The NSW – Victoria border closure: impacts on workers and alternative scenarios – an analysis of census data
Report No. 141
Rachel Whitsed
The NSW-Victoria border closure: impacts on workers and alternative scenarios – an analysis of census data.

Rachel Whitsed

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For further information contact:

Associate Professor Rachel Whitsed
Charles Sturt University
Institute for Land, Water and Society
rwhitsed@csu.edu.au

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The NSW-Victoria border closure: impacts on workers and alternative scenarios

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1. Executive summary

Almost 300,000 people live along the NSW-Victoria border. Over 20,000 workers cross the border for work daily, with many thousands more crossing for essential medical appointments, education, or caring roles, and thousands more for daily life.

The current border restrictions mean some people need to apply for permits and face lengthy crossing times, and others cannot cross for any reason. Just over 15,000 people who need to cross for work live within the “border zone” and therefore can apply for permits. Almost 5,500 people who need to cross the border for work live outside of the “border zone” and therefore cannot cross unless they are classed as critical workers. These are people whose workplaces are open and require them to be there – only a small fraction of these can successfully work from home. These are people who live within 50km of the border – they are not long-distance travellers.

Table 1. Communities most impacted by working cross-border

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Working population</th>
<th>Number who work cross-border and can apply for a permit</th>
<th>Number who work cross-border and cannot access permits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mildura</td>
<td>23,511</td>
<td>2,130</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robinvale</td>
<td>1,174</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swan Hill</td>
<td>11,177</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echuca-Moama</td>
<td>17,848</td>
<td>1,841</td>
<td>537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tocumwal / Cobram-Barooga</td>
<td>5,929</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarrawonga-Mulwala</td>
<td>6,316</td>
<td>884</td>
<td>509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corowa-Wahgunyah / Rutherglen</td>
<td>3,763</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albury-Wodonga</td>
<td>43,478</td>
<td>9,664</td>
<td>1,125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corryong / Towong</td>
<td>2,478</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigo</td>
<td>5,398</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>987</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis in this report shows where the affected people live, and proposes some solutions to move the checkpoints so that as few as 1,000 people need to cross this boundary for work, allowing the border communities to continue to function as cross-border communities.
2. Introduction

This report has been compiled to provide data to inform decision-making around the NSW-Victoria border closure put in place to stop the spread of COVID-19 from Victoria to New South Wales. The closure and corresponding permit system have a significant impact on border communities, with close to 300,000 people living along the border and over 20,000 crossing the border for work alone.

This report uses data from the Census of Population and Housing, 2016 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2018). The methodology used to derive the data is detailed in the appendix. This analysis is focussed on workers, primarily because census data is available on Place of Work and Place of Residence and can be cross-tabulated. These figures will be an underestimation of the total number of people needing to cross the border, as it does not account for students, or people crossing the border for medical reasons.

The alternative scenarios presented are for comparison, to show that a different location of checkpoints would impact vastly fewer people. The viability of policing these different locations would need to be investigated, but this analysis shows that the number of people wishing to cross at these checkpoints would be a fraction of those currently wishing to cross the border.

The author recommends that if checkpoints are required, they should be between population centres, not within population centres. Each of the border communities needs to be able to continue to function as a cross-border community, not just for work, but also for education and health. The northern boundary in both scenarios presented below would achieve this.
3. Populated areas along the NSW-Victoria border

Almost 300,000 people live along the NSW-Victoria border, with a third of these in NSW and two thirds in Victoria.

Cities and towns along the NSW-Victoria border with residents and workers who cross the border on daily basis include Mildura, Robinvale, Swan Hill, Echuca-Moama, Tocumwal, Cobram-Barooga, Yarrawonga-Mulwala, Corowa-Wahgunyah, Rutherglen, Albury-Wodonga, Towong and Corryong, and Indigo, as well numerous other places within 50-100km of the border, which are not included in this count.

