

**JOINT RELEASE:**

**Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland**

**National Retail Association**

**Franchise Council of Australia**

**Restaurant & Catering Industry Association of Australia**

**Australian Association of Convenience Stores**

**2 December 2021**

**WHAT'S NEXT: Queensland businesses have two weeks left to plan long-term recovery but need essential details first**

Time is running out for the state's business sector to prepare for new COVID business as usual conditions when the economy and borders re-open but there are still details outstanding for businesses to be able to make informed decisions about their long-term recovery.

Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland (CCIQ), National Retail Association (NRA), Franchise Council of Australia (FCA), Restaurant & Catering Industry Association of Australia (RCA) and Australian Association of Convenience Stores (AACS) are calling for essential long-term detail to allow businesses to make informed decisions about the future of their business after state borders re-open, after 80% vaccination and after the festive season.

*Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland: What happens after state borders re-open and what is the next vaccine milestone*

CCIQ Policy and Advocacy General Manager Amanda Rohan said CCIQ had spoken to hundreds of businesses since the new rules were announced in November with the majority concerned about what the next vaccine milestone was, when Queensland was expected to reach it and what it meant for them.

"What businesses need now, just two weeks out from borders and the economy re-opening, is certainty. Businesses are desperate for details as to what happens after then," Ms Rohan said.

"New vaccine in the workplace rules disproportionately impact small businesses so they need to know what's next so they can confidently plan for the long-term recovery. Businesses are genuinely concerned about losing staff just when they're finally ready and able 'get back to business' and in an already tight labor market.

"We need certainty on what is the next vaccine milestone and what that means for businesses in terms of restrictions, vaccinations, access to skilled labor and supply chains.

"Businesses have endured so many hurdles in the lead-up to Queensland reaching the 80% milestone but there is still work to do to ensure they know what they're up against long-term."

*National Retail Association: Store owners are not the police*

NRA CEO Dominique Lamb said Queensland small businesses had shown throughout the pandemic they were willing and flexible to adapt to changing government requirements.

"Queensland businesses have tackled the challenge with enthusiasm and with minimal complaint and fuss," Ms Lamb said.

“Essentially, they just want to get on with the business of serving their loyal customers and creating jobs for local people, especially young people and those putting their foot on the employment ladder for the first time.

“The only way they can do that is by securing certainty around the rules that will apply as they try to open up, and with the knowledge that they will not be alone in enforcing those rules.

“We believe it’s reasonable for the state to put guidelines and rules in place, but they need to give businesses support on the ground when it comes to enforcing those rules. Store owners are not the police.”

Ms Lamb also supported the government’s initiative to encourage the public to be respectful and polite in their dealings with retail staff, but said it needed to be back with training and resources.

“Young, low-skilled workers are caught in the middle of this battle between the government and the small percentage of people who just refuse to follow the rules. Encouragement is nice, but what they really need is training and support to deal with aggressive and belligerent customers,” Ms Lamb said.

*Franchise Council of Australia: Businesses need appropriate planning time and resources to reopen successfully*

FCA CEO Mary Aldred said certainty and security were essential for both small businesses and employees after many months of changing rules and growing customer unrest.

“Businesses need appropriate planning time and resources to reopen successfully, and employees want to know they can come to work and be safe and not be expected to control potentially aggressive customers,” Ms Aldred said.

*Restaurant & Catering Industry Association of Australia: Industry ready to come back roaring*

RCA CEO Wes Lambert said Queensland’s hospitality sector was ready to come back roaring but the industry needed government certainty before the state border opening date.

“There are still many questions that have not yet been answered,” Mr Lambert said.

“Questions like what happens if I have a COVID-19 case in my business, what are my rights with workers and patrons, what support is there for businesses that have to shut down and where will I find staff. They’re the common questions we hear on a daily basis.

“Restaurants, cafes and caterers are keen to get back to doing what they do best but those essential questions that keep operators up at night need to be rectified.”

*Australian Association of Convenience Stores: Unless the rules moving forward are clear, exiting issues will escalate*

AACS CEO Theo Foukkare said living in Queensland had its advantages during the pandemic, however small businesses needed absolute clarity to be able to plan their recovery and investments plans for 2022 and beyond.

“Like most industries, service stations and convenience stores have suffered significant sales and foot traffic declines and dealt with aggressive customers. Unless the rules moving forward are clear, this will only escalate,” Mr Foukkare said.

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