



[Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened](#)

The Guardian (London)

February 16, 2023 Thursday 7:31 PM GMT

Copyright 2023 The Guardian, a division of Transcontinental Media Group Inc. All Rights Reserved

theguardian

Section: [AUSTRALIA](#) NEWS; Version:26

Length: 20530 words

Byline: Elias Visontay (now) and Natasha May (earlier)

Highlight: Special legislation passed by the Albanese government with Coalition support. This blog is now closed
Get our morning and afternoon news emails, free app or daily news podcast

Body

block-time published-time 7.55am GMT

What happened on Friday, 17 February 2023

With that, we'll wrap up our live coverage of the day's news.

Here's a summary of the main news developments:

The New South Wales finance minister, Damien Tudehope, has [resigned from his position in cabinet](#) after it was revealed he owned shares in the state's major toll road owner, Transurban. The former Australian prime minister Scott Morrison has [defended his failure to introduce sanctions against Chinese officials](#) over human rights abuses, saying he ran out of time before his election loss. Large swathes of [Australia sweltered amid a heatwave on Friday](#), including in the Pilbara, where temperatures reached 45C. Conflicting accounts have emerged about a meeting between Peter Dutton and the Indigenous voice referendum working group after a key member of the group said the [opposition leader's personal views showed they were "not that far apart" on the voice](#). Annastacia Palaszczuk says a \$2.7bn plan to knock down and rebuild Brisbane's Gabba stadium will "anchor a major urban renewal project" that will see thousands of new homes built and deliver a more connected and livable city. But political opponents, community groups and prominent architects [say the project's blown out price tag](#) and the loss of a primary school mean the Queensland government should look to alternative plans. The federal government is developing a national long Covid strategy, with a parliamentary inquiry [hearing the condition has resulted in job losses and homelessness](#) among some sufferers.

Thanks for tuning in, have a pleasant weekend.

block-time updated-time Updated at 8.19am GMT

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

block-time published-time 7.42am GMT

Alice McCall placed into liquidation

Once one of the country's biggest fashion success stories, Alice McCall has been placed into liquidation today.

In a statement, [posted to the brand's Instagram](#), McCall thanked "all the people that have worn, supported and loved the brand over the years":

To me the brand embodied a lightness of spirit, the clothes were something you celebrated life in.

Stylist-turned-designer Alice McCall founded her eponymous label 20 years ago, and quickly found favour with celebrities, fashion editors and customers alike with her feminine, party-girl dresses featuring playful embroidery, bright palettes and sometimes daring hemlines.

The business was placed into administration in 2020, and over the next three years, shuttered all but one retail store. Matthew Kucianski of Worrells was appointed liquidator today.

In a statement to Inside Retail he said: "This is a difficult time for everyone involved... Our team is committed to ensuring that the liquidation process is conducted in a professional and transparent manner and that all parties are kept informed of developments as they arise."

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.53am GMT

block-time published-time 7.14am GMT

'I value my own integrity': NSW finance minister quits cabinet over share holdings in Transurban

The New South Wales finance minister, Damien Tudehope, has resigned from his position in cabinet after it was revealed he owned shares in the state's major toll road owner, Transurban.

Premier Dominic Perrottet accepted Tudehope's resignation on Friday evening after the minister was cleared of "knowingly" breaching ministerial standards.

Perrottet will take on the roles of finance and employee relations minister until the election.

The premier said:

I have known Damien for many years and he is a person of integrity and honesty.

At all times he has undertaken his responsibilities as a minister with the highest of standards.

My department provided advice to me earlier today which cleared Damien, saying he did not knowingly breach the ministerial code of conduct.

Tudehope said that even though he had been cleared of knowingly breaching the code, he did not want to be a distraction ahead of the election.

He said:

The legal advice from the Department of Premier and Cabinet has cleared me, advising I did not knowingly breach the ministerial code of conduct. However during the course of the day I have had the opportunity to consider my position and I value my own integrity and the integrity of the government to be something that is not the subject of repeated political attacks.

The events of the last 24 hours have provided an unnecessary distraction for the government at a time when the most important thing for the people of NSW is to be concentrating on the choice before them.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

Tudehope maintains he did not know he owned shares in the company that were purchased through his family's superannuation trust and sold them after being contacted by a journalist about them this week.

Damien Tudehope has quit his cabinet position. Photograph: Dean Lewins/AAP

Related: [Future of NSW minister Damien Tudehope in doubt over shares in toll giant Transurban](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.30am GMT

block-time published-time 7.13am GMT

Perrottet to take on NSW finance minister role as Tudehope quits cabinet

New South Wales premier Dominic Perrottet has just released a statement following Damien Tudehope ministerial resignation announcement.

Tudehope's political future was in question on Friday after it was revealed he held shares in the state's major toll road owner, Transurban. The senior minister and leader of the government in the upper house confirmed he held shares in the toll operator, whose portfolio of Sydney toll roads includes WestConnex, NorthConnex and the M2.

Tudehope resigned despite legal advice clearing him in relation to the share holdings.

In a statement, Perrottet said:

Tonight I have accepted the resignation of Finance Minister Damien Tudehope.

I have known Damien for many years and he is a person of integrity and honesty.

At all times he has undertaken his responsibilities as a Minister with the highest of standards.

My Department provided advice to me earlier today which cleared Damien, saying he did not knowingly breach the Ministerial Code of Conduct.

I will take on the role of Minister for Finance and Minister for Employee Relations.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.25am GMT

block-time published-time 7.09am GMT

Tudehope resigns as NSW finance minister

Some breaking news in New South Wales politics, with Damien Tudehope resigning as minister for finance.

His resignation follows a day intense speculation as to his future after it was revealed he [held shares in the state's major toll road owner, Transurban](#).

In a statement released shortly after 6pm on Friday, Tudehope said he had given his resignation as the Minister for Finance, Minister for Employee Relations and Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council to the Premier.

He said:

As outlined earlier today, my family superannuation fund was disclosed to Premier Berejiklian in 2019 as required under the Ministerial Code of Conduct. This disclosure has since been subject to continuous updating on an annual basis in accordance with the code of conduct.

When it was brought to my attention that held within my family superannuation fund are shares in the company Transurban I took action to remove them from my fund. The legal advice from the Department of Premier and Cabinet has cleared me, advising I did not knowingly breach the Ministerial Code of Conduct.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

However during the course of the day I have had the opportunity to consider my position and I value my own integrity and the integrity of the Government to be something that is not the subject of repeated political attacks.

During the eight years I have been elected as a member of parliament I have always sought to ensure that I have conducted myself, and those responsibilities that have been given to me, as something where I have acted beyond reproach.

The events of the last 24 hours have provided an unnecessary distraction for the Government at a time when the most important thing for the people of New South Wales is to be concentrating on the choice before them - an experienced Liberal and Nationals Government with a long term economic plan compared to a NSW Labor Party interested in tired and old politics."

You can read more about this in Tamsin Rose 's story:

Related: [*Future of NSW minister Damien Tudehope in doubt over shares in toll giant Transurban*](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.21am GMT

block-time published-time 6.29am GMT

Measles alerts in NSW and ACT

A few measles alerts have been issued today.

Health authorities in the ACT asked the community to be aware of measles exposure sites and monitor for symptoms after a confirmed case in the territory.

The ACT chief health officer Dr Kerry Coleman said the individual likely acquired the infection on a recent overseas trip, and said the best form of protection was vaccination, particularly for those travelling overseas.

The case attended the following public venues while infectious:

Flight QF1433 from Sydney to Canberra on Wednesday 15 February 2023; Canberra Airport between 11:00am and 11:30am on Wednesday 15 February 2023; Canberra Centre on Wednesday 15 February 2023; David Jones between 12:30pm and 1:00pm; Bed Bath and Table between 12:30pm and 1:30pm; Myer between 1:00pm and 1:45pm; Madeleine's Café on Level 2 of the Marian Building at the Calvary Public Hospital Bruce between 3:00pm and 3:30pm on Wednesday 15 February 2023.

People who attended these sites at the times listed are at very low risk of exposure to measles, authorities say. They asked those to monitor for symptoms, and if they develop to seek medical care and advise a practitioner of their concerns before arrival.

Symptoms include fever, tiredness, runny nose, sore eyes, cough and rash. People generally develop symptoms seven to 18 days after being exposed.

The case has also triggered an alert from NSW health authorities, as the ACT resident flew through Sydney airport.

In a statement, NSW Health said the case developed their infection while travelling in Asia, and listed the following as possible exposure sites:

Passengers on QF42 from Jakarta to Sydney departing at 7pm on Tuesday 14 February, arriving in Sydney 6.20am on Wednesday 15 February; In the international arrivals terminal including baggage claim and customs, on the morning of 15 February between 6am and 8am; Passengers on the Qantas transfers bus between the International and Domestic Terminals on the morning of 15 February; In the domestic departures terminal of Sydney Airport before 10am on 15 February; Passengers on flight QF1433 from Sydney to ACT departing 10am on 15 February; In the domestic arrivals terminal of Canberra Airport, including baggage claim on 15 February between 11am and 11.30am.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

NSW authorities are asking people who visited the above locations to be alert for symptoms until Sunday 5 March.

block-time updated-time Updated at 6.41am GMT

block-time published-time 6.06am GMT

Dozens of people re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes

Dozens of people released from immigration detention over Christmas are being re-detained due to special legislation passed by the Albanese government with Coalition support.

About [100 people were released from detention](#) due to a full federal court case ruling that aggregate sentences don't count for the purposes of the Migration Act's automatic visa cancellation provisions.

Rather than appeal, the government passed legislation restoring its interpretation of the law. The Aggregate Sentences bill passed both houses on Monday (13 February), despite [outcry from refugee and asylum seeker groups](#) that its retrospective provisions would see people re-detained.

Guardian [Australia](#) has heard from lawyers representing two dozen people whose visas were affected by the bill, who are now being told they will be re-detained.

The notice, seen by Guardian [Australia](#), says:

Your visa cancellation under section 501 of the Migration Act has been validated by operation of the Aggregate Sentences Act and is legally effective, and you no longer hold a visa. As such you are an unlawful non-citizen and may be detained and removed from [Australia](#).

As you no longer hold a valid visa to remain in [Australia](#), you are liable for immigration detention and we encourage you to self-report to the Australian Border Force ...

Alternatively, it is open to you to depart [Australia](#) voluntarily.

block-time updated-time Updated at 6.12am GMT

block-time published-time 5.57am GMT

Wong says [Australia](#)'s relationship with China 'very consistent with the Biden administration's'

At the earlier press conference, a journalist asked the foreign affairs minister, Penny Wong, whether [Australia](#) and the US had been moving at different speeds on their relationship with China – and whether she was concerned about any potential wedge between Canberra and Washington on relationships with Beijing.

Wong replied:

First, as you would probably anticipate, I don't agree with the way in which you constructed the question. We have sought to stabilise the relationship for the reasons I've spoken about at length. I think it's actually very consistent with the Biden administration's approach to the China relationship.

The language is a little different. I think they speak about putting a floor under the relationship. They talk about the importance of guardrails, which is a term I have also used because it really goes to the central point, which is we want the US and China to manage their relationship, their competition, in a way that ensures there is no escalation because of the risks and consequences of escalation or miscalculation.

I think that's very consistent with what Secretary Blinken has said, with what their national security adviser has said, and what President Biden has said. It is the case, obviously regrettably that Secretary Blinken's trip was deferred, given the events involving the balloon, but I do note that the US made clear that they stand ready to engage diplomatically with China and we welcome that.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.17am GMT

block-time published-time 5.49am GMT

Cyclone Gabrielle toll rises to nine amid speculation about an undercount in deaths

The death toll from Cyclone Gabrielle in New Zealand has climbed to nine, including the father of an NRL star.

Four new deaths have been reported in the past 24 hours, almost doubling the overall toll.

Social media is awash with speculation of an undercount in deaths, with the prime minister, Chris Hipkins, acknowledging community concerns.

“I have heard some outlandish claims out there... it’s no good to anybody speculating about how many people may have been injured or how many people may have died in this tragedy,” he said.

“We will certainly share that information as soon as we can.”

Police on foot check houses and search for bodies in Napier. Photograph: Kerry Marshall/Getty Images

Police and emergency services simply don’t know what the final death toll may be, with many remote settlements still not accessed and without communication lines.

