

Anti-vaccine violence prompts Melbourne building site shutdown

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The forced closures of construction sites will worsen the country's economic activity with some economists predicting the extended lockdowns may push Australia's estimated \$1.45 trillion economy into a second recession in as many years [James Ross/AAP Image via Reuters]

Melbourne, September 21 (RHC)-- Australian authorities have shut down construction sites in Melbourne for two weeks after an anti-vaccine protest in the city turned violent and COVID-19 cases in the states of Victoria and New South Wales (NSW) surged.

The closure takes effect from Tuesday and follows clashes in which bottles and a crate were thrown at union officials, and police deployed special units.

“We put the industry on notice just a week ago, we have seen appalling behaviour on site and on our streets, and now we’re acting decisively and without hesitation,” state Industrial Relations Minister Tim Pallas said in a statement Monday night. Victoria police said “several people” had been arrested in the unrest.

The forced closure of construction sites will worsen the country’s economic activity, with some economists predicting the extended lockdowns may push Australia’s A\$2 trillion (\$1.45 trillion) economy into a second recession in as many years.

Australia has locked down Sydney and Melbourne, its largest cities, and the capital Canberra to quell an outbreak of the highly infectious Delta variant. But the tough restrictions have triggered anti-lockdown rallies with police arresting hundreds in both cities over the weekend.

In NSW, at least three regional councils – in Byron, Kempsey and Tweed – were ordered to go back into lockdown on Tuesday afternoon, after 1,022 cases and 10 deaths were reported in the state, according to the Sydney Morning Herald.

“Unfortunately, we’ve had some cases in the northern part of the state,” NSW’s Health Minister Brad Hazzard was quoted as saying on Tuesday morning.

Across NSW’s hospitals, there are at least 1,266 active COVID-19 cases, including 244 people in intensive care.

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