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Economist Saul Eslake questions need for so many details

Sue Bailey
Coronavirus



UNSAFE: Leading Tasmanian economist Saul Eslake says no social distancing was maintained for passengers at Hobart Airport. Picture: Saul Eslake.

A prominent Tasmanian says he felt like he was "arriving in a foreign country" when he had to complete a detailed COVID form when returning home from interstate.

Leading economist Saul Eslake has also questioned the safe distancing requirements at Hobart Airport with people standing close together for 35 minutes as they made their way through the checking process.

Mr Eslake said when he recently arrived in Sydney from Hobart he did not have to complete any COVID forms on his arrival.

"I was a bit surprised that on my return I was expected to fill in what seemed remarkably like a visa application for arriving in a foreign country.

"Not only was I supposed to supply my name and phone number or email address - something I readily understand is required for contract tracing - but they also wanted my date of birth and address - why?"

"The Tasmanian experience was in marked contrast to what happened when I arrived in Sydney where I just got off the plane (wearing a mask, of course, as required), wandered through a nearly empty terminal, and got on the train to the city, just as I would normally do.

"Are Tasmanians and visitors going to be made to feel like we're arriving in a foreign country?"

"As we've seen after 9/11, once governments get these powers they never give them up."

Mr Eslake was more concerned about the lack of social distancing at the airport.

"What was rather more surprising, however, was that in order to enforce this measure which is presumably in order to "keep Tasmanians safe", all of the passengers who had arrived on the same flight as me were required to line up, in quite close proximity to each other, both for some distance outside the airport, and then again once inside the entrance to the terminal.

"There was absolutely no requirement for any kind of 'social distancing' whatsoever."

"The government says it is trying to keep us safe but given COVID can spread in 15 minutes how is standing in a queue for 35 minutes with people who you don't know where they've been safe?"

Deputy premier Jeremy Rockliff said social distancing rules needed to be obeyed.

"The rules are there and people should be social distancing," he said.

A government spokesman said all measures at Tasmanian airports were designed to protect the health and safety of all Tasmanians.

"These measures have served the State well to date in providing protection from the risk of an outbreak which would be devastating for the Tasmanian economy and the community generally," the spokesman said.

He said staff were present at airports at all times to ensure people were abiding by the guidelines including wearing masks.

"Anyone who believes they have witnessed a breach of these guidelines is able to contact the Public Health hotline or make a report online on the Tasmania Police website," the spokesman said.