NEWS

Lord Howe's new normal

COVID cases burst island's bubble



BY LIZ LANGDALE

THE Lord Howe Island community is adjusting to a new sense of normal after its COVID-free period ended.

The island has recorded 91 COVID cases since it opened to visitors in October 2021, and 12 of those cases are currently in isolation, according close for a week in January to a spokesperson from the island's board.

The island's Local Emergency Management Committee has been meeting since January 1, and implemented a COVID response plan to minimise the impact of the spike.

The vaccination booster clinic begn earlier than planned, Rapid Antigen Tests have been sourced for critical clinical needs and a workforce continuity plan has been established to ensure critical services can be maintained.

The news comes after Norfolk Island paused visitor arrivals until January 26, in an attempt to stem its number of COVID cases.

The Lord Howe Island Board is urging visitors to get tested for COVID prior to travel to the world heritage-listed site.

The board spokesperson said people who become COVID positive on the island are required to isolate in their accommodation. None of the 91 cases have needed treatment on the mainland.

Lord Howe Island Coral Cafe owner Stevie Sia said his business was forced to after two staff members tested positive.

He's owned his business for the last 20 years and also runs the post office and the island's newspaper.

Mr Sia said there was an increased number of COVID cases at the start of 2022, after a New Year's Eve party.

"The first and second weeks of January was a bit of a struggle for businesses," he said.

Mr Sia encourages people to test themselves prior to travel to the island.

"We do have a small population and we do have some the island getting back to elderly people on the island."

The island community has a strong reliance on visitation to boost its tourism industry.



ADJUSTING: Lord Howe Island is no longer free of COVID cases. Picture: Jackson Arkadieff via the Lord Howe Island's Tourism Association's website.

normal," Mr Sia said.

Arajilla Retreat owner Bill Shead said their accommo-

2023. "The island is highly

sought after," he said.

Mr Shead said the island dation has taken bookings has the right health practices

"It's definitely good to see throughout 2022 and into to mitigate the spread of the through participating in outvirus, through good ventilation at accommodation, outdoor dining venues and plenty of opportunities for people to social distance tination," he said.

door activities.

"We're limited at any one time to 400 people, so it's definitely not a crowded des-

nline events to celebrate Australia Day

AUSTRALIA Day awards and made lightly. citizenship ceremonies will move online in an attempt to keep the community safe as cases of COVID-19 rise.

Port Macquarie-Hastings Council CEO Dr Clare Allen Allen said. and mayor Cr Peta Pinson said the decision to cancel reluctantly as we were lookthe in-person ceremony at ing forward to celebrating

"With the COVID-19 situation in our local community and escalating infections statewide, we feel this is the and citizenship ceremosafest decision for all," Dr

"We made this decision Wauchope RSL Club was not in-person and recognising

our amazing award nom- ty groups nominated across inees and those taking up Australian citizenship."

The Australia Day awards nies will be separate online events.

The council received 19 nominations in the 2022 Australia Day awards with 16 citizens and three communifive categories.

Some 28 people are set to become Australian citizens on Australia Day.

Australia Day ambassador Donna Ciccia has reluctantly cancelled her trip to the region due to the COV-ID-19 situation.

"Cancelling the in-person

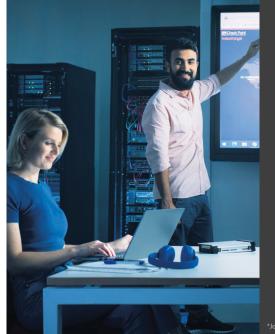
celebration is a hard call to our event when the Omicron make and it was made with a heavy heart," Cr Pinson said.

"Our priority is to protect the community as much as we can, and while COVID-19 nominees and winners and safety plans were in place, we welcome our new citizens feel the current situation is a as best as we can and fingers concern.

"We don't want to encourage people to congregate at

variant is running rife in our community.

"We are hoping to be able to honour our award crossed we will be back on track in 2023.'



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