence department confirmed that HMAS Adelaide, which docked in the Pacific island nation last week, had lost power during the operation. A defence spokesperson said back-up power had been activated aboard the vessel to restore essential systems. The situation is being closely monitored and the safety of the ship and the embarked forces

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remains our highest priority... The power outage has not affected Australia's ability to support requests from the government of Tonga to assist their recovery efforts. The ship departed from Brisbane and arrived in Tonga last week, carrying critical relief including medical and humanitarian supplies as well as helicopters, following the January 15 underwater volcanic eruption and tsunami. Defence said civilian specialists are on route to conduct an assessment of the affected systems of the HMAS Adelaide. The minister for superannuation and the digital economy, Jane Hume, has denied that these newly announced aged care worker bonus payments are an election bribe. She was just speaking now with ABC radio. We provided the aged care workforce with a bonus payment back in 2020 in recognition of the increased demands on their time they faced. She indicated that the prospect of a \$5 per hour pay rise across the industry (a proposal currently before the Fair Work Commission) may be unsustainable. A \$5 per hour increase would dramatically increase the cost of an aged care workforce. We want to make sure this is a sustainable system going into the future... The decision for a pay rise is not for government but one for the Fair Work Commission and it's making that decision now. The Sydney Morning Herald is reporting that the presumed Liberal candidate for Warringah has pulled out as the party's NSW branch descends into preselection turmoil. According to them, barrister Jane Buncle, withdrew her nomination on Monday night, adding yet another stress to the party after the state executive rejected a motion that would have granted special powers to endorse three prominent sitting Morrison government MPs without the need for plebiscites Guardian Australia's Anne Davies has been reporting heavily on this over the last few weeks, but basically, the prime minister's office sponsored a motion that asked the state executive to bypass the preselection process in North Sydney, Farrer and Mitchell - effectively saving the careers of the moderate faction leader, Trent Zimmerman, the environment minister, Sussan Ley, and the immigration minister, Alex Hawke. You can read the full report below: The Morrison government's failure to impose sanctions against Myanmar junta figures sends a message that Australia is a "mere bystander to authoritarian backsliding in our region", according to the Labor party. With today marking one year since Myanmar's military seized power in a coup, the opposition today joined with human rights activists in urging the Australian government to act to stop the flow of money to the junta. Labor's acting foreign affairs spokesperson, Kristina Keneally, said at every stage of the crisis in Myanmar, the government had "acted too late and done too little to demonstrate Australia's opposition" to the coup and to the "the killing of over a thousand innocent civilians". She said: The Morrison-Joyce government's refusal to act over the past year sends precisely the wrong message - that Australia does not care and that we are mere bystanders to authoritarian backsliding in our region ... We join calls from the Australian Council of Trade Unions, Human Rights Watch and the Australian Council for International Development, as well as many other NGOs, for targeted sanctions against the Tatmadaw and linked entities. Mr [Scott] Morrison and the foreign minister must use this anniversary to finally act - and stand up for democracy in our region. Elaine Pearson, the Australia director of Human Rights Watch, said Australia needed to take coordinated actions together with like-minded governments "to help deprive the military of its revenue sources and to maximise pressure on the junta to end its campaign of terror": This is the one-year anniversary of the coup and I think it sends a terrible message that Australia has failed to implement any new targeted sanctions against the coup leaders or any of the business interests. Pearson said the Australian government had repeatedly expressed its grave concerns, but "actions speak louder than words". She said the government should target the oil and gas revenue flowing to the junta. Citing Woodside Petroleum's announcement last week that it would leave Myanmar, Pearson added: When Woodside is taking stronger action on human rights than the Australian government, I think that's a cause for concern. Earlier this month the foreign affairs minister, Marise Payne, and the defence minister, Peter Dutton, joined with their British counterparts in calling on the Myanmar military "to immediately cease violence against civilians; engage in constructive, inclusive dialogue; end the targeting of legitimately elected leaders; and release all those arbitrarily detained, including Australian Professor Sean Turnell". New South Wales will resume a limited number of non-urgent elective surgeries in private and regional public hospitals from next week, the government will announce on Tuesday. The government announced on 7 January that non-urgent elective surgery would be suspended as hospitalisations rose following the Omicron wave of infections. At the time the premier, Dominic Perrottet, said surgeries would resume from the middle of February. But while the government is confident that hospitalisation numbers have plateaued, on Tuesday the premier will announce some elective surgeries will resume in a staged capacity from Monday 7 February. The plan will see non-urgent elective surgery requiring an overnight stay returning to 75% capacity in private hospitals, and up to 75% of pre-pandemic levels at some public hospitals in regional and rural NSW. Perrottet said in a statement: The reintroduction of non-urgent elective surgery will be done in a phased manner to balance the ongoing potential need for extra capacity in our hospitals and the need for people in NSW to access their elective surgeries as quickly as possible... We recognise the effect these

