



We Know Daniel Andrews Has Maimed Melbourne. He's Also Wreaking Ruin In The Regions

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The implementation of Victoria's lockdown restrictions highlights the growing divide between Melbourne and regional Victoria. The Melbourne centric Victorian government has ignored the issues faced by regional Victorians, failing to implement measures in proportion to the varying risk of coronavirus across the state.

To understand why many regional Victorians are frustrated with the restrictions one has only to look at the active cases map of Victoria. There are 139 active cases in Melbourne but only five cases across regional Victoria, a landmass larger than most European countries. These five cases are just beyond the border of metropolitan Melbourne. Yet, the Andrews government has inexplicably tied any further easing of restrictions in regional Victoria to case numbers in Melbourne.

In my shire of Corangamite in south-west Victoria, there have only ever been three cases, there has been no community transmission, and there are zero active cases. Yet the restrictions in place are still more severe in many respects than the restrictions imposed on the hardest hit councils in Melbourne between March and August.



The Andrews government's Melbourne-centric policy has failed to account for the lower risk of transmission in regional Victoria. The Corangamite Shire, for example, has 0.04 people per hectare compared to Greater Melbourne's 5 people per hectare. It doesn't take an expert in epidemiology to work out that the risk of viral disease is not uniform between regional Victoria and a city with 135 times the population density.

When questioned as to why it is mandatory to wear a mask outside when there is no one in the same square kilometre, Daniel Andrews dismissed the issue as an "esoteric debate". It is hardly esoteric for the many Victorians who work in wide-open outdoor spaces, who may encounter 50 head of cattle for every human, and are far removed from the world of packed trains and office elevators.

Shutting down businesses and preventing social interaction in areas with zero cases of coronavirus is indefensible, especially when the government maintains that it is not pursuing an eradication strategy. There is no science or rational risk assessment that supports making masks mandatory for those walking the streets of Mildura, a town more than five hours drive from the nearest known case.

Not being allowed to have people in your own home, visit loved ones, or operate your business to capacity when there are no cases of coronavirus in the district is an absurd restriction, and would not have been believed possible several months ago.

There is no reason why restrictions cannot be further eased in low-risk areas to minimise the cost to the social and economic wellbeing of Victorians while maintaining the mitigation of the spread of the virus.

The restrictions that have needlessly damaged the social and economic health of regional Victoria have been implemented by a government with no incentive to care about regional Victoria. The Victorian Labor party can comfortably form government by controlling Melbourne electorates and the electorates between Bendigo, Ballarat, and Geelong. Even with its landslide victory in 2018, Labor only won the one electorate outside of this corridor. The concentration of political power into Victoria's cities has resulted in a blanket treatment of regional Victoria as a broad region that can be safely ignored.

We are increasingly being divided into two Victorias in more ways than one. One Victoria can be categorised as regional and suburban, being employed in small productive-sector businesses, with higher rates of self-employment, and without political connections, while the other Victoria is centralised in the cities, employed in the public service, health or education, and politically connected.

The Victoria in the private sector experienced a 4.2% decline in wages in the June quarter in the wake of the current crisis while the other Victoria in the public sector has seen their wages increase by 0.7%. This has been made possible by a Labor government that *The Herald Sun's* James Campbell describes as "simply a machine for shovelling money to public sector workers. Nothing more, nothing less."



The Andrews government's Melbourne-centric approach has prevented vast segments of Victoria from reopening and returning to our normal way of life built on enjoying and caring for family, religious worship, the ability to run businesses and experience the dignity of work. The restrictions have been implemented in a way that has caused needless damage and widened the gap between two Victorias.

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