

Australia politics live updates: Albanese and Morrison to face off in election leaders' debate, Nine says;  
Coalition pledges to cut medication costs; 53 Covid d....



## [Australia politics live updates: Albanese and Morrison to face off in election leaders' debate, Nine says; Coalition pledges to cut medication costs; 53 Covid deaths](#)

The Guardian (London)

April 29, 2022 Friday 11:26 PM GMT

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theguardian

**Section:** AUSTRALIA NEWS; Version:19

**Length:** 13828 words

**Byline:** Caitlin Cassidy (now) and Donna Lu (earlier)

**Highlight:** Prime minister announces a \$10 cut to PBS scripts from next year in an attempt to tackle cost-of-living pressure, while Labor vows to hold a royal commission into the robodebt scandal. Follow live 'The director of his own show': the PM mingles with middle Australia Needling Albanese over his Covid workload is a sign that Morrison is starting to worry Guardian Australia's full federal election coverage Get our free news app ; get our morning email briefing

### Body

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block-time published-time 8.13am BST

Rain should be clearing in New South Wales by tomorrow afternoon.

enltrA rain band is continuing to move across northern [#NSW](#) tonight, expected to clear the northeast around Sunday lunchtime. Dry & mostly sunny in the south and west tomorrow, with the odd shower about the central coast. For latest forecasts & observations see <https://t.co/zclSpwjtsw> [pic.twitter.com/SX7pC99Xrk](https://t.co/SX7pC99Xrk)

- Bureau of Meteorology, New South Wales (@BOM\_NSW) [April 30, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 7.55am BST

enltrScott Morrison was asked today about Karen Andrews' remarks speculating about China timing the announcement of deal with Solomon Islands as a possible act of foreign interference in the Australian election. Notably, PM did not repeat the claim & he did not say he agreed with it [pic.twitter.com/Xq7GkbMQTG](https://t.co/Xq7GkbMQTG)

- Daniel Hurst (@danielhurstbne) [April 30, 2022](#)

Australia politics live updates: Albanese and Morrison to face off in election leaders' debate, Nine says;  
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enltrRead his answer closely. It's worded in general terms and pointing to past record of interference: "Well, all I'm saying is there is form on foreign interference in **Australia**. There is." Again, he doesn't repeat Andrews' specific claim (which she couched as a question) [pic.twitter.com/hlNM4uqDYp](https://pic.twitter.com/hlNM4uqDYp)

- Daniel Hurst (@danielhurstbne) [April 30, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 7.37am BST

Speaking of Western Australians, here's the latest on Anthony Albanese's Perth barbecue from AAP.

The party is launching its campaign in WA for the first time since John Curtin in 1940, with Labor hoping to pick up the seats of Pearce, Swan and Hasluck while sandbagging marginal Labor seats like Cowan.

"We've got the quality, there's one thing we're missing. Quantity. We want more Labor seats in WA," Albanese told the party faithful alongside the Cowan MP, **Anne Aly**, who holds the seat on less than a 1% margin.

The opposition leader targeted the cost of living as he tried to piggyback off the popularity of WA's Labor premier, Mark McGowan.

Albanese announced \$125m in funding for 135 locally made electric buses, as part of a plan to shore up onshore manufacturing:

A core part of my pitch to the Australian people is making more things here. One of the lessons of the pandemic is we have to stand on our own two feet. We're vulnerable if we're at the end of supply chains.

And every time a state Liberal government has gone and invested in rail carriages and other transport infrastructure overseas, it's never fit for purpose.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.08am BST

block-time published-time 7.23am BST

Nothing nabs a Western Australian's vote like a good old-fashioned cook-up boys!

enltrBeautiful day for a BBQ in WA. [pic.twitter.com/NhlExFgoyK](https://pic.twitter.com/NhlExFgoyK)

- Anthony Albanese (@AlboMP) [April 30, 2022](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.02am BST

block-time published-time 6.59am BST

If you missed it earlier, Ian Chesterman has been announced as the new president of the AOC, stepping into the shoes vacated by the most influential figure in Australian Olympic history.

Here's the latest from AAP:

Chesterman was elected to succeed John Coates as AOC president, convincingly defeating the triple Olympic medallist Mark Stockwell 67-26 in a vote of AOC delegates at Saturday's AGM in Sydney.

His appointment brings to an end a tenure the IOC president, Thomas Bach, described as unparalleled, Coates having bookended his 32-year reign by delivering the 2000 Olympics to Sydney, before bowing out with the awarding of the 2032 Games to Brisbane.

Chesterman's election is viewed as a sign of continuity, the 63-year-old having served as AOC vice-president and chef de mission for six Winter Olympic teams before filling the same role at the Tokyo Games:

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My vision for the Olympic movement is about making sure we continue to create opportunities for young Australians. We have to continue to drive interest in Olympic sports.

We really want to use this opportunity going forward to Brisbane, having built a fantastic platform in Tokyo, to drive our Olympic sports, to encourage kids to dream, not about becoming an AFL player or an NRL player, but becoming an Olympian.

That goal is no doubt aided by the 10-year runway to Brisbane 2032, the winning of which was one of the final acts of Coates' presidency.

Emotion got the better of Coates as he closed his final presidential address, but it was also clear the physical toll the relentless job has taken on the 71-year-old, who struggled to stand for any length of time at the meeting.

Bach, who noted that no other Olympic official had ever delivered two Games to their home nation, said he had good and bad news in congratulating Chesterman on his appointment.

The shoes he has to fill in are huge. This is also good news, because it also means he can build on a very solid base. John is leaving the AOC in a great state.

Stockwell, a member of the famed "Mean Machine" relay swim team from the 1984 Olympics, was seen as a purveyor of change - having made his post-competition career in sports administration outside the AOC, as well as the business sector. But he pledged his support for Chesterman.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.06am BST

block-time published-time 6.49am BST

We are now at the "what is the price of a sausage" stage of gotcha questions.

enltrLabor leader [@AlboMP](#) says onions are a key part of the bbq. Asked how much sausages cost he replied "here - free" [@westaustralian pic.twitter.com/zDn9Sa7Mdf](https://twitter.com/zDn9Sa7Mdf)

- Lanai Scarr (@lanai\_scarr) [April 30, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 6.44am BST

**Australia** records highest Covid death toll in 59 days

In a sombre reminder the pandemic is still very much with us, there have been 53 Covid deaths nationally today - the highest toll in 59 days.

In the past week alone, there have been 263 Covid deaths - including 86 in New South Wales and 70 in Victoria.

enltr53 COVID-19 Deaths??today in ???? (highest in 59 days) ??263 in the past week. ??7,262 pandemic total. Today / Week / Pandemic total NSW 20 / 86 / 2771 VIC 19 / 70 / 2983 QLD 5 / 33 / 866 WA 4 / 35 / 138 SA 4 / 32 / 356 TAS 0 / 3 / 50 ACT 1 / 1 / 51 NT 0 / 3 / 47 [pic.twitter.com/rCBimhP8Jm](https://twitter.com/rCBimhP8Jm)

- CovidBaseAU ???????? (@covidbaseau) [April 30, 2022](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.47am BST

block-time published-time 6.37am BST

Many thanks to the delightful Donna Lu for keeping us informed on a busy news day. I'll be keeping you company for the rest of the afternoon.

Australia politics live updates: Albanese and Morrison to face off in election leaders' debate, Nine says;  
Coalition pledges to cut medication costs; 53 Covid d....

block-time published-time 6.34am BST

That's me done for the day - thanks for following along! I'll now leave you in the hands of the wonderful Caitlin Cassidy, who will take you through into the evening. Ciao!

block-time published-time 6.32am BST

NT reports 395 Covid cases

Heading up to the top end, the Northern Territory reported 395 Covid cases in the 24 hours to 8pm yesterday.

There are currently 45 people in hospital, two of whom are in intensive care.

block-time published-time 6.15am BST

Tasmania records 1,054 new Covid cases

The state has seen no deaths and 1,054 reported Covid cases in past day, according to the Tasmanian department of health.

There are 15 people in hospital for Covid symptoms, while 26 others are Covid-positive patients who are being treated for unrelated medical conditions.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.16am BST

block-time published-time 5.44am BST

Zoe Daniel, who is running as an independent candidate in the seat of Goldstein, has reported that human excrement has been smeared on signs placed outside a supporter's house. Police will be called, she says.

enltrUpdate. It's human excrement. Police will now be called. As I have repeatedly said, this vandalism and aggression must stop, no matter whose signs are involved. To those who did this, grow up.  
[#auspol](#) [#GoldsteinVotes](#) <https://t.co/JUw0irKlyn>

- Zoe Daniel (@zdaniel) [April 30, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 5.34am BST

Albanese and Morrison to face off again in leaders' debate on 8 May

Anthony Albanese and Scott Morrison will face each other in a second election debate to be broadcast on Nine on 8 May, [according to the network](#).

