

Trouble ahead for Esperance

■ Tom Zaubmayr

Kalgoorlie-Boulder is well-placed to weather the COVID-19 economic storm, but Esperance could face trouble as the tourism dollar dries up.

That is the warning from Central Queensland University regional economic development Professor John Rolfe, who yesterday touted regional Australian economies' ability to survive the coronavirus pandemic.

Pubs, clubs, gyms, indoor sporting venues, cinemas, casinos, places of worship and cultural facilities were closed down across the country yesterday, and restaurants and cafes were limited to takeaway.

Professor Rolfe said Kalgoorlie-Boulder's isolation and lack of reliance on industries such as tourism put it in good stead to ride out global financial headwinds.

"A lot of primary and secondary sectors will remain fairly steady — mining and agriculture in particular," he said.

"Mining companies will face increased costs to get their workforce to location but, from what I am hearing, mining companies are saying they can accommodate the restrictions.

"It will mostly be the flow-on effect from reduced consumption which will impact Kalgoorlie so long as there isn't a particularly high case issue in town."

Professor Rolfe said Esperance could face trouble if restrictions remained in place into the second half of the year.

"What is unusual about this case is it is not only international travel restrictions but also domestic, and it is unclear how long it will last for," he said.

"There will be a rebound once this is over — we just don't know when," Professor Rolfe said running



The Government's stage 1 shutdown has seen the closure of pubs across Kalgoorlie-Boulder. Pictured is the Exchange Hotel. Picture: Kelsey Reid

ning tourism promotions while restrictions were in place to encourage local holidays once they eased would help tourism-reliant towns recover. WA Premier Mark McGowan said he expected the nationwide business and facility closures to remain in place for at least six months.

"Unfortunately this means devastation for many businesses and their employees," he said.

"My heart goes out to those people

who have built their businesses up from scratch and have now had their whole lives turned upside down because of a virus we had never even heard of a few months ago.

"This stage of restrictions will change West Australian life as we know it and, it is possible we will have to go even further."

WA had recorded 140 cases by yesterday morning, including one in the Goldfields.

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WA Premier Mark McGowan



Airport scene was 'apocalyptic' says witness as doctor remains unbowed

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have a responsibility at this time to make everyone as safe as possible and scaring people through social media is not just bad from a mental health point of view, but continued alarmist claims could result in the population ignoring a genuine serious announcement sometime in the future," he said.

A State Government spokesman

confirmed Dr Armstrong's actions had not been approved by officials.

"This action was not endorsed by the WA Country Health Service or the Department of Health and is not in line with current State and Commonwealth advice," he said.

"Currently, WA Police and the Chief Health Officer are able to enforce self-isolation measures while border restrictions, once in place, will be regulated by WA Police and other key

agencies. While we know this is a challenging time for our communities, it's important that we continue to follow the orders from State Government authorities."

Local business owner Leah Hannam arrived to pick up her daughter and described the scene at the airport as "apocalyptic".

"You had a group of between 20 and 30 people not knowing what's going on and thinking these buses

were for their family to go to an unknown location," she said.

"The fact of what she looked like, the hazmat suits, her sanitary items ... it was made to look official ... it was incredibly misleading and frightening.

"People were very confused and they didn't know where they were supposed to go because it looked like something out of the apocalypse."

State Member for Kalgoorlie Kyran O'Donnell also observed the incident

at the airport and encouraged Dr Armstrong to work with officials to support the community.

"My personal opinion, April, if you've got an issue about planes or people coming in here, it is a City-owned building, work with the City to put a plan in place," he said.

The Miner yesterday spoke with Dr Armstrong, who expressed no regrets and said she acted to protect the community.

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