

With obvious growing fears of the coronavirus spreading to Australian shores, the Tasmanian State Government has made it clear that they are more than prepared to deal with the outbreak, if and when it reaches the state.

With the virus now located in 42 countries, effecting more than 82,000 people globally, and killing 2,800 people, at a national security committee meeting yesterday, Prime Minister Scott Morrison has activated appropriate emergency measures.

Specific coronavirus wards will be set up in hospitals, additional and increased screenings at local airports for sick or suspect passengers arriving from overseas, more protective gear available at convenient stores, and if infection does occur, isolation of themselves and those in direct contact will be encouraged to be kept in quarantine.

Tasmanian Premier Peter Gutwein and Health Minister Sarah Courtney have said in an interview that the state is well prepared to respond if a coronavirus pandemic is declared.

A spokesperson for Tasmania's Public Health Service said the state has been working closely with both the Communicable Disease Network of Australia, and the Australian Health

Protection Principle Committee, which have been, quote "working on coordinating national coronavirus surveillance, preparation and response, for over a month now."

Furthermore, Chinese students at the University of Tasmania are being provided financial support in the wake of the coronavirus and the imposed travel bans in and out of China.

UTAS director of safety and wellbeing Chris Arnold states that a total of 15 students have been forced to defer their study due to the virus, 17 have taken a leave of absence and two have withdrawn completely - he goes on to claim that an estimated 1,180 students are still stuck in China.

Tasmanian police have begun an investigation into the robbery of a taxi driver who was threatened at knife point late last night.

The driver was flagged down by two men on South Esk Road in Travallyn in the states north, demanding the helpless driver to hand over his wallet, any cash and other valuables inside the car.

The taxi driver complied with his assailants and escaped unharmed, but Launceston CIB are calling for any

information that may assist in their investigation.

A southern Tasmanian man has been sentenced in the Supreme Court for burning down two of his houses and a Kombi van in an attempt to make fraudulent insurance claims.

Over the space of a decade, Mark Gordon Bird - on three separate instances - set fire to his own property in order to file fake insurance claims totalling upwards of a million dollars.

The court ruled that in 2007 Mr Bird deliberately set alight his VW Kombi and dishonestly acquired \$7,700 in insurance. In 2012, Bird also staged an arson attack at his Blackmans Bay home, pouring petrol around the interior of the home and damaging the door lock, to which he was again unlawfully granted \$557,000 in insurance.

In 2017, another suspicious fire broke out at Mr Bird's home on the Huon Highway at Geeveston, absolutely decimating the property, but this instance finally led authorities to suspect foul play when the insurance claim was reported to be worth \$705,000.

When sentencing, Justice Michael Brett referred to the fraudulent claims as being seriously dishonest, that were

repeated over a long period of time, and were motivated, quote "because of Mr Bird's long periods of heavy spending." Mr Bird was sentenced to four years in prison, and will be eligible for parole in early 2022.

Just quickly in sports news, local Tasmanian paddler Danial Watkins will make his Olympic debut this year after securing a place in the Australian slalom team.

The 24-year-old from Hobart is the reigning Oceania C1 slalom champion, and after winning the Paddle Australia trails last week in Sydney, and says that finally being selected for the Olympics means everything to him. Still overwhelmed about his achievement, Watkins mentioned, quote "It's hard to put into words how it feels paddling for 10 years, to make an Olympic team - it's very powerful."

And that's what's making news headlines for the 28th of February