

Australia warns virus pandemic now 'upon us'

February 27 2020



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Australia's prime minister said the country considered the new coronavirus to be a pandemic Thursday, going a step beyond the WHO as he extended a travel ban on visitors from China.

Announcing a national emergency response plan to the contagion, Scott Morrison said he was considering "additional measures" for monitoring travellers arriving in the country.

"We're effectively operating now on the basis that there is one—a pandemic," Morrison said.

"We believe the risk of a global pandemic is very much upon us."

The World Health Organization has stopped short of calling the virus a [pandemic](#), even as the number of new infections outside China exceed those inside the hardest-hit country.

More than 2,700 people have died in China and some 78,000 have been infected. There have been more than 50 deaths and 3,600 cases in dozens of other countries.

The extended travel ban will come as a blow to Australian universities which stand to lose \$2 billion in fees as tens of thousands of Chinese students are unable to take up places Down Under.

Students stuck in China "have been provided with a range of options", said Catriona Jackson, chief executive of Universities Australia, which represents the sector.

They include postponing start dates, delaying assessments, fee-free deferrals and accessing course content online.

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Morrison's warning comes as he scrambles to burnish his leadership credentials after fierce criticism of his handling of the months-long

bushfire crisis.

His government is also embroiled in a deepening political scandal over the funnelling of taxpayer money into areas his coalition targeted in last year's election.

One minister has already been forced to resign as a result.

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