The hour-long debate will take place on Sunday, May 8 at 8:30pm at Nine's Sydney studios. It will be broadcast on the network's main free-to-air channel, streaming service Nine Now and the websites of The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age.

The pair first debated each other in Brisbane on 20 April, which was broadcast by Sky News. Albanese was chosen as winner of the election forum by an audience of undecided voters, receiving [40% of votes to Morrison's 35%](#).

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.49am BST

block-time published-time 5.26am BST

South **Australia** records four Covid deaths and 3,907 cases

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There have been 3,907 Covid cases reported in South **Australia** today, with sadly four deaths.

There are currently 250 people in hospital for Covid across the state.

enltrSouth Australian COVID-19 update 30/04/22. For more information, go to <https://t.co/XkVcAIWPSN> or contact the South **Australia** COVID-19 Information Line on 1800 253 787. [pic.twitter.com/RIBO36pwAw](https://twitter.com/RIBO36pwAw)

- SA Health (@SAHealth) [April 30, 2022](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.39am BST

block-time published-time 5.24am BST

National Covid update

Here are the Covid numbers reported around **Australia** today:

NSW

Deaths: 20Cases: 11,709 In hospital: 1,623

Victoria

Deaths: 19Cases: 9,064In hospital: 448

Western **Australia**

Deaths: four historical deathsCases: 6,829In hospital: 234

Queensland

Deaths: fiveCases: 5,885In hospital: 468

Australian Capital Territory

Deaths: oneCases: 939In hospital: 68

South **Australia**

Deaths: fourCases: 3,907In hospital: 250

Tasmania

No deathsCases: 1,054 In hospital: 15

Northern Territory

No deathsCases: 395In hospital: 45

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.28am BST

block-time published-time 5.12am BST

In case you missed it earlier, Jo Dyer, an independent candidate for the seat of Boothby, announced this morning she had received confirmation that a renunciation of her British citizenship was processed back in February. It means she is eligible to run for election.

She's tweeted about the development with a dig at her Liberal counterpart:

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enltrTo summarise the last 2 days: on Thursday [@theTiser](#) raised questions about my eligibility to run for office due to dual citizenship. It was confirmed overnight my application was revoked in February with nearly two months to spare..so homework done early, [@drrachelswift](#) ! [#auspol](#) [pic.twitter.com/qBJYW4GZRI](#)

- Jo Dyer - an independent voice for Boothby (@instanterudite) [April 30, 2022](#)

In a statement earlier today, Dyer criticised the requirement that political candidates renounce secondary citizenship. She said:

[It] is an inhibitor to attracting the widest possible range of people from diverse backgrounds to stand for election to our federal parliament. This in turn prevents us from ensuring that our parliament is truly representative of the Australian people it serves.

block-time published-time 4.55am BST

Some good news: Australian scientists have discovered a new species of frog in south-east Queensland. The bad news: it's already endangered.

The frog's only known habitat is the world heritage-listed Gondwana rainforests which were extensively burned during the 2019-20 black summer bushfires.

Queensland's environment department said it was already moving to protect the habitat of the newly identified species, a mountain frog with the scientific name *Philoria knowlesi*.

You can read more here, from AAP :

Related: [New frog species discovered in Australia - and it's already endangered](#)

block-time published-time 4.48am BST

In Queensland, a \$6.75m mental health and wellness package has been announced to mark the start of Queensland small business month.

The minister for employment and small business, Di Farmer, said the month would have a particular focus on small businesses hit by the pandemic and recent floods.

As part of our \$14.5bn Queensland economic recovery plan, we are rolling out the small business support and wellness package.

The package will directly address the pandemic's toll on business owners - with coordinated promotion of support services, as well as triage points for small businesses doing it tough.

Queensland employment and small business minister Di Farmer. Photograph: Dan Peled/AAP

Included in the package will be the appointment of six specialist small business wellness coaches across Queensland, a \$3m small business support services fund and the extension of the education program "Small Business Smile4Biz".

Farmer said:

It has been an incredibly challenging time over the last two years and some Queensland small businesses are still rebuilding while contending with worker and supply shortages, which places added mental pressure and stress on business owners.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.56am BST

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block-time published-time 4.38am BST

ACT records Covid death

A 96-year-old man has died with Covid in the ACT.

There have been 939 new cases detected in the territory.

There are 68 people being treated in hospital, including three in intensive care.

enltrACT COVID-19 Update - 30 April 2022 COVID-19 vaccinations\* ?Aged 5-11 years (1 dose): 80.7% ?Aged 5-11 years (2 doses): 65.2% ?Aged 5+ years (2 doses): 97.0% ?Aged 16+ years (3 doses): 75.2% COVID-19 case numbers ? New cases today: 939 (505 PCR and 434 RAT) [pic.twitter.com/gWlJ2io6hx](https://pic.twitter.com/gWlJ2io6hx)

- ACT Health (@ACTHealth) [April 30, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 4.37am BST

The Victorian department of health has released additional information regarding today's Covid-19 update.

Eleven of the 19 deaths recorded occurred in the past week, and four were in the past two days.

Sadly, the department was notified of 19 deaths yesterday of people aged in their 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s and 100s. Eleven of today's reported deaths occurred in the past week including four deaths that occurred in the past two days. This brings the total number of deaths in Victoria since the pandemic began to 2,967.

block-time published-time 4.28am BST

Now is not the time to take a risk on what you don't know.

Interesting argument. When is?

enltrPM at rally in Launceston: "You may not like everything we've done, you may not like me that much, but that's not the point. The point is you know what our plan is... now is not the time to take a risk on what you don't know."

- Finbar O'Mallon (@finbaromallon) [April 30, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 4.24am BST

Clive Palmer 's centrepiece campaign pledge to cap homeowners' interest rates for five years has been dismissed by economists as "radical", "crazy" and "utterly irresponsible" even though it will probably appeal to some gullible voters.

According to the [United Australia party's website](#) , the mining billionaire's "economic plan for freedom and prosperity" pledges to set a maximum 3% interest rate for all home loans to head off a looming mass default as lending rates start to rise.

Wednesday's surprisingly large 5.1% consumer price inflation figure has stoked expectations the Reserve Bank will be forced to lift its cash rate target from 0.1% when its board meets on Tuesday. Market home loan rates have been rising for months, with most fixed rates now between 3% and 5% with variable rates above 2%.

Read the full story here:

Related: [Clive Palmer's campaign pledge to cap home loan rates 'utterly irresponsible', experts say](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.33am BST

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block-time published-time 4.22am BST

Queensland records five Covid deaths

Queensland has released today's Covid update.

There have been 5,885 new cases detected and, sadly, there have been five further deaths.

enltrToday we have recorded 5,885 new COVID-19 cases. Sadly, we have reported 5 deaths in the past 24 hours. Full details?? <https://t.co/MyDwPPzP2F> [pic.twitter.com/aoeE2BDeVz](https://pic.twitter.com/aoeE2BDeVz)

- Queensland Health (@qldhealth) [April 30, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 4.11am BST

AOC will support Ukrainian athletes seeking to resettle in **Australia**

The Australian Olympic Committee will support Ukrainian athletes seeking to resettle in **Australia** on humanitarian grounds, Reuters reports.

John Coates, who is stepping down as president of the AOC after 32 years in the role, said today:

The AOC executive has, by circular resolution last week, determined that the AOC will support humanitarian visa applications by Ukrainian athletes and will seek the assistance of ... our member sports in their settlement requirements.

As Ukrainians are forced to defend their families and homes, Ukrainian athletes are amongst them ... How sad it is that young men and women just swapped their rackets and running spikes for rifles and flak jackets.

Outgoing Australian Olympic Committee president John Coates (centre) at the AOC annual general meeting in Sydney. Photograph: Steven Saphore/AAP

Coates added the AOC would contribute \$100,000 to the International Olympic Committee's solidarity fund for the Ukrainian Olympic community.

Earlier today, the AOC elected Ian Chesterman as the new president to succeed Coates .

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.58am BST

block-time published-time 3.56am BST

enltrScott Morrison on robodebt: "There have been numerous inquiries into this and there's been court matters we've fully cooperated in." In fact the govt has blocked the release of all relevant documents sought by the Senate and won't say what advice it received on its legality

- Luke Henriques-Gomes (@lukehgomes) [April 30, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 3.49am BST

Anthony Albanese wraps up the presser by thanking everyone for coming along, adding:

It's great to be out again. I look forward to the campaign launch here in Perth tomorrow, where we'll be outlining our plan for a better future.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.55am BST

block-time published-time 3.47am BST



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Asked about Labor's focus on a real wage increase, Jim Chalmers says:

If you compare the real wage outcomes of Australians, versus the Americans ... to take one example, Australian workers are faring worse than their American counterparts.

