

Joint Statement NSW – VIC Border Closure Impact and Recommendations

The NSW – VIC border community of 180,000 NSW and 260,000 VIC¹ people are being profoundly and exceptionally disadvantaged economically and socially as a direct consequence of Victorian and New South Wales Emergency Public Health Orders.

Our communities are experiencing unique regional exclusion from daily activities; from work, health, education and welfare services, family interaction, business delivery and development, banking, groceries and fresh food, sports and recreation activities.

No other area of Australia has suffered the impact of not being able to attend work because of COVID-19 Emergency Orders. Our communities are facing rules more restrictive than those imposed on residents of Melbourne and Sydney hotspots.

Approximately 5% of the border workforce are unable to work because they live or work outside the designated Border Zone². Border businesses are being forced to close where staff are excluded from entering NSW or are forced to self-isolate upon returning home.

Results from recent local surveys² of border businesses found:

- 89.22% businesses had been impacted by border closure
- An average of 2.7 staff per business unable to cross the border to attend work
- An average \$8,500 weekly revenue loss for impacted businesses
- Impacted businesses are being forced to reduce their staff by up to 1.8 FTE

Dynamic modelling of the adverse impacts of COVID-19 on unemployment, social dislocation, and mental health shows that there may be a 25 per cent increase in suicides.³ This unique and extreme situation requires an equally impactful response from government.

Our Prioritised Recommendations:

1. Include residents and businesses in NSW - VIC border LGAs in all Commonwealth and State assistance and support packages; social, economic and mental health
2. Create a Border Closure Disaster Response program, similar to the Bushfire Grant Scheme, to support and sustain impacted businesses and services.
3. NSW Government establish a fund similar to the Victorian Regional Tourism Accommodation Support Program to compensate accommodation businesses for cancellations arising from the border closure.
4. Adjust NSW Border Closure zone and restrictions to include locally identified border communities
5. Consult with local regional development leaders prior to future changes to border regulations.

¹ ABS 2016 Census *QuickStats* accessed 6/8/2020

² BusinessNSW *COVID-19 Economic Impacts Survey* n=1195 30/7/2020

Albury Northside Chamber of Commerce *Border Closure Survey* n=269 24/7/2020

Murray Regional Tourism *Border Closure Impact Modelling* preliminary findings; 30/7/2020

³ Systems Modelling and Simulation Team of the Brain and Mind Centre at the University of Sydney, and the NHMRC Centre for Research Excellence on prevention of youth suicide (YOUTH), in which Orygen and the University of Melbourne are partnering 7/5/2020 <https://ama.com.au/sites/default/files/documents/070520%20-%20Joint%20Statement%20-%20COVID-19%20Likely%20to%20Lead%20to%20Increased%20Rates%20of%20Suicide%20and%20Mental%20Illness.pdf>

**Signatories of this Joint Statement collectively,
all border RDAs, Councils, and Economic Development Agencies**

Regional Development Australia Murray Inc	Regional Development Australia Southern Inland
Regional Development Australia Gippsland	Regional Development Australia Loddon Mallee
Regional Development Australia Hume	Regional Development Australia Far South Coast
BusinessNSW Murray Riverina	Upper Murray Inc
The Australian Industry Group	Murray Regional Tourism Board
Mildura Regional Development	Central Victoria Export Network
South West Arts Inc	Riverina and Murray Joint Organisation of Councils
BEC Business Advice South and West NSW	Echuca Moama Tourism Association
Committee for Echuca Moama	Echuca Moama Accommodation Association
Master Builders Association NSW	Albury Northside Chamber of Commerce Albury CBD
Albury City Council	Mildura Rural City Council
Wodonga City Council	Swan Hill Rural City Council
Edward River Council	Wentworth Shire Council
Bega Council	Federation Council
Moira Council	East Gippsland Shire Council
Greater Hume Shire Council	Indigo Council
Campaspe Shire Council	Gannawarra Council
Berrigan Shire Council	Murray River Council
Snowy Valleys Council	Snowy Monaro Regional Council
Towong Council	Balranald Shire Council

Media Release

**Regional Development Australia Murray Inc
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