PM grilled at National Press Club as 77 Covid deaths recorded nationally - as it happened

necessary restrictions have had on the lives of people requiring non-urgent elective surgery and I want to assure them we will be doing everything possible to return to full capacity in all of our hospitals as soon as possible. The NSW government has been using private hospitals to deal with the surge in Covid-19 hospitalisations during the Omicron wave, and the health minister, Brad Hazzard, said that would continue for non-urgent elective surgery to ensure equity of access. Our hospitals remain under pressure due to Covid-19 so only our public hospitals that are in a position to resume non-urgent elective surgeries without compromising their ability to care for Covid-19 patients and patients with other medical conditions will do so. The latest Bureau of Health Information report released in December revealed that waves of Covid-19 outbreaks had seen the elective surgery waitlist in NSW rise to more than 92,000 people before the most recent suspension. Last week the government flagged a resumption of some elective surgeries as hospitalisations and ICU presentations remained within the best-case scenarios projected by the state's health department. "Hospitalisation numbers have certainly plateaued, as we said last week... we do think that in the coming week we will start to see them drop," deputy health secretary Susan Pearce said last week.

Good morning everyone, It's Matilda Boseley here and, like always, there is plenty to chat about today so let's jump in. Prime minister Scott Morrison is under fire today after union leaders labelled his newly announced aged care bonus payments as "too little, too late". Ahead of a major speech at the National Press Club this afternoon, Morison promised two pre-election bonus payments worth up to \$800 for aged care workers, but Health Services Union Gerard Hayes says the industry wants accountability for the slow residential care vaccine roll-out, not "trinkets". Trinkets are not required when diamonds are needed... From day one, they have not understood aged care, they have never understood the rollout of the vaccine, they haven't understood the booster shots, and they have never understood the workforce crisis we are facing - and they never complied with the outcomes of the royal commission. Heading over to NSW, and elective surgery is set to return to all private hospitals and regional public health facilities on 7 Febuary. Any elective procedures that required a stay overnight in the hospital were paused during the Omicron surge, but as case numbers slowly retreat these will be allowed to resume at 75% capacity. However, public metropolitan hospitals will keep focusing on treating Covid patients and emergency surgery recipients for now. Speaking of NSW, thousands of students across the state are heading back to classrooms today as state schools restart across the state, putting the government's Covid-safe education plan to the test. Strict anti-virus protocols have been implemented including improved ventilation, vaccinations, mask-wearing, twice-weekly RATS, and the segregation of year groups, but with daily cases still in the tens of thousands, many are fearful the start of the education year could spark numerous outbreaks. OK! With all of that out of the way, why don't we get cracking on the day's news? 95029 false false Mostafa Rachwani and Matilda Boseley Barnaby Joyce looking for his car as security clears a path through protestors. NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet speaks to the media. Prime Minister Scott Morrison at the National Press Club in Canberra. Greens senator Larissa Waters. NSW premier Dominic Perrottet. Shadow aged care minister Clare O'Neil. HMAS Adelaide docked at Nuku'alofa, Tonga, last Thursday, after carrying disaster relief and humanitarian aid supplies. A protester holds up a poster featuring detained civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi during a demonstration against the military coup in February 2021. NSW premier Dominic Perrottet meets with medical intern graduates at the Royal North Shore hospital in Sydney last week.

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