

**From:** [Graham Catt](#)  
**To:** [LA Committee - COVID19; Archie Tsirimokos](#)  
**Cc:** [Justine Heidemann](#)  
**Subject:** RE: COVID-19 Select Committee - Proof transcript of hearing  
**Date:** Friday, 22 May 2020 12:32:30 PM  
**Attachments:** [image007.png](#)  
[image008.png](#)  
[image009.png](#)  
[image010.png](#)  
[COVID\\_Proof\\_30\\_April\\_2020\\_G\\_Catt.docx](#)  
[Letter to Chief Minister economic stimulus 16 March 2020 FINAL.pdf](#)  
[Letter to Chief Minister Commercial Rates and other measures 27 March 2020 FINAL.pdf](#)

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Dear Danton

Thank you for providing this transcript. On review I have noted one small item as a comment on the attached that may be misleading to the reader. Mr Tsirimokos has reviewed and has no comments or amendments.

We agreed to provide the committee with copies of relevant submissions sent to the ACT Government, these are attached for your information.

We also agreed to provide further information on the cost to employers of their staff working remotely. It has been a difficult obtaining this information but I have summarised below. Generally costs related to:

- Hardware
- Technology to allow remote communication and team work
- Phones and devices
- More costs for direct IT support
- Internet
- Productivity

IT suppliers reported a surge in demand to set up systems to allow people to work from home that will be charged to businesses if not already included in service contracts. This includes things like:

- Remote Access to files
- Set up Sharing/Comms arrangements (Zoom, Microsoft Teams etc)
- Improve phone capability
- Setting up staff devices
- Hardware: PC, Screens, Printers, Camera's etc

Some firms advised that in some cases staff demanded the organisation set up internet for them to allow them to work from home. Many did a number of days of testing, where staff worked from home for a day and then back in the office. So there were productivity costs as well as an impact on capacity to service customers. Many were managing children at home and juggling their needs with work, and this impacted productivity negatively, but the elimination of travel time and other changes had a positive impact.

This is very much a case of every business being different. Based on the feedback from members the best we can suggest is that the cost per employee covered range between \$300 to \$3,000 per head.

Thank you again for the opportunity to the Select Committee.

Kind regards

**Graham Catt**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Canberra Business Chamber

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**From:** LA Committee - COVID19 <LACommitteeCOVID19@parliament.act.gov.au>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 19 May 2020 4:33 PM  
**To:** Archie Tsirimokos <archie.tsirimokos@mvlawyers.com.au>; Graham Catt <ceo@canberrabusiness.com>  
**Cc:** Justine Heidemann <Justine.Heidemann@canberrabusiness.com>  
**Subject:** COVID-19 Select Committee - Proof transcript of hearing

UNCLASSIFIED

Good afternoon Mr Catt and Mr Tsirimokos,

Thank you again for appearing before the Select Committee on the COVID-19 pandemic response on 30 April 2020.

Please find attached a proof copy of the transcript of the evidence from the hearing. Please check the transcript and return it by close of business on **Friday 22 May 2020** with any corrections that should be made.

Please note that corrections can only be made for incorrect spellings, mishearings, misattributions etc. You cannot seek to change by addition or deletion anything that was said in a hearing.

If you are returning the transcript electronically, would you please make any corrections in revision or track-change mode. If you are returning hard copy, please make amendments in your own handwriting.

*You may have been asked for additional information by Members, or otherwise taken questions on notice, during the hearing. Please check the transcript carefully to respond appropriately to these requests and questions, if any.*

Very best regards,

**Danton Leary**  
Select Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic Response  
Office of the Legislative Assembly for the ACT  
Email [danton.leary@parliament.act.gov.au](mailto:danton.leary@parliament.act.gov.au) | Online [www.parliament.act.gov.au](http://www.parliament.act.gov.au)



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**From:** Justine Heidemann <[Justine.Heidemann@canberrabusiness.com](mailto:Justine.Heidemann@canberrabusiness.com)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, 30 April 2020 10:28 AM  
**To:** LA Committee - COVID19 <[LACommitteeCOVID19@parliament.act.gov.au](mailto:LACommitteeCOVID19@parliament.act.gov.au)>  
**Cc:** Graham Catt <[ceo@canberrabusiness.com](mailto:ceo@canberrabusiness.com)>  
**Subject:** WITNESS DETAILS- CATT, Graham 30.04.2020

Good morning Danton,

Please see attached that completed Witness Details for Grahams appearance today.