Table 2: Population along the NSW-Victoria border

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Populated area</th>
<th>Includes SA2s</th>
<th>NSW population</th>
<th>Victorian population</th>
<th>Total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mildura</td>
<td>Wentworth-Buronga (NSW), Irymple (VIC), Merbein (VIC), Red Cliffs (VIC), Mildura-North (VIC), Mildura-South (VIC)</td>
<td>5,967</td>
<td>50,154</td>
<td>56,121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robinvale</td>
<td>Robinvale (VIC)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3,313</td>
<td>3,313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swan Hill</td>
<td>Gannawarra (VIC), Kerang (VIC), Swan Hill (VIC), Swan Hill Region (VIC)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27,823</td>
<td>27,823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echuca-Moama</td>
<td>Moama (NSW), Echuca (VIC), Kyabram (VIC), Numurkah (VIC)</td>
<td>5,849</td>
<td>37,751</td>
<td>43,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tocumwal / Cobram-Barooga</td>
<td>Tocumwal – Finley – Jerilderie (NSW), Cobram (VIC)</td>
<td>9,728</td>
<td>6,348</td>
<td>16,076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarrawonga-Mulwala</td>
<td>Corowa Region (NSW), Moira (VIC), Yarrawonga (VIC)</td>
<td>6,736</td>
<td>10,500</td>
<td>17,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corowa-Wahgunyah / Rutherglen</td>
<td>Corowa (NSW), Rutherglen (VIC)</td>
<td>5,482</td>
<td>3,869</td>
<td>9,351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albury-Wodonga</td>
<td>Albury-East (NSW), Albury-North (NSW), Albury-South (NSW), Albury Region (NSW), Lavington (NSW), West Wodonga (VIC), Wodonga (VIC).</td>
<td>61,269</td>
<td>39,353</td>
<td>100,622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corryong / Towong</td>
<td>Towong (VIC)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5,956</td>
<td>5,956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigo</td>
<td>Beechworth (VIC), Chiltern-Indigo Valley (VIC), Yackandandah (VIC)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11,781</td>
<td>11,781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>95,031</strong></td>
<td><strong>196,848</strong></td>
<td><strong>291,879</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The border closure directly impacts a large proportion of these 300,000 people by restricting their daily movement across the border. This includes, for some people, movement that is allowed within local Stage 3 restrictions, but is denied because of the border closure, including, but not limited to caring for relatives and vulnerable people, accessing medical care, education, and attending work where the workplace is still open and working from home is not possible.
The NSW-Victoria border closure: impacts on workers and alternative scenarios

Map 1 – Population density along the border (see Appendix for larger maps)

Map 1A
Population density along the border - Western

Map 1B
Population density along the border - Eastern

Map 1C
Population density along the border – Albury-Wodonga region
4. Workers who cross the border

A large number of workers crosses the border on a daily basis. Map 2 shows the impact on residents – the number of workers who live in a region but work across the border. Map 2* (see Appendix) shows the impact on workplaces – the number of workers who work in a region but live across the border. For example, in South Albury, 23% of residents work in Victoria, but 32% of workers live in Victoria. So when cross-border workers are impacted, it is a problem for both their place of residence and their place of work.

All along the border, the total number of workers who cross is over 20,000 people (not including people who live outside of the regions included in this analysis), with half of these in Albury-Wodonga.

![Cross border workers by border region](image1)

![Number of cross border workers by region and state of residence](image2)

It is noteworthy that the majority of the 400 people in Towong shire who need to cross the border are not farmers, but are in fact from the towns of Bethanga, Bellbridge and Tallangatta, which service and are serviced by Albury. Further analysis of cross-border workers by industry and age can be found in the Appendix.
The NSW-Victoria border closure: impacts on workers and alternative scenarios

Map 2 Proportion of workers who work cross-border, by SA2 of residence

Map 2A: Proportion (map) and number (table) of workers who work cross-border – Western

