

A Christmas that will be like no other

By Zoe McKenzie*

POLITICIANS of all persuasions at all levels of government have started talking about our upcoming COVID-Christmas.

With Victoria's lockdown indefinitely extended, it has become clear the simple pleasures of life, like meeting up with friends, walking into a bar, or sitting down for a meal in a restaurant, are unlikely to return until we reach the magical marker of 70 or 80 per cent vaccination of all people over 16.

Recent analysis of the rate of vaccination suggests Victoria will reach 70 per cent at the start of November, and 80 per cent by the end of November.

Whether Christmas does indeed come in December, however, appears to depend on the performance of all jurisdictions. The Morrison govern-

ment has suggested we will not move to phase C under the Doherty Institute modelling until all jurisdictions reach the threshold.

Given the growing gap between New South Wales, the ACT, Tasmania and the rest of the country, our "definitely-not-Freedom Day" 80 per cent attainment may not arrive much before mid-December.

What happens on the Mornington Peninsula in mid-December? Our population booms from its customary 150,000 to a quarter of a million people, and probably more this year as Victorians are likely to avoid border-frogger and stay closer to home, like they did last summer.

No government has yet defined the rules of our post-80 per cent lives. Unlike other states and territories

seeming to cower behind the untested provisions of the Fair Work Act and discrimination laws, NSW has gone out and made vaccination mandatory for a raft of customer-facing professions, and also sent clear messages that bars, restaurants, hospitality and the much-vaunted vertical consumption will only be accessible to those who can prove their fully-vaxed status.

NSW is already exploring a tech solution which marries the ServiceNSW check-in with Medicare's vaccination certificates, meaning, upon check-in with a smart-phone, the patron will get a harder-to-forge good to go pass, easily shown to the venue's gatekeeper for swift service, or at least seating.

There is little evidence the Victorian government is as advanced, nor any sign that a post-80 per cent playbook

of rules is about to be circulated.

When asked about their plans, most businesses on the peninsula say, "I will do whatever the government tells me to do".

Fair enough, but if double jabbed becomes the rule from early December, the testing ground for this new approach will be the cafes, bars, gyms, community clubs and public transport of the peninsula.

Anyone who has tried to get a coffee on Main Street, Sorrento in January will tell you the last thing they need is an overwhelmed 15-year-old checking methodically their Medicare certificate before they are allowed to order their lattes.

More jarring, however, is the sheer mathematics of the situation. If double-jabbed is the ticket to ride,

drink, eat, sail, sit, then those in the AstraZeneca camp need to be jabbed today. Like actually today, in order to have their second dose the optimum 12 weeks later, and thus be "immune" by mid-December.

Any parent of a 16-year-old will tell you, there's currently no Pfizer bookings available before November, and the new 6-8 week second dose delay means they too won't be welcome much before mid-December.

Given the history of governments not thinking about the needs of the peninsula, it's urgent we start planning for ourselves.

**Zoe McKenzie is principal of Trade and Investment Advisory and a board member of Committee for Mornington Peninsula.*