Kind Regards,

Justine Heidemann Event Manager / Executive Assistant to CEO  
Canberra Business Chamber  
Level 3, 243 Northbourne Avenue, Lyneham, ACT 2602  
Tel: 02 6247 4199 Direct: 02 6154 6160

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In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge that we are on Ngunnawal land

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Mr Andrew Barr  
ACT Chief Minister  
ACT legislative Assembly

By email: [barr@act.gov.au](mailto:barr@act.gov.au)

**Economic Stimulus measures: Responding to COVID-19**

Dear Chief Minister

The Canberra Business Chamber, the Master Builders (ACT) and the Property Council of Australia (ACT Division) have been seeking feedback from our collective memberships on what measures might assist to alleviate the impact of COVID-19 on the Canberra and Region business community, protect the Territory economy and support local workers at this challenging time.

There are more than 30,000 businesses in the ACT, who provide almost two thirds of Canberra's jobs. The Territory's construction industry is the second largest private sector industry accounting for 8% of GDP and supporting the employment of 20,000 Canberrans. It is also vital that we work together to support the Territory's construction industry and the 1,900 construction apprentices currently in training.

In discussion with our members, it is evident that our members are taking proactive measures to ensure continuity of business, but also doing their bit to work with their suppliers, clients and tenants to offer support to them where possible, ease financial burden on smaller business owners and are acting where possible in the best interests of the broader community.

We also would like to support the ACT Government in considering measures which could immediately help business manage retain staff, manage their cash flow by reducing business costs, and generate spending and employment; noting the Federal overnment stimulus packages will see some benefit flow to the Canberra businesses.

It is important to recognise that local Canberra Businesses have been struggling since last December when we started to be impacted by bushfire, smoke pollution and hailstorms – all taking a heavy toll economically and on the mental health and wellbeing of so many local business operators.

We believe that targeted stimulus measures if enacted quickly will go a long way to improve confidence amongst local businesses and prevent the imminent closure of so many businesses and loss of jobs.

Having spoken to our members, we have agreed that a range of immediate actions could assist if taken by the ACT Government, and we would like to request a meeting to discuss these initiatives in more detail with either you, your office or the appropriate ACT Government officials.

The key principles that should be considered in developing a local business stimulus package include:

- Support for local businesses
- Support for small businesses
- Focus on addressing cash flow
- Focus on keeping people employed, especially low income earners

We also believe that there is merit in the appointment of a Special Minister for Economic Assistance. The Minister could coordinate and engage with industry on some of the proposed stimulus initiatives. These may include

1. Cut or forgo payroll tax with a moratorium on payment - ensuring that employers are able to retain staff for longer if their operations are inhibited;
2. Immediate moratorium on rate payments for commercial building owners which assists building owners reduce costs to tenants;
3. Temporary immediate reduction in power and water billing rates;
4. Defer licensing fee renewals and DA/BA fees and charges;
5. Fast track or streamlining of government procurement practices to help bring planned projects to the construction phase sooner;
6. Reinstating the VET funding cuts for apprentices and adding additional top up apprentice payments for ACT businesses
7. Setting up a dedicated small business support service to provide targeted support for individual businesses that may have suffered significant economic impacts from COVID-19 or compounding impacts from bushfires, hail, smoke or other businesses collapses. This service could also help resolve disputes / provide advice to consumers and builders who may have project delays due to material delays or other business impacts
8. More staffing resources into EPSDD to get current Development Applications approved and commenced
9. More resources for the Unit Titling Office to get plans registered and settled
10. Mirror the Federal Assistance with targeted grants available immediately for tourism operators who have had a significant reduction in revenues over January – February.

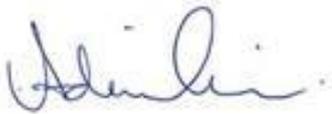
In addition, we urge the ACT Government to identify additional projects which can be brought forward to help keep the construction sector working and we are happy to assist in identification of these.

We look forward to hearing from you about an appropriate time for a meeting / teleconference.

Yours sincerely,



Graham Catt  
Chief Executive Officer  
Canberra Business Chamber



Adina Cirson  
Executive Director  
Property Council of Australia



Michael Hopkins  
Chief Executive Officer  
Master Builders ACT



25 March 2020

Mr Andrew Barr MLA

ACT Chief Minister  
ACT Legislative Assembly  
196 London Circuit  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

[andrew.barr@act.gov.au](mailto:andrew.barr@act.gov.au)

### **Commercial rates relief to help business and other requested stimulus measures**

Dear Chief Minister

Our organisations are acutely aware of the significant impacts the COVID-19 outbreak is having and will increasingly have on the cashflows of businesses across a range of sectors who are commercial tenants. There are already many tenants who are unable to make regularly scheduled rental payments and there will be many more who find themselves in this situation.