There have been more than 4,500 people reported to police as uncontactable, and 80 people have been tasked with working through the lists, escalating cases of key concern.

“We’re not talking huge numbers,” Hipkins said of an expected death toll.

“It’s not like I’m aware that there are lots and lots and lots out there that we’re doing not reporting.

- AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.20am GMT

block-time published-time 5.36am GMT

NSW Liberal MP resigns from parliamentary role after explicit photo leaking scandal

The NSW Liberal MP Peter Poulos has resigned from his role as parliamentary secretary after an explicit photo scandal rocked the government.

The upper house MP leaked intimate Penthouse modelling photos of a female MP to fellow party members about five years ago.

“Peter Poulos contacted me today and informed me that he will be resigning his parliamentary secretary role,” the premier told reporters on Friday.

“I’ve accepted his resignation.”

The photos, which were taken in the 1980s, were sent via email as the MP battled to run for her seat in 2019.

The female MP appeared to defend Poulos this week, saying they had become “great mates”, she had accepted his apology and she wished the matter to be “put to bed”.

- AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.46am GMT

block-time published-time 5.27am GMT

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

Senate estimates hears concerns about alcohol and social harm in the Northern Territory

Still in Senate estimates, proceedings have turned to the Northern Territory now. The discussion focuses on alcohol and funding to address social harms in the NT, and in particular Alice Springs, in the wake of the Stronger Futures legislation lapsing at the end of July last year, and whether that led to an increase in crime and antisocial behaviour.

The NT Coalition senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price asks questions about the legislation and about federal consultation and briefings on what was happening on the ground in Alice Springs, particularly around the minister for Indigenous Australians, Linda Burney.

Julie-Anne Guivarra from the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) says that Burney has visited a number of times over the past three months, including most recently last weekend.

The NT Labor senator Malarndirri McCarthy says Burney has gone to the territory several times for extensive briefings in recent months, and that since December it has been a “deeply traumatic time” for everyone in central Australia, with the recent prime minister’s visit and subsequent restrictions needed as a “circuit breaker”.

McCarthy says the federal government had been raising concerns about the Stronger Futures laws expiring since it was elected.

Price also raises concerns about harms relating to family violence and alcohol, with the recent Dorelle Anderson report handed down earlier this month saying family violence reports have nearly doubled.

The NIAA says the Anderson report stated that weekly intelligence reports were not showing a “substantial rise” in alcohol-related harms following the lapsed laws, and that is true, but the report also points to further data and operational intelligence from the Northern Territory government that found there had been an “increase in alcohol-related harm”.

The South Australian Liberal senator Kerryne Liddle questions if the removal of the cashless debit card has contributed to a rise in social harms.

She also talks about Aboriginal organisations and governance, the data behind evidence-based programs, and funding and accountability, and how that contributes to positive outcomes.

McCarthy says the federal government will be working with datasets and police and other authorities to get a fuller picture of what’s happening on the ground.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.08am GMT

block-time published-time 5.19am GMT

Senate estimates hears of housing and water concerns in Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community

In Senate estimates, where we’ve been hearing Indigenous issues across portfolios, after a slight delay due to the temporary closure of Parliament House over fears of a bomb threat, things have resumed.

We hear from Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community Council, which first speaks about housing, commercial leases and a disconnect between Canberra and their community and how they don’t feel heard.

Annette Brown, the chair of the Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community Council, says the community fears any reforms going forward could have a negative impact.

“We were not involved with those discussions. My fear is that reforms could actually have a negative impact.”

Brown says that going forward dialogue is needed “with higher levels of government”, which currently doesn’t happen. “At this current time, we’re not even included in talks.”

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

Brown also speaks about the community's fears over PFAS stemming from the Department of Defence's historic use of chemicals and how it has impacted cultural practices.

She says the community only became aware of it when the Department of Defence made it public in 2016 and many families don't feel comfortable drinking the water from the taps.

"Out of the families, the majority will drink, or purchase, water in regard to drinking water," Brown says.

She says the ACT infrastructure department is negotiating with the NSW government to provide water directly to the Wreck Bay community.

Asked by the committee chair, Senator Louise Pratt, about water testing, Brown says testing has found the water to not be harmful but the community disagrees with the findings.

"Community have their own assessments and they feel that it could be contaminated," Brown says.

"What's acceptable is determined by other parties and the community basically disagrees with it."

Pratt thanks her for putting that on the public record.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.11am GMT

block-time published-time 5.01am GMT

PNG and **Australia** vow to speed up visa processing

Papua New Guinea has promised to consult Pacific neighbours on its planned security treaty with **Australia**, with both sides still hoping to conclude negotiations by the end of April.

Australia has also announced that it will begin visa processing in Port Moresby, as part of a pledge to cut processing delays that could have a negative effect on the relationship.

These were among issues discussed during a visit by 16 PNG ministers to **Australia**. The delegation met with 10 Australian ministers, including the foreign affairs minister, Penny Wong, the deputy prime minister, Richard Marles, and the immigration minister, Andrew Giles, in the first in-person ministerial forum held since 2019.

Wong told reporters the group "had a very frank and open discussion on visa-related issues – and ministers recognised that high quality timely visa services were an important underpinning of our bilateral ties".

In a [joint statement](#) issued afterwards, the ministers "acknowledged that efficient and speedy visa issuing arrangements would help underpin labour, business and broader people-to-people connections and announced separately a range of steps that would be taken to improve their respective systems".

Ministers agreed to "aim to process at least 75% of completed visitor visa applications within 14 days" and to open in-country visa processing in Papua New Guinea. A ministerial working group, nicknamed "the cut-through committee", will follow up on those issues.

Penny Wong (left) and PNG foreign minister Justin Tkatchenko during a press conference at Parliament House today. Photograph: Lukas Coch/AAP

Wong and the PNG minister for foreign affairs, Justin Tkatchenko, have been placed in charge of [negotiating the details of a security treaty](#) after talks between leaders last month. Wong said the ministers had exchanged draft texts and would be "doing a lot more work in the coming weeks". She added:

We're pleased that that is being progressed and we see this as a natural progression of our security partnership.

Tkatchenko said the treaty was "a work in progress" and reaffirmed the deadline of April to conclude negotiations:

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

We're working with all our other brothers and sisters in the Pacific on this as well. So we look forward to ratifying this treaty agreement in the not-too-distant future.

So we look forward to the Pacific Islands Forum retreat coming up in the next coming days in Fiji. And that will bring all our brothers and sisters together from the Pacific to reunite, especially from Micronesia and [Kiribati](#) and all the rest - our Pacific Island leaders to come back as one voice, one group for the benefit of moving forward together.

Pressed on whether PNG planned to brief the Pacific Islands Forum on the broad outlines of the agreement so it was understood across the region, Tkatchenko said: "Absolutely."

But he declined to draw comparisons between that approach and that of Solomon Islands when it negotiated a security agreement with China.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.30am GMT

block-time published-time 4.16am GMT

Publisher refused appeal in defamation case over claims made in Scientology book

HarperCollins has failed in a bid to have [Australia's](#) highest court rule on legal issues in a defamation case over controversial psychiatric treatments at Sydney's Chelmsford private hospital.

The high court on Friday refused special leave to appeal two aspects of a federal court decision overturning an earlier judgment. That earlier judgment found claims in Steve Cannane's book *Fair Game: The Incredible Untold Story of Scientology* in [Australia](#) were substantially true.

John Gill and John Herron, who has since died, launched defamation proceedings against the publisher and ABC journalist Cannane.

The lawsuit centred on claims made in one chapter about the use in the 1960s and 1970s of deep sleep therapy and electro-convulsive therapy at Chelmsford and the role of Scientologists in exposing it.

Read more from AAP:

Related: [HarperCollins refused appeal in defamation case over claims made in Scientology book](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.26am GMT

block-time published-time 4.10am GMT

I am signing off for the day and leaving you in the excellent hands of Elias Visontay. Have a great weekend!

block-time published-time 3.57am GMT

Plibersek commits \$5m to koalas, pledging to avoid extinction

The initiative in Canberra is part of 32 koala conservation and protection projects being funded through \$5m in community grants from the federal government.

The investment is supporting on-ground and community-led projects across Queensland, NSW and the ACT where koalas are listed nationally as endangered.

The projects will aim to improve koala habitat, reduce threats from feral species and roads by building koala corridors, and improve understanding of koala populations.

Overall, the Australian government is investing more than \$76m through the [Saving Koalas Fund](#) for the conservation and protection of koalas.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

The environment minister, Tanya Plibersek, said:

No one wants to imagine an **Australia** without the koalas. The Albanese Labor government is ensuring that our kids and grandkids will still be able to see koalas in the wild.

Communities across **Australia** play a crucial role in protecting and conserving this beloved animal. This funding is about supporting local groups to do what they do best – getting communities involved in protecting this iconic species.

I am committed to achieving our target of zero new extinctions in **Australia** – this includes the koala.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.03am GMT

block-time published-time 3.44am GMT

Government pledges \$100,000 for Ngunnawal people to track koalas and plant trees in ACT

After that scare at Parliament House, I bring you good news for a different national icon.

The environment minister, Tanya Plibersek, and ACT senator David Pocock have announced \$100,000 will be committed for Ngunnawal people to track koalas and plant trees for the marsupial to forage on in the ACT.

The project is a partnership between the Ngunnawal Community and ACT Government to conduct surveys and monitoring, as well as tree planting events to improve the quality of koala habitat across the ACT.

Pocock says it's a welcome announcement but that "so much more needs to be done" to protect our biodiversity to halt extinctions.

Plibersek also invited the visiting US secretary of the interior, Deb Haaland, to see a koala at the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve where the announcement was made.

During the visit, the minister said she and the secretary discussed threatened species conservation and how to draw on First Nations knowledge to better protect and manage the environment.

enltrWhen you have a US guest, of course you have to take them to see a koala. At Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve with US Secretary of the Interior, [@SecDebHaaland](#) to discuss threatened species conservation + drawing on First Nations knowledge to better protect and manage our environment. pic.twitter.com/RtFifiNPV2

— Tanya Plibersek (@tanya_plibersek) [February 17, 2023](#)

enltrAt Tidbinbilla for [@tanya_plibersek](#) announcing \$100,000 for Ngunnawal people to track koalas and plant trees in the ACT for ?? to forage on. A welcome announcement but so much more needs to be done to protect our biodiversity (including our iconic species) and halt extinctions. pic.twitter.com/SXa9GpU7gp

— David Pocock (@DavidPocock) [February 16, 2023](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.54am GMT

block-time published-time 3.38am GMT

Parliament House police operation resolved with nothing suspicious found

ACT police have said the matter at Parliament House has now been "resolved" with the police cordon lifted:

About 12.45 this afternoon, ACT Policing received a call about a possible suspicious package at Parliament House.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

A cordon was put in place for approximately one hour, with some local road closures, while a search of the area was undertaken.

This matter has now been resolved with nothing suspicious located.

The cordon has been lifted, the building and all roads are now reopened.

A police roadblock outside Parliament House this afternoon. Photograph: Lukas Coch/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.00am GMT

block-time published-time 3.35am GMT

Students protest housing crisis in Sydney CBD

Students from major Sydney universities are gathering in the CBD this afternoon to protest the ongoing housing crisis hitting renters.

The University of Sydney SRC education officer, Yasmine Johnson, says students were “sick of seeing poverty and homelessness alongside gentrification” in Sydney.

The protesters are calling for immediate action from state and federal governments to secure affordable housing.

Johnson says:

In NSW there are currently almost 60,000 people on public housing waitlists, while 164,624 homes sit empty across Greater Sydney.

Students have planned to target several businesses associated with the current housing and cost-of-living crises.

The University of NSW SRC education officer, Cherish Kuehlmann, says the cost of living is going “through the roof”.

Our wages aren’t keeping up. Young people are scraping by on youth allowance or jobseeker, while landlords make our lives worse with price rises.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.46am GMT

block-time published-time 3.30am GMT

Parliament House briefly closed due to bomb threat

ACT police briefly shut a section of **Australia**’s Parliament House due to a bomb threat on Friday.

In a statement, police said “about 12:45 this afternoon, ACT Policing received a call about a possible suspicious package at Parliament House”.

A search of the area is currently being undertaken.

