



## **RE: Regional Victoria calling for an easing of restrictions**

The Victorian Chamber Alliance has been working hard to offer resources and information to regional businesses and we acknowledge and thank the Government for the support and funding that has been put in place to assist our businesses.

It was pleasing to hear the Premier say yesterday in his press conference that we could hope to see further easing of restrictions in regional Victoria in the coming weeks.

### **We plead with the State Government to further ease restrictions in regional and rural Victoria on October 19.**

In line with the Government's request, regional Victorians have continued to 'stay the course' recording minimal active cases, no new outbreaks, a 0.4 new case average for 14 days and 0 unknown source cases. Regional Victorian business owners and operators understand that such harsh restrictions were required to achieve this reduction however, we are now pleading the State Government to further ease restrictions to enable our local economies to commence the crucial recovery process. Whilst we appreciate the reasons for wanting to wait for Metro Melbourne to 'catch-up' as such, the regional economy continues to unnecessarily suffer.

Business owners and operators heavily impacted or closed by the restrictions have invested endless time and resources into innovating their practices, developing policy, training staff and transforming their operations to ensure they can maintain the safety of their workforce, clients and broader communities. They understand that it is in their best interest to go above and beyond when it comes to not only preventing outbreaks but maintaining clear records should contract tracing be needed.

The hospitality sector as well as being a major employer of our young people is such a critical part of the recovery of our devastated tourism industry and it is simply not viable for them to continue under their current restrictions. They are hemorrhaging money trying to stay afloat and keep their staff employed. Over the past few weeks the current restrictions have resulted in many unforeseen difficulties for business owners. Venues have reported that attempting to predict weather conditions for outdoor dining impacts on stock ordering and results in food wastage. Last minute booking cancellations are also magnifying these issues. They have expressed that whilst they are trying to be cooperative and impose seating's to avoid patron overlap, this is creating a culture of binge drinking and venue hopping which impacts on venues, other patrons, our streets and our community.

Additionally, there is enormous concern surrounding upcoming social events such as the Melbourne Cup Carnival and the AFL Grand Final. If people are unable to book into a venue due to small patron caps, it is inevitable there will be an increase in illegal private gatherings, creating potential issues regarding hygiene rules, social distancing or conducting adequate contact tracing – all of which are already well managed within venues who have a proven track record during the previous restriction relaxations and the '20 per space' rules. Venues are prepared now more than ever with policies and COVID Safe plans in place.

We also advocate on behalf of the industries who have been left behind. These industries, inclusive of gyms and indoor group fitness could have opened as part of the first reopening - they had proven their ability to apply strong hygiene practices, and appropriately manage the risk of transmission. There is

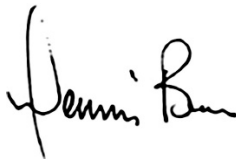
grave concern for the mental health of our communities right across Victoria and a space to be active, regardless of the weather forecast, is a positive step we can make out of what is a deadly consequence of prolonged business closures.

Finally, on many occasions it can be days or weeks for detailed information to be available online after it is announced publicly. During this time the businesses become increasingly stressed and concerned and are spending valuable time seeking the support and clarity they need. It is known that being under major stress for a period of six months can result in long term trauma. Our business owners and operators are already under severe stress, which can be amplified by delays in funding and information transfer.

The industries throughout regional Victoria are now well equipped and ready to be open. We need to be confident in the ability to successfully operate alongside this virus by ensuring that we can provide our businesses with realistic parameters to work within, allowing them to keep staff employed and enabling them the best opportunity to recover financially.

Regards,

Victorian Regional Chamber Alliance



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