We are seeing inflation around the world, we are seeing inflation here. The difference is, we've had almost a decade now of wage stagnation, which is a deliberate design feature of this government. Now, Scott Morrison in his usual way - he takes credit but not responsibility. He wants to pretend that all of this cost of living pressure on families and on Australians more broadly has just shown up when Russia invaded Ukraine.

Shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers speaks to the media in Perth. Photograph: Lukas Coch/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.50am BST

block-time published-time 3.41am BST

Bill Shorten again on the pledged robodebt royal commission:

The aim of the royal commission is not about additional compensation. But Australians are owed an answer, aren't they? How can a government for four years illegally issue debts worth \$1.8bn against half a million of its fellow citizens and then take them to court, debt collectors, the whole ugly process ... how can this happen and Mr Morrison doesn't know who did it?

All of the inquiries and court processes so far have not got to answer that crucial question. Who knew what, when? ... I just think taxpayers want justice. The victims want justice. We need to make sure it never happens again.

Bill Shorten and Anthony Albanese speak to the media on day 20 of the election campaign in Perth. Photograph: Lukas Coch/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.48am BST

block-time published-time 3.38am BST

Asked whether Labor will match the Coalition's pledged cut to PBS medicine costs, Albanese says:

This the same government that in the 2014 budget had a \$5 increase in the PBS in prescriptions. This announcement today is not about prescriptions for Australians, it's about a prescription for Mr Morrison for his re-election. And thirdly, watch this space, I'm not going to make announcements here because then you might not turn up tomorrow.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.58am BST

block-time published-time 3.31am BST

Albanese starts on cost-of-living measures:

We have said we'll make childcare cheaper. We've said we have a plan to actually lift wages. We have said we have a plan as well to take pressure off electricity prices.

He is interrupted by a comment about grocery price increases. Jim Chalmers takes over and reiterates similar points:

The first thing is you need to acknowledge the serious cost-of-living pressure on Australians right now. Secondly, take responsibility for making a meaningful difference where you can. We have policies about getting power bills down, we have policies for cheaper, workable healthcare which is a big part of the story. We've got policies to make childcare cheaper, and we've got policies to get real wages moving again.

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block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.46am BST

block-time published-time 3.25am BST

Anthony Albanese is taking questions from reporters. Asked what mistakes Labor made in 2019 that they will not repeat, he says:

We take collective responsibility for what's good and what's not so good. The truth is that we've been unsuccessful in three campaigns in a row. And what we did was we had a review, in which we outlined and released it in full. No other political party has done ever what we did ... I went to the National Press Club, I outlined the four-part strategy ... we are in the last quarter now.

Anthony Albanese speaks to the media in Perth. Photograph: Lukas Coch/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.16am BST

block-time published-time 3.22am BST

Bill Shorten has given some more details about the proposed robodebt royal commission:

We have budgeted the costs to be up to \$30m. That's looking towards what the bushfires royal commission was and the pink batts royal commission was for costing.

In terms of what victims of robodebt want, I haven't met victims of robodebt who don't want a royal commission.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.44am BST

block-time published-time 3.21am BST

Ian Chesterman named as Australian Olympic Committee president

Ian Chesterman has been elected as the president of the Australian Olympic Committee, beating out Mark Stockwell to succeed John Coates, who has stepped down after 32 years in the role, AAP reports.

Chesterman won the vote of AOC delegates 67-26 at Saturday's AGM in Sydney, which brought to an end Coates' remarkable reign as president, a tenure which delivered two Olympic Games to [Australia](#).

Chesterman, the AOC vice-president, was chef de mission of the Australian team at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and six Winter Olympics teams, and has been a member of the executive since 2001.

Coates, who will remain as vice-president of the International Olympic Committee until 2024, played a key role in delivering both the 2000 Olympics to Sydney and 2032 Games to Brisbane.

Ian Chesterman speaks at the annual general meeting of the Australian Olympic Committee in Sydney. Photograph: Steven SAPHORE/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.16am BST

block-time published-time 3.19am BST

Bill Shorten is now talking about Labor's election pledge to launch a royal commission into robodebt:

Just to briefly remind you of the robodebt scandal: \$1.8bn was illegally raised by the government in debts against nearly 500,000 Australian citizens. These citizens were vulnerable - they were pensioners, people who are unemployed, people with disabilities, university students from the country and the city ... I have spoken to families who absolutely believe that the pressure of the unfair debt notices raised against loved family members contributed to them taking their own life.

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The robodebt campaign over four years was the government going to war with its own people and it didn't have the legal authority. Labor have put forward our proposal for the terms of reference and will consult so we have them in place before Christmas of this year if we are to be elected. We are going to find out who was responsible because the federal government has never owned up, actually.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.35am BST

block-time published-time 3.15am BST

On the funding announcement, Rita Saffioti, the WA minister for transport, says:

It will be a true partnership. It is a \$250m commitment. It is a proposal we put to both sides of politics, it has been costed by the state government and includes ... \$80m for buses, it includes \$50m for the facility. It includes \$120m for the depot upgrades and all the necessary infrastructure.

We very much thank Anthony Albanese and his team for getting the recognition of what we want, which is for new jobs in Western **Australia**, long-term manufacturing capacity, and also the ability to roll out these buses and make sure that we all do our bit to tackle climate change.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.20am BST

block-time published-time 3.11am BST

Anthony Albanese speaks in Perth ahead of Sunday's Labor campaign launch

Anthony Albanese is speaking now. He says having the national campaign launch in Western **Australia** "sends a message that I want to be the prime minister for the whole of **Australia**".

He continues with an announcement about electric vehicles:

We've agreed to partner with the WA McGowan government to deliver 130 electric buses made here. A core part of my pitch to the Australian people is making more things here. One of the lessons of the pandemic is we have to stand on our own two feet. We're vulnerable if we're at the end of supply chains.

Anthony Albanese plugs in an electric bus while visiting Swan Transit Joondalup bus depot in Perth.  
Photograph: Lukas Coch/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.13am BST

block-time published-time 3.08am BST

The Labor leader, Anthony Albanese, is campaigning with the shadow treasurer, Jim Chalmers, in Perth.

Chalmers is up first:

Here in Perth is the epicentre of Scott Morrison's cost of living crisis. Inflation here, at 7.6% in Perth, is the highest of any capital city in **Australia**. And if the Reserve Bank increases interest rates next Tuesday or next month, the cost for that on an average Western Australian mortgage will be \$94 a month if the increase is a quarter of a per cent.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.15am BST

block-time published-time 2.58am BST

Western **Australia** records 6,829 new Covid cases

Western **Australia** had a total of 6,829 new cases to 8pm last night, according to the state's health authority.

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There are currently 234 people in hospital with Covid, eight of whom are in intensive care.

The state recorded four historical deaths dating back to 29 March: a woman in her 40s, a man in his 70s and a man and a woman both in their 80s. WA currently has 43,586 active cases.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.01am BST

block-time published-time 2.45am BST

Out on the campaign trail, Scott Morrison is aware of every angle, every interpretation.

He curates images and conversations for the consumption of the media pack precisely. He is the star actor, while imagining being the spectator. He is the director of his own show.

Scott Morrison during a visit to Doblo's fruit market during the federal election campaign. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

It's strange, after two years of pandemic politics, to be reminded of Morrison back in his natural habitat, pressing the flesh with voters, making small talk. Morrison is softer in this embodiment, he smiles and jokes easily. He knows this is his strength as a politician.

There are none of the awkward pauses that used to plague Malcolm Turnbull when he attempted to mingle with middle [\*\*Australia\*\*](#). None of the peculiar Abbott-isms that came before that. No risk of onion-eating here.

For Morrison, he is confident that all the ingredients are there for a victory. But will it come together? Or will it remain a figment of imagination, a fantasy left behind on the campaign trail?

Read the full story here:

Related: ['The director of his own show': the PM mingles with middle \*\*Australia\*\*](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.01am BST

block-time published-time 2.25am BST

This is good analysis from my colleague Peter Hannam, our economics correspondent, on the pressures felt by renters around [\*\*Australia\*\*](#) as major party policies on housing affordability stagnate.

The latest data, out on Wednesday, showed rent prices rising in all cities, including Melbourne and Sydney which had been hard hit by the absence of international students while borders were shut.

Related: [Locked out: housing has become a path to wealth, but renters have been left behind](#)

block-time published-time 2.15am BST

enltrJo Dyer, running as an Independent for Boothby, says she's got confirmation that the renunciation of her British citizenship was processed in February - "rendering her eligible to continue her campaign"  
[pic.twitter.com/KPI3cOBILk](https://pic.twitter.com/KPI3cOBILk)

- Josh Butler (@JoshButler) [April 30, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 2.07am BST

South Australian Covid restrictions ease

Australia politics live updates: Albanese and Morrison to face off in election leaders' debate, Nine says; Coalition pledges to cut medication costs; 53 Covid d....