A cordon is in place, with some local road closures in effect, and the public is urged to avoid the area until further notice.

Guardian **Australia** understands the search operation, which was a response to a bomb threat, is now concluded.

Police officers outside Parliament House in Canberra. Photograph: Lukas Coch/AAP

Earlier, at 1.39pm, the Department of Parliamentary Services warned building occupants that the public entrance and Marble Foyer had “been closed due to a police operation”.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

Building occupants and visitors will not be able to access the public entrance or the marble foyer until further notice.

The police operation temporarily interrupted committee work, including the House of Representatives health committee's long Covid inquiry and Senate estimates hearings.

Today Parliament House is hosting a "early years" summit in the Great Hall, adjacent to the public entrance and Marble Foyer.

The summit, which had been suspended, is back under way and members of the public are back in the Marble Foyer.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.42am GMT

block-time published-time 3.24am GMT

Parliament House back to normal following police operation

Our foreign affairs correspondent in Canberra, Daniel Hurst, gave us this update:

Everything is back to normal here in federal parliament's Marble Foyer. The early years summit, which is being held in the adjoining Great Hall has been suspended, but is back under way. And members of the public are back in the Marble Foyer.

The time from evacuation to return to the building was about an hour.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.40am GMT

block-time published-time 3.23am GMT

Morrison says 'no window' for China sanctions before election

The former prime minister Scott Morrison has defended his failure to introduce sanctions against Chinese officials over Xinjiang while he was still in office – now that he is calling for the current government to consider the move.

Morrison said there "just simply wasn't the window" between the Magnitsky-style sanctions laws passing the parliament in December 2021 and the election in May 2022.

Scott Morrison gives a speech at a symposium of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China in Tokyo. Photograph: Androniki Christodoulou/Reuters

He addressed the issue this afternoon after delivering a speech to a symposium in Tokyo organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, a group of parliamentarians that urges democracies to take a strong coordinated stand against the Chinese Communist party:

To be honest when we did all the sanctions off the invasion of Ukraine, we did it not under Magnitsky, we did it under the other [autonomous sanctions] regime that was already there because we could create a country [specific] regime. Magnitsky is great. But it's not the whole cake. It's a slice. And it's an important one, because it gives you discretion, flexibility, you can move fairly quickly and that's good.

We could not or would not have – I don't think ever – have moved on any sanction issue with respect to China without Magnitsky laws.

And the challenge for us was we came into our Magnitsky laws at the end of 2021, we moved through a fairly comprehensive process to consider the first round of them. That got us to mid-March. There was an election in May. And if you're going to – particularly in the Indo-Pacific – for countries like Japan and ***Australia***, if you're going to go down the path of applying sanctions in your own region in particular there's got to be a bit of dialogue amongst

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

partners as well. You don't just drop this on the table. And from our government's point of view there just simply wasn't the window between that first round and when the election was.

But there was a lot of work done about what could be done. So that's why it's appropriately now the consideration of the new government and I wish them well with that.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.36am GMT

block-time published-time 3.17am GMT

Police called to Parliament House over possible suspicious package

ACT police have released a statement about the operation at Parliament House:

About 12.45 this afternoon, ACT Policing received a call about a possible suspicious package at Parliament House.

A search of the area is currently being undertaken.

A cordon is in place, with some local road closures in effect, and the public is urged to avoid the area until further notice.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.21am GMT

block-time published-time 3.11am GMT

Parliament House closed due to police operation

The Department of Parliamentary Services says the public entrance of Parliament House and Marble Foyer have been closed due to a police operation.

Building occupants and visitors will not be able to access the public entrance or the Marble Foyer until further notice.

Further advice will be provided when available.

ACT Police said they received a call about a possible suspicious package at Parliament House about 12.45 this afternoon, and that a search of the area is currently being undertaken.

A cordon is in place, with some local road closures in effect, and the public is urged to avoid the area until further notice.

Police officers with dogs are seen outside Parliament House in Canberra. Photograph: Lukas Coch/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.48am GMT

block-time published-time 3.01am GMT

Experts at long Covid roundtable forced to evacuate Parliament House

Experts participating in a roundtable discussion on long Covid at parliament house have been asked to evacuate due to "a problem in the Marble Foyer".

The postponed roundtable, as part of an inquiry into the condition, is chaired by Prof Tania Sorrell of the University of Sydney, an internationally renowned infectious diseases physician, and includes Prof Sharon Lewin, director of the Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity; Prof Brendan Crabb, director of the Burnet Institute; and former co-chair of Atagi Prof Allen Cheng, who is director of infectious diseases at Monash Health.

There are reports of a "credible threat" at parliament house.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

enltrUPDATE: I'm told the House has been locked-down due to a 'credible threat' in the Marble Foyer. Visitors are currently gathered in public access areas, away from the front of the building. [@9NewsAUS #auspol](#)

— Reece D'Alessandro (@R_DAlessandro9) [February 17, 2023](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.17am GMT

block-time published-time 2.56am GMT

South **Australia** records seven Covid deaths and 42 people in hospital

There were 1,720 new cases in the weekly reporting period, and five people are in intensive care.

enltrSouth Australian weekly COVID-19 update 17/02/23. For more information, visit <https://t.co/XkVcAmeZ6V> [pic.twitter.com/LQ9hqU6Sw7](https://t.co/LQ9hqU6Sw7)

— SA Health (@SAHealth) [February 17, 2023](#)

block-time published-time 2.52am GMT

ACT records six Covid deaths and 10 people in hospital

There were 487 new cases in the weekly reporting period, with no people in intensive care.

enltrWeekly ACT COVID-19 Update – 17 Feb 2023 COVID-19 case numbers New cases this week: 487 (102 PCR and 385 RAT) Total cases since March 2020: 231,529 COVID-19 hospital numbers Active cases in hospital: 10 In ICU: 0 Ventilated: 0 Lives lost: 6 More info <https://t.co/qRDoepyJkh> [pic.twitter.com/q6LaSKaghl](https://t.co/q6LaSKaghl)

— ACT Health (@ACTHealth) [February 17, 2023](#)

block-time published-time 2.44am GMT

Wong brushes off Morrison's foreign policy advice

The foreign affairs minister, Penny Wong, has brushed off advice from the former prime minister Scott Morrison about **Australia**'s relationship with China.

Wong was responding to a question about [Morrison's speech in Tokyo today](#), including his suggestion that **Australia** should consider sanctions against Chinese officials over human rights abuses in Xinjiang. Wong was also asked to respond to Morrison's suggestion that **Australia** should be demanding and expecting an end to China's trade sanctions on Australian products, rather than being thankful for any changes.

Speaking at a press conference in Canberra this afternoon, Wong replied:

I'm not sure how much advice it would be sensible to take from Mr Morrison on foreign policy.

Foreign minister Penny Wong speaks during a press conference in Canberra today. Photograph: Lukas Coch/AAP

Wong said the Australian government never speculated on sanctions decisions in advance, but added that she had "outlined at length our position on sanctions as one of the ways – not the only, but one of the ways – in which **Australia** will express and assert its values".

Wong added:

We have a set of national interests of which, obviously, human rights is central. In relation to trade, I have made clear we believe it is in the interests of both countries, including China, for those trade impediments to be removed.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.50am GMT

block-time published-time 2.40am GMT

Firefighters deploy waterbombing aircraft in Cowra

Firefighters are still working to contain a 322ha fire in Cowra, with waterbombing aircraft being deployed.

enltrADVICE: Conimbla Rd Fire, Cowra (Cowra LGA) Firefighters continue to work on containment of the fire, supported by waterbombing aircraft and heavy machinery, the fire is now approximately 322ha. Today crews are focusing on containments lines on the western edge of the fire. pic.twitter.com/czZXHdfw4u

— NSW RFS (@NSWRFS) [February 17, 2023](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.47am GMT

block-time published-time 2.34am GMT

RBA's Lowe getting good sleep but don't wait up for rate cuts soon

Philip Lowe and RBA colleagues face the economics committee at Parliament House in Canberra. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

The nearly three-hour marathon Reserve Bank quizathon has now wrapped up, and there's a bit to stew over even if markets seemed to "look through" whatever the governor, Philip Lowe, and co had to say.

As one gauge, the Australian dollar started at about 68.8 US cents when he began the session and was lately at 68.7 US cents (not that currency traders were only listening to the economics committee session during those hours). So no surprises.

Anyway, Lowe made it clear that more interest rate rises were coming but did inject the view that the RBA was "not on a predetermined path with interest rates".

We meet every month and we are looking at all the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle every month, and trying to put them together, and if those pieces tell a different story then we will respond.

That's worth noting because words about not being on a preset path had been in recent monthly statements accompanying those metronomic increases in interest rates until this month's. So Lowe wants us to know he (and his eight fellow board members) is not a robot.

Asked about future markets pointing to the RBA cutting rates next year (by about June), Lowe said "that can happen".

"If we get on top of inflation, if inflation expectations stay well-anchored, the supply-side problems get fixed up, wage growth and wage setting doesn't move up too fast, and we can come back on that narrow path that I talked about before," Lowe says in listing a rather long wishlist.

"So that is a plausible scenario, that rates rise and start coming down next year," he says, concluding with a dose of caution. "But a few things would have to go right for that to happen. It is possible but there are other scenarios as well."

Asked about what worries him:

I'd like to be in the media less but apart from that nothing keeps me awake at night.

Bless. Stressed borrowers might like more of what he has, I suppose.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.42am GMT

block-time published-time 2.30am GMT

Parts of Queensland brace for heavy rain as Victoria swelters

With that press conference from Brisbane wrapped up, here are some weather updates for Queensland and Victoria.

The Bureau of Meteorology is warning that parts of Queensland's Gulf Country and north west regions could see heavy rainfall that could lead to flash flooding.

In Victoria, temperatures have been very hot overnight with many locations in inland recording their warmest night since 2020.

enltrSevere Weather Warning for HEAVY RAINFALL that may lead to FLASH FLOODING is current in parts of [#GulfCountry](#) and [#NorthWest](#), including [#Normanton](#) [#Mtlsa](#), with monsoon low in the Gulf. Several FLOOD WATCH/WARNINGS are also current in the area. Warning <https://t.co/qmCl5AXm8s> [pic.twitter.com/ClmjnlqD1a](https://t.co/ClmjnlqD1a)

— Bureau of Meteorology, Queensland (@BOM_Qld) [February 17, 2023](#)

enltrIt was a warm night for [#Vic](#) ahead of a trough & cool change moving through today. [#Ballarat](#) fell to 23.4°C, its warmest night since 25 Jan 2019. [#Hopetoun](#) (27.1°C), [#CapeOtway](#) (23.5°C) and [#WilsonsProm](#) (22.4°C) all recorded their warmest night since 2020. <https://t.co/8yi9i05yXo> [pic.twitter.com/lhm4lZXzml](https://t.co/lhm4lZXzml)

— Bureau of Meteorology, Victoria (@BOM_Vic) [February 17, 2023](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.46am GMT

block-time published-time 2.18am GMT

Olympics will help put Brisbane on the world stage, PM says

Anthony Albanese is talking up the value of the Brisbane 2032 Olympics for **Australia** as a whole.

Framing the commonwealth's multibillion-dollar contribution, the prime minister says "this is nation-building" and "this event is a great event for Queensland, but it is great for **Australia** as well".

Albanese also says the Olympics will help assert Brisbane on the world's stage:

We have a stable legal-political system, we have a multicultural community as well, that is a bonus for us, is a human asset, is what we have here in Queensland, and Queensland is positioned to be a driving force.

He says Queensland's decentralised population spread outside of Brisbane means that having Olympic venues in other cities in the state, including in north Queensland, will help in "projecting the positive image of Queensland to our north [Asia], but indeed, to the world as well".

Anthony Albanese and Annastacia Palaszczuk shake hands after signing a funding agreement for the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Photograph: Darren England/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.31am GMT

block-time published-time 2.12am GMT

Palaszczuk asked about rising cost of Gabba redevelopment

The Queensland premier, Annastacia Palaszczuk, is asked why the cost for the Gabba redevelopment has risen.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

She says:

There has been a whole lot of factors taken into account. The prices have gone up for commodities and everything in terms of we are going to be doing the demolition. But this is not unusual, this is happening for projects, this is happening with projects all over the world.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.25am GMT

block-time published-time 2.10am GMT

Olympics infrastructure to have 'transformational impact on Queensland', PM says

Speaking about the commonwealth's investment in 2032 Olympics venues, Anthony Albanese says the games "will be the largest event that's ever been held in Queensland".

