

I am an emergency response humanitarian worker with over 25 years international disaster response management experience in the field of public health. This comprises Water supply. Sanitation and hygiene education. Typically I prevent water related diseases from occurring after natural disasters or man-made disasters or complicated emergencies. I have attended and responded to several public health emergency responses, including cholera epidemics, and pandemic prevention, and reconstructed or built health clinics, schools and community water and sanitation infrastructure in approximately 25 countries. I have additionally trained fourteen National Red Cross Society emergency response country teams in Asia and the Pacific, including Australian Red Cross Delegates over a five year period. Some of my work highlights for pandemics and epidemics include;

- Designing and facilitating trainer of trainers in water related disease cross-contamination prevention, I've key messages wash hands with soap, avoid shaking hands, etc
- supervising international NGOs to meet the required international standards for camps and villages in Myanmar, for UNICEF/Australian Civilian Corps
- cholera epidemic response in DR Congo
- cholera epidemic response in Papua New Guinea
- Refugee and internally displaced camp design, construction and site management in Kosovo, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan

I was stationed in [REDACTED] Syria for Oxfam GB, doing Humanitarian Work since January 2019, and I was due to finish my contract at the end of March, 2020. It became apparent that COVID19 as a pandemic was taking hold, and a statement [from Scott Morrison] for Australian citizens to 'stay put' was convincing enough to agree with my in country country director to extend a further 3 months until the end of June. An Emirates flight was booked for me to return Beirut / Dubai to [REDACTED] on the [REDACTED]. Perhaps only a few days before my flight and return to Australia, I checked to see that the Dubai – [REDACTED] leg had been cancelled. Several hours of emails and phone calls, including further Australian news coverage, made it apparent that the Australian borders were either closed or capped. I think at that time, closed entirely to Australian inbound passengers. I booked an available Etihad flight from Athens / Doha to [REDACTED], and on payment, immediately the Doha leg was deemed cancelled. By now [June] my only available exit routes through the Syrian border to either Lebanon or Jordan were by using especial, freely available UN chartered flights to Dubai or Europe, but I was not able to take advantage of these, as there was no way of confirming a guaranteed and connecting confirmed flight [REDACTED] from Dubai or other key transit points, due to the Australian incoming passenger caps. I was locked in to where I was, but able to get documentation to leave, but I was locked out of Australia. It was August 16th when I eventually managed to get papers and passage out of Syria through to Beirut, where I chose to wait in Greece to get a confirmed flight. I spent two months in Greece trying to get flights [REDACTED]. With all airlines at that time, bookings were showing availability for seats to [REDACTED] or anywhere in Australia, but on payment, the [REDACTED] or Australian leg of the flight showed as cancelled. It might take a minimum 30 days to get refund from whichever airline and at one stage, I had two Australian bound flights waiting on refund. Now paying for hotels for two months, I decided to return to the UK to avoid spending all of my available money to stay with friends [couch surfing].

Having registered on smart traveller, and each relevant Australian country consulate that I was in, I continued to solely get home somehow. The consulates never had telephone or email response support available other than automated non updated information that they were doing all that they could. In England also I registered with the Australian Consulate in London, and it seemed that each hour of 24 hours, I became acutely attuned to every COVID update coming out of Australia, waiting for a gap to get home. My savings were dwindling, and I still had mortgage payments to make in Victoria,

and sustenance payments to make in the UK. [REDACTED]
Inbound Caps were fluctuating now to around 200 per week [REDACTED] But I couldn't help noticing the disparity of access to Australia between myself and celebrities, or sports stars or indeed the prime minister and his entourage drinking outside of a pub in the UK, then next quarantining at home in Canberra the following week. I find that extremely triggering even now to write.

I used all of available social media outlets such as facebook to garner updated information, wrote to my MP [REDACTED], and I sent emails and FB messages to the Victorian state government, to explain my plight and to ask for some assistance to get home. I received no reply from my MP, and the state government gave me the email contact of federal ministry, citing it was their [federal government] responsibility to set the conditions for inbound caps. I wrote to the email contact at federal level, and was told to contact my state, citing it was their [state government] responsibility to set the conditions for inbound caps.

Around November, I was quite depressed if I'm honest. My money was running out rapidly, and I felt like I had maybe 30 to 40 days before financial ruin. I'd maybe read on social media that Australian government were planning to facilitate one way flights from certain destinations around the world back to Australia, so I updated my smart traveller every day, wrote emails every day to Australian Consulate, London, and from nowhere, received a call from a young female government admin staff in Canberra at 0130am UK time, (approximately 15th November, 2020) asking the following questions:-

- Could I get to London Heathrow for the London Darwin flight in 30 hours time
- Could I get to a designated PCR testing facility before 11.30am the next morning
- Could I afford the \$2500 one way Qantas flight, and pay Qantas as confirmation
- Could I pay \$2500 quarantine fee to stay in Howard Springs, Northern Territory

I answered yes to everything, as with costs of taxis to PCR testing, train to London, overnight hotel in London, tube journey to Heathrow, follow on flights from Darwin to Melbourne after quarantine, I [REDACTED] I don't know how I would have answered, if that 0130am phone call was perhaps a week or two later. So a few hours later I woke and actioned everything and left for London around ten hours after that phone call.

