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CORONAVIRUS- BULLETIN 4 FROM ALLAN MORRIS

Advisory 4: Coronavirus Covid-19- from the Board

On Monday we issued Advisory No3 recommending action players and clubs should follow. A lot can be done by being responsible and vigilant about personal hygiene.

We are listening to Governments all around the world taking action. Borders are being closed and we are seeing restrictions being imposed on large gatherings. In the USA they are talking about gatherings of 50 or more. Our Government has taken action in an attempt to control the spread of the virus at the border. New Zealand Public Health's position is for the restriction of events over 500 people. Yesterday we spoke to Public Health about bridge and our clubs and they are not recommending, at this stage, a need to close our doors.

At the same time the global messaging is border closure in itself will not be enough and that more is required if we are going to take control and quell this pandemic. "Social distancing" is becoming the norm and people should not congregate in close proximity for more than 15 minutes at a time.

The difference in New Zealand compared with other countries is that those societies are subject to community transmission whereas we only have a border issue. Hopefully that remains the case and we are able to largely contain the virus at the border. Unfortunately our planning must assume community transmission, a rise in cases and the impact this will have on everyone.

New Zealand Bridge is deeply concerned about protecting our bridge community. We know we have an older demographic who are the most susceptible group. We also know that bridge is a game that involves close-quarters contact around a bridge table and touching of cards that go to numerous people. Droplets from people talking, laughing, sneezing and coughing pose a threat to all players and officials present, especially if someone is unaware they are infected.

So what should Clubs be doing? Already some Clubs have given notice that their Club is closing for a period of time. We have had notice of tournaments being called-off. The Australian Bridge Federation and American Contract Bridge League have recommended closure of Clubs. The Asia Pacific Bridge Congress in Perth from 15-22 April has been postponed indefinitely.

There is a legitimate argument that any action we recommend should be evidence based and the evidence so far suggests it is okay for Clubs to remain open. It is acknowledged that things are changing rapidly and by the time we issue an advisory the position could be quite

different. There is a converse position that due to the rapidly changing situation we should show leadership and try to be ahead of the curve. Paramount is whatever action is taken we do our best to protect our players from harm. It is not so long ago that many thought this virus could be contained in China. Clearly that assumption was wrong and in hindsight Governments all round the world should have taken earlier action.

None of us want players harmed; consequently we see no choice but to recommend that clubs close for three weeks from Monday 23rd March. We also recommend all tournaments throughout this period be cancelled.

Whilst we have recommended closing from Monday 23rd clubs may take earlier (including cancelling tournaments scheduled for this weekend 21- 22 Mar) or later action. As long as clubs remain open they should follow the guidelines set out in Advisory No3. We cannot mandate what Clubs do. The decision to stay open or close is a decision that rests with the Club. We can only share our thoughts and recommend a course of action for you to consider.

Currently we plan to re-evaluate on 9th April to see whether closure should be extended or if it is okay to reopen clubs. In the meantime we suggest Clubs look at running events on BBO. Over the coming days we will put out guidelines on how you might achieve this.

We are very sad at having to make this recommendation as we know the important role Clubs play in the community. We must however take care of our people. This could be a difficult time for some club members. It is possible people might want help (shopping for example) or they may welcome the occasional phone call checking that everything is okay. We know the Tauranga Bridge Club have a Welfare Sub-Committee which they are looking at expanding. Clubs might want to consider doing something like Tauranga. I know they would be only too happy to share their experience.

We would far rather apologise for what might be seen in hindsight as an over-reaction; than to have to explain why we didn't have the courage to make some hard decisions that could have saved lives.

Hopefully we will see you at the bridge table shortly.

Cheers Allan

Date: Mar 18, 2020

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