

# Tasmanian Government's Response to the COVID19 Pandemic – Inquiry

Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry's submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Accounts



October 2022

The COVID-19 pandemic presented an unprecedented challenge to business in Tasmania, government, and the community. It is the view of the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TCCI) that the state government met this challenge with integrity, whilst balancing public interests and safety with sincerity.

## Communication

The leadership of the state government narrowed divides, bolstered cooperation, and created strength through consultation.

To prevent harm to the community, the state government was often forced to make difficult decisions in short timeframes. TCCI acknowledges that there were decisions that could have been better made, but thus is the benefit of hindsight and additional information.

TCCI applauds the role of public servants in responding to the pace of government demands. Public servants, by all accounts, were hard working, reliable, and engaging without complaint.

## Business Services

Throughout the pandemic it was evident that business in Tasmania was a key consideration in guiding policy decisions. TCCI felt meaningfully consulted with regardless of policy outcomes.

In the future, however, TCCI would again encourage government to continue working with stakeholders that provide an existing relevant service, rather than attempt to reinvent them.

By leveraging existing services, government could have significantly reduced costs through funding relevant providers to meet demands; subsequently, increasing quality of service provision via pre-established skills, experience, and procedures.

## Check-in Tas App

From the perspective of business, the Check-in Tas app provided employers, employees, and consumers the confidence to engage with the community by removing a layer of uncertainty. Owing to clear and accessible information, the Check-in Tas app was proportionate, easy to implement, enforceable, and not overly burdensome. In the future, TCCI would again recommend reviewing a similar programs relevance by better monitoring government and community utilisation to determine effectivity and continuation.

## Business Support

Early in the pandemic, the state government lead the nation in providing financial aid through business support packages. The potential impact on employers and employees was greatly minimised through various pre-emptive and reactionary grants and programs, including the:

- small business sustainability and recovery assistance package;
- small business emergency support grant;
- small business hardship grant;
- small business interest free loans scheme;
- business continuity grant;
- digital ready for business program;
- skilled employee assistance program;
- pandemic isolation assistance grant;
- regional chambers of commerce grant; and
- waiving utility costs for small businesses.

Though the above grants primarily targeted small businesses that were hardest hit by the pandemic. The state government also introduced a range of measures that acknowledged the hardships being experienced by the broader business community. These measures included relief for:

- payroll tax;
- land tax;
- motor tax and vehicle registration; and
- liquor and gaming licences and permits.

In addition, the success of the various rounds of travel vouchers was reflective of the state government's initiative and commitment to business in Tasmania. The travel vouchers provided further support to businesses hardest hit by movement restrictions, such as regional businesses and tourism operators.

## Restrictions Ongoing

As Tasmania transitions out of the pandemic, TCCI cautions the growing risk of regulatory creep. Though there are regulations that will likely remain due to benefits external to COVID-19 (e.g. disease management in the workplace), all regulations resulting from COVID-19 have the potential to become onerous. TCCI recommends a regulatory review or the construct of a working group to ensure regulations resultant of COVID-19 are relevant, necessary, and fit for purpose.