

13th August 2020

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Hon Dr Steven Miles
Deputy Premier and Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services
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Dear Deputy Premier

Despite numerous and some constructive discussions with the Queensland Government since the border closure was announced last week, with some important amendments and considerations made, we are writing to formally request further amendments.

By its very nature, the construction industry is transient and in South East Queensland particularly, is reliant on suppliers and trades that work across the QLD/NSW border.

Currently we have hundreds of residential and commercial construction businesses whose primary source of work is in northern NSW. Without access to NSW, we have businesses who are unable to provide their Queensland workers with ongoing income, and who have incomplete projects that have stopped as a direct result of the border closure.

It is also important to note that some construction services here in Queensland simply do not exist in the Northern Rivers area of New South Wales, and therefore the majority of these businesses trade with clients within NSW. For example – there are four staircase manufacturers based on the Gold Coast who supply the bulk of the builders in the Northern Rivers area, as the closest supplier in NSW is Coffs Harbour.

Key impacts on the industry

The biggest impact on the industry of not being able to continue construction projects in NSW will be the contractual implications stemming from project delays. These delays result in liquidated damages and contract terminations with potential litigation.

These contractual issues will filter down the contractual chain from the client through to subcontractors. The flow-on effect of such issues may also result in some contractors being affected under their financial requirements by QBCC (which can impact their licence), the need to reduce costs through staff cuts, and potential full closures of businesses.

We are also concerned for the public safety implication of having unsupervised and abandoned sites, which up until last week were active construction sites.

We are asking the Queensland Government to consider amending the current border restrictions to allow Queensland construction workers to undertake works outside the NSW border zone (as listed in Border Restrictions Direction (No 11), in accordance with conditions we've outlined below.

The solution

We understand that any border arrangements need to strike an appropriate balance between economic sustainability for Queensland businesses, whilst also safeguarding the health and wellbeing of all Queensland residents.

As was done during the last border closure, we recommend that the Queensland Government deem construction workers (and necessary ancillary staff such as administration, certifiers, architects, project managers and supervisors) as essential workers, and that these workers are permitted to work within a reasonable area outside of the border zone provided they ensure the following conditions are adhered whilst working on construction sites in those areas:

1. On domestic projects (single dwelling or duplex) and small commercial projects (e.g. shop fit outs)– a maximum of 5 construction workers will be on site at any one time. In addition to this 5 are any necessary supervisors, plant operators or delivery personnel.
2. On large commercial projects - a maximum of 5 workers per floor or work zone. For example on a multi storey building a maximum of 5 workers per floor or designated work zones or on a large low rise warehouse (large floor footprint) a maximum of 5 person per designated work zone. In addition to this 5 are any necessary supervisors, plant operators or delivery personnel.
3. Workers are not permitted to leave the site for any purpose except in response to a medical or safety emergency.
4. Upon completion of their daily duties, workers must return home by the fastest route, and not undertake any social activity outside the border zone.
5. Any person who is required to undertake a Covid-19 test is to notify the builder, or their representative, immediately and isolate until results have been provided.
 - The builder is to notify any person who was on site or encountered the person being tested in the last 14 days to monitor for any symptoms or have a Covid test undertaken.
 - Any person waiting for results from a Covid test is not permitted to attend site and must forward a copy of the results report to the builder before being allowed back to site.

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6. Each site must have a Covid 19 site specific plan which must include the following:
- Rules for social distancing on entering and exiting the site, during work activities (as far as reasonably practicable) and during break times and &/or lunch.
 - Processes for daily and regular cleaning of meal areas and amenities in accordance with the state guidelines for cleaning and disinfecting.
 - a site sign in/ out register that captures.
 - a) The person's name
 - b) Company or business
 - c) Their undertaking (example – carpenter, plumber, etc).
 - d) Mobile number
 - e) Personal address
 - Provision excluding any unauthorised visitors to site.
 - Processes for managing sick workers or potential COVID 19 cases.
 - Each business who is responsible for undertaking construction work outside the border zone is responsible for ensuring that the COVID19 Safety plan is followed on that site.

In addition we are asking for a border pass specifically for construction workers. This will allow Queensland and NSW construction workers to cross the border more easily and allow for consistent application of the exemptions for Queensland construction workers at the border.

We believe the solutions we've outlined above would continue to meet the concerns of government in relation to managing the health of workers and the potential spread of COVID 19. They also go a long way to allowing the building and construction industry to continue to run their businesses and meet their contractual obligations; while at the same time supporting Queensland's economic recovery.

Yours sincerely



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Queensland Master Builders

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