

9 April, 2020

NSW Premier orders Minister Don Harwin back to Sydney amid coronavirus bans on non-essential travel

By [Riley Stuart](#)

Updated yesterday at 11:36pm

Space to play or pause, M to mute, left and right arrows to seek, up and down arrows for volume.

VIDEO: [NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian apologises on behalf of Arts Minister Don Harwin](#) (ABC News)

RELATED STORY: [Experts set to plan Australia's 'way out' of coronavirus crisis within weeks](#)

RELATED STORY: [NSW Premier says some coronavirus restrictions could be eased next month](#)

RELATED STORY: [We've been told social distancing restrictions will remain until a vaccine. Do we know when that will be?](#)

NSW Arts Minister Don Harwin has apologised and returned to Sydney after he was sprung at his Central Coast holiday house despite bans on non-essential travel.

Key points:

- Mr Harwin said he was at the property because of a health condition
- He had also been there since before NSW's coronavirus travel restrictions were introduced
- The NSW Government announced pre-school would be free for the next six months

Authorities in Australia's worst-affected coronavirus state have spent several days warning people not to go away over the Easter break.

Premier Gladys Berejiklian said Mr Harwin's actions created a "horrible" public perception.

"I regret and apologise to everybody that somebody from my team took this action," Ms Berejiklian said.

Mr Harwin, who was fined \$1,000 by NSW Police, said he had been working from his Pearl Beach residence for several weeks.

"I took advice from my department officials about the Public Health Order to ensure I adhered to the guidelines during this period," Mr Harwin said.

"While I was assured I was compliant with the guidelines I apologise to the Premier and the people of NSW."

NSW Police said a penalty infringement notice had been issued before 9:00pm on Thursday.

"Police have been given these powers to ensure the community spread of COVID-19 — which we know is devastating communities across the globe — is minimised," NSW Police Commissioner Mick Fuller said in a statement.

"You only need to look at the statistics to see that people are dying where appropriate measures have either not been established or are ignored.

"No one individual or corporation is above these laws — anyone suspected of breaching the orders will be investigated and if a breach is detected, they will be dealt with in accordance with the act."

[Coronavirus update: Follow the latest news in our daily wrap.](#)

Deputy Premier John Barilaro said he was "bloody angry" with Mr Harwin's conduct.

"Politicians aren't exempt from this rule and what Don Harwin has done over the last couple of weeks is unacceptable. I'm absolutely upset about it," Mr Barilaro said.

"In the public eye, it looks like politicians believe they're above the rules and above the law and we're not."



PHOTO: [NSW Arts Minister Don Harwin's holiday home at Pearl Beach on Thursday morning.](#) (ABC News)

The number of new COVID-19 infections in NSW continues to drop.

In the 24 hours to 8:00pm on Wednesday, 39 new cases were reported, taking the state's total to 2,773.

Ms Berejiklian announced her Government would make pre-school free in the state for the next six months, as part of a continuing rollout of measures to support people financially affected by coronavirus.

The Premier said Mr Harwin had not broken any rules because he went to his holiday house before NSW's tough social-distancing shutdown was announced last month.

"They are very serious circumstances and I don't want to take away from that," Ms Berejiklian said.

But Shadow Arts Minister Walt Secord said the Premier should punish Mr Harwin for ignoring warnings to avoid unnecessary travel and stay home.

"The Premier must act — remove this Minister and make a clear example out of him," Mr Secord said.

[Coronavirus questions answered](#)



[Breaking down the latest news and research to understand how the world is living through an epidemic, this is the ABC's Coronacast podcast.](#)

Ms Berejiklian apologised for Mr Harwin's actions and said she was "deeply disappointed".

"A lot of us are going through a lot of pain to stick to the rules, and for people in positions of power, it's all about perception."

The Premier stressed Mr Harwin had technically not breached the restrictions on non-essential travel as he had relocated to his holiday house before the laws came into effect.

"I appreciate how people feel today ... but he had not broken the rules," he said.

Ms Berejiklian said she expected everyone to behave in an "adult way" but had no intention of sacking Mr Harwin.

"I feel very passionate for protecting the wellbeing of 8 million citizens but I can't be responsible for everyone's actions," she said.