South **Australia** has relaxed its Covid close contact rules but has also extended the emergency declaration for another month to deal with the ongoing pandemic.

From Saturday, close contacts of positive cases are no longer required to isolate for seven days, bringing SA into line with NSW, Victoria, Queensland and the ACT.

The change comes with new rules including a requirement for close contacts to take five rapid antigen tests over the seven-day period.

At the same time, an extension for the Major Emergency Declaration, which provides the legal framework for ongoing Covid restrictions, has been approved.

The declaration will remain in force until the end of May.

Also remaining in force is a requirement for high school students to wear masks for the first four weeks of term two, starting on Monday.

block-time published-time 2.06am BST

If you haven't already, I recommend reading this piece by my colleague Caitlin Cassidy, who will join us later today on the blog, about a Sydney family who was rejected for 35 rental homes despite \$1,000-a-week budget. It's a telling example of the present direness of the rental market.

The entire series on [Australia's rental crisis](#) is eye-opening, and really worth your time.

Related: ['My daughter couldn't start school': Sydney family rejected for 35 rental homes despite \\$1,000-a-week budget](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.11am BST

block-time published-time 1.56am BST

Here's the footage from the tail end of Barnaby Joyce 's announcement earlier (with a slow-mo eyebrow raise edit at the end).

enltrLive TV with Barnaby Joyce. [#auspol pic.twitter.com/WcJjJwu9iA](#)

- Squizz (@SquizzSTK) [April 30, 2022](#)

block-time published-time 1.45am BST

A search and rescue effort is underway off the coast of north Queensland for a fisherman missing from a capsized tinny, AAP reports.

The alarm was raised at about 6:30am this morning when a commercial fishing vessel found a 45-year-old man signalling for help in the water off the coast of Townsville.

He and a friend had been fishing in a small tinny when the vessel capsized, throwing both men into the water off Sandfly Creek.

A 45-year-old man was rescued by the commercial ship and taken to shore where he was treated for exposure. He was taken to hospital in stable condition, but a 41-year-old Townsville man is still missing.

Police have launched a large-scale search for the fisherman and the capsized boat.

Australia politics live updates: Albanese and Morrison to face off in election leaders' debate, Nine says;  
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Anyone who spots the four-metre, white Quintrex coast runner Queensland registration RD806Q is urged to contact police.

block-time published-time 1.31am BST

The deputy prime minister Barnaby Joyce has been speaking in the Northern Territory. He has announced \$10m in federal funding as part of an upgrade to Darwin airport, as well as "\$10m for the kids and the Litchfield sports centre". On the airport, Joyce says the upgrade would involve 300 direct jobs:

This \$10m goes towards a \$63m upgrade: \$10 million from the federal government, \$40m from the airport, \$10m from the territory government, \$3m from private enterprise. That will allow further things such as the development of amphibious aircraft ... [and] manufacturing of planes for Darwin.

The details for the other \$10m promised for the sports centre wasn't broadcast on the ABC. Joyce, presumably for the journalists there, says:

Do you need that cleaner for the \$10m for the sports? I'm going to make it cleaner for the announcement for the sports.

But alas, the ABC has cut away.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.40am BST

block-time published-time 1.05am BST

Labor will launch royal commission into robodebt if elected

In case you missed it earlier, Labor has announced it will launch a royal commission into the r obodebt scheme if it wins government, with the aim of determining who was responsible for implementing the discredited program.

AAP has the story:

The automated matching of tax and Centrelink data to raise debts against welfare recipients, for money the Coalition government claimed to have overpaid, was ruled unlawful in 2019.

A \$1.2bn settlement between robodebt victims and the federal government was reached in 2020.

But the Morrison government has never detailed who was accountable for the four-year scheme, and which ministers knew about its problems.

Scott Morrison was social services minister when the scheme was conceived, but has denied personal responsibility for the disaster.

Labor has long called for a royal commission into robodebt, which opposition leader Anthony Albanese described as "a human tragedy, wrought by this government".

Against all evidence, and all the outcry, the government insisted on using algorithms instead of people to pursue debt recovery against Australians who in many cases had no debt to pay," he said on Saturday.

It caused untold misery. Only an Albanese Labor government will find out the truth."

The royal commission would be tasked with establishing who was responsible for the scheme, what advice was used in its implementation, and complaints handling processes.

It would also look at the cost to taxpayers of the robodebt debacle, and the harm caused by those targeted.

Prime minister Scott Morrison hit back at the proposal, saying the issues had already been addressed.

Australia politics live updates: Albanese and Morrison to face off in election leaders' debate, Nine says; Coalition pledges to cut medication costs; 53 Covid d....

Prime minister Scott Morrison visits a chemist in Launceston, Tasmania on Saturday, 30 April 2022. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

There have been numerous inquiries into this and there have been court matters which we fully co-operated in.

Labor's government services spokesman Bill Shorten said Australians still did not know "how this reckless scheme was unleashed".

We do not know whether poor legal advice was given or whether legal advice was simply never sought.

Albanese is set to unveil the proposals in Perth, where he has also announced a Labor government would partner with the state government to deliver a local electric bus manufacturing facility and more than 130 new, locally manufactured electric buses.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.59am BST

block-time published-time 12.55am BST

In news that comes as absolutely no surprise, the Greens have announced they will preference Labor over Liberal candidates across the country.

The Greens are running in 151 seats, and their how-to-vote cards will also recommend a preference for climate independents in key Liberal-held seats.

Historically, Green preferences have overwhelmingly favoured Labor.

enltr [#BREAKING](#) : The Greens will put Labor ahead of the Liberals across the country. If you follow the Greens' how to vote, your preferences will work to kick out the Liberals, & put the Greens in balance of power to push the next government further & faster on climate and inequality. [pic.twitter.com/HEQMZXOZQg](https://pic.twitter.com/HEQMZXOZQg)

- Australian Greens (@Greens) [April 29, 2022](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.19am BST

block-time published-time 12.39am BST

The Australian Council of Social Service, the peak body for the community services sector, has backed Labor's robodebt royal commission election pledge.

The Acoos chief executive, Dr Cassandra Goldie, said in a statement:

The robodebt affair was not just a maladministration scandal, it was a human tragedy that resulted in people taking their lives.

A royal commission is appropriate and proportionate. We need to properly probe the decisions and processes that led to this woeful situation and make sure nothing remotely similar ever happens again.

But we also need to probe the underlying thinking.

There is a very stark contrast between the rules for pursuing people on income support for overpayments and debts compared with the rules for corporate recipients claiming jobkeeper. A different morality seems to apply for those with deep pockets.

Acoos will be an enthusiastic participant if this royal commission happens. This is an important opportunity to amplify the struggles of people who have not been heard.

Australia politics live updates: Albanese and Morrison to face off in election leaders' debate, Nine says;  
Coalition pledges to cut medication costs; 53 Covid d....

As governments increasingly rely on automated decision-making and technology to deliver life sustaining human services, often to people at high risk including those on income support, employment services and the NDIS, we strongly welcome this commitment from the ALP and urge all parties and candidates to deliver the same.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.43am BST

block-time published-time 12.34am BST

Back to cost-of-living pressures. Morrison :

I do understand that Australians are facing cost of living pressures. I do understand that there is rising pressure on interest rates ... we do know that the impacts on inflation are coming from well beyond Australia's shores.

He criticises Labor:

They have no magic pen that makes's people's wages go up any more than they have a magic pen that can change the price of a lettuce. Talking about the problem is not enough, Mr Albanese.

Morrison then goes on to reiterate the Coalition's measures, including the temporary fuel excise cut, and the one-off \$250 cost-of-living payment, before wrapping up the press conference:

And finally, today, what we've announced: cutting \$10 off the price of their medicines for the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.39am BST

block-time published-time 12.24am BST

Asked whether the religious discrimination bill is dead in the water, Morrison says:

I was devastated that that wasn't passed, along with faith communities. It was a great disappointment to me. But what I propose to do and made very clear is I will take it forward. But I'll be taking it forward as standalone legislation. It will deal with the RDA. It won't be dealing with other issues.

block-time published-time 12.19am BST

Morrison says it's 'hypocritical' for Labor to criticise robodebt

Morrison is asked about Labor's election pledge to hold a royal commission into the robodebt scheme. He says:

There have been numerous inquiries into this and there's been court matters which we've fully cooperated in and almost \$750m in reimbursements have been made by the government and changes to the scheme have been put in place. So the problem has been addressed.

But any such inquiry, I imagine, would have to start with the process of ... income assessment, averaging of income, which was introduced by the Labor party. I find it quite hypocritical that a scheme that the Labor party actually introduced for income averaging - in assessing people's welfare entitlements - that they now seek to criticise the government for when the Labor party do this all the time.

As a reminder, robodebt was introduced by the Coalition government in 2016.

