

## **The Australian – 24<sup>th</sup> August 2020 – Adam Creighton**

### **Coronavirus Australia: Entrepreneurs slam ‘reckless’ border closures, Victorian stage four restrictions**

Three female entrepreneurs have slammed interstate border closures and the Victorian government’s stage four lockdown as “reckless” and dependent on “fear mongering spin”, urging political leaders to explain society will have to live with, rather than eradicate, the coronavirus.

At the half way mark of Victoria’s six week lockdown, the toughest the nation has seen, entrepreneurs Tania de Jong, Naomi Simson and Julie Parker, whose businesses have operations in Victoria, told The Australian many of the restrictions had been an over-reaction that would see “deaths of despair” from economic and social damage outnumber lives saved.

“People die every day; part of life is death,” said chief executive of experience company RedBalloon, Naomi Simson. “We have to learn to live with the virus; we don’t stop work when influenza comes,” she added.

State border closures have been progressively tightened since July amid outbreaks of coronavirus infections in Melbourne, Sydney and last week in a Queensland detention centre.

“Do we really want to isolate ourselves from the rest of the world and bring back the tyranny of distance which so long inhibited the development of Australia?” asked Ms de Jong, a former opera singer who has founded businesses and charities including Creative Universe and Mind Medicine Australia.

Ms Simson said over half of small businesses in Victoria could collapse over next 12 months as federal support was unwound. “I thought we were one Australia not five countries; I never structured my business to operate in five jurisdictions,” she said.

Ms de Jong said Australians were “being brain washed”. “The so-called ‘cures’ – curfews, lockdowns and border closures – are destroying us as individuals and our country as a whole,” she said.

Julie Parker, a dental and health entrepreneur based in Melbourne, said she had “never seen governments act so recklessly”.

“They have taken into consideration shoddy scientific evidence and ignored other scientific evidence in order to go down this path,” she told The Australian. “Our freedom to earn money has been taken away,” she added.

Surveys show most Australians support tough measures to contain the virus, but business leaders and the Reserve Bank have started to demand more clarity around whether shutdowns and border closures are justified.

Ms de Jong said lockdowns had “unfairly prejudiced women because they are already trying to juggle jobs and families and now they have to home school as well”.

The women said the media had been “one-sided”. “We are relentlessly subjected to fearmongering spin and those who dare to voice an opinion questioning the existing narrative are considered pariahs,” Ms de Jong said.

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