

To: Minister Grant Robertson
Minister Stuart Nash
Minister Chris Hipkins

Via E-mail

2nd March 2022,

Dear Ministers,

Business North Harbour (BNH) operates the North Harbour Business Improvement District (BID) in Auckland which has a membership of 4,500 property owners and businesses who between them employ around 35,000 people. The BID sits within the Upper Harbour Local Board area which contributed over \$7 billion in GDP to the NZ economy last year.

The ongoing pandemic has seen businesses across a multitude of sectors facing significant challenges, some of which have been around for quite some time, with others, many of which in the short-term are far more debilitating for businesses, coming on-stream as Omicron tightens its grip.

In response to a recent survey of our members, 86% of respondents noted major concerns regarding the effects of COVID-19 on their business. In addition to the ongoing challenges already highlighted by many people throughout the country such as financial sustainability, the shortage of labour, reduced operational capacity and problems with the supply chain, staff unavailability (isolating or looking after children that are isolating) and inflationary / cost pressures can now be added to this list of common concerns that members are having to deal with daily. It is also important to acknowledge that these challenges are seldom, if ever, faced in isolation, rather, in the majority of cases businesses are having to deal with them all at the same time.

BNH acknowledges the financial support already given to business by the Government, but it simply isn't enough. We are asking the Government for more assistance in a number of areas to ensure as far as is practicable, that as many businesses as possible survive in the short-term, thus giving them all hope for the longer-term.

We are asking the Government to:

1. Provide more direct financial support by:
 - a. Reviewing the criteria for the recent COVID Support Payment as the current criteria, including comparison dates, exclude too many businesses who require the payments from applying, especially those in Auckland who have already been further disadvantaged due to the increased time spent in lockdowns compared to the rest of NZ.
 - b. Reintroducing wage subsidies and the COVID Resurgence Payments to assist employers whose staff are having to isolate for various reasons and simply can't work from home, thus the business is unable to operate.
 - c. Extending the period of business loan repayments and due dates for GST and provisional tax and ACC levy deadlines.
 - d. Assisting import and export businesses who are facing expensive demurrage charges because of the delays at our ports and additional transport costs when the agreed port of delivery is changed due to excessive delays at that port.
2. Introduce test-to-work arrangements for all workers by making RATs readily available to everyone free of charge, thus avoiding many businesses having to

reduce operational capacity or close because they have staff at home isolating when they could be at work following a negative RAT result.

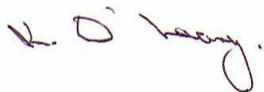
3. Ease border and MIQ restrictions allowing more essential and specifically skilled migrants into the country to manage the demand for suitable workers to fill job vacancies.
4. Work with the relevant authorities / organisations at our ports and in the logistics sector to improve our capability to manage supply chain issues, assisting them to reduce the delays in off-loading vessels and moving off-loaded goods to their final destination.
5. Enable businesses to plan for the future by providing business and indeed the country, with a definitive roadmap which details how and probably most importantly when New Zealand will join other countries such as the UK in living as normally as possible with the virus. This will also serve to dispel much of the widespread fear and confusion which are currently preventing many people from functioning normally, as they are adding to their already high stress levels. The roadmap would include:
 - a. Removal of restrictions at the border
 - b. Removal of compulsory isolation periods for asymptomatic people
 - c. Removal of or easing of restrictions under the Traffic Light System including gathering limits
 - d. Removal of vaccination mandates and vaccination certificates

On behalf of our members, I am writing to ask the Government to urgently consider what can be done to ease the ever-increasing burden which threatens the very existence of many businesses. I have provided some possible solutions to assist in this process.

Whilst the health and wellbeing of our population remain of paramount importance, the health and wellbeing of many business owners is being severely compromised because of the additional stress brought about by the ever-growing list of serious issues highlighted above. I would ask the Government to take urgent action to help mitigate the effects of these issues on both individuals and the nation.

Thank you and I look forward to your response.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "K. O'Leary".

Kevin O'Leary
General Manager Business North Harbour