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EXCLUSIVE: Senior NSW minister Don Harwin has been caught staying at his Pearl Beach holiday home on the Central Coast despite repeated government pleas for Sydneysiders to stay out of regional NSW to avoid the spread of the virus.

The Arts Minister, whose principal place of residence is Elizabeth Bay in Sydney's eastern suburbs, was found by The Daily Telegraph on Wednesday afternoon at his \$1.3 million investment property, 300m from the beach.



Don Harwin outside his Palm Beach holiday house on Wednesday afternoon.

Mr Harwin confirmed to the The Daily Telegraph he had been at the holiday home for “about three weeks” and in that time had once travelled to and from Sydney for a medical appointment.

However, he was also in parliament on March 24 — two weeks ago — which he did not mention.

The minister’s getaway comes as the government ordered a statewide police blitz on would-be holiday-makers, ordering people turning up at caravan parks and camping sites to go back home.

Deputy Premier John Barilaro, who has led pleas for Sydneysiders to stay away from the regions, said there was a clear expectation everyone stayed in their principal place of residence.

“The rules apply to everyone, politicians aren’t exempt — we need to set the standard and I’m bloody disappointed,” he said last night.

“Everyone could go to their holiday home — we are asking people not to. This sets a bad example.”



An unknown guest at Mr Harwin house in Pearl Beach. Picture: Christian Gilles

Mr Harwin told Premier Gladys Berejiklian of the arrangements two days ago, including that he had been on the coast since March 13, a source said on Wednesday night.

Mr Harwin on Wednesday said he was on the coast for health reasons, preferring the “fresh air” of the Central Coast as he said he was 55 and had co-morbidities and a history of respiratory problems.

He added his work-from-home arrangements were better at Pearl Beach than they were in his “small apartment in Sydney”.

“I live in a very built-up area in Sydney with high density and here I have windows that can open so I can have the fresh air and I can walk in fresh air and I have more room in my house here than I would have in my small apartment in inner Sydney,” he told The Daily Telegraph.

A government spokesman said Mr Harwin had not breached any laws or health orders, and pointed to a clause in the special coronavirus Public Health Orders which does allow “moving between different places of residences of the person”.

However, senior ministers, who were on Wednesday night furious on hearing of their colleague’s relocation, said the intention of the clause was not to allow relocation to holiday homes because authorities are deeply concerned about the ability of the regional health systems to cope with an influx of people.

Multiple senior sources said the intention of the clause was, instead, to ensure divorced families were not breaking the law when ferrying children between homes.

Mr Harwin insisted he had no “guests coming and going from this house”, but The Daily Telegraph sighted a guest with Mr Harwin at the Pearl Beach property.

Police Commissioner Mick Fuller said on March 31 he wanted people to stay in “their primary home” as the hospitals were equipped based on where the population is usually spread.

Mr Harwin said: “I have two residences. I have chosen to live at this one for health reasons.”