The prime minister says:

The Australian government has worked cooperatively with the Palaszczuk government to secure infrastructure projects that will have a long-term and transformational impact on Queensland as we count down to 2032. My government is ensuring that every dollar that is invested has lasting benefits, not just for Brisbane but for all Queenslanders and all Australians.

The Queensland premier, Annastacia Palaszczuk, says the venues will serve the state well after the Olympics.

For example, the Gabba has hosted sport for more than a century and is home to cricket and AFL most weeks of the year. It must be upgraded to maintain our competitiveness for international sport and events. Brisbane Arena will provide a new indoor entertainment centre – something Brisbane's CBD has not had since the demolition of Festival Hall in 2003.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.26am GMT

block-time published-time 2.07am GMT

Albanese and Palaszczuk announce multibillion-dollar Olympics deal

The Albanese government has announced a multibillion-dollar funding deal with the Queensland government as it prepares for the 2032 Olympics.

In a joint statement, Anthony Albanese and Annastacia Palaszczuk said the Queensland government would fund the \$2.7bn redevelopment of the Gabba while the commonwealth would provide \$2.5bn for the Brisbane Arena development.

Anthony Albanese and Annastacia Palaszczuk during a press conference in Brisbane today. Photograph: Darren England/AAP

Brisbane Arena is planned to be built within the Roma Street precinct with easy access for people of all mobilities to the city's rail and bus network.

Sixteen new or upgraded venues will receive close to \$1.87bn in co-funding on a 50-50 basis between the two governments.

The plan includes upgrading nine existing venues: Wyaralong Flatwater Centre and Precinct for rowing, Sunshine Coast Stadium for football, Brisbane Aquatic Centre and Precinct for aquatics, Barlow Park in Cairns for football, Toowoomba Sports Ground for football, Brisbane International Shooting Centre, Sunshine Coast Mountain Bike Centre, Anna Meares Velodrome and BMX Track, and Queensland Tennis Centre.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

The funding will also cover the construction of five new venues: Breakfast Creek (Brisbane) Indoor Sports Centre for basketball, Chandler Indoor Sports Centre for gymnastics, Sunshine Coast Indoor Sports Centre for basketball, Moreton Bay Indoor Sports Centre for boxing, Redlands Whitewater Centre for canoe, as well as a Temporary International Broadcasting Centre and the Logan Indoor Sports Centre as a potential training or competition venue.

The commonwealth's contribution for the Olympic venues totals \$3.435bn.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.17am GMT

block-time published-time 1.43am GMT

Senate estimates on Indigenous affairs gets 'off to a fiery start'

I've been keeping across Senate estimates for the finance and public administration legislation committee in Canberra this morning, looking at Indigenous affairs across portfolios.

So far there's been mostly Indigenous senators from Labor, the Coalition and independents asking questions of Aboriginal land councils across the vast Northern Territory.

Things have gotten a bit heated at times, with some senators feeling like they haven't been listened to and keep getting interrupted.

This is also the former Greens turned independent Victorian senator Lidia Thorpe's first time asking questions. She's appearing via Zoom, along with the Western Australian Greens senator Dorinda Cox, who has taken over the First Nations spokesperson role for the party, South Australian Liberal senator Kerryne Liddle, Northern Territory senator and Country Liberal party member Jacinta Nampijinpa Price, who sits with the Nationals, and Victorian Labor senator Jana Stewart.

The Central Land Council, Northern Land Council, Tiwi Land Council and Anindilyakwa Land Council have appeared this morning.

Throughout the morning there have been calls to order, with questions running too long or people being interrupted, and Thorpe saying things are "off to a fiery start on Blak Friday".

Much of the questions are concerning free and prior and informed consent under the NT legislation and how that is worked out with Traditional Owners, with mining, fracking and gas works on their land, government funding and allocations of that funding, employment and economic opportunities and support for the Voice and Constitutional recognition.

Stewart asks the Tiwi Land Council what advice they'd give the opposition leader, Peter Dutton, on the referendum going forward.

Joe Martin-Jard, the CEO of the Northern Land Council in the NT, suggests that Dutton should "quietly listen" and come at the process with an "open heart".

"He should come to this with an open mind and an open heart and be prepared to listen to Aboriginal people, engaging them on Country meetings and talking in quiet spaces in a quiet way and listening. That might help progress the debate," Martin-Jard told estimates.

Thorpe interjects here, asking if Stewart's questioning is "free advertising for the voice", and the Labor senator Louise Pratt, chair of today's committee, fires back that it's not a point of order and senators can ask what questions they want of witnesses.

The Tiwi Land Council's Robert Graham says there is lots more "talking and understanding" to be done on the voice but constitutional recognition and the upcoming referendum are being "positively" viewed by many there.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.14am GMT

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

block-time published-time 1.26am GMT

Burney urges Dutton to 'stay engaged' after Indigenous voice meeting

The minister for Indigenous Australians, Linda Burney, has said she is unaware of exactly what the opposition leader, Peter Dutton, told a referendum working group meeting yesterday, because she was asked not to attend.

It is understood the shadow minister for Indigenous Australians, Julian Leeser, wrote to Burney on 15 February to thank her for a recent phone call and to request a private meeting with the group, which was agreed.

Burney was addressing reporters at Parliament House in Canberra today. When asked for her reaction to reports that Dutton told the working group yesterday that he believed this referendum was on a path to failure at this point, Burney said:

I'm not going to comment publicly on discussions within the working group. But I will say that we are on track to introduce the constitution alteration bill in parliament in March. And then there'll be a Senate inquiry, a committee process around which the bill will be examined, which is very normal, as you know. People will be able to make submissions.

And I say to Mr Dutton: please stay engaged with the working group. That is certainly the desire of the working group. Unfortunately, I was asked to leave the room by Mr Dutton, so I wasn't actually there to hear what he had to say. I just believe that it's important that all parliamentarians engage with this process, come to understand it, and also recognise it's about two things: It's about improving the life outcomes for First Nations people. And it's about recognising 65,000 years, something that we as Australians should be all proud of in our founding document.

Peter Dutton speaks during a meeting of the voice to parliament referendum working group in Canberra yesterday. Photograph: Lukas Coch/AAP

Burney was also asked whether the voice should have the ability to advise both the parliament and the executive government, or whether the government should remove the executive component to garner more support from conservatives. She replied:

I'm taking my direction from the working group. And the working group will come to its final position around these issues at our next meeting. The importance of the working group, and the engagement group, ensures that First Nations people are at the decision-making table when we make decisions around questions and amendments and so forth. It is a process and I will not get ahead of the working group. And I am very sure that the momentum that's gathering behind the voice and the decency of the Australian public will see a successful referendum.

The Sydney Morning Herald and the Age had reported earlier that prior to the meeting, Dutton "requested that no government MPs attend the briefing, which would otherwise be chaired by Indigenous Australians Minister Linda Burney and senator Pat Dodson" but a government staff member was in the room to take notes.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.59am GMT

block-time published-time 1.23am GMT

'Eyes of the world are on Australia' ahead of referendum, Burney says after US meeting

The minister for Indigenous Australians, Linda Burney, has declared "the eyes of the world are on Australia" in the lead up to the referendum on a voice to parliament, after she met with the visiting US secretary of the interior, Deb Haaland.

Haaland, the first Native American to serve as a cabinet secretary, visited Canberra at the end of a weeklong visit to Australia.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

US ambassador Caroline Kennedy, US secretary of the interior Deb Haaland and Indigenous Australians minister Linda Burney at an Indigenous smoking ceremony at Parliament House in Canberra. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

Burney told reporters at a joint press conference with Haaland at Parliament House:

The eyes of the world are on **Australia** as we approach a referendum on constitutional recognition through a voice later this year.

Haaland diplomatically avoided giving an explicit position on the voice to parliament proposal, but spoke in general terms about the importance of listening to Indigenous people:

What I can say is that with respect to the United States, having this position of first Native American to serve at a cabinet level position ever in the history of our country, it was very important to me to make sure that we were doing everything we could to uphold the trust and treaty obligations of the United States. President Biden is working so hard to make sure that his government, his administration, looks like America, and wants native people to have a seat at the table. And so I think that for our part we will continue just to work hard and do what we can to make sure that we're upholding those responsibilities.

Later, when asked whether the west – including the US and **Australia** – was at a moment of reckoning, Haaland said:

Indigenous people have been speaking for a long time. Some people haven't stopped to listen to them. So I don't think the Indigenous people have changed, they're still speaking out. It's the people who are in leadership positions that are finally opening their ears to hear what they have to say and what they have to say is incredibly important.

Burney also spoke about the latest domestic political situation with the voice proposal. More details on that front soon.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.35am GMT

block-time published-time 1.15am GMT

Ecstasy use linked to music festival-related hospital admissions, NSW Health says

NSW Health is flagging concerns around the risks of ecstasy (MDMA) use, after a spate of patients being admitted to hospital following attendance at a music festival in Sydney last weekend.

In a statement the department said:

A panel of toxicology experts has determined MDMA as the cause of toxicity in these patients. No contaminants or other substances were detected in the patients' toxicology testing, meaning there is no evidence of a 'bad batch' as the cause.

The medical director of the NSW Poisons Information Centre, Dr Darren Roberts, said consumption of the drug can cause serious illness, which may include severe agitation, raised body temperature, seizures or fits, heart rhythm problems and death:

Consumption of MDMA has been linked with cases of serious illness and death, particularly when multiple doses are consumed.

The amount of MDMA in a tablet or capsule can vary substantially, even within the same batch.

While one MDMA tablet or capsule alone can cause some people to experience toxicity, the risk of serious toxicity is much greater if multiple tablets or capsules of MDMA are consumed over a short period, or if MDMA is consumed in combination with other stimulants.

Roberts said the weather could have also been a factor:

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

The high temperatures are also likely to have contributed to the high numbers of critically unwell patients at last weekend's music festival. Taking a break from dancing, seeking shade if it's sunny and drinking water are important measures to reduce the risk of overheating at festivals.

The department of health urged people to seek help if they were unwell, pointing to the teams of peer volunteers from programs such as DanceWize NSW and the Acon Rovers who are able to support people at many major festivals. The department also said that other event staff are also trained to help patrons.

You can read more about this issue of drug safety from Michael McGowan :

Related: [*Dominic Perrottet's hardline stance on drugs is 'magical thinking', says pill testing advocate*](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.28am GMT

block-time published-time 1.05am GMT

Lowe: competition among banks is helping borrowers, savers not so much

RBA governor Philip Lowe is well into the second half of the House of Reps "grilling".

To be honest, there's not a lot of sizzle. Tania Lawrence, a WA Labor MP, even cited a "Rosemary from Stoneville" who had written to say the RBA was doing "a very fine job". Lowe says, with a wry smile, "If you are writing back to Rosemary, could you pass on my thanks?"

Less cheery though are comments from Lowe that banks were very quick to pass on higher loan rates but "most of them very slow to pass on [those higher rates] to deposit rates and they need to do better there".

Lowe advises:

So if you are unhappy with the interest rate your bank is paying, go to another one because there are some very good deals out there.

You can easily get 4% or above on a full functionality deposit account which you can use with all the modern payment methods.

So my advice here is switch and if Australians switch, then the banks have to respond.

(The ACCC has also been tasked by treasurer Jim Chalmers to examine the deposit matter more closely.)

Reserve Bank governor Philip Lowe speaks during an economics committee hearing at Parliament House in Canberra. Photograph: Lukas Coch/AAP

Competition, though, appears to be working a bit better when it comes to mortgage rates. Of the 300 basis-point increases prior to this month's extra 25bp, mortgage holders had only seen rises of 260bp.

There is competition for new borrowers and there is this discounting and again, people switching. I encourage people to do it.

Bert van Manen, a Queensland LNP MP, makes the reasonable point about the challenges facing those wanting to refinance if they are facing repayment stress (such as having "negative equity", if the value of their asset has dropped below the outstanding loan size).

Lowe notes that issue "is not starting to occur at the moment" with the rate of refinancing at a record high. Banks "are competing very aggressively for existing customers including some of the customers on fixed rate loans", he says.