I was on that first flight from London to Darwin, there were approximately 158 passengers, and all the DFAT staff members in London shepherding Australians through Heathrow airport, masked up, I think we possibly had another PCR test, filling more forms in, and not ever feeling safe or confident that my seat on the plane was guaranteed until we took off. I particularly remember at the check in queue, passengers getting a bit anti-social with the then Australian Consulate Ambassador, who was singing 'we'll all be home by Christmas', as if this was in some way even denting the problems we and hundreds of thousands of others were going through. and the queue curtly reminding the ambassador that there were tens if not hundreds of thousands of Australians still trying to get home, and that, 'so we wouldn't all be home by Christmas'. He left abruptly without comment, without engagement leaving his DFAT staff to continue shepherding us through. If you can imagine how tense we [passengers] were, not wanting to vent further with DFAT staff for fear of not getting the boarding pass. A very tense and traumatic lining up in that queue with some passengers not yet having received confirmation results from their PCR tests yet. I didn't receive confirmation until I was actually at the desk.

We arrived in Darwin, in the military area of the airport and were then herded through the RAAF arrivals, taking approximately 3 to 4 hours to exit the plane row by row, more forms, more segregation, and onto the coaches to wait further a few hours until transported to Howard Springs. At Howard Springs, we were given another PCR test and shown on a map where our manifest's cabins' zonal area

was. The press were there, and we were being portrayed by federal government in the media as the most vulnerable Australians being rescued from overseas. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] As passengers, we collectively agreed that we weren't the most vulnerable, rather we were the most available, fit and healthy, mostly single, and able Australians to drop everything to get to Heathrow.

Another PCR test on day 11, and I think the Darwin Springs staff were caught unawares of what we were all supposed to do on day 14. When I asked what time we would be released from quarantine and how I was getting to Darwin airport, I was told I would need to book a taxi. Only later I imagine it dawned on whoever was in charge that coaches should take us all either to Darwin, or to the airport. I went to the airport and boarded [REDACTED]

When I arrived, Victoria had its own very different COVID response measures in place, but it seemed that I could get home to rural Victoria. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I have received phone calls and automated emails ever since Howard Springs, asking me to pay for the quarantine. Now it is exactly three years later, and I refuse to pay, because Australian Government financially ruined me with its international arrivals caps, and because I had extensive costs to bare whilst stranded overseas.

- When I tried to ask for help to State and then Federal government, they told me to go back to speak to the other, and citing each other for having the responsibility.
- Australian government has never been held accountable for its poor execution of responsibilities as mentioned on the inside of every Australian passport. There are several developing countries that repatriated hundreds of thousands of its citizens. Australian government firstly closed its borders to Australians, and did not repatriate one single Australian.
- Quarantine costs are the responsibility of federal government and demanding payment from its citizens is illegal. There have been several different methodologies used by different states to recover quarantine costs including garnishing bank accounts in NSW, and so the different states' inconsistent approach and lack of clarity speaks volumes. The government uses its size as intimidation to force formerly stranded Australians to pay costs from citizens rather than government actually having coherent and lawful right.

- [REDACTED] I initially did have a flight paid for back in 2020, and it was cancelled by the airline because of Australian imposed caps. I was denied re-entry to Australia which is unforgiveable. Incidentally, I have never had COVID, although I consider that if I did oin re-entry to Australia, why at the same time were the general public allowed to quarantine at home. That is inconsistent application of rules, and makes no professional emergency response sense.

My professional opinion is that non emergency personnel handled the emergency in Australia. There was an existing emergency plan and it was ignored when it all got too exciting. Politicians with zero experience or capacity of managing an emergency response invoked laws or acts that

allowed them to run freely with knee jerk populist approaches to solving problems. The big serious question nobody is asking is why did these non-qualified politicians and civil servants manage the COVID 19 response when there are already thousands of emergency personnel and organisations around Australia and the world who make correct decisions under intense emergency pressures, difficult decisions that they're used to making to achieve the long term outcomes? National and international emergency response people make these decisions all of the time, so why was the emergency plan ignored? If I had managed any of my 25 years international responses in the way Australia federal and state government handled COVID, I would never get work again, because my reputation would be ruined. I truly believe it was managed so badly. Not only were knee-jerk reaction decisions made, billions of dollars were wasted on the wrong measures, and billions of dollars were lost in livelihoods. There are still no demonstrable figures published or have emerged that overall morbidity rates were effectively managed, but there are many individual cases of death and suffering that can be attributed to the response decisions. Suicides, gender based violence, restrictions of life saving treatment or absence of early detection. Ministers are definitely culpable by law for that. So why is no one being charged?

- My personal opinion is that 'mateship and fair go' values are gone forever. The government used main stream media to pitch public opinion of resident citizens against stranded Australians. I now have total distaste for Australian life and complete distrust of this nation's leaders. I don't trust or love Australia anymore, the whole episode left me depressed and highly anxious on many days, and I'm strongly considering leaving Australia for good as soon as [REDACTED] and go have a lucky life somewhere else.

Specifically because lives were also unnecessarily lost, my wish is that every decision maker from the top down should be held accountable for what we call. in emergency response, and at the highest office, asked to account for lives and livelihoods lost. It would be appropriate therefore that the charges they should face include manslaughter and/or financial mismanagement.

My suggestions;

- Thoroughly investigate every known key decision maker that managed the response for incompetence, using emergency response sector professionals to analyse all key decisions were made that were significantly outside of the national emergency plan. Should any of those decisions be attributable to manslaughter or financial irregularities, press charges. By law, Ministers have a duty of care and are culpable for prosecution if people come to harm.
- Stop the continued rorting of stranded Australians for quarantine fees, and Compensate stranded Australians with an apology
- Stick to the emergency plan in future and take the key decisions away from incompetents.
- Don't cap Australians from re-entering Australia. Assist, don't create stranded Australians and become the laughing stock of the world.
- In the interests of safety and avoiding hysteria, Do not allow the media to worsen or polarize opinion and worsen the situation.