



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE COVID-19 2021 PANDEMIC RESPONSE

Ms Elizabeth Lee MLA (Chair), Ms Suzanne Orr MLA (Deputy Chair), Ms Jo Clay MLA

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into the COVID-19 2021 pandemic response

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Dear Secretary

The overall response in the ACT to the Covid 19 crisis emphasises that the ACT Government has very poor knowledge and trust in the business sector.

The spread of the virus has predominantly occurred from gatherings of people and not from transactions with businesses. Businesses are responsible to their own staff and customers and desperately needed to be trusted to continue the essential economic recovery. Every business has different nuances and those nuances are best handled by each business to ensure covid safe practice. But the parameters enforced by the ACT Government have unnecessarily stifled business to a huge extent and show the complete disconnect between Government and business.

Our key take-outs from the recent “Pathway Forward” were

- Business generally has been willing to do their bit to help keep the community safe, but patience has grown thin.
- We were the first to welcome the move to contactless trade for small business and for the ability for car dealerships to be able to deliver cars purchased before lockdown. We have given credit where credit is due to the government and we appreciate what a difficult job it is to balance the community’s needs.
- Unfortunately, the pathway out of lockdown was disappointing in spite of the hype. For some key business sectors, it repeated the mistakes of the first transition out of lockdown in 2020. It really smacks of not listening, not understanding and not learning (and as a natural follow on from that, business perceives the government does not want to and does not care, preferring to persist with what it thinks is best without any solid evidence base. This was certainly not from lack of intelligent feedback by business about how to navigate the road to economic recovery while at the same time keeping the community safe.
- A few targeted industries got all the headlines – hairdressers, beauty therapists, gyms and personal trainers – but we don’t have many of those in Fyshwick! And, it sounded like good news for hospitality (only to be disappointed by the restrictions which will still prevent many from re-opening), but in Fyshwick such businesses rely on people being at work or coming to Fyshwick to shop and that’s fundamentally still prohibited.
- The big opportunity missed here is for retail. There has been no easing of restrictions on

retail which essentially has to limp along with nothing but contactless trade for another five weeks. That's just unconscionable when a graduated return to trade would have been fairer and helped businesses more. The government should have allowing retail businesses to re-open, subject to a COVID-safe plan and capacity restrictions, from 1 October. It makes no sense hairdressers can re-open with up to five people, but shops can't. As an interim measure, why can't retailers be allowed to make appointments so they can limit and control the number of people in their stores, the same as service industries? That makes sense.

- Retail businesses have adapted with some online services but when your business needs to let people see and touch and feel and try on, you can only get so far with contactless trade. And many smaller retail businesses are not geared up with online sales platforms so it's been a huge burden to manage what little trade they can generate.

There is still the opportunity for more easing between now and those dates in the pathway and we'd expect to see government engaging more to help those retail businesses get closer to re-opening.

Rob Evans

President, Fyshwick Business Association

www.FyshwickBusiness.com.au