Commercial landlords want their tenants to survive this economic crisis and to be in place to provide goods, services and jobs in the recovery. While the economic crisis is only in its early stages in Australia, building owners are already working with their tenants to support their businesses on a case by case basis with short-term solutions. These may include deferral of rent, reductions in outgoings, changes in rental frequency, percentage rental abatements or grace periods for defaults.

We are all in this together. The financial support that commercial building owners are likely to provide over the coming months will be very substantial, amounting to millions of dollars across the economy. Property groups also have their own workforce and overhead costs they need to fund during these difficult times.

This letter outlines a number of measures we believe are necessary to ensure the survival of ACT businesses post the coronavirus crisis.

## COMMERCIAL RATES

It is critical that support for commercial tenants is provided through temporary rate relief in the ACT. This will allow building owners to provide their tenants with the rental relief they desperately need to avoid closure.

Along with other jurisdictions around the country, we are calling for the ACT Government to follow suit and not be left behind. Specifically, we are calling on the ACT Government to implement the following additional measures:

- **Immediately implement a Rate Relief Scheme which provides a cash rebate equal to six months of the rates paid by building owners in the last available assessment.**

We acknowledge the public comments you have made that landlords with Australian or ACT Government tenants will not require rate relief because government tenants will continue to pay their rent. We acknowledge that rate relief will not be required for these landlords.

Generally, building owners will pay their commercial rate notices annually, and pass on an estimate of these costs to their tenants through their regularly scheduled rental payments (either as outgoings or rent).

The need for urgent cashflow support means that building owners cannot wait for relief to be provided as part of the next, future assessment notice.

Building owners who receive the cash rebate could be legislatively obligated to pass this through to their tenants and we would support that approach. Clawback provisions can apply if the building owner cannot produce evidence that they have passed through the cash rebate to their tenants. Many small business tenancies (especially retail) either pay rates directly or a portion, via reimbursing the property owner.

## PAYROLL TAX

The first round of the ACT Government's economic stimulus package provides some relief for employers via arrangements to allow them to defer their 2020-21 payroll tax, interest free until 1 July 2022 and a payroll tax waiver for hospital, creative arts and entertainment industries for six months from March to August 2020.

Since the announcement of the ACT's first round of economic stimulus measures it has become evident that the reach and impact of the coronavirus crisis will be far more reaching. Consequently, the limited payroll tax measures already announced will not be enough to allow small businesses to survive this crisis. We call on the ACT Government to consider the following additional measures:

- **Expand the six month waiver of payroll tax to all ACT businesses with Group Australia-wide wages of up to \$10 million from March to September 2020.**

## OTHER FEES, CHARGES AND LEVY'S AND REMMISIONS

We also would like to outline some additional measures we believe should be considered as part of the second package, and welcome and opportunity to discuss these with government in more detail, as follows:

- A 50% reduction in power and water bills from back-dated from 1 January to 30 September 2020,
- A six month waiver of land tax and stamp duty,
- A six month waiver of Lease Variation Charge for any project that can demonstrate it will commence construction within six months (as was adopted in 2014).
- A Mr Fluffy building program, whereby the ACT Government engages local companies to design and build single houses (and dual occupancies where permitted) on vacant unsold Mr Fluffy blocks. This will serve as both an industry stimulus measure and aid to dispose of the currently unsold blocks, and

## CONCLUSION

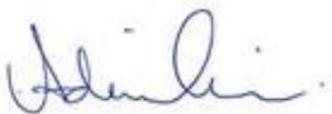
We understand that these requests are significant and will create a substantial impact on the ACT's budget position in the short-term. However, with such measures we believe the economic impact on ACT's businesses will be far more significant, leading to a longer recovery, which in turn will have a far more damage impact on the ACT's budget position, potential for years to come.

Thank you for your consideration of these measures.

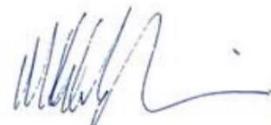
Yours sincerely,



Graham Catt  
Chief Executive Officer  
Canberra Business Chamber



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Michael Hopkins  
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Master Builders ACT