So no problem there - yet.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.13am GMT

block-time published-time 1.00am GMT

New Zealand minister: 'We can expect that there will be further lives lost'

The rising death toll from ex-Cyclone Gabrielle comes as first responders eye a spell of good weather which will improve prospects for rescue teams and recovery.

Major efforts are being made across the country to restore power and transport links, with flooding, landslips and tree falls blocking many roads.

As access improves, authorities warn more bodies could be found as emergency services are able to access previously cut-off communities.

East Coast MP and regional development minister Kiritapu Allan said:

We can expect that there will be further lives lost.

Napier Port chief executive Todd Dawson told Stuff the defence force and police - who have sent huge resources into Hawke's Bay - had also set up a temporary morgue at the port.

Alongside the loss, stories of heroism are emerging from the catastrophe.

Urban Search and Rescue team leader Ken Cooper from FENZ said a man walked 70km from Putorino to Napier to give rescue workers help with their missions. He told Radio NZ.

That's a day and a half walk.

He walked to give us a list of people still trapped up in the East Coast.

A woman was killed in Putorino on Tuesday when a house collapsed on her under the weight of a landslip.

- AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.04am GMT

block-time published-time 12.56am GMT

Tragedy for a New Zealand family after Cyclone Gabrielle

AAP provides more details on the cyclone fatalities in NZ:

The mother of a two-year-old who drowned in floodwaters in Eskdale, in Hawke's Bay, has given a heartbreaking public statement of grief for her lost child.

Ella Collins said water filled her home up to 10cm below the ceiling, with her partner Jack helping her and four-year-old daughter Imogen survive.

Mother Ella Collins wrote:

Our wee Ivy was such a bright shining light.

We were not wealthy at all, but we lived such rich and love filled days.

This tragedy has cost us everything; our home and everything in it.

This loss of Ivy will deeply impact ourselves and many others forever. Right now it seems an insurmountable mountain, but we have each other.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.59am GMT

block-time published-time 12.49am GMT

Cyclone Gabrielle toll now at seven in New Zealand

Cyclone Gabrielle's death toll in New Zealand has climbed to seven, as civil defence officials declare a major crisis in Gisborne.

Tairāwhiti Civil Defence has asked tens of thousands of residents of Gisborne to stop using mains water as its water treatment facility has failed. A statement reads:

This is a major crisis. Our city has no water. Don't turn your taps on.

Two new deaths have been confirmed in the past 24 hours.

This morning, police said a person died in floodwaters near Waiohiki, south-west of Napier.

News outlet Stuff reported the body was of a man in his 70s.

Waiohiki is wedged between two rivers - the Tutaekuri and the Ngaruroro - which burst their banks under huge rainfall on Tuesday.

On Thursday night, a sixth death was confirmed in Murawai, on Auckland's hard-hit west coast.

The man, Craig Stevens, was a volunteer firefighter who was admitted to hospital on Monday after attending a house which then collapsed on him.

The same house collapse also killed fellow firefighter Dave van Zwanenberg, whose body was found on Wednesday.

Fire and Emergency NZ (FENZ) chief executive Kerry Gregory said his crew were "still coming to terms" with the fact they'd lost two comrades. He said:

All of Fire and Emergency will feel his loss, and my heart goes out to his family.

- AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.51am GMT

block-time published-time 12.46am GMT

What is a quiet moment on the blog for if not plugging your own stories? While the politics live blog has been firing with parliament sitting, I helped our medical editor Melissa Davey on this series on the state of bulk-billing in **Australia**.

Here's the second story in the series, out today, about the areas where Australians are most struggling to access to free GP care:

Related: [Revealed: the areas where Australians are struggling to access free GP care](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.49am GMT

block-time published-time 12.33am GMT

Warnings continue for the bushfire in Queensland's western Darling Downs.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

enlrMONITOR CONDITIONS - Hookwood, Myall Park and Kowguran (near Miles) - fire as at 9:23am Friday, 17 February 2023. For all current warnings, updates and mapping go to <https://t.co/vqyJTUPBhe>.
[pic.twitter.com/xkrhlx9n6Q](https://t.co/vqyJTUPBhe)

— Qld Fire & Emergency (@QldFES) [February 16, 2023](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.42am GMT

block-time published-time 12.21am GMT

Managing expectations a central task for RBA's Lowe

An interesting line of questions from Labor MP (and economist) Andrew Charlton led to some insights into how the RBA seeks to manage expectations regarding interest rate changes.

Charlton was asking about why the RBA shifted from its 50 basis point track back to interest rate rises of half that amount. Recall that after an initial 25bp rise last May (memo, shadow treasurer Angus Taylor, it was not 10bps), the RBA unleashed four half-point cash rate rises in a row. Then, [last October](#), it reverted to 25bp rises, and we've had three more since.

Anyway, Lowe's first response about the shift to the slower pace (at the time **Australia** was the first advanced nation to slow the rate of rate rises) was to explain the RBA's intent is to be consistent. That's another way of saying he's not inclined to pause and need to restart rate rises if inflation perks up.

Lowe said:

If you are doing it consistently over a number of meetings that keeps public attention on monetary policy, and the seriousness of the task that we have.

With a mild dig at the media, he noted that we focus on the change of interest rates, not the level [guilty].

So when we are changing them each month, that gets a lot of coverage... people focus on it incredibly strongly ... The world is uncertain, and when it is uncertain, it is better to move consistently and predictably rather than in steps.

And so, if the bank had kept up with those 50bp increases "we could more quickly get to the peak rate and then people would say 'Oh well, they are done', and the effectiveness and the focus on monetary policy and our task would be diminished," Lowe said.

On that score, perhaps it's time to resume meetings in January rather than take that month off and let complacency – from the media and the populace – take over.

The last one was in January 1992, when the RBA slashed its cash rate a full percentage point to 7.5%.

Perhaps thinking about the consequences of his comments, Lowe later adds in a session about his public comments: "In January, people don't want to hear about interest rates."

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.42am GMT

block-time published-time 12.14am GMT

Australia deploys 25 emergency personnel to New Zealand to assist with cyclone response

A team of Australian disaster experts will be deployed to New Zealand within the next 24 hours to assist with the recovery in the wake of ex-Tropical Cyclone Gabrielle.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

An impact assessment team, made up of 25 expert officers from Queensland Fire and Emergency Services and contributions from other jurisdictions, will be sent to regional areas of New Zealand to assist Fire and Emergency New Zealand with the response.

It comes a week after more than 70 emergency responders were despatched to Turkey, where they are currently assisting the recovery in the aftermath of the deadly earthquake.

The foreign minister, Penny Wong, said of the latest deployment:

Our close relationship with New Zealand has meant we have been able to mobilise assistance quickly in response to this disaster. Whether it be as far away as Turkiye or as close as New Zealand, we stand ready to do our part to help our international counterparts in times of distress.

The minister for emergency management, Murray Watt, said

Unfortunately, over the past few years we have become experts in flood response and recovery, and these teams will be of great help to the New Zealand authorities. In the wake of our Black Summer bushfires, the New Zealand government moved quickly to provide assistance here on the ground. Their crews also supported our State Emergency Services during the recent floods. Our neighbours have been there for us, and we are more than willing to return the favour in their hour of need.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.16am GMT

block-time published-time 12.08am GMT

Campese withdraws as NSW Labor candidate for Monaro

Former NRL star Terry Campese has withdrawn as the New South Wales Labor candidate for Monaro, just five weeks out from the state election.

He says since being picked as the candidate he has learned politics is about a “win at all costs mentality” and he does not want his life dragged through the media.

Campese:

Today I'm announcing that I will step down as Labor's candidate. Not because my heart isn't in it but because I love this community too much to drag it through the media - whether they are truthful or not. However, I will continue to serve my community in the same way I have over the last decade, through the work of my foundation and other charities. Perhaps in the future things will change and we will see more community members put their hand up to be involved in politics. It's clear we need a fresh start in New South Wales and our communities do too.

Campese has been the subject of a number of media reports in recent weeks including the publishing of photos at a sex-themed party where he was dressed as a scantily clad police officer.

The opposition is now without a candidate in the seat it needs to win off the Nationals to take power in March.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.16am GMT

block-time published-time 11.57pm GMT

Anxiety and depression symptoms ‘fairly common’ early in long Covid

Dr Ruth Vine, deputy chief medical officer for mental health, is asked what needs to be implemented to deal with rises in mental health issues for people living with long Covid. She says:

Symptoms of anxiety and depression, some symptoms consistent with post traumatic stress disorder, are fairly common in the early part of long Covid.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

Most of the research would tend to suggest that they do return to baseline over time and that one of the most important things actually is to give people hope of that recovery.

The committee's co-chair, Melissa McIntosh, responds:

That's interesting, because a lot of the evidence that's come through [the inquiry] – they're not displaying hope. They're really saying that they're suffering and no one's listening.

In a later session, the question is put to associate prof Nada Hamad, a clinician who testifies powerfully about her own experiences of long Covid. She says:

I don't think it's about hope. I think it's knowledge, it's empowerment, it is protection ... I want to be able to continue living despite the disabilities I've accumulated ... I want to be comfortable in wearing a mask because everybody knows that some people must wear a mask and that you should help them and wear a mask around them.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.04am GMT

block-time published-time 11.54pm GMT

Long Covid data collection 'very complicated', chief medical officer Paul Kelly says

At the public hearing into the impacts of long Covid, data collection on the condition in [Australia](#) is emerging as a problem. Labor MP Anne Stanley asks:

Data collection has been the biggest issue across jurisdictions ... whose responsibility do you think it should be to define what data needs to be collected?

And later again:

I am struggling to understand given the amount of evidence we have about the lack of data, three years after this started, how we can't – with all the brainy people around who can do algorithms and all that – that we can't have some sort of collection ...

The chief medical officer, Prof Paul Kelly, responds:

The biggest issue we have in infectious diseases is that we do not have notifiable, identifiable disease data at the national level – there's legal impediments to that.

... The second thing is tasking us with having a clearer definition that can be useful to diagnose long Covid. The ones we're using at the moment – the WHO definition, the NICE definition from the UK, they're great for research purposes, because they're so broad. But in terms of trying to actually understand this thing, we have to get beyond it and if no one else is going to do it, then we should do it here.

... What data do you actually collect when you've got a new disease characterised by 200 different symptoms, with a range of tests that are being done in different ways in different places, looking at different elements of long Covid. It's very complicated.

The deputy chief medical office, Prof Michael Kidd, adds:

One of the challenges is that some people presenting with symptoms of long Covid, it'll be recorded around the symptoms and what's done to address those symptoms – of depression or anxiety or fatigue or breathlessness – and there may not actually be a record of this person having been diagnosed with long Covid as such ... It may be that we miss out in the data on actually capturing a lot of people.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.59pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.49pm GMT

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

RBA says labour market still 'tight' despite jobless rate climbing to 3.7%

RBA governor Philip Lowe and senior economist Luci Ellis have downplayed those January labour market numbers, including 15,500 jobs being lost and the jobless rate climbing to 3.7% from 3.5% in December (both seasonally adjusted).

There were some caveats with those numbers (as [we noted here](#)), not least that many people reporting they had lost jobs had actually signed up for new ones. As the survey was taken only up to 14 January, it's reasonable to think many firms were yet to restart full operations and welcome those shiny new hires.

Ellis said the usual seasonal shifts "have gone awry" as a result of the Covid pandemic. One of those changes was that many people had built up holiday leave ("revenge vacations" you might say), and more of them took time off than was typical in January.

In January, there is normally a spike in those figures and these people are counted as unemployed in the numbers.

Ellis noted that by February, 70% of those people could be expected to be working.

But there was an additional 100,000 people waiting to start a new job in January than there were in pre-pandemic Januarys," Ellis said. "So you can think that is probably made a 50- to 70,000-person difference to employment, which we think will come through in the next month or so.

In other words:

The labour market is a bit less tight than it was a few months ago but we would still regard it as being tight and this is an area we are watching closely.

Or as Lowe chimed in a bit later, those January jobs numbers were "just one piece of information".

We know from other sources that businesses still want to hire workers. The job ads are high, job vacancies are high, so things have tailed off a bit late last year.

