

21 January 2022

Paul Martyn
Director-General
Department of Energy and Public Works
1 William Street Brisbane

Email: paul.martyn@epw.qld.gov.au

Dear Paul

On behalf of the Queensland building and construction industry we are writing to urge the Queensland Government to consider providing critical industry status to our industry in the context of managing COVID-19 close contacts in a similar fashion to the recent National Cabinet decision.

Building and construction is a significant contributor to the state's economy and has always played a major role in keeping the wheels of other industries turning and contributing to Queensland's economic recovery and success.

Since the onset of the pandemic, we have demonstrated the ability to operate in a COVID-safe manner and implement significant control measures to ensure business continuity and the health and safety of workers, clients and visitors. As you know, we successfully and safely remained open throughout lockdown periods during 2020 and 2021.

The industry is now telling us with increasing urgency that they are experiencing the same critical staff shortages as industries such as health and hospitality, with many workers sidelined due to close contact rules and work sites grinding to a halt as a result.

We encourage the Queensland Government to allow building businesses to keep their doors open and maintain their ability to assist other critical industries by giving building and construction workers (who are fully vaccinated and asymptomatic) critical status in certain circumstances.

In particular, we need to continue to support other critical industries, safety critical works and the community in general by providing:

- Urgent repairs and maintenance
- Completion of building work to the extent to ensure that construction sites are safe and stable
- Building work to enable or support essential community functions (for example, health, education facilities).

Industry hanging in the balance

Maintaining essential functions is not the only reason it's vital for the industry to be given critical industry status, as COVID-19 and the current wave is just one of the issues that the industry is grappling with.

Across the country, building businesses big and small are experiencing increasing project costs, significant project delays and workforce shortages due to booming demand in the residential and commercial sectors. This comes off the back of government financial stimulus, record low interest rates and peaking interstate migration, amongst other factors. The industry is facing a perfect storm and is scrambling to keep pace with demand against the backdrop of supply chain delays and price hikes caused by the pandemic. These price rises and delays are already affecting clients, particularly homeowners as well as the businesses themselves.

These conditions are anticipated to persist well into 2022. We have already seen Queensland building businesses fail financially under these conditions and we envisage the number of insolvencies will grow throughout 2022.

Any further delays experienced from the current wave of COVID-19 and the staff shortages it is creating, will create further disruption and costs increases on an already struggling industry, exacerbating the impact on businesses and the community broadly.

Giving us critical industry status will give building businesses the flexibility to ensure project essential activities can be undertaken across a range of building work and allow key personnel onsite.

Our proposal

Critical essential worker definition

We recommend that critical essential workers in our industry who are fully vaccinated with no symptoms be eligible to access quarantine exemptions if they are deemed COVID-19 close contacts.

A critical essential worker should be defined as where an individual's absence will place service delivery at a critical risk. This is consistent with the approach taken in other industries where close contact exemptions have already been introduced.

The following are examples of individuals whose absence will place service delivery at a critical risk:

- Trades critical to the continuing program of work, where without that trade to complete their task, the whole or significant part of the project is delayed
- Critical ancillary support functions and critical decision-makers including supervisors, health and safety officers, certifiers
- If a business is unable to continue operations due to major staff shortage, for example, where a small business has all workers unable to work due to quarantine requirements.

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In summary

Since the onset of the current COVID-19 wave, each of our organisations has been receiving member feedback about increasing hardship, inability to continue or complete work, and significant stress from dealing with demands of clients, the rescheduling of work and suppliers, and ensuring their staff remain in jobs.

We urge the Queensland Government to take a common sense and safe approach to this type of exemption for our industry.

Yours sincerely



Paul Bidwell
Deputy CEO



Jen Williams
Queensland
Executive Director



Ben Hawkins
A/g Executive
Manager - QLD



Michael Roberts
Executive
Director



Malcolm Richards
Chief Executive
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