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Dear Scouting colleagues and friends,

This is an important update, which I encourage you to take the time to read.

We are introducing further restrictions on some of our Scouting activities in NSW. This has been an exceptionally difficult decision for us to make. However, we are doing this to ensure the safety of our youth, our volunteers, their families, and the wider community in which we live, work and Scout.

From Tuesday 18 August, we need to temporarily cease all overnight Scouting activities and camps – indoors and outdoors - for four weeks.

This applies to everyone in Scouting across NSW.

A review of this situation will be taken in the week commencing 7 September.

In May, we were optimistic that, along with the rest of the country, Scouts NSW would be able to return to a "COVID-safe society and economy" by July. We even anticipated being able to travel across the Tasman and to the Pacific Islands. But today, we continue to face enormous challenges from the global pandemic.

NSW authorities, along with those in Western Australia, Queensland and Victoria, have wound back the relaxation of restrictions for their people. Currently, there is no face-to-face Scouting across Victoria - they have stopped all indoor and outdoor Scouting for youth and adult members.

In NSW, there continues to be community transmission of this highly contagious disease. There have been many schools affected across the State, and the Premier of NSW has been reviewing the impact of study retreat camps on transmission rates between young people. The issues raised include that camps increase the time people are interacting and being together, and that it is not possible to guarantee physical distancing at all times on a camp.

The NSW Scouts COVID-19 Taskforce, assisted by the Medical Advisor to the NSW Government's COVID-19 Response, has confirmed that the State government has heightened concerns about the risks of camping at this time.

I have accepted the Taskforce's determination that the risk is too high at this time to continue to allow indoor and outdoor overnight activities and camps including those at Region and State camp sites across NSW.

This applies to non-Scout groups also wanting to use our Region and State camp sites.

The Taskforce, which includes representatives from across our Scouts community in NSW, carefully considered the implications for country and city Regions, especially in light of the evidence that people in high risk areas are travelling to and through areas of little or no risk. We determined that we cannot put our members or our camp sites in the way of harm.

Next Steps

We recognise that Scout Groups who have an overnight booking at one of the many Region and State camp sites will have to cancel or postpone this arrangement if it falls within the next four weeks. Region Commissioners are fully across this decision and will help work with any Group that needs support to manage cancellations. Please use your Region Office and your Region Commissioner as your first contact point should you need help or wish to clarify any part of this decision.

You may wish to postpone your arrangements to the week commencing 14 September, but please be ready to reverse or amend plans if we are unable to proceed with camping after this four week period.

You can continue to meet in Scout Halls and Rover Dens, provided you have completed a COVID-19 safety plan, which has been approved by your Region Commissioner.

You can continue to support youth members through daytime activities. If you are looking for exciting program ideas, speak with the Groups in your District, contact your Region's Youth Program lead or reach out to members of the State Youth Program Team.

To help alleviate the frustration of not being able to proceed with a camping event, Scouts NSW will provide a wide range of alternative activity ideas on our website and social media pages. We hope you find some new opportunities to explore so that you can keep running inspiring programs for young people.

Please check out the Scouting Guide to Coronavirus webpage which provides all the latest comprehensive information about our guidelines for Scouting in NSW at this time. You might wish to bookmark this page: it is the single source of truth for Scouts NSW guidelines during the pandemic.

Finally, I want you to know that we are aware of how much you've done as volunteers, especially over the past few months. Never for one moment do any of us take this for granted.

Taking action like this is never easy, and we expect that it will be disappointing, especially for our youth members. However let's never lose sight of why we do this – to help young people step up, play their part and gain those brilliant skills for life.

While this is undoubtedly a challenging time for our Movement, better days are ahead. Thank you for your fantastic support – it's always appreciated.

With best wishes,

Yours in Scouting,

Neville Tomkins OAM JP
Chief Commissioner
Scouts Australia (NSW Branch)

To contact the Chief Commissioner, please email chief.commissioner@nsw.scouts.com.au.

Child Safety in Scouting

Scouts Australia NSW is committed to operating as a child safe organisation and implementing child safe policies and practices in accordance with the elements of a child safe institution outlined by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse report entitled Creating Child Safe Institutions.

Remember

All suspicions, concerns or allegations about criminal matters or child protection matters should be reported directly to the Chief Commissioner, the Deputy Chief Commissioner (Youth Safety, Compliance and Support), the CEO or the Child Protection Officer at the NSW State Office.
To make a report use the online child protection form, call 02 9735 9000 or email childprotection@nsw.scouts.com.au.

Imminent Danger

If a young person is in imminent danger, the matter should be reported directly and immediately to NSW Police on 131 444.
Where a report is made to the police, you should also subsequently notify the NSW State Office.

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