

NAKED CITY



JOHN SILVESTER

The A to Z of pandemic politics

Negotiating our way through lockdown is as simple as stirring a pot of alphabet soup.

Here we are, the people of Melbourne, about to be partially released from the most savage Australian lockdown since convicts arrived at Botany Bay.

This column, therefore, has a solemn duty to provide a hysterical (I mean historical) record of these unprecedented times. Here is the definitive A to Z of pandemic politics.

A – Amnesia. Condition infecting senior politicians, police and public servants when asked questions about whose bright idea it was to use private security guards at quarantine hotels. The same condition has infected billionaire casino operator James Packer, who no longer remembers whether a junket is a tactic to lure high-rolling gamblers or a yummy dessert.

B – Black Lives Matter. Demonstrations that proved nothing except police are powerless to enforce the law in the face of widespread civil disobedience. *Also* – Bus. A vehicle under which subordinates are to be thrown during formal inquiries by tribunals, parliament or courts.

C – Curfew. The decision to turn us into pumpkins after 8pm. The only people allowed out were emergency service workers, UberEats drivers and drug dealers.

D – Dan Andrews. The Premier has fronted a media conference every day since decimal currency was introduced. It is a little like the headmaster at school assembly, except we don't get playlunch.

E – Emergency management. The art of blaming someone else for dumb decisions.

F – Family gatherings. An illegal act akin to running a meth lab next to a primary school. *Also* – Five-kilometre limit, which gives people less geographical freedom than an Argentinian fire ant.

G – Golf. An illegal activity involving metal sticks and bad clothing. *Also* – Grand Final. For the first time, it will be held outside of Victoria.

H – Home schooling. The art of pretending to understand trigonometry while refraining from drinking before 3.30pm.

I – Idiots. Self-appointed know-alls who quote non-existent legislation to explain why they don't have to follow the rules. Anti-mask loonbags who protest while covering themselves in Australian flags (an emblem perhaps more relevant to the Rats of Tobruk who took on Rommel than the Prats who Sook and took on Bunnings).

J – Just hang on. The vast majority of people stay within the rules, try to be positive and make the best of a situation that no one could possibly have imagined.

K – Karens. The self-entitled who believe the rules don't apply to them



and film themselves instigating confrontations that only prove they are complete and utter dingbats (See I). The tone deaf in the community choir.

L – Lockdown. A natural state for brown bears in winter but not usually associated with residents of a 24-hour city (except in certain leather-clad dungeons, establishments that will not be discussed in this family newspaper).

M – Ministerial responsibility. A quaint and redundant concept where ministers are responsible for the actions of public service departments. This has been replaced by "I can't recall – I didn't take notes", "Look over there while I run away" and "Can I ring my mum?"

If ministers are to be believed, private security guards just turned up in uniform at the quarantine hotels like wasps at a picnic. Then it was too hard to shoo them away.

In 1984, federal special minister of state Mick Young stepped down after he failed to declare a large Paddington Bear in his wife's luggage on return to Australia. Today, if a minister was found at Customs with cocaine up their bottom, they would hold an inquiry to find out who put it there.

N – Nothing to see here (see A).

O – Overseas travel. An exotic and near-forgotten pastime involving airports, passports, small bottles of red wine and tiny snack packets that are impossible to open. For the foreseeable future, our travel aspirations will be Puffing Billy rather than Paris, Lakes Entrance instead of Las Vegas and Gumbuya rather than Gorky Park.

P – Phillip Island penguins. When the live feed of flightless birds wandering a few metres up a beach becomes an internet sensation, we are in serious trouble. *Also* – Police. Now chasing people for not wearing masks rather than chasing armed robbers who do. *And also* – Pubs. Places of hospitality and companionship now

considered more dangerous than maximum-security prisons.

Q – Quarantine. The process of being taken to a hotel after arriving from overseas where you are policed by private security guards wearing gardening gloves, shower caps and garbage bags. A two-week period where you are encouraged to bounce on the jumping castle in the foyer, hook up on Tinder with those on other floors and engage in Twister as a group therapy session.

R – Ring of steel. Police assigned to stop Melburnians escaping to regional Victoria. The ingenious have tried sneaking along lonely dirt roads, wearing R.M. Williams boots to impersonate *The Man From Snowy River*, or hiding in car boots. If a regional cafe inadvertently serves a Melbourne escapee, they are to be treated in the same way as a Frenchman providing shelter for a member of the Resistance.

S – Self-isolation. The process of leaving home as often as possible to go to family gatherings (see F), or to visit

The scientific data is conclusive: No one can catch Cyril Rioli. Photo: Scott Barbour

Scan this QR code for the Naked City podcasts:



The ingenious have tried sneaking along lonely dirt roads, wearing R.M. Williams boots.



Two stockbrokers trying to escape Melbourne's ring of steel.

shops to buy essential items such as potting mix, potato gems and retro editions of Twister (see Q).

T – The immediate challenge. There is no playbook for this. By good luck, good management and geographic space, Australia has been one of the least COVID-infected countries. The challenge for the federal and state governments is the rebuild, which will take generations. In one way, it is a blank canvas: Do we need a workforce flooding into the CBD on a nine-to-five weekday roster that has existed since 1948? Do we need to review our education system to provide a smarter, technologically savvy workforce? Can we finally address the massive holes in mental health treatment, an epidemic that no vaccine can cure? All police are about to undergo two-day mental health training – an investment of 30,000 shifts at a cost of \$15 million.

U – US presidential elections. On one side is a 74-year-old who believes he is immune to COVID-19, sometimes struggles to complete a sentence and was running the country while on a cocktail of drugs that would have felled Jimi Hendrix. On the other is a man who will turn 78 just after the election, has been in public office for nearly 50 years without doing anything remotely interesting and sometimes struggles to complete a sentence.

V – Vaccine. Likely to contain a vial of Donald Trump's haemoglobin, the pituitary gland of a deep-fried Wuhan fruit bat and DNA from Cyril Rioli's wispy moustache – for it is a scientific fact that nothing can catch Cyril Rioli. (PS Call me, Cyril, we need you.)

W – When. When will we be normal? When will we be able to travel, when can we sit in a restaurant to gobble scallops and sip pinot, when will we be able to see friends and when will we get some of our civil liberties back? As Bob Dylan observed: "The answer, my friends, is blowing in the wind (so wear a mask and wash your hands). The answer is blowing in the wind."

X – Explanation. A series of words which, if placed in order, creates sentences that, if uttered honestly by people in authority, provide the *explanation* as to why private security rather than the military or police were used to guard quarantine hotels. If you were holding your breath for this event, you would now be unconscious.

Y – Yacht (1) Mega: Such as the \$200 million, 108-metre gigayacht from which James Packer gave evidence to the NSW inquiry into Crown Resorts. By the end, he was unsure whether he owned it, was first mate or was about to walk the plank. Yacht (2) Luxury: A migratory vessel designed to allow the wealthy to escape lockdown under the pretext of heading interstate for urgent maritime repairs.

Z – Zoom meetings. The electronic program allowing people to conduct remote work meetings without wearing trousers. *Also* – ZZZZZZZZ. The sound emanating from the CBD that has been shut down tighter than the OK Corral before a gunfight.

This will end. It is just a matter of when. (See J.)