Prime minister Scott Morrison visits a chemist in Launceston, Tasmania on Saturday, 30 April 2022. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.03am BST

block-time published-time 12.13am BST



Australia politics live updates: Albanese and Morrison to face off in election leaders' debate, Nine says;  
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Now some questions on China's security deal with the Solomon Islands.

Morrison, asked about the timing of the announcement, says:

We're very aware of the influence that the Chinese government seeks to have in this country. We, in fact, introduced laws to prevent it. So any suggestion that the Chinese government doesn't seek to interfere in Australia - well, we didn't put that legislation in for no reason. We put it in there to ensure that Australian security could be safeguarded from foreign influence in our own country.

Asked for a response regarding comments from China's vice foreign minister, who said Morrison's criticism of the deal amounted to disinformation, coercion and intimidation, he said:

The Chinese government would say that, wouldn't they?

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.16am BST

block-time published-time 12.07am BST

Morrison has been asked repeatedly why the government did not include the medications cut as a measure in this year's budget, rather than saving it as an election promise. Asked a second time, he says:

There are temporary measures that we put on the budget, longer term measures in the mid-year statement. It is a fairly common way that we do budgets ...

This is a longer term measure and it will start next calendar year. So the reason that we're talking about it now, normally we would make an announcement like that later in the year.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.13am BST

block-time published-time 12.07am BST

Victoria records 19 Covid deaths and 9,064 new cases

Victoria has reported 19 new Covid deaths and 9,064 new cases. There are currently 30 people in ICU and three requiring ventilators.

enltrWe thank everyone who got vaccinated and tested yesterday. Our thoughts are with those in hospital, and the families of people who have lost their lives. More data soon:  
[#COVID19Vic #COVID19VicData pic.twitter.com/1rWX3ECV4M](https://t.co/OCCFTAtS1P)

- VicGovDH (@VicGovDH) [April 29, 2022](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.09am BST

block-time published-time 12.04am BST

Morrison :

If you need these medicines, then I can think of no more essential service for to you get access to ...

I should stress that this is a permanent change that follows indexation into the future and we're also ensuring that no one is worse off on any existing medication, and that will be dealt with through legislation when the parliament returns to ensure that those who are on discounted medicines will continue to get the discounts wherever they're getting them from.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.13am BST

Australia politics live updates: Albanese and Morrison to face off in election leaders' debate, Nine says;  
Coalition pledges to cut medication costs; 53 Covid d....

block-time published-time 12.03am BST

NSW records 20 Covid deaths and 11,709 new cases

enltrCOVID-19 update - Saturday 30 April 2022 In the 24-hour reporting period to 4pm yesterday: - 96.2% of people aged 16+ have had one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine - 94.7% of people aged 16+ have had two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine [pic.twitter.com/Pu6tSTihlx](https://pic.twitter.com/Pu6tSTihlx)

- NSW Health (@NSWHealth) [April 29, 2022](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.06am BST

block-time published-time 11.59pm BST

Scott Morrison pledges to cut medication costs

Morrison is talking about the new election pledge to cut medication costs:

What we have decided to do from the first of January, so re-elected as a government, what we will put ... in the mid-year budget update is we will include a new measure which will see the cost of non-concessional PBS payments fall from \$42.50 down to \$32.50 - what's known as the PBS general co-payment.

This will save patients taking one medication a month ... \$120 a year.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.01am BST

block-time published-time 11.55pm BST

Scott Morrison is campaigning with Bridget Archer in Tasmania.

Speaking at a pharmacy in Mowbray, he says:

We understood the need to take action to provide relief on cost of living pressures, and we know those pressures are real. We saw that reinforced again this week.

Those pressures, as we know, are coming from all around the world, particularly the war in Europe, but the aftereffects and lingering effects of what's happening with Covid. And even more recently, we started to see emerge in the numbers the impact of things like the floods and so on.

block-time published-time 11.51pm BST

The Nationals senator Perin Davey has been speaking on the ABC.

Asked about the Coalition's pledge to cut the cost of medicines listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme, she said it would come at significant cost to the federal budget, but would help individuals' health costs. Davey said:

It will cost the budget, but it is something that we have heard the pharmacists - the Pharmacy Guild of **Australia** have been calling for a reduction in the PBS costs for some time - and we know that this will help.

One of the biggest risk factors that we have in our health system is people avoiding costs, so people avoiding medications because they cost too much. So this is really going to help people with their cost of living, but also with their health outcomes.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.34am BST

block-time published-time 11.40pm BST

Australia politics live updates: Albanese and Morrison to face off in election leaders' debate, Nine says;  
Coalition pledges to cut medication costs; 53 Covid d....

Anthony Albanese is now out of isolation and has positioned in Perth for his official campaign launch on Sunday.

Earlier this week, Scott Morrison took aim at Albanese, contrasting Albanese's "quiet" week at home against his own "busy" schedule while isolating with Covid earlier this year.

The comparison frustrated our political editor Katharine Murphy, who writes in her column today that needling Albanese over his Covid workload is a sign that Morrison is starting to worry. Morrison's prime ministership is now on the clock, at the halfway mark of the election campaign.

She writes:

Having had Covid himself, Morrison knows the lingering after effects of the virus are fatigue and brain fog. Debates, after a day of campaigning, are gruelling encounters, physically and mentally, even for seasoned professionals. So Morrison's calculation is simple: Albanese is significantly more likely to make a mistake when he's not 100%.

Again, time is of the essence. Morrison knows he's got to find a pivot point in the campaign, and finding it is all on him.

Read Murph's column here:

Related: [Needling Albanese over his Covid workload is a sign that Morrison is starting to worry](#)

block-time updated-time Updated at 12.04am BST

block-time published-time 11.26pm BST

Good morning

Hello and welcome to day 20 of the election campaign.

Labor has announced that if it wins government it would launch a royal commission into the Robodebt scheme to find out who was responsible for implementing the discredited program.

If your memory needs jogging, the automated matching of tax and Centrelink data to raise debts against welfare recipients was ruled unlawful in 2019, with a \$1.2 billion settlement reached between Robodebt victims and the federal government in 2020.

The Morrison government has never detailed who was accountable for the four-year scheme, and which ministers knew about its problems.

Meanwhile, the Coalition will today pledge to cut the cost of medications for everyday conditions such as blood pressure and high cholesterol under a \$150 million cost-of-living measure.

Scott Morrison will announce that the price of medications listed under the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme would be cut from January 1 next year, with a saving of \$10 per script.

Let's get stuck in. You can contact me on Twitter @donnadlu or via email at [Donna.Lu@theguardian.com](mailto:Donna.Lu@theguardian.com)

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false en true Rain should be clearing in New South Wales by tomorrow afternoon. Speaking of Western Australians, here's the latest on Anthony Albanese's Perth barbecue from AAP. The party is launching its campaign in WA for the first time since John Curtin in 1940, with Labor hoping to pick up the seats of Pearce, Swan and Hasluck while sandbagging marginal Labor seats like Cowan. "We've got the quality, there's one thing we're missing. Quantity.

