

2 April 2020

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP  
Premier of Victoria  
Level 1, 1 Treasury Place  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

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Tim Pallas MP  
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The Hon Richard Wynne MP  
Minister for Planning  
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**By email:** [peter.keogh@minstaff.vic.gov.au](mailto:peter.keogh@minstaff.vic.gov.au)

Dear Premier, Treasurer and Minister,

## **Recommended immediate actions to retain jobs**

We acknowledge the State Government's rapid and evolving response to the challenges posed by the pandemic crisis.

Given the size of our industry, I wanted to collate the current issues facing us so that they could be considered as a whole. This letter contains current concerns which are creating challenges now and is focused on ensuring Victoria can navigate this crisis as effectively as possible, minimising job losses and ensuring we can rebound quickly once the current restrictions are loosened and, eventually, eliminated. I am aware that work on many of the initiatives is also underway and we thank you for that.

A second set of recommended medium-term reform actions are contained in a separate letter, entitled 'Medium and long-term reform to kickstart Victoria's economy'.

All actions have been developed from a position that we are all in this together, as we look to slow the spread of COVID-19 in the community as quickly as possible.

## **Department of Premier and Cabinet**

### *The establishment of an Industry Response and Recovery Council*

Comprised of key industry representatives, it would advise the State Government on the experiences of businesses and industry and on recovery measures.

### *Structuring and coordination of key Government departments*

To fast track approvals for key projects or rezoning to reduce friction costs and time.

### *Consideration of measures to unlock key projects across Victoria to encourage housing supply, jobs, growth and investment*

In some cases, projects are waiting for planning approvals; in others, planning processes could be fast tracked, or government services coordinated. Our members have proposed several projects that will provide economic activity and are shovel-ready (see **Annexure A**).

## **Department of Treasury and Finance**

### *A six month waiver of land tax and council rates for building owners*

Building owners who receive the cash rebate could be legislatively obligated to pass this through to their tenants. Claw back provisions could be considered if the building owner cannot produce evidence that they have passed through the cash rebate to their tenants.

### *Extensions to payment of land tax and council rate obligations*

Otherwise, exemptions from penalties if these amounts are not paid by the due date to assist businesses with management of cash flow.

### *Continued operation of relevant authorities for the purposes of providing compliance approvals as well as the construction of essential services – for example: Melbourne Water, AusNet, Powercor*

It has become more difficult for many contractors to source materials required to complete works and be issued with a Statement of Compliance. Without this, they cannot be paid. We suggest that any remaining works that cannot be completed due to COVID-19 related supply chain disruptions can be listed in a Remaining Works Schedule. If it was required by the authorities, then those Remaining Works could be subject to a bond or guarantee.

### *Allocation of resources to training programs to address shortages of planning and building practitioners*

This could facilitate re-skilling for through who have lost their jobs and could also be conducted as a virtual program to facilitate ongoing social distancing measures.

## **Department of Land, Water, Environment and Planning**

### *Extended hours of operation for construction*

To facilitate work environments that implement social distancing.

### *Continued operation of Land Use Victoria*

So that settlements can continue to be processed.

#### *Legislative intervention on critical projects*

This would enable the Minister for Planning to allow any development necessary to protect the health, welfare and safety of the community during the pandemic without the normal development approvals. Requirements for documents to be available in hard copy or for inspection in premises can be met by being available online.

#### *Provision of support and direction to local government*

So that they continue to assess planning applications during the disruption and ensure that currently legislated assessment timeframes are adhered to, with projects deemed to be approved if they are not.

### **Consumer Affairs**

#### *Legislative amendment to provide a blanket extension to sunset clauses on residential projects*

These clauses will allow both sides to terminate contracts in the next quarter. A blanket exemption to sunset dates allows buyers and vendors time to decide at a later date. Extension need not erode people's rights, but merely defer the decision to a period where there is more certainty for both sides.

### **Department of Health and Human Services**

#### *Guidance on retirement village visitation*

It is unclear what powers retirement village operators have to limit outside visitors to communities and enforce controls to avoid or contain the transmission of COVID-19 to residents and staff.

A public health notice could be issued under the provisions in the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* in relation to retirement villages, which would benefit from a clear statement that it applies despite the terms of residence contracts and other laws.

#### *Aged care entry funding modification*

Victorian retirement living operators are required to advance up to 85% of an outgoing resident's refundable accommodation deposit when they move into residential aged care, where that resident moved into the village before August 2017.

Considering current cashflow and real estate challenges, we propose villages instead fund residents' entry to care via the Daily Accommodation Payment, as they are now able to for all contracts commencing since 1 August 2017.

### **Department of Transport**

#### *All freight activity continues to be classed as 'essential'*

This will ensure Victoria avoids confusion experienced in the New Zealand shutdown, where containers with "non-essential" goods have been unable to be moved or unloaded, causing hold-ups at key ports and a container shortage for "essential" goods.

*Potential relief for industrial landowners which sign short-term tenancy deals*

This will ensure that goods unable to go to stores that have been required to shut down can be held where capacity exists, reducing or eliminating blockages at key ports.

We look forward to supporting you and your broader team during these extraordinary times and contributing to the longer-term goal of getting the Victorian economy back on track.

Yours faithfully,



**Cressida Wall**  
**Executive Director, Victoria**  
**Property Council of Australia**