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SA2</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wentworth</td>
<td>1,106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irymple</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merbein</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mildura Region</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Cliffs</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mildura-North</td>
<td>487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mildura-South</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robinvale</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gannawarra</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerang</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swan Hill</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swan Hill Region</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echuca</td>
<td>777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moama</td>
<td>1,423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyabram</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numurkah</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tocumwal-Finley-</td>
<td>786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerilderie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cobram</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Map 2B: Proportion (map) and number (table) of workers who work cross-border – Eastern

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SA2</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corowa Region</td>
<td>646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moira</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarrawonga</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corowa</td>
<td>448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rutherford</td>
<td>591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albury-East</td>
<td>1,769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albury-North</td>
<td>910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albury-South</td>
<td>1,073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albury Region</td>
<td>475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lavington</td>
<td>1,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West-Wodonga</td>
<td>2,167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wodonga</td>
<td>3,189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towong</td>
<td>412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beechworth</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yackandandah</td>
<td>472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiltern-Indigo Valley</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Map 2C: Proportion of workers who work cross-border – Albury-Wodonga detail
5. Analysis of Albury-Wodonga Functional Economic Region

The Albury-Wodonga Functional Economic Region (https://www.alburycity.nsw.gov.au/strategies-and-plans/albury-wodonga-regional-economic-development-strategy) comprises five Local Government Areas – Albury City, Wodonga City, Greater Hume Shire, Federation and Indigo Shire. The state border cuts this region in half and a proportion of residents live outside the current “border zone”. Over 14,000 workers within the region cross the border for work, the majority working with Albury City or Wodonga City.

Currently a portion of the Economic Region falls outside the “border zone” and these workers cannot get permits (see section 6 below).

There is still significant activity between this region and surrounding regions – for example, 740 residents (29%) of Towong Shire (mainly residents of Bethanga, Bellbridge and Tallangatta) work within the Economic Region, and 884 residents (12%) of Indigo Shire (mainly residents of Chiltern and Beechworth) work outside the Economic Region (mostly in Wangaratta City and Alpine Shire).

The boundary of the Economic Region would not necessarily make the best boundary for checkpoints, given the above, but even so, the number of people needing to cross the Economic Region boundary for work (4,310) is around 30% of those needing to cross the state border for work (14,253).
6. Current border closure impacts

The current border closure requires permits for those who reside within the “border zone”, and then only for limited purposes, with very few people outside of the “border zone” able to cross the border at all. The proportion of people needing to cross the border for work is shown above in Section 3. The maps that follow show the proportion of people who cannot get a permit because they live outside the border zone (not accounting for the small number of critical workers with exceptions).

Almost 5,500 people along the river need to cross the border for work but cannot access permits, either because they live outside the “border zone”, or work outside the “border zone”, with the majority in Victoria. These are all people who live within 50km of the border, in most cases much closer – these are not long-distance travellers.

While the majority of workers in Albury-Wodonga, Echuca-Moama, Mildura and Yarrawonga-Mulwala can apply for permits, in all other border regions the majority of cross-border workers cannot access permits. Indigo shire (most noticeably Rutherglen, but also Chiltern, Yackandandah and Tangambalanga) and Towong shire (in particular the western region adjoining Albury) are particularly affected by being excluded from the “border zone”. Many of the residents in these shires live within 20km of the border, including Rutherglen (10km), Bethanga (12km) and parts of Barnawartha (5km), but despite this, have not been included in the border region.