So, those "other indicators we have suggest the labour market is still very tight and yesterday's data didn't affect that assessment", Lowe said

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.54pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.45pm GMT

Icac discontinues investigation into NSW rail corporation TAHE

An investigation by the New South Wales corruption watchdog into the formation and running of the state's controversial rail corporation has been discontinued after it could not find any evidence of corrupt conduct.

The independent commission against corruption had been investigating Transport Asset Holding Entity, or TAHE, since October 2021.

Icac was looking into whether people involved in setting it up and running it had engaged in corrupt conduct, including in the commissioning of a number of reports from KPMG, and in the termination of the NSW transport secretary's employment in late 2020.

On Friday, a spokesperson for the commission said:

The investigation did not identify any evidence of corrupt conduct. As a result, the commission has discontinued its investigation and does not propose taking any further action with respect to the matter.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

A January report from the state's auditor general concluded the corporation's formation was ineffective, incohesive and opaque and the corporation was designed to meet the government's immediate budgetary goals.

TAHE was established in 2020 after seven years of planning to transfer the state's \$40bn rail assets out of the hands of the transport department and into a state-owned corporation.

Related: [*'Ineffective' rail corporation was designed to meet NSW budget goals, auditor general says*](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.50pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.39pm GMT

Australian Tax Office continues raids tackling biggest GST fraud in Australian history

The Australian Tax Office-led Serious Financial Crimes Taskforce (SFCT) has this week tackled the biggest GST fraud in **Australia**'s history, Operation Protego.

The law enforcement activity saw warrants executed in three states against 10 individuals suspected of promoting the fraud, including on social media.

Stephen Jones, the assistant treasurer, has welcomed the "swift action" of the major operation begun in early 2022.

In a statement, Jones described that people invent fake businesses and lodge false Australian business number (ABN) applications, then attempt to submit fictitious Business Activity Statements to gain a dishonest GST refund.

Jones stressed that these raids "sends a strong signal that tax fraud will not be tolerated."

He said it was alleged that this is "not accidental over-claiming" but rather people "took deliberate steps to engage in tax crime and encouraged others to do the same".

Tax crime is not victimless. It takes money out of the hip pockets of all Australians.

The SFCT has advised that Operation Protego has entered the compliance phase, with more charges expected to be laid over coming months.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.56am GMT

block-time published-time 11.29pm GMT

Explosion in number of high-paid NSW public servants costs extra \$800m a year

NSW taxpayers are spending nearly \$800m a year more on executive wages after a five-fold increase in senior government executive positions, AAP reports.

The number of senior executives grew from 708 in 2010 to 3,680 in 2021.

With the average executive receiving \$256,000 a year, the bill has risen nearly \$800 million, shadow treasurer Daniel Mookhey said today.

It's obscene that [the premier is] happy to pay this but won't even think about giving a fair pay rise to our teachers, nurses and paramedics and healthcare workers, let alone negotiate.

Twelve years of this government has created a surplus of top bureaucrats and a deficit of essential workers.

In the final years of the last Labor government, senior executive positions were slashed by 171, leaving one executive for every 400 public servants.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

Multiple remuneration tribunal members noted this was a “very small” proportion.

In 2021, one executive oversaw an average of 115 employees.

Over the same 11-year period, NSW teacher numbers grew 7.1% - the slowest of any mainland state, according to ABS figures.

Taking in all specialist support staff and admin staff such as teachers aides, numbers grew 14.6%.

Labor education spokeswoman Prue Car said:

The minister for education continues to insist the teacher shortage is a nationwide problem, but this data shows that NSW is recording the largest declines and the slowest recruitment across the nation.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.35pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.10pm GMT

Lowe: RBA expects to see lower costs being paid by firms on global markets reflected locally soon

Unlike his appearance before Senate estimates, RBA governor Philip Lowe provided an opening statement to the House of Representatives economics committee.

In doing so, he provided this line of reasoning behind the record run of interest rate rises, and indeed, why more are needed.

Inflation was running at the highest since the 1990s, and is “too high, way too high”. That’s not really new of course, but one element of particular surprise was that - unlike elsewhere - **Australia** at the end of 2022 did not see a slowdown in the rate of goods price increases.

In follow-up questions from Daniel Mulino, a Labor MP, Lowe implied companies had been slow in passing on lower prices. “We know firms are paying less on global markets” for these goods, and the RBA expects to see those lower costs reflected locally soon. Something for the ACCC to look at too, it would seem.

And Lowe echoed precisely the wording in [the statement accompanying](#) the RBA’s rate rise on 7 February, namely: “the board expects that further increases will be needed over the months ahead to ensure that inflation returns to target and this period of high inflation is only temporary”.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.18pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.01pm GMT

Fears avian botulism could be spreading among birds in Victoria

Wildlife Victoria fears the toxin that is most likely the cause of [more than 350 bird deaths at a nature reserve south-west of Bendigo](#) could be spreading.

Wildlife Victoria has recorded close to 450 animals at Bells Swamp, including 55 requiring euthanasia and 20 being determined well enough to be transported to Melbourne for specialist treatment.

Wildlife Victoria said while testing is ongoing, it understands that avian botulism is the most likely cause.

Avian botulism presents as paralysis with infected birds showing lethargy, an inability to walk or fly, or to hold their head up. Impacted birds often drown when they can no longer hold their heads above water.

A statement from Wildlife Victoria said there was the potential to spread the toxin to other waterways and regions:

As flying species, ducks and waterbirds have the potential to spread the toxin to other waterways and regions.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

Wildlife Victoria are aware of two other reports of waterbirds displaying similar symptoms outside of Bells Swamp, suggesting this may become a wider issue.

Duck species represent the majority of those animals impacted, with chestnut teals, grey teals, pacific black and wood ducks all impacted. Other impacted birds include spoonbills, moorhens, coots, White-faced herons, and magpie larks.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.08pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.58pm GMT

National long Covid strategy in development

Representatives from the Department of Health and Aged Care are answering questions at a parliamentary inquiry into the impacts of long Covid and repeated Covid infections.

The chief medical officer, Prof Paul Kelly, is asked by Labor MP Dr Michelle Ananda-Rajah whether there is a national long Covid strategy being developed – something encompassing data collection, prevention, immunisation, treatment and research.

Kelly:

The short answer is yes, absolutely ... we as a department have an effect – me personally, [I] have been charged by the [health] minister to develop such a strategy, and that is well under way.

Ananda-Rajah:

Do you have a timeline, Professor Kelly, on when you're going to land this strategy?

Kelly:

It depends very much on your timeline, because I think to develop such a strategy whilst this committee is continuing to meet and to deliberate is fine, but to finalise it – we can't do that until we receive your advice.

Ananda-Rajah adds that more funding into long Covid research is needed, with an emphasis on culturally diverse communities:

Long Covid clinical trials absolutely I believe need to be funded. But I would urge the department to strongly consider mandating inreach into communities, that funders are actually forced to ... stipulate a certain number of culturally diverse people be recruited into these trials, otherwise we will continue to ... have these people underrepresented going forward.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.01pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.56pm GMT

Central Victoria experiencing first extreme fire danger day of summer

It is also its first day under the new fire danger rating system that was introduced last year.

Victoria has also declared a total fire ban for the central and north central fire weather districts, which stretch from Port Phillip Bay all the way up to Bendigo.

CFA chief officer Jason Heffernan said fire conditions could make it difficult to control any fires that may start.

Tomorrow's conditions could make it difficult for firefighters to suppress a fire should one start; therefore, we are asking people to take heed of the Total Fire Ban conditions.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

People need to be aware of the increased fire danger and ensure your fire plan covers all possible contingencies.

The new national fire danger rating system has been in place since 1 September, 2022, and is intended to simplify the previous six-tier rating system for ease of public communication and planning.

It replaces a model that used the McArthur fire danger index, developed in the 1960s, with rating [based on the fire behaviour index \(FBI\)](#), a scale from 0 to 100 that draws on models of fire behaviour for different fuel types.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.58pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.52pm GMT

Lowe on new \$5 note

Lowe is speaking about the new design of the \$5 banknote, which was announced a couple of weeks ago, with a design honouring **Australia's** First Nations to replace Queen Elizabeth II.

The other side of the note will continue to feature this building and its forecourt. Given the national significance of the issue, the board decided to consult the Australian government before it made a decision. In response, the government indicated its support for a design that honoured the first Australians.

The new note will continue the RBA's proud tradition of having First Australian imagery on our banknote. Some of you might recall the \$1 paper banknote issued in 1966 and you might recall the \$10 polymer banknote issued in 1998, both of which feature the art and culture of First Nations peoples, and our new \$5 note will continue that tradition.

Australia's coins are produced by the Royal Australian Mint and will continue to have the image of the monarch on one side. The RBA is now embarking on a process of consultation with First Australians on the new design, we anticipate it will be at least a couple of years before the new banknote is ready for circulation. Until then the current \$5 banknote will continue to be issued and it will still be able to be used once the new banknote enters circulation in a few years' time.

Lowe wraps up his speech with those comments on the \$5 note and is now taking questions from the committee.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.55pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.48pm GMT

Household spending is 'complicated' picture at the moment, Lowe says

Lowe is speaking about households, which he says is a "complicated" picture, and he is unsure of whether households will continue to spend following the holiday period:

It is not clear whether households will want to spend the savings in coming months or whether they really see them as part of their long-term wealth to be spent gradually over a long period of time.

It is also possible that the resilience evident in household spending on services recently is simply because this was the first holiday period for three years that Covid restrictions were not in place. If what we have been seen recently is extra spending, as people enjoy their usual freedom for the first time in three years, a period of belt tightening could now follow.

But it is also possible that the extra savings and jobs are giving part of the population sufficient confidence to keep spending just at the same time that other people are finding things very difficult at the moment. So it is a really complicated picture at the moment on the household side.

Reserve Bank governor Philip Lowe at House Economics Committee hearing at Parliament House in Canberra, Friday, 17 February, 2023. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.52pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.45pm GMT

Lowe says inflation expected to be 'around 3%' by mid 2025

Lowe says the central bank's assessment is that inflation is likely to have peaked at the end of last year and will now start declining.

The central forecast is for CPI inflation to decline to 4.75% this year and around 3% by mid 2025.

We have not yet seen evidence of a moderation in goods price inflation in Australia but we have seen evidence of that elsewhere around the world and we expect the same to take place here over the months ahead.

Supply chain problems are being resolved, shipping costs are normalising and oil prices are off their peak. The lower prices and lower rates of inflation in global markets should flow through into Australia.

While this will help in the return of inflation to target, it is unlikely to be enough without also observing some ongoing moderation of demand.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.48pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.43pm GMT

Lowe acknowledges the 'uneven' effect of interest rate rises

The instrument we have to achieve this is interest rates which are acknowledged can be a very blunt instrument. We are very conscious that the impact is being felt quite unevenly across the community, around one third of households have a home loan and many are finding managing the higher interest rates are very difficult at the moment.

But the mortgage market is only one channel through which monetary policy works. Changes in interest rates also affect asset prices, including housing prices and the exchange rate, and they also affect the incentive for all households to save and to spend.

Changes in interest rates also affect expectations of the future, which can affect spending plans and price and wage setting behaviour. These various transmission mechanisms take time to work and their effects are felt unevenly across the community.

As difficult as this unevenness is, our job as Australia's central bank is to deliver low inflation for all Australians and to do so in a way that best contributes to the collective economic welfare of the Australian people, that is our job and that is what we are attempting to do.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.44pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.41pm GMT

Lowe continues :

In broad terms, the RBA and many other central bank are managing two risks.

One is the risk of not doing enough, which would result in high inflation persisting, as I said earlier it would then be costly to bring it down later on.

So what is the risk of not doing enough? The other is the risk that we move too fast or too far and the economy slows by more than is necessary to bring inflation down in a timely way.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

The path here is a narrow one. It is still possible for us here in [Australia](#) to navigate this narrow path, especially with inflation and wage expectations remaining contained and issues on the supply side continuing to be resolved.

Also possible that we get knocked off this narrow path. Not surprisingly, given the various uncertainties, there are a range of views in the community where the main danger lies.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.45pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.38pm GMT

Philip Lowe: 'once inflation becomes ingrained, the end result is even higher interest rates'

Lowe:

High inflation is damaging and it is corrosive. It hurts people. It puts serious pressure on household budgets and it erodes the value of people's savings, and it increases inequality and it hurts most those on low incomes.

