

FINANCIAL REVIEW

'Worse than Russia': Victoria urged to wind back COVID-19 fines



Matthew Cranston *Economics correspondent*

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Economist Saul Eslake says Victoria's fines for COVID-19 breaches have exceeded countries such as Russia and need to be pulled back or replaced with other means of deterring unsafe practices.

Speaking at the Melbourne Economic Forum on Thursday, where the longer-term impacts of COVID-19 restrictions are being used to forecast the economic recovery, Mr Eslake said the penalties should be wound back.



Saul Eslake is concerned Victoria has gone too hard on COVID-19 fines. **Jesse Marlow**

"I can't think of a regime anywhere in the world that has imposed restrictions on people like Victoria," Mr Eslake said.

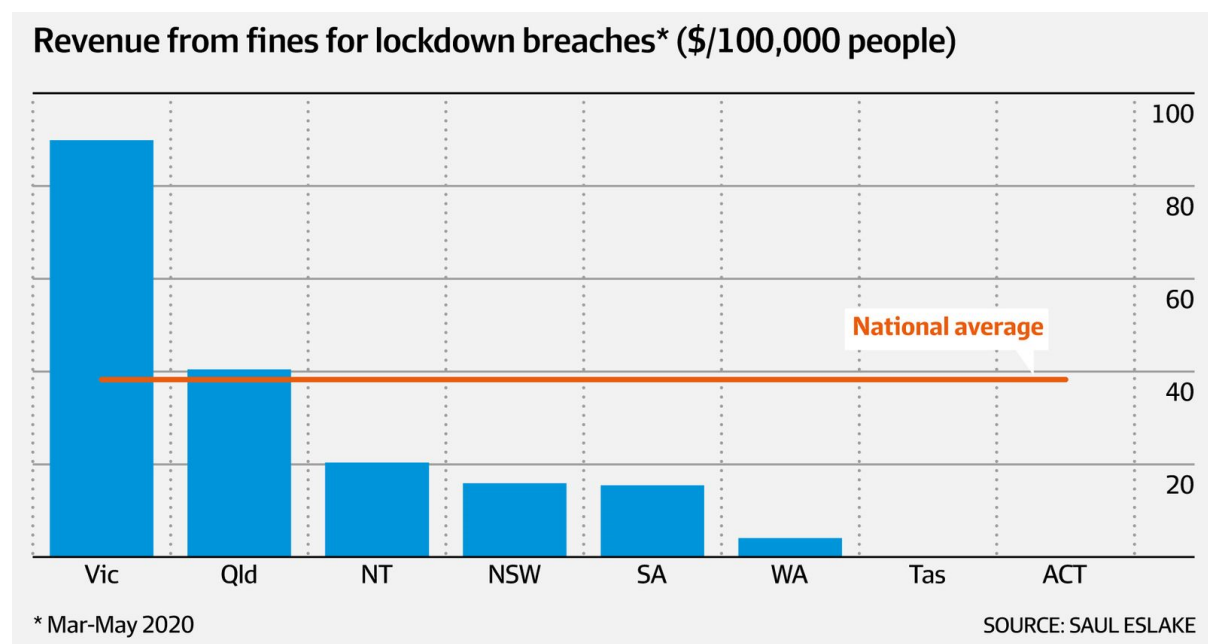
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"I've never advocated that breaches, or, at least, repeat or egregious breaches, of regulations should go unpunished. But there could have been other ways of doing that – for example, putting the mugshots of repeat or egregious offenders on the VicPol Facebook page, or on the front page of the *Herald Sun*."

Mr Eslake said that in Russia the fine for breaching COVID-19 rules is 40,000 roubles (\$721) for individuals and 150,000 roubles (\$2704) for businesses. In Victoria people have been fined \$1652 for breaching Melbourne's 8pm to 5am curfew, while fines of \$4957 are in place for unauthorised gatherings.

However, Victoria is on the lower side of some fines. In Singapore, the fine for not wearing a mask is \$300 (\$307), which is higher than Victoria's \$200.

Mr Eslake said that before the second lockdown, Victoria had collected almost \$6 million in fines for breaches of lockdown restrictions – \$2.2 million more than every other state and territory put together.



"The other key question surely ought to be: did this approach of very zealous policing of regulations combined with big fines actually 'work' in terms of delivering better epidemiological outcomes for Victoria, by comparison with other jurisdictions in Australia or elsewhere that made very different choices?"

"The answer is very clearly and unequivocally no. There are, of course, plenty of other jurisdictions that have had much better epidemiological outcomes than Victoria."

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Senator James Paterson, who has railed against Victoria's draconian restrictions, said the fines were always far too high.

"No Victorian, particularly anyone claiming to be 'progressive', should be proud of the very dubious honour of leading the world in COVID fines, outpacing even authoritarian states like Russia," Senator Paterson said.

"It's a particularly shameful statistic given the state government has admitted many of the restrictions, like the curfew, were not based on medical advice and may yet be found to have been unlawful.

"Victorians deserve a state government that respects their freedoms and does not use the excuse of a pandemic to extinguish them."

The Victorian Premier's office spokeswoman said: "We don't want anyone to be fined and if Victorians follow the rules they won't be."

Matthew Cranston is the economics correspondent, based in the Canberra bureau. He was previously property editor. *Connect with Matthew on [Twitter](#).*