In total, an estimated 3,260 Victorian residents and 2,155 NSW residents cannot access permits to attend work, unless they satisfy the critical workers permit criteria.
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**Map 3 Proportion of workers who work cannot get a permit to work cross-border**

**Map 3A Proportion (map) and number (table) of workers who cannot get a permit to attend work - Western**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SA2</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wentworth</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irymple</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merbein</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mildura Region</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Cliffs</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mildura-North</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mildura-South</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robinvale</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gannawarra</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerang</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swan Hill</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swan Hill Region</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echuca</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moama</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyabram</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numurkah</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tocumwal-Finley-Jerilderie</td>
<td>483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cobram</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Map 3B Proportion (map) and number (table) of workers who cannot get a permit to attend work - Eastern**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SA2</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corowa Region</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moira</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarrawonga</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corowa</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rutherford</td>
<td>439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albury-East</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albury-North</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albury-South</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albury Region</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lavington</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Wodonga</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wodonga</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towong</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beechworth</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yackandandah</td>
<td>463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiltern-Indigo Valley</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Map 3C Proportion of workers who cannot get a permit to attend work – Albury-Wodonga detail**

7. Scenario 1 – “Clancy-Tilley border bubble”

On 13 August 2020, Justin Clancy MP, Member for Albury, and Bill Tilley MLA, Member for Benambra, suggested a region made up of the Albury and Benambra electorates. This region is slightly larger than the Albury-Wodonga Functional Economic Region (section 4) and includes Towong shire and part of Snowy Valleys LGA.

If checkpoints were placed at the boundaries of this region, the number of people needing to cross these boundaries for work would be approximately 5,500 – about half of the number currently needing to cross.

If only the northern border was used for checkpoints, then the number would be much smaller – see Section 8.

Map 4 Scenario 1 – proportion of workers needing to cross the boundary of the “Clancy-Tilley border bubble” to attend work
8. Scenario 2 – checkpoints north of border

Although there are a lot of populated areas along the river, north of the river is much less densely populated. The exact line and placement of checkpoints would need to be considered, but a first analysis shows that placing a boundary line approximately 60km north of the river would greatly reduce the number of people needing to cross the checkpoints to work to fewer than 1,300 along the entire border, with the majority moving between the Albury-Wodonga region and the Wagga Wagga region. With such low numbers – around 10% of those currently needing to cross the border for work – it would be possible to allow all of these people to cross for work with a permit system, while still stopping long-distance travellers.

![Map of the NSW-Victoria border showing population distribution and checkpoints](image-url)
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Appendix A - Analysis of workers by industry and age in Albury-Wodonga region

This section gives a snapshot of workers in the Albury-Wodonga region by Industry at LGA level.

Workers who cross the border by industry (LGA)

A large number of health care workers (2,396) cross the border for work. In Wodonga, 38% of all health care workers cross the border for work. Indigo, Alpine and Towong shires have between them 370 cross-border health care workers, the majority of whom are outside the “border zone” and unable to get permits for work. Another concerning area is cross-border education workers – teachers and university lecturers – who cannot attend their schools and universities. In Towong shire, 22% of all education providers are unable to cross the border to teach.

Towong and Indigo Shires are shown separately, as these are regions that have so far largely been left out of the “border zone”, to illustrate the large number of people in these regions who cannot work from home, yet are unable to get permits to cross the border. In Towong shire, 437 people need to cross the border for work, almost half of these in health care, education and construction, industries where workers are unable to work from home.
In Indigo shire, 1,606 people need to cross the border for work, again with a majority in occupations who cannot work from home.
Workers who cross the border by age (LGA)

In the Albury-Wodonga region, people aged 20-39 are overrepresented as cross-border workers, with over a quarter (26%) crossing the border for work, compared to 22% of all workers.

With the exception of the 15-19 year old age group (which is a smaller group by total number), younger workers are disproportionately affected by the border closure, calculated as percentage of workers in each age group who need to cross the border for work.

There are many other attributes that cross-border workers could be analysed by, including gender and income, that would likely also show that some demographics are disproportionately affected by the border closure. This analysis may be included in a future version of this document.
Appendix B – Methodology

All data is sourced from the Census of Population and Housing, 2016, Australian Bureau of Statistics. Population density (Maps 1A-1C) were calculated at meshblock level. The majority of analysis was carried out at Statistical Area 2 (SA2) level, which is the smallest geographical unit for Place of Work data. SA2s are medium-sized general purpose areas designed to represent a community that interacts together socially and economically, with a population range of 3,000-25,000 persons\(^1\).