Australia politics live updates: Albanese and Morrison to face off in election leaders' debate, Nine says;  
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We want more Labor seats in WA," Albanese told the party faithful alongside the Cowan MP, **Anne Aly**, who holds the seat on less than a 1% margin. The opposition leader targeted the cost of living as he tried to piggyback off the popularity of WA's Labor premier, Mark McGowan. Albanese announced \$125m in funding for 135 locally made electric buses, as part of a plan to shore up onshore manufacturing: A core part of my pitch to the Australian people is making more things here. One of the lessons of the pandemic is we have to stand on our own two feet. We're vulnerable if we're at the end of supply chains. And every time a state Liberal government has gone and invested in rail carriages and other transport infrastructure overseas, it's never fit for purpose. Nothing nabs a Western Australian's vote like a good old-fashioned cook-up boys! If you missed it earlier, Ian Chesterman has been announced as the new president of the AOC, stepping into the shoes vacated by the most influential figure in Australian Olympic history. Here's the latest from AAP: Chesterman was elected to succeed John Coates as AOC president, convincingly defeating the triple Olympic medallist Mark Stockwell 67-26 in a vote of AOC delegates at Saturday's AGM in Sydney. His appointment brings to an end a tenure the IOC president, Thomas Bach, described as unparalleled, Coates having bookended his 32-year reign by delivering the 2000 Olympics to Sydney, before bowing out with the awarding of the 2032 Games to Brisbane. Chesterman's election is viewed as a sign of continuity, the 63-year-old having served as AOC vice-president and chef de mission for six Winter Olympic teams before filling the same role at the Tokyo Games: My vision for the Olympic movement is about making sure we continue to create opportunities for young Australians. We have to continue to drive interest in Olympic sports. We really want to use this opportunity going forward to Brisbane, having built a fantastic platform in Tokyo, to drive our Olympic sports, to encourage kids to dream, not about becoming an AFL player or an NRL player, but becoming an Olympian. That goal is no doubt aided by the 10-year runway to Brisbane 2032, the winning of which was one of the final acts of Coates' presidency. Emotion got the better of Coates as he closed his final presidential address, but it was also clear the physical toll the relentless job has taken on the 71-year-old, who struggled to stand for any length of time at the meeting. Bach, who noted that no other Olympic official had ever delivered two Games to their home nation, said he had good and bad news in congratulating Chesterman on his appointment. The shoes he has to fill in are huge. This is also good news, because it also means he can build on a very solid base. John is leaving the AOC in a great state. Stockwell, a member of the famed "Mean Machine" relay swim team from the 1984 Olympics, was seen as a purveyor of change - having made his post-competition career in sports administration outside the AOC, as well as the business sector. But he pledged his support for Chesterman. We are now at the "what is the price of a sausage" stage of gotcha questions. In a sombre reminder the pandemic is still very much with us, there have been 53 Covid deaths nationally today - the highest toll in 59 days. In the past week alone, there have been 263 Covid deaths - including 86 in New South Wales and 70 in Victoria. Many thanks to the delightful Donna Lu for keeping us informed on a busy news day. I'll be keeping you company for the rest of the afternoon. That's me done for the day - thanks for following along! I'll now leave you in the hands of the wonderful Caitlin Cassidy, who will take you through into the evening. Ciao! Heading up to the top end, the Northern Territory reported 395 Covid cases in the 24 hours to 8pm yesterday. There are currently 45 people in hospital, two of whom are in intensive care. The state has seen no deaths and 1,054 reported Covid cases in past day, according to the Tasmanian department of health. There are 15 people in hospital for Covid symptoms, while 26 others are Covid-positive patients who are being treated for unrelated medical conditions. Zoe Daniel, who is running as an independent candidate in the seat of Goldstein, has reported that human excrement has been smeared on signs placed outside a supporter's house. Police will be called, she says. Anthony Albanese and Scott Morrison will face each other in a second election debate to be broadcast on Nine on 8 May, according to the network. The hour-long debate will take place on Sunday, May 8 at 8:30pm at Nine's Sydney studios. It will be broadcast on the network's main free-to-air channel, streaming service Nine Now and the websites of The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age. The pair first debated each other in Brisbane on 20 April, which was broadcast by Sky News. Albanese was chosen as winner of the election forum by an audience of undecided voters, receiving 40% of votes to Morrison's 35%. There have been 3,907 Covid cases reported in South **Australia** today, with sadly four deaths. There are currently 250 people in hospital for Covid across the state. Here are the Covid numbers reported around **Australia** today: NSW Deaths: 20 Cases: 11,709 In hospital: 1,623 Victoria Deaths: 19 Cases: 9,064 In hospital: 448 Western **Australia** Deaths: four historical deaths Cases: 6,829 In hospital: 234 Queensland Deaths: five Cases: 5,885 In hospital: 468 Australian Capital Territory Deaths: one Cases: 939 In hospital: 68 South **Australia** Deaths: four Cases: 3,907 In hospital: 250 Tasmania No deaths Cases: 1,054 In hospital: 15 Northern Territory No deaths Cases: 395 In hospital: 45 In case you missed it earlier, Jo Dyer, an independent candidate for the seat of Boothby,

Australia politics live updates: Albanese and Morrison to face off in election leaders' debate, Nine says;  
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announced this morning she had received confirmation that a renunciation of her British citizenship was processed back in February. It means she is eligible to run for election. She's tweeted about the development with a dig at her Liberal counterpart: In a statement earlier today, Dyer criticised the requirement that political candidates renounce secondary citizenship. She said: [It] is an inhibitor to attracting the widest possible range of people from diverse backgrounds to stand for election to our federal parliament. This in turn prevents us from ensuring that our parliament is truly representative of the Australian people it serves. Some good news: Australian scientists have discovered a new species of frog in south-east Queensland. The bad news: it's already endangered. The frog's only known habitat is the world heritage-listed Gondwana rainforests which were extensively burned during the 2019-20 black summer bushfires. Queensland's environment department said it was already moving to protect the habitat of the newly identified species, a mountain frog with the scientific name *Philoria knowlesi*. You can read more here, from AAP: In Queensland, a \$6.75m mental health and wellness package has been announced to mark the start of Queensland small business month. The minister for employment and small business, Di Farmer, said the month would have a particular focus on small businesses hit by the pandemic and recent floods. As part of our \$14.5bn Queensland economic recovery plan, we are rolling out the small business support and wellness package. The package will directly address the pandemic's toll on business owners - with coordinated promotion of support services, as well as triage points for small businesses doing it tough. Included in the package will be the appointment of six specialist small business wellness coaches across Queensland, a \$3m small business support services fund and the extension of the education program "Small Business Smile4Biz". Farmer said: It has been an incredibly challenging time over the last two years and some Queensland small businesses are still rebuilding while contending with worker and supply shortages, which places added mental pressure and stress on business owners. A 96-year-old man has died with Covid in the ACT. There have been 939 new cases detected in the territory. There are 68 people being treated in hospital, including three in intensive care. The Victorian department of health has released additional information regarding today's Covid-19 update. Eleven of the 19 deaths recorded occurred in the past week, and four were in the past two days. Sadly, the department was notified of 19 deaths yesterday of people aged in their 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s and 100s. Eleven of today's reported deaths occurred in the past week including four deaths that occurred in the past two days. This brings the total number of deaths in Victoria since the pandemic began to 2,967. Now is not the time to take a risk on what you don't know. Interesting argument. When is? Clive Palmer's centrepiece campaign pledge to cap homeowners' interest rates for five years has been dismissed by economists as "radical", "crazy" and "utterly irresponsible" even though it will probably appeal to some gullible voters. According to the United **Australia** party's website, the mining billionaire's "economic plan for freedom and prosperity" pledges to set a maximum 3% interest rate for all home loans to head off a looming mass default as lending rates start to rise. Wednesday's surprisingly large 5.1% consumer price inflation figure has stoked expectations the Reserve Bank will be forced to lift its cash rate target from 0.1% when its board meets on Tuesday. Market home loan rates have been rising for months, with most fixed rates now between 3% and 5% with variable rates above 2%. Read the full story here: Queensland has released today's Covid update. There have been 5,885 new cases detected and, sadly, there have been five further deaths. The Australian Olympic Committee will support Ukrainian athletes seeking to resettle in **Australia** on humanitarian grounds, Reuters reports. John Coates, who is stepping down as president of the AOC after 32 years in the role, said today: The AOC executive has, by circular resolution last week, determined that the AOC will support humanitarian visa applications by Ukrainian athletes and will seek the assistance of ... our member sports in their settlement requirements. As Ukrainians are forced to defend their families and homes, Ukrainian athletes are amongst them ... How sad it is that young men and women just swapped their rackets and running spikes for rifles and flak jackets. Coates added the AOC would contribute \$100,000 to the International Olympic Committee's solidarity fund for the Ukrainian Olympic community. Earlier today, the AOC elected Ian Chesterman as the new president to succeed Coates. Anthony Albanese wraps up the presser by thanking everyone for coming along, adding: It's great to be out again. I look forward to the campaign launch here in Perth tomorrow, where we'll be outlining our plan for a better future. Asked about Labor's focus on a real wage increase, Jim Chalmers says: If you compare the real wage outcomes of Australians, versus the Americans ... to take one example, Australian workers are faring worse than their American counterparts. We are seeing inflation around the world, we are seeing inflation here. The difference is, we've had almost a decade now of wage stagnation, which is a deliberate design feature of this government. Now, Scott Morrison in his usual way - he takes credit but not responsibility. He wants to pretend that all of this cost of living pressure on families and on Australians more broadly has just shown up when Russia invaded Ukraine. Bill Shorten