High inflation also damages longer-term economic performance, making the environment for business and households more uncertain. It makes it harder for firms to invest and if inflation does become ingrained in people's expectations, bringing it back down is very costly.

History teaches us that once inflation becomes ingrained, the end result is even higher interest rates and greater unemployment to bring inflation back down, so it would be dangerous indeed do not contain and to reverse this period of high inflation.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.43pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.37pm GMT

Philip Lowe: interest rate rises 'required' to fight highest inflation rate in decades

Lowe is now speaking, saying he will begin by discussing why this increase in interest rates has been necessary and to discuss the outlook for the next couple of years.

At its core the rise in interest rates has been required to make sure that the current period of high inflation in [Australia](#) is only temporary. That is the job for the Reserve Bank of [Australia](#) as the country's central bank. In the December quarter the inflation rate reached 7.8%.

That is the highest since 1990 and it's too high, way too high. The inflation pressures were broadly based with the prices of almost three-quarters of the items in the CPI basket increasing by more than 4% last year, in underlying terms the inflation rate reached 6.9% in the December quarter.

Again, this is the highest rate in decades. It's too high and it's higher than we were expecting just a few months ago.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.39pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.31pm GMT

RBA's Philip Lowe about to front his political overlords (of sorts)

Just two days after fronting a Senate estimates panel, Reserve Bank governor Philip Lowe gets a redux this morning with several fun hours before the House of Representatives' economics committee.

Among the certain topics will be what he thought of [yesterday's jobs numbers for January](#), which saw losses in workers for two consecutive months.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

The rise in the jobless rate to 3.7% was a bit of a surprise, but actually markets didn't budge much in their hawkish view of rate rises to come:

enltrAhead of RBA governor Philip Lowe's appearance before a House of Reps committee, investors were forecasting a 70% chance of a 10th cash rate rise in a row, come March 7th. They're still forecasting a peak rate around 4.1% despite yesterday's softish jobs numbers. pic.twitter.com/1dRTvTVosv

— @[phannam@mastodon.green](https://twitter.com/phannam@mastodon.green) (@p_hannam) [February 16, 2023](https://twitter.com/phannam@mastodon.green/status/1618111111111111111)

And ANZ joined NAB in predicting the RBA's cash rate would max out at 4.1%, another sign that economists weren't convinced those weaker jobs figures pointed to a turn.

Anyway, stay tuned for Lowe's appearance.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.32pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.26pm GMT

Lack of data on First Nations long Covid impacts

A public hearing is being held today for a parliamentary inquiry into the impacts of long Covid and repeated Covid infections.

First up was Dr Jason Agostino, a senior medical adviser at the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (Naacho), who expressed concern about a lack of coordinated data on how long Covid has affected First Nations communities.

He said:

It is clear that a high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are at higher risk of long Covid. Covid-19 infections are higher among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than non-Indigenous Australians and the immunisation coverage is lower, particularly among younger people.

The impacts of long Covid are also potentially more severe due to the high percentage living in poverty or with significant financial stress, the high percentage with high psychological distress and the high burden of chronic disease.

However, we have no clear evidence on long Covid cases amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – most jurisdictions have not shared data on presentations to their long Covid clinics by Indigenous status. Our primary care data systems cannot provide reliable or timely data, and no researchers have approached Naacho to partner with them on research into long Covid.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.29pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.14pm GMT

Victoria records 56 Covid deaths in week and 106 people in hospital

There were 3,344 new cases in the weekly reporting period, and nine people are in intensive care.

Going against the trend which has seen figures going down in Victoria, these figures show a rise from last week's 2,941 cases and 52 deaths.

enltrThis week we reported 3,344 new cases with a daily average hospital occupancy of 106 and 9 patients in ICU. 56 deaths were reported in the past 7 days. Our thoughts are with those in hospital, and the families of people who have lost their lives. pic.twitter.com/gcl4aPy7jn

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

— Victorian Department of Health (@VicGovDH) [February 16, 2023](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.15pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.06pm GMT

NSW records 51 Covid deaths in week and 844 people in hospital

There were 6,033 new cases in the weekly reporting period, and 23 people are in intensive care.

That's down from 6,440 cases and 62 deaths last week, as the summer spike continues to ebb.

enltrCOVID-19 weekly update – Friday 17 February 2023 In the 7 days to 4pm Thursday 16 February: - 6,033 new cases of COVID-19 have been recorded: 3,209 rapid antigen tests (RATs) and 2,824 PCR tests - 51 lives lost pic.twitter.com/WhdgS9vZI

— NSW Health (@NSWHealth) [February 16, 2023](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.15pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.58pm GMT

PM reveals \$3.4bn federal investment in Brisbane Olympics

Anthony Albanese has revealed on 4BC Radio that \$7bn will be invested into the 2032 Brisbane Olympics, including \$3.4bn from the federal government.

Albanese said:

It's going to be a fantastic event for Queensland that will cement Brisbane as a global city. All of the focus will be on the Olympics and Paralympics, but it will leave a lasting legacy of better infrastructure and better facilities.

Albanese cited upgrades to Sunshine Coast stadium, Barlow park Cairns, Brisbane aquatic centre, Toowoomba sports ground and a new venue, the Sunshine Coast indoor sports centre.

He said:

For Queensland, it's an investment that will produce a return, with increased economic activity and increased visitors... It's such a fantastic tourist destination and this will really showcase the state.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.59pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.51pm GMT

Australia and PNG on track to sign security deal

More from AAP on the meeting between Papua New Guinea and Australian ministers today in Canberra:

Australia and Papua New Guinea are on track to increase defence co-operation and sign a new security agreement by April.

The foreign ministers are co-chairing the 29th ministerial forum in Canberra on Friday, bringing together nine Australian ministers and 16 from PNG to discuss security, development and economic potential.

Defence minister Richard Marles lauded PNG as an important neighbour and security partner after an informal dinner between ministers on Thursday night.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

“PNG is a profoundly important country for Australia, in so many ways, but security is definitely one of them. It’s a critical part of our national security landscape,” he told reporters in Canberra this morning:

A lot of the conversations I’ve had with my counterpart Win Bakri Daki is about thickening what is already a very strong relationship between our two militaries.

The negotiations in respect of this are very much on track.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.53pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.32pm GMT

Hot weather to continue

Heatwave conditions are forecast to continue today for parts of South Australia, Tasmania, New South Wales and Victoria. Some areas have already recorded more than 40C and Victoria has declared a total fire ban in the central and north central districts.

enltrToday, Friday 17 February has been declared by the CFA as a day of Total Fire Ban in the Central and North Central districts. No fires can be lit in the open air between 12:01am and 11:59pm. For more information, visit <https://t.co/PwTouu9Ut3> [pic.twitter.com/X29QQym1M4](https://t.co/X29QQym1M4)

— VicEmergency (@vicemergency) [February 16, 2023](#)

You can read more about those soaring temperatures here:

Related: [Melbourne to hit 38C and western Sydney 35C as heatwave sweeps parts of Australia](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.34pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.24pm GMT

PhD stipends questioned at Senate estimates

The Department of Education has suggested universities should “prioritise” how they allocate their funding, when questioned over punishing PhD stipend rates which languish below the minimum wage.

At Senate estimates on Thursday evening, Greens senator and spokesperson for higher education Mehreen Faruqi questioned a panel over how it was fair for students to be relying on the incomes of their partners or extensive savings to complete their PhDs.

PhD students are increasingly struggling to make ends meet with stipends falling well below the minimum wage... one of these PhD students was recently quoted in the Guardian saying the stipend is so low, if it weren’t for her partner her PhD in nuclear radiation simply wouldn’t have happened, and I know many researchers relate to this... what is the department doing, if anything, about this?

Secretary of higher education Tony Cook said it was part of the higher education accord process – which is due to submit its findings this year, with implementations to come into effect in 2024.

We have had a number of individual students who wrote... submissions. I can assure you the university accord panel is aware of the issue and will consider it in the next stage of consultation ... that conversation is being discussed.

He said universities may not be “aware” of the funding they could provide under current arrangements, on top of the federal government stipend.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

First assistant secretary of research at the Department of Education Dom English said the funding was “designed as a scholarship, not a wage” and as such wasn’t benchmarked to wages and was tax free – provided students didn’t earn too much additional income.

He said the range of stipend rates available to universities had been “substantially expanded” and some universities had moved to increase the wage.

Since 2017, universities have been able to top up the stipend to a maximum amount which rises with inflation.

There is an opportunity for universities to prioritise the support they offer to students. We are concerned to ensure the PhD pathway remains viable... we think there’s scope for the sector to take greater opportunity and flexibility as they’ve had for six years.

The minimum PhD stipend rate is currently \$29,863 – just over two thirds of the minimum wage, and capped at a maximum of \$46,653.

Related: [Instant noodles and extra jobs: PhD candidates ‘barely scraping by’ on stipends below minimum wage](#)

block-time updated-time Updated at 9.29pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.19pm GMT

Flood victims given marching orders from Victorian site

Victoria’s purpose-build quarantine centre will close its doors as a flood recovery site, with residents given a little over a month’s notice to vacate, AAP reports.

The Mickleham centre in Melbourne’s outer north was set up as temporary emergency accommodation in mid-October after widespread flooding hit central and northern Victoria.

It has housed 255 residents so far and 44 from five local government areas remain on site.

They have been told to pack up and leave by the end of March, when the federal government-owned centre is handed back to the Commonwealth.

Remaining residents will be helped to return to their own homes or into alternative accommodation closer to home, such as private rental, social housing, hotels and caravan parks.

Emergency Recovery Victoria is working on a pilot program, allowing people to stay in caravans and modular homes placed on their own properties while repair and rebuilding work continues.

In addition, residents will be connected with a recovery support worker.

Emergency Services Minister Jaclyn Symes said people living on site are keen to get back to their home towns as quickly as possible.

Now the flood waters have receded and it’s safe to return, we’re helping everyone who’s staying at the centre to return to their communities - and we’ll keep providing support to everyone who needs it once they’re back in their communities.

We will continue to stand with flood-impacted communities for as long as it takes to recover from this extraordinarily tough event.

block-time published-time 9.05pm GMT

PM spruiks Labor’s Aston candidate Mary Doyle

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

Albanese also talked up Labor's candidate in the Aston byelection, Mary Doyle, who contested the seat at the 2022 election.

Albanese:

She's a great candidate. She ran less than a year ago, since the people of Aston voted, and she received almost an 8% swing, so it's now sitting around about 53% whereas it was above 60, I think, before the election. So she's a great candidate, she works in the finance sector. She has lived in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne for a long period of time. She studied performing at Tafe.

She is someone who's also had real-world experience with the health system. Mary got breast cancer when she was just 25. And going through that treatment and recovery has meant that she is a passionate advocate of Medicare.

And she's got a couple of kids, she's a single mum. And she's someone who I think would make an outstanding member of parliament.

Albanese said it would be "a pretty tough ask to win a position from government during a byelection", noting this had not been done for 100 years.

He said:

We think that it's the right thing to do to contest the byelection. So of course the Liberal party will be hot favourites if they get around to selecting a candidate. There's a bit of chaos on the other side at the moment, in the Vic branch, I think.

But we are very early on selecting our candidate. Mary was preselected unopposed because the locals really wanted her to run again. Alan Tudge announced his resignation last week but he hasn't actually resigned yet. So the byelection date hasn't been established, I'm not quite sure what's going on there. But when it is called, Mary Doyle will be the candidate.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.27pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.00pm GMT

Albanese expresses confidence in RBA governor Phil Lowe

Anthony Albanese has expressed the government's confidence in Reserve Bank governor Phil Lowe, who has been coping scrutiny this week for interest rate decisions, first in Senate estimates and today in the house economics committee.

The PM told ABC Melbourne:

He's doing his job now and we have, we have confidence... the decision, has has not [been made about his reappointment] but he has the government's confidence and the Reserve Bank, of course, makes these decisions independently and it's very important that they be allowed to do that... But as for future appointments that decision will come down the track.

I'll let the RBA do its own job. We have made it very clear that the government hasn't come to a view on a reappointment in the future. We will have that discussion down the track that will be a decision for the treasurer. But our job we're focused on our job which is making sure that we do what we can to do with the inflation challenge, which is out there.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.06pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.57pm GMT

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

Summit to focus on First Nations children

Social services minister Amanda Rishworth says First Nations children, as well as children with a disability and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds will be a priority at the early years summit today.