The Place of Work against Place of Residence tabulations (Maps 2-5) were calculated in TableBuilder\(^2\), counting persons aged 15 years and over by Place of Work (POW) and Place of Usual Residence (UR) by SA2 in 2016.

As SA2 boundaries do not line up with the “border zone” boundaries, population (including cross-border working population) was apportioned according to meshblock populations, to calculate how many people live and work each side of the border both within and outside of the “border zone”.

The Albury-Wodonga Functional Economic Region (Section 5) is based on Local Government Areas (LGAs). These do not align with SA2s, and therefore the same method was used to apportion population to SA2 areas inside and outside of the Economic Region.

The “Clancy-Tilley border bubble” (Section 7) is based on electoral boundaries, which do not line up with LGAs or SA2s. The same method was used as above.

It is recognised that adjusting the population within these areas makes an assumption that people within a region cross to other regions for work uniformly throughout the SA2. This is clearly not the case, but in the absence of Place of Work data at a finer geographic resolution, adjusting by population is the closest approximation possible.

It should also be noted that cells in the TableBuilder tables have been randomly adjusted to avoid the release of confidential data, therefore the numbers and proportions given should be taken as estimations only. However the totals across the regions will be a true reflection of the number of people affected.

Finally, the census data was collected in 2016, and therefore some newer residential areas will not be reflected, and the true numbers across the analysis are likely to be 2-5% higher, due to growth.

TableBuilder and ArcMap were used under licence from the Spatial Analysis Network (SPAN), Charles Sturt University.

\(^1\) https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/1270.0.55.001~July%202016~Main%20Features~Statistical%20Area%20Level%202%20(SA2)~10014
\(^2\) Copyright Commonwealth of Australia, 2018, see abs.gov.au/copyright. ABS data licensed under Creative Commons, see abs.gov.au/ccby

Charles Sturt
University
Appendix C – Larger versions of maps plus additional maps

Map 1A – Population density along the border - Western

Map 1B – Population density (Eastern)
Map1C – Population density (Albury-Wodonga region)
Map 2A Proportion of workers who need to **cross the border** for work by SA2 of **residence** (Western)
Map 2B Proportion of workers who need to **cross the border** for work by SA2 of **residence** (Eastern)
Map 2C Proportion of workers who need to **cross the border** for work by SA2 of **residence** (Albury-Wodonga region)

Map 2A* Proportion of workers who need to **cross the border** for work by SA2 of **workplace** (Western)
Map 2B* Proportion of workers who need to **cross the border** for work by SA2 of **workplace** (Eastern)
Map 2C* Proportion of workers who need to cross the border for work by SA2 of workplace (Albury-Wodonga region)
Map 3A Proportion of people who **cannot get a permit** to attend work by SA2 of **residence** (residence and/or workplace outside of border zone and in different states) (Western)
Map 3B Proportion of people who **cannot get a permit** to attend work by SA2 of **residence** (residence and/or workplace outside of border zone and in different states) (Eastern)
Map 3C Proportion of people who **cannot get a permit** to attend work by SA2 of **residence** (residence and/or workplace outside of border zone and in different states) (Albury-Wodonga region)
Map 3A* Proportion of people who cannot get a permit to attend work by SA2 of workplace (residence and/or workplace outside of border zone and in different states) (Western)
Map 3B* Proportion of people who cannot get a permit to attend work by SA2 of workplace (residence and/or workplace outside of border zone and in different states) (Eastern)
Map 3C* Proportion of people who cannot get a permit to attend work by SA2 of workplace (residence and/or workplace outside of border zone and in different states) (Albury-Wodonga region)
Map 4 Scenario 1 Proportion of workers needing to cross the boundary of the “Clancy-Tilley border bubble” to attend work by SA2 of residence
Map 4* Scenario 1 Proportion of workers needing to cross the boundary of the “Clancy-Tilley border bubble” to attend work by SA2 of workplace
Appendix D – Bill Tilley and Justin Clancy’s proposal
Attached on following page
13 August 2020