Australia politics live updates: Albanese and Morrison to face off in election leaders' debate, Nine says;  
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again on the pledged robodebt royal commission: The aim of the royal commission is not about additional compensation. But Australians are owed an answer, aren't they? How can a government for four years illegally issue debts worth \$1.8bn against half a million of its fellow citizens and then take them to court, debt collectors, the whole ugly process ... how can this happen and Mr Morrison doesn't know who did it? All of the inquiries and court processes so far have not got to answer that crucial question. Who knew what, when? ... I just think taxpayers want justice. The victims want justice. We need to make sure it never happens again. Asked whether Labor will match the Coalition's pledged cut to PBS medicine costs, Albanese says: This the same government that in the 2014 budget had a \$5 increase in the PBS in prescriptions. This announcement today is not about prescriptions for Australians, it's about a prescription for Mr Morrison for his re-election. And thirdly, watch this space, I'm not going to make announcements here because then you might not turn up tomorrow. Albanese starts on cost-of-living measures: We have said we'll make childcare cheaper. We've said we have a plan to actually lift wages. We have said we have a plan as well to take pressure off electricity prices. He is interrupted by a comment about grocery price increases. Jim Chalmers takes over and reiterates similar points: The first thing is you need to acknowledge the serious cost-of-living pressure on Australians right now. Secondly, take responsibility for making a meaningful difference where you can. We have policies about getting power bills down, we have policies for cheaper, workable healthcare which is a big part of the story. We've got policies to make childcare cheaper, and we've got policies to get real wages moving again. Anthony Albanese is taking questions from reporters. Asked what mistakes Labor made in 2019 that they will not repeat, he says: We take collective responsibility for what's good and what's not so good. The truth is that we've been unsuccessful in three campaigns in a row. And what we did was we had a review, in which we outlined and released it in full. No other political party has done ever what we did ... I went to the National Press Club, I outlined the four-part strategy ... we are in the last quarter now. Bill Shorten has given some more details about the proposed robodebt royal commission: We have budgeted the costs to be up to \$30m. That's looking towards what the bushfires royal commission was and the pink batts royal commission was for costing. In terms of what victims of robodebt want, I haven't met victims of robodebt who don't want a royal commission. Ian Chesterman has been elected as the president of the Australian Olympic Committee, beating out Mark Stockwell to succeed John Coates, who has stepped down after 32 years in the role, AAP reports. Chesterman won the vote of AOC delegates 67-26 at Saturday's AGM in Sydney, which brought to an end Coates' remarkable reign as president, a tenure which delivered two Olympic Games to Australia. Chesterman, the AOC vice-president, was chef de mission of the Australian team at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and six Winter Olympics teams, and has been a member of the executive since 2001. Coates, who will remain as vice-president of the International Olympic Committee until 2024, played a key role in delivering both the 2000 Olympics to Sydney and 2032 Games to Brisbane. Bill Shorten is now talking about Labor's election pledge to launch a royal commission into robodebt: Just to briefly remind you of the robodebt scandal: \$1.8bn was illegally raised by the government in debts against nearly 500,000 Australian citizens. These citizens were vulnerable - they were pensioners, people who are unemployed, people with disabilities, university students from the country and the city ... I have spoken to families who absolutely believe that the pressure of the unfair debt notices raised against loved family members contributed to them taking their own life. The robodebt campaign over four years was the government going to war with its own people and it didn't have the legal authority. Labor have put forward our proposal for the terms of reference and will consult so we have them in place before Christmas of this year if we are to be elected. We are going to find out who was responsible because the federal government has never owned up, actually. On the funding announcement, Rita Saffioti, the WA minister for transport, says: It will be a true partnership. It is a \$250m commitment. It is a proposal we put to both sides of politics, it has been costed by the state government and includes ... \$80m for buses, it includes \$50m for the facility. It includes \$120m for the depot upgrades and all the necessary infrastructure. We very much thank Anthony Albanese and his team for getting the recognition of what we want, which is for new jobs in Western Australia, long-term manufacturing capacity, and also the ability to roll out these buses and make sure that we all do our bit to tackle climate change. Anthony Albanese is speaking now. He says having the national campaign launch in Western Australia "sends a message that I want to be the prime minister for the whole of Australia". He continues with an announcement about electric vehicles: We've agreed to partner with the WA McGowan government to deliver 130 electric buses made here. A core part of my pitch to the Australian people is making more things here. One of the lessons of the pandemic is we have to stand on our own two feet. We're vulnerable if we're at the end of supply chains. The Labor leader, Anthony Albanese, is campaigning with the shadow treasurer, Jim Chalmers, in Perth. Chalmers is up first: Here in Perth is the epicentre of Scott

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Morrison's cost of living crisis. Inflation here, at 7.6% in Perth, is the highest of any capital city in Australia. And if the Reserve Bank increases interest rates next Tuesday or next month, the cost for that on an average Western Australian mortgage will be \$94 a month if the increase is a quarter of a per cent. Western Australia had a total of 6,829 new cases to 8pm last night, according to the state's health authority. There are currently 234 people in hospital with Covid, eight of whom are in intensive care. The state recorded four historical deaths dating back to 29 March: a woman in her 40s, a man in his 70s and a man and a woman both in their 80s. WA currently has 43,586 active cases. Out on the campaign trail, Scott Morrison is aware of every angle, every interpretation. He curates images and conversations for the consumption of the media pack precisely. He is the star actor, while imagining being the spectator. He is the director of his own show. It's strange, after two years of pandemic politics, to be reminded of Morrison back in his natural habitat, pressing the flesh with voters, making small talk. Morrison is softer in this embodiment, he smiles and jokes easily. He knows this is his strength as a politician. There are none of the awkward pauses that used to plague Malcolm Turnbull when he attempted to mingle with middle Australia. None of the peculiar Abbott-isms that came before that. No risk of onion-eating here. For Morrison, he is confident that all the ingredients are there for a victory. But will it come together? Or will it remain a figment of imagination, a fantasy left behind on the campaign trail? Read the full story here: This is good analysis from my colleague Peter Hannam, our economics correspondent, on the pressures felt by renters around Australia as major party policies on housing affordability stagnate. The latest data, out on Wednesday, showed rent prices rising in all cities, including Melbourne and Sydney which had been hard hit by the absence of international students while borders were shut. South Australia has relaxed its Covid close contact rules but has also extended the emergency declaration for another month to deal with the ongoing pandemic. From Saturday, close contacts of positive cases are no longer required to isolate for seven days, bringing SA into line with NSW, Victoria, Queensland and the ACT. The change comes with new rules including a requirement for close contacts to take five rapid antigen tests over the seven-day period. At the same time, an extension for the Major Emergency Declaration, which provides the legal framework for ongoing Covid restrictions, has been approved. The declaration will remain in force until the end of May. Also remaining in force is a requirement for high school students to wear masks for the first four weeks of term two, starting on Monday. If you haven't already, I recommend reading this piece by my colleague Caitlin Cassidy, who will join us later today on the blog, about a Sydney family who was rejected for 35 rental homes despite \$1,000-a-week budget. It's a telling example of the present direness of the rental market. The entire series on Australia's rental crisis is eye-opening, and really worth your time. Here's the footage from the tail end of Barnaby Joyce's announcement earlier (with a slow-mo eyebrow raise edit at the end). A search and rescue effort is underway off the coast of north Queensland for a fisherman missing from a capsized tinny, AAP reports. The alarm was raised at about 6:30am this morning when a commercial fishing vessel found a 45-year-old man signalling for help in the water off the coast of Townsville. He and a friend had been fishing in a small tinny when the vessel capsized, throwing both men into the water off Sandfly Creek. A 45-year-old man was rescued by the commercial ship and taken to shore where he was treated for exposure. He was taken to hospital in stable condition, but a 41-year-old Townsville man is still missing. Police have launched a large-scale search for the fisherman and the capsized boat. Anyone who spots the four-metre, white Quintrex coast runner Queensland registration RD806Q is urged to contact police. The deputy prime minister Barnaby Joyce has been speaking in the Northern Territory. He has announced \$10m in federal funding as part of an upgrade to Darwin airport, as well as "\$10m for the kids and the Litchfield sports centre". On the airport, Joyce says the upgrade would involve 300 direct jobs: This \$10m goes towards a \$63m upgrade: \$10 million from the federal government, \$40m from the airport, \$10m from the territory government, \$3m from private enterprise. That will allow further things such as the development of amphibious aircraft ... [and] manufacturing of planes for Darwin. The details for the other \$10m promised for the sports centre wasn't broadcast on the ABC. Joyce, presumably for the journalists there, says: Do you need that cleaner for the \$10m for the sports? I'm going to make it cleaner for the announcement for the sports. But alas, the ABC has cut away. In case you missed it earlier, Labor has announced it will launch a royal commission into the robodebt scheme if it wins government, with the aim of determining who was responsible for implementing the discredited program. AAP has the story: The automated matching of tax and Centrelink data to raise debts against welfare recipients, for money the Coalition government claimed to have overpaid, was ruled unlawful in 2019. A \$1.2bn settlement between robodebt victims and the federal government was reached in 2020. But the Morrison government has never detailed who was accountable for the four-year scheme, and which ministers knew about its problems. Scott Morrison was social services minister when the scheme was conceived, but has denied personal