She told ABC Radio:

There is a significant focus as we have discussion on those children that are most at risk of falling behind and not getting support.

First Nations children are absolutely one of those groups of people that we don't see the outcomes we need to see. And so there is a significant focus today at the summit and how we can best lift those that are most at risk of falling behind.

And so there will be a focus, particularly on First Nations children, as well as for example, children for culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and children with disability.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.10pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.39pm GMT

Marles says Australia able to track balloons

The defence minister, Richard Marles, says government would have capability to track a balloon if one was to appear over Australia as it did in the US a couple weeks ago.

Marles is speaking to ABC News Breakfast after the speech from US President Joe Biden saying nothing suggests China's spy balloon program is related to three unidentified objects downed over North America. Biden says the balloons are most likely related to private companies.

Marles:

Well, I think it's important that this statement's been made by the president to clarify the circumstances. There's obviously been a particular fascination about balloons over the last month given the original spy balloon that we saw over the United States. I think from an Australian point of view, what's important to say is that we've had no advice of any balloon of that kind being over Australia but we very much do have the capability to track such an object if there was one-to-and to deal with it.

Marles was also asked about the calls from former prime minister Scott Morrison for the government to impose human rights sanctions on Chinese officials over the treatment of Uyghur minorities and other minorities in China.

Look, human rights matter and need to be central in the way we engage with the world. For this government, we will always call out human rights concerns where we have them and we've done that in respect of Xinjiang and the Uyghur population. I've done it publicly in China.

It forms part of the way in which we speak with China in our relationship. I think it's also important, though, that in doing that, you know, be we raise those issues in a respectful way with China and in the context of the broader relationship and in the context of seeking to take steps which actually make a difference and it is important that we are stabilising our relationship with China.

You know, we value a productive relationship with China and so pursuing that has been an objective of the government. But we can do that and in the same context raise our concerns about human rights, which we do.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.52pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.31pm GMT

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

Perrottet backs ban on gay conversion practices

New South Wales is a step closer to banning so-called gay conversion therapy after the premier, Dominic Perrottet, said he would support legislation to end the damaging practices.

He said:

There is no room for any harmful practices in NSW, particularly if they affect our young and vulnerable.

When the parliament returns, my government will provide in principle support for legislation that brings an end to any harmful practices. This is a complex matter and in working through it with parliamentary colleagues we will carefully consider the legal expression and effect of such laws.

Earlier in the week he had refused to give the reform his support.

The backing from Perrottet is a win for independent Alex Greenwich, who this month said he would introduce a bill to ban the practice.

The opposition has already agreed to support it.

enltrl'm grateful for the Premier's support to end LGBT conversion practices in NSW. We start [@SydWorldPride](#) with both [@Dom Perrottet](#) and [@ChrisMinnsMP](#) backing legislation to support and protect the LGBTQ community in NSW. This is a good day for our state. <https://t.co/LsgMURLAgm>

— Alex Greenwich MP (@AlexGreenwich) [February 16, 2023](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.50pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.30pm GMT

NSW Labor pledges bike paths in western Sydney

A New South Wales Labor government would pour \$60m into footpaths and bike paths across western Sydney and the regions if elected in March.

A Sydney bike path. Photograph: Carly Earl/The Guardian

The state opposition leader, Chris Minns, will today promise to boost the state's active transport budget with an extra \$15m a year over the next four years.

The money would be focused on new development areas lacking in walking and cycling infrastructure, as well as existing areas where options are poor.

Minns said:

We all want our communities to be more walkable and more cycle friendly. It shouldn't matter whether you're living in Leppington or Lilyfield. Everyone should have access to quality walking and cycling infrastructure.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.15pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.28pm GMT

Condolences over mine deaths

The two men trapped 125 metres underground at a north-west Queensland mine were found dead yesterday.

The prime minister, Anthony Albanese, as well as resources minister, Madeleine King, and opposition leader, Peter Dutton, have expressed their condolences to the families of the two men, Dylan Langridge and Trevor Davis.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

My deepest condolences to Dylan and Trevor's families. You are in our hearts tonight. <https://t.co/2bgLMeMJgf>

— Anthony Albanese (@AlboMP) [February 16, 2023](#)

My condolences to the families and friends of Dylan Langridge and Trevor Davis, who have been found deceased at the Dugald River Mine. My heart goes out to their fellow miners who are impacted by this terrible tragedy.

— Madeleine King MP (@MadeleineMHKing) [February 16, 2023](#)

Terrible news to hear of the tragic passing of two Australian men at the Dugald River Mine near Cloncurry. Deepest condolences to the families.

— Peter Dutton (@PeterDutton_MP) [February 16, 2023](#)

You can read more about the tragedy here:

Related: [Two men trapped underground at outback Queensland mine site found dead](#)

block-time updated-time Updated at 8.49pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.24pm GMT

Australia sends aircraft to enforce North Korea sanctions

Australia has deployed a Poseidon patrol aircraft on Operation Argos as part of its commitment to enforcing UN security council sanctions on North Korea, the defence department said last night.

Australia is supporting UN sanctions through the deployment of maritime patrol aircraft and Royal Australian Navy vessels.

The P-8A Poseidon will operate from Kadena airbase in Japan, conducting airborne surveillance to monitor and deter illegal ship-to-ship transfers of sanctioned goods in the region.

Since 2018 **Australia** has deployed RAAF maritime patrol aircraft on eleven occasions and navy vessels eight times in support of the operation.

block-time updated-time Updated at 8.47pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.18pm GMT

Ann Aly speaks about son

The early childhood minister, **Anne Aly**, who is co-chairing the early years summit, spoke to ABC News about her own child's battle with a hearing loss that she didn't pick up until he went to daycare.

Because we picked it up at two and because we picked it up early enough that there was no long-term hearing damage.

He was able to get surgery. As soon as he got that surgery, he started to talk and he hasn't shut up since.

He went on to become dux of his school. That is an example of how we can get it right in the first five years.

block-time updated-time Updated at 8.49pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.09pm GMT

PNG delegation in **Australia** to discuss defence pact

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

Good morning! Natasha May reporting for blog duty.

A high-level delegation from Papua New Guinea will meet with their Australian counterparts in Canberra today for the 29th ministerial forum to discuss security, development and economic potential.

Both nations are locked in negotiations over a new defence pact, which leaders are hoping to have completed by April, AAP reports.

Pacific minister Pat Conroy said the forum would help **Australia** implement what it has promised to its Pacific neighbour, including bringing in more labour scheme workers, tackling security challenges and promoting a PNG rugby league team.

enlrIt was great to speak with Papua New Guinea Foreign Minister Justin Tkatchenko and Treasurer Ian Ling-Stuckey again so soon after my trip to PNG in January. Tonight's reception in Parliament precedes the Ministerial Forum between ???? and ???? ministers tomorrow. pic.twitter.com/NxX5U4Q2qb

— Senator Nita Green (@nitagreenqld) [February 16, 2023](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.48pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.03pm GMT

Early years summit to address education shortfall

The prime minister, Anthony Albanese, says **Australia** has “an enormous amount of work to do” in boosting results for the youngest children as the federal government convenes a major summit on early education this morning.

Parliament House will host the early years summit today, at which 100 delegates from parenting, education, family and social organisations will have input into the federal early years strategy for the first five years of a child's life.

The social services minister, Amanda Rishworth, said the summit was about “the big ideas to get the policy and support settings right for **Australia's** little children.”

We know that the early years are where the building blocks are stacked for life-long physical, emotional, social and cognitive health and wellbeing.

There is strong evidence that when we identify and intervene early for issues arising in the early years, this significantly alters the trajectory for children. It's time we better coordinate federal spending across health, welfare and education, to close gaps in services and better address intergenerational disadvantage.

After a fortnight of parliament sitting, the summit will hear from Albanese, treasurer Jim Chalmers, Rishworth and early childhood minister **Anne Aly**.

Chalmers will say that “good early years policy is good economic policy as well”; Rishworth is expected to say: “There is strong evidence that when we identify and intervene early for issues arising in the early years, this significantly alters the trajectory for children.”

Delegates include the Parenthood's Georgie Dent, Muslim Women **Australia's** Maha Abdo, NDIS expert Bruce Bonyhady, Thrive By Five's Jay Weatherill, Nicola Forrest of the Minderoo Foundation, Sam Mostyn of the women's economic equality taskforce, and representatives of PWC, Uniting Care, Carers **Australia** and union groups.

Albanese will say:

This summit is a chance to be clear about our aspirations for the wellbeing, education and development of all of our children.

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

Ultimately, your discussions will help shape the commonwealth early years strategy, a new approach by our government to ensuring our kids have the best possible start in life.

We know we have an enormous amount of work to do to ensure the best results, but I am absolutely confident that together, we can deliver on our commitment to improve the lives of all Australian young people.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.46pm GMT

block-time published-time 7.31pm GMT

Education visa processing delays

The Department of Education has acknowledged lengthy visa processing delays for international students are an “area of concern” for the government after students told Guardian [Australia](#) they had faced wait times of more than three years for outcomes.

At Senate estimates last night, Greens senator and higher education spokesperson Mehreen Faruqi asked the panel if the Department of Education had been in contact with home affairs to improve the significant backlog.

Students from deemed high-risk countries including Iran, Pakistan, India and China have told Guardian [Australia](#) they are turning to countries with streamlined visa processing times due to frustration with the Australian system.

Faruqi said:

Is the department talking to home affairs?

The department’s secretary, Tony Cook, said it was under “regular contact” with home affairs regarding the delays.

There are some issues around security particularly around the courses some of these students might be studying that home affairs takes under consideration.

The department’s first assistant secretary, Karen Sandercock, said it was an issue that had been brought to the attention of the department through a “number of sources”.

I think it’s of shared interest to us and the Department of Home Affairs as to how we can improve visa processing in these areas.

She said there were a “range of considerations” that were taken into account by government agencies. Students from a wide range of Stem and technology fields face lengthy security clearances and delays – even after their respective universities clear them for studying banned subjects.

The department’s group manager, Dom English, said officials were aware of the complaints, which were under “active discussion”.

We’re not aware of the specific timeframes [of wait times] but we are aware of broad concerns. Universities do raise this with us and raise it with home affairs directly... we are joined in those discussions. Visa processing has been an area of concern and focus for the government.

Anthony Chisholm, the assistant minister for education and regional development, added the federal government inherited a “significant backlog” from the Coalition when it came into office.

We have thrown significant extra resources at processing. The backlog has been cut, but there is obviously more work to do and we all get feedback from the university sector about that.

Related: [*Iranian PhD students remain in limbo due to Australian visa delays despite securing scholarships*](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.44pm GMT

Dozens re-detained after visa cancellation bill passes – as it happened

block-time published-time 7.31pm GMT

Welcome

Good morning and welcome to our live coverage of the day's news. I'm Martin Farrer, here to get things rolling before my colleague Natasha May takes over.

Former prime minister Scott Morrison is making a splash back on the world stage with a speech in Tokyo today in which he accuses western leaders of appeasing China, saying that accommodating China was the worst assumption since the infamous Munich agreement with Hitler. He is expected to urge the Albanese government [to consider targeting Chinese officials with Magnitsky-style human rights sanctions](#) (which his government didn't do).

After news yesterday that Domain [had seen profits plunge](#) because of a lack of new home sales listings, there are more signs today that there is trouble ahead for the housing market with warnings of an ["avalanche" of people in mortgage stress](#) this year when they are obliged to switch from fixed to variable rates. One householder in Wagga Wagga said repayments had gone up \$300 a fortnight. Against this background, the head of the Reserve Bank, Philip Lowe, will today face his second parliamentary grilling of the week, at the House of Representatives' economics committee.

The Queensland resources minister, Scott Stewart, said he expects a thorough investigation into the [deaths of two miners near Cloncurry](#) on Wednesday. As the community mourned the loss of Dylan Langridge, 33, and Trevor Davis, 36, Stewart said: "The loss of a life in any workplace at any time is not acceptable. Families should be able to expect that when their loved ones depart for work that they return safely."

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.43pm GMT

Load-Date: February 17, 2023

End of Document