Premier of NSW
The Hon. Gladys Berejiklian
PO Box 5341
Sydney
NSW 2001

Premier of Victoria
The Hon. Daniel Andrews
1 Treasury Place
Melbourne
Victoria 3002

Dear Premiers,

We write as a matter of urgency to encourage the adoption of a strategic and more targeted approach to the public policy that is imposing unsafe and unworkable COVID-19 restrictions on the largest regional centre on the NSW/Victorian border, a proposal supported by leaders in our community that could also provide a roadmap to how we live, work and raise families under the ongoing threat of this virus and future pandemics.

At present the Albury (NSW) and Benambra (Victoria) electoral districts and their commercial centres are facing unnecessary and crippling restrictions that fail to recognise the unique relationship between the cross-border communities and its 142,872 people at the last Census. The community is frustrated by perceptions of the lack of coordination between the two states on their planning for their border communities, with the resulting policy disconnect applied as a "one-size-fits-all" solution. Families, businesses, industry, education and health care are struggling to survive and failing to meet the needs of people under your care. The economic and social cost is incalculable. Mental health is one of the major casualties.

The public perception is of arbitrary lines that have left businesses with builders on one side of the river and their tradesman on the other; farmers who can't tend their animals; a public hospital whose COVID specialist physicians were exiled by overnight changes to Border crossing permits, the head nurse in ICU similarly prevented from working; teachers going to school while their children learn from home and an 80-year-old, chronically ill grandmother left homeless with her house sold and no exemption for her move to Coffs Harbour to be in her daughter's care. Pinched between Victoria's Stage 3 restrictions and the ill-advised conditions applied to Border-crossing permits the current situation is unsustainable, divisive, and encouraging non-compliance and law breaking.
This region has seen a single cluster of Melbourne-acquired, COVID-cases affecting a NSW family since March. We hold hope that there is an end date for Victoria’s Stage 3 restrictions and a vaccine, but the present crisis and likelihood of future pandemics provides you with the opportunity to bring these communities together and demonstrate to the country how we can live and work while effectively managing this and all future crises.

We want you to be the Champions of overcoming past failures, delivering a legacy built on far-sighted, innovative policy that could provide the blueprint for similar and far greater cities across the nation.

- We’re asking you to put a ring around the Albury and Benambra electorates. To make this the test case for how we live with and respond to the immediate threat of COVID-19 and future pandemics.
- Use this “Border Bubble” to demonstrate best practice in living in COVID-normal and responding to outbreaks.
- We are ideally placed — the largest regional centre between Sydney and Melbourne, with no COVID cases but with the potential threat from both cities.
- For almost half a century this region has been identified as a single entity by public policy and planning at a State and National level. The Boite/Askin/Hamer/Whitlam and Fraser decentralisation policy brought major employers to the region from 1972; in 2001, the Victorian and NSW Premiers, Steve Bracks and Bob Carr, planned for Albury/Wodonga to be one city and little more than a decade ago the creation of the nation’s only cross border hospitals and health service that now includes a regional cancer centre and mental health.
- Our community is asking you to embrace that sentiment by acknowledging we are by design and public policy one economic region.
- We are asking you to lift Victoria’s Stage 3 restrictions and remove the need for NSW Border crossing permits for those inside the bubble.
- We would maintain the use of masks, social distancing and proper hygiene.
- It may mean the relocation of Border checkpoints and concessions from State health authorities.
- It would require a dedicated, rapid response, contact tracing team.
- We’re not calling for a committee of management nor additional public funds.