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responsibility for the disaster. Labor has long called for a royal commission into robodebt, which opposition leader Anthony Albanese described as "a human tragedy, wrought by this government". Against all evidence, and all the outcry, the government insisted on using algorithms instead of people to pursue debt recovery against Australians who in many cases had no debt to pay," he said on Saturday. It caused untold misery. Only an Albanese Labor government will find out the truth." The royal commission would be tasked with establishing who was responsible for the scheme, what advice was used in its implementation, and complaints handling processes. It would also look at the cost to taxpayers of the robodebt debacle, and the harm caused by those targeted. Prime minister Scott Morrison hit back at the proposal, saying the issues had already been addressed. There have been numerous inquiries into this and there have been court matters which we fully co-operated in. Labor's government services spokesman Bill Shorten said Australians still did not know "how this reckless scheme was unleashed". We do not know whether poor legal advice was given or whether legal advice was simply never sought. Albanese is set to unveil the proposals in Perth, where he has also announced a Labor government would partner with the state government to deliver a local electric bus manufacturing facility and more than 130 new, locally manufactured electric buses. In news that comes as absolutely no surprise, the Greens have announced they will preference Labor over Liberal candidates across the country. The Greens are running in 151 seats, and their how-to-vote cards will also recommend a preference for climate independents in key Liberal-held seats. Historically, Green preferences have overwhelmingly favoured Labor. The Australian Council of Social Service, the peak body for the community services sector, has backed Labor's robodebt royal commission election pledge. The Acoss chief executive, Dr Cassandra Goldie, said in a statement: The robodebt affair was not just a maladministration scandal, it was a human tragedy that resulted in people taking their lives. A royal commission is appropriate and proportionate. We need to properly probe the decisions and processes that led to this woeful situation and make sure nothing remotely similar ever happens again. But we also need to probe the underlying thinking. There is a very stark contrast between the rules for pursuing people on income support for overpayments and debts compared with the rules for corporate recipients claiming jobkeeper. A different morality seems to apply for those with deep pockets. Acoss will be an enthusiastic participant if this royal commission happens. This is an important opportunity to amplify the struggles of people who have not been heard. As governments increasingly rely on automated decision-making and technology to deliver life sustaining human services, often to people at high risk including those on income support, employment services and the NDIS, we strongly welcome this commitment from the ALP and urge all parties and candidates to deliver the same. Back to cost-of-living pressures. Morrison: I do understand that Australians are facing cost of living pressures. I do understand that there is rising pressure on interest rates ... we do know that the impacts on inflation are coming from well beyond Australia's shores. He criticises Labor: They have no magic pen that makes's people's wages go up any more than they have a magic pen that can change the price of a lettuce. Talking about the problem is not enough, Mr Albanese. Morrison then goes on to reiterate the Coalition's measures, including the temporary fuel excise cut, and the one-off \$250 cost-of-living payment, before wrapping up the press conference: And finally, today, what we've announced: cutting \$10 off the price of their medicines for the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. Asked whether the religious discrimination bill is dead in the water, Morrison says: I was devastated that that wasn't passed, along with faith communities. It was a great disappointment to me. But what I propose to do and made very clear is I will take it forward. But I'll be taking it forward as standalone legislation. It will deal with the RDA. It won't be dealing with other issues. Morrison is asked about Labor's election pledge to hold a royal commission into the robodebt scheme. He says: There have been numerous inquiries into this and there's been court matters which we've fully cooperated in and almost \$750m in reimbursements have been made by the government and changes to the scheme have been put in place. So the problem has been addressed. But any such inquiry, I imagine, would have to start with the process of ... income assessment, averaging of income, which was introduced by the Labor party. I find it quite hypocritical that a scheme that the Labor party actually introduced for income averaging - in assessing people's welfare entitlements - that they now seek to criticise the government for when the Labor party do this all the time. As a reminder, robodebt was introduced by the Coalition government in 2016. Now some questions on China's security deal with the Solomon Islands. Morrison, asked about the timing of the announcement, says: We're very aware of the influence that the Chinese government seeks to have in this country. We, in fact, introduced laws to prevent it. So any suggestion that the Chinese government doesn't seek to interfere in Australia - well, we didn't put that legislation in for no reason. We put it in there to ensure that Australian security could be safeguarded from foreign influence in our own country. Asked for a response regarding comments from China's vice foreign minister, who said Morrison's criticism of the



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deal amounted to disinformation, coercion and intimidation, he said: The Chinese government would say that, wouldn't they? Morrison has been asked repeatedly why the government did not include the medications cut as a measure in this year's budget, rather than saving it as an election promise. Asked a second time, he says: There are temporary measures that we put on the budget, longer term measures in the mid-year statement. It is a fairly common way that we do budgets ... This is a longer term measure and it will start next calendar year. So the reason that we're talking about it now, normally we would make an announcement like that later in the year. Victoria has reported 19 new Covid deaths and 9,064 new cases. There are currently 30 people in ICU and three requiring ventilators. Morrison: If you need these medicines, then I can think of no more essential service for you to get access to ... I should stress that this is a permanent change that follows indexation into the future and we're also ensuring that no one is worse off on any existing medication, and that will be dealt with through legislation when the parliament returns to ensure that those who are on discounted medicines will continue to get the discounts wherever they're getting them from. Morrison is talking about the new election pledge to cut medication costs: What we have decided to do from the first of January, so re-elected as a government, what we will put ... in the mid-year budget update is we will include a new measure which will see the cost of non-concessional PBS payments fall from \$42.50 down to \$32.50 - what's known as the PBS general co-payment. This will save patients taking one medication a month ... \$120 a year. Scott Morrison is campaigning with Bridget Archer in Tasmania. Speaking at a pharmacy in Mowbray, he says: We understood the need to take action to provide relief on cost of living pressures, and we know those pressures are real. We saw that reinforced again this week. Those pressures, as we know, are coming from all around the world, particularly the war in Europe, but the aftereffects and lingering effects of what's happening with Covid. And even more recently, we started to see emerge in the numbers the impact of things like the floods and so on. The Nationals senator Perin Davey has been speaking on the ABC. Asked about the Coalition's pledge to cut the cost of medicines listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme, she said it would come at significant cost to the federal budget, but would help individuals' health costs. Davey said: It will cost the budget, but it is something that we have heard the pharmacists - the Pharmacy Guild of Australia have been calling for a reduction in the PBS costs for some time - and we know that this will help. One of the biggest risk factors that we have in our health system is people avoiding costs, so people avoiding medications because they cost too much. So this is really going to help people with their cost of living, but also with their health outcomes. Anthony Albanese is now out of isolation and has positioned in Perth for his official campaign launch on Sunday. Earlier this week, Scott Morrison took aim at Albanese, contrasting Albanese's "quiet" week at home against his own "busy" schedule while isolating with Covid earlier this year. The comparison frustrated our political editor Katharine Murphy, who writes in her column today that needling Albanese over his Covid workload is a sign that Morrison is starting to worry. Morrison's prime ministership is now on the clock, at the halfway mark of the election campaign. She writes: Having had Covid himself, Morrison knows the lingering after effects of the virus are fatigue and brain fog. Debates, after a day of campaigning, are gruelling encounters, physically and mentally, even for seasoned professionals. So Morrison's calculation is simple: Albanese is significantly more likely to make a mistake when he's not 100%. Again, time is of the essence. Morrison knows he's got to find a pivot point in the campaign, and finding it is all on him. Read Murph's column here: Hello and welcome to day 20 of the election campaign. Labor has announced that if it wins government it would launch a royal commission into the Robodebt scheme to find out who was responsible for implementing the discredited program. If your memory needs jogging, the automated matching of tax and Centrelink data to raise debts against welfare recipients was ruled unlawful in 2019, with a \$1.2 billion settlement reached between Robodebt victims and the federal government in 2020. The Morrison government has never detailed who was accountable for the four-year scheme, and which ministers knew about its problems. Meanwhile, the Coalition will today pledge to cut the cost of medications for everyday conditions such as blood pressure and high cholesterol under a \$150 million cost-of-living measure. Scott Morrison will announce that the price of medications listed under the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme would be cut from January 1 next year, with a saving of \$10 per script. Let's get stuck in. You can contact me on Twitter @donnadlu or via email at [Donna.Lu@theguardian.com](mailto:Donna.Lu@theguardian.com) 34792 false Caitlin Cassidy (now) and Donna Lu (earlier) Scott Morrison at a chemist in Launceston, Tasmania, where he announced cuts to the cost of medicines as record inflation puts cost of living pressures in the election spotlight. Queensland employment and small business minister Di Farmer. Outgoing Australian Olympic Committee president John Coates (centre) at the AOC annual general meeting in Sydney. Shadow treasurer Jim Chalmers speaks to the media in Perth. Bill Shorten and Anthony Albanese speak to the media on day 20 of the election campaign in Perth. Anthony Albanese speaks to the media in Perth. Ian Chesterman speaks at the annual

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general meeting of the Australian Olympic Committee in Sydney. Anthony Albanese plugs in an electric bus while visiting Swan Transit Joondalup bus depot in Perth. Scott Morrison during a visit to Doblo's fruit market during the federal election campaign. Prime minister Scott Morrison visits a chemist in Launceston, Tasmania on Saturday, 30 April 2022. Prime minister Scott Morrison visits a chemist in Launceston, Tasmania on Saturday, 30 April 2022.

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