

BRIEFING NOTE

To: The Hon Nola Marino MP and DITRDC
From: RDA Murray NSW
Submitted by: Mary Hoodless – Chair, RDA Murray
Information Source: RDA Murray and Murray Socio-Economic Activation Taskforce (MSEAT)
Date: Wednesday 15 July 2020

Recovery phase and what this looks like:

- NSW-VIC border closure
- RDA Murray coordinating communication and supporting local govt
- Police/defence presence is notable – road blocks, random stops/ checks. This has a highly tangible impact on general community confidence.
- RDA Murray are working together with regional leaders to predict and assess border closure impacts and what we can do to support the community
- Addressing migrant workforce cross border issues.

How recovery can be effectively implemented:

- Support border specific economic and social needs
- Consider the USA Chapter 11 bankruptcy restructure process to allow insolvent businesses to restructure without the current bankruptcy costs that may in fact 'sink' the business
- Community – Invest in health promotion to improve immunity and impact of COVID 19 on the general population. Programs to avoid co-morbidities associated with obesity, excessive alcohol, little exercise and smoking.
- Murray Irrigation Limited & Local Government bridge infrastructure proposal development.

Impact and effectiveness of the government COVID interventions in your region including identifying what additional support may be needed.

- 3 active Covid cases on the border. Pop up testing units in Albury to support increased demand for testing.
- Business concerns when existing job keeper/ATO support ends
 - Zombie Business – pre COVID were at risk, given life support, still unsustainable
 - Other businesses are genuinely in trouble – eg a tourism business had to refund \$60k overnight – flourishing one day-closed the next – will they survive?
 - Other business owners have taken the opportunity to collect the funds, close and retire
- Reports that some tourism operators are nervous about accepting bookings and feel unable to request further information, such as postcodes, from their clients.
- Confusion about travel within the 50km border community zone and what is and isn't permitted.
- This has seen some patients from Albury being refused medical and/or surgical services in Wagga Wagga.



- NSW Small Business Commissioner has seen the number of requests for mediation in retail lease disputes more than quadruple, however, evidence suggests most landlords are being receptive and accommodating.
- Echuca-Moama residents are still experiencing delays of up to two hours at the border crossing. Police are working to streamline this and encouraging residents to stagger opening times for business to reduce the peak demand on the bridge crossing.

Issues in your region with logistics particularly with any tightening in the supply chain or supply chain shortages

- Getting supply of farming chemicals due to closures in China early on is still a problem and a bigger problem now than previously because of seasonal needs and that there is a crop this year.
- Deliveries which would normally come from Victoria are being impacted by the border closure, some couriers are unwilling to cross into NSW to avoid delays or are waiting until much later in the day to avoid traffic jams.
- Availability of some equipment and vehicles is poor or non-existent due to Covid related production disruption in China. In automotive, there is limited availability of Toyota HiLux and Ford Ranger models. A North Coast Toyota dealer has reported a 75% activity cut in pre-sales. Blacklocks Automotive in Albury are reporting shortages of prestige models. While there is still time on the \$150K write off this has hampered or prevented some from taking advantage of that opportunity.
- Shipping lanes are working OK but slower and there is potential for a blockage to build in Sydney if Melbourne is avoided due to border closures

Business confidence across your region and good news stories

COVID Response

- Business confidence is negative with expected polarisation and severity of impacts expected with border closures
- Henty Field Days (September 22 to 24) also cancelled, the event brings 60,000 visitors and \$92 million to the local economy.
- Deniliquin Ute Muster 2020 (October 2 - 3) has been cancelled, the event brings 20,000 visitors and \$15 million into the local economy.
- Tourism promotion unlikely to pay off at this time, focus is on building awareness of destinations for when people can travel freely again. Local communities are being encouraged to support businesses struggling due to reduced tourism.
- Agriculture sector continues to be buoyant with season.

Getting On With It

- Communications have focussed on information about permits and bridge and ferry closures. We have seen a more than 300% increase in interaction with our Facebook page as people seek this information.
- Community attitudes have become more positive since permit system has launched. Attitudes to Police largely positive on NSW side of border. Issues with traffic congestion on Vic side of border.



- Seven border crossings have been reopened with checkpoints established: Abbotsford Bridge, Tooleybuc Bridge, Gonn-Murrabit Bridge, Barmah Bridge, Koraleigh-Nyah Bridge, Wymah Ferry and Tintaldra Bridge.
- RDA Murray investigating partnering to provide tax reform information.

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