This “Bubble” would draw on existing knowledge and act as the bellwether to getting people back to work, businesses opening, schools resuming face-to-face teaching and uniting families across the states and nation. It recognises we are very different to the city suburbs or other regional centres. This community have been model citizens – followed the strict health guidelines and adhered to restrictions. We call on you to have the courage to accept this challenge in the knowledge that this community will reward you with its faith and trust in a new COVID normal.
Your action can also reignite 50 years of stalled public policy and planning for decentralisation that initially created the Albury Wodonga Development Corporation. Your courage could champion change – generational change that delivers on the national growth centre drive in the 1970s that seeded major industry such as Mars, Uncle Toby’s, Borg-Warner, Australian Tax Office, and enhanced Defence capability and a paper mill to name just a few. Many believe that the failure to deliver the one city concept by Premiers Bracks and Carr was a lost opportunity that has built the barriers that now threaten the viability of business, jobs and life under COVID-19 restrictions.

This pandemic has sharpened focus on the anomalies that plague our communities. Divergent policy and regulations from two state jurisdictions that are now accepted as the cost of doing business and working on the Border. The "Bubble" may lay the groundwork to removing those anomalies.

Our proposal is formative and accepts there is no mortgage on the good ideas. There will be "red flags" and "what ifs" but this is an opportunity to tackle COVID head-on, bridge the community divide and champion change and policy for the good of the entire nation. Our community won’t accept the platitudes offered to local media that simply claims these measures are your only defence against COVID-19 reaching Sydney.

This proposal is offered in good faith, it is a call to action that we hope you have the courage to embrace. Attached are signatories from business, industry, education, health and local council leaders who are a small sample of those who support this concept.

Sincerely

Bill Tilley
MEMBER FOR BENAMBRA

Justin Clancy
MEMBER FOR ALBURY
TIM PARRAH
KEVIN MACK
MAYOR OF ALBURY

BJ
Bronwyn Tyrell

CO
Bruce Parran

J M
John Martin

Al Croup. Regional Manager
Albury 802-

Chair
Albury Northside
Chamber of Commerce

ANDREW COTTRILL
REGIONAL MANAGER
BUSINESS NSW

ADJUNCT 495 UC PARTNERS
CHANCE DUTY UNION

CEO Nungabaneena Aboriginal Corp.
Dr Craig Underhill MBBS FRACP
Medical Oncologist
Conjoint Senior Lecturer UNSW
Clinical Director Cancer Services, Albury Wodonga Health
Clinical Director, Hume Regional Integrated Cancer Service
Medical Advisor Cancer Services, Murrumbidgee Health Service
Ph: +61 250 641515
Fax: +61 250 641516

LY ANNA SPEEDIE
WODONGA MAYOR

John Elkins
MD
MURRAY HUME BBB LTD

ERIC PIRILCA
DIRECTOR NORDCON P/L

Geoff Gwilym
Chief Executive Officer
VACC
Level 7 | 464 St Kilda Road | Melbourne Vic 3004
Ph: 03 9829 1103 | M: 0417 350 159 | ggwilym@vacc.com.au

DAVID WORTMANN
TOWONG SHIRE MAYOR

towong

PETER ANDERTON

CEO VICTORIAN TRANSPORT ASSOCIATION
DAVID MUE
RICE GRAPHIC IMAGES WOODONGA

MATT BURNE OAM
CHAIRMAN, AWNH
ALBURY WOODONGA HEALTH

PETER ROPER
MAYOR OF ALPINE SHIRE

WILLIAM BONNICI
FIRST NATIONAL REAL ESTATE
BONNICI & ASSOCIATES

WHITE
MORRIS BURKE
WOODONGA HEALTH

RPA AND DISABILITY ADVOCATE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DAVID AFONSO
DIRECTOR - AFONSO BUILDING SOLUTIONS
Chair Senior Medical Council AWNH
Head of Urology Unit AWNH
Deputy chair Medical Advisory Committee, ANPM

Dr Jonathan Leish
MABS, MRCS, MD, FRCS(CAND), FRACS
ALBURY WOODONGA HEALTH