

17 February 2021



The Hon. Daniel Andrews
Premier of Victoria
1 Treasury Place
Melbourne Victoria 3002

By email: daniel.andrews@parliament.vic.gov.au

cc: The Treasurer of Victoria and Minister for Economic Development

The Hon Tim Pallas MP tim.pallas@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Premier

**UDIA & CCF Request to Provide Briefing
Greenfield Development and Civil Construction – Exemption from future Shutdowns**

We acknowledge today's announcement confirming the five-day Circuit Breaker lock-down will end as planned and write to seek Government support to exclude all civil construction and greenfield sites from future shut downs due to the nature of these settings and the importance the industry plays in supporting the State's economy. We recognise that the risk of further shutdowns remains, however, we believe our industry can continue to operate through as it did successfully during Stage 4 lockdown, ensuring jobs and the wellbeing of a large workforce are secure.

Purpose of letter:

- To seek a meeting with you and the Treasurer to set out why we believe the industry is well positioned to continue operating through a shutdown.
- To invite your Senior Advisers on a guided tour of a greenfield development site. Our intention is to help the people that are advising you to understand how these sites are managed and demonstrate how the COVID Safe plans are being implemented. We believe this will provide the confidence your teams need to allow works to continue on greenfield sites.
- To demonstrate that the CCF and UDIA will work with you to prove that as an industry we are sensitive to the health issues and can be responsive and dynamic when required to keep the wheels turning.
- To reinforce the fact that civil construction on greenfield development is outdoor based and well suited to achieving social distancing requirements and warrants special consideration.
- To ask that Government proactively and preemptively engage with UDIA and CCF ahead of any further restrictions to develop early clear staged responses modelled off the 2020 shutdown periods. This would avoid the high levels of confusion caused by the 5-Day Circuit Breaker Lockdown.

- To have the opportunity to explain in a briefing why the measures introduced as part of the 5-day Circuit Breaker lockdown caused mass confusion amongst the industry (with our respective members unsure if works were required to stop). We are keen to work with your office so this can be avoided in future.
- To assure you as an industry we recognise the importance of being diligent and remain committed to continuing all industry activity in the COVID Safe manner that we demonstrated successfully throughout 2020.

Greenfield Development & Civil Construction - Ability to Operate in COVID Safe manner

It is important the Victorian Government draw the distinction between civil construction (sometimes referred to as horizontal construction – road, rail, airport, bridges, and utilities, i.e. telecommunications, power, water, and sewerage) and building construction (sometimes referred to as vertical construction – high-rise buildings, commercial buildings, and houses). This was duly acknowledged in previous COVID-19 restrictions as “Early Stage” Development but was omitted in the 5-day circuit breaker action causing mass confusion across our member base. We feel it is important that future policy and directions make the critical distinction between construction sectors to avoid confusion and recognise civil construction as a low-risk environment.

It is relevant because civil construction and greenfield sites by their very nature of being outdoors lend themselves to social distancing compliance. There should be no reason these sites cannot operate safely where a COVID Safe Plan is in effect, as was demonstrated in the Stage 4 lockdown of 2020.

With respect to building construction, the industry has demonstrated that building sites can be successfully managed as COVID-safe work sites. Previously, there was a staged return to work in response to changing circumstances, with specified densities to ensure the achievement of social distancing. The same approach should be adopted.

Greenfield Development Site Safety

A ‘greenfield development site’ is very different to a ‘high-rise’ construction worksite, whilst low and medium density, and domestic settings are different again. **Given the nature of greenfield developments, typically no more than 20 employees are on site at any given time.** The average area of a typical 30 lot development is 2ha (**1 person per 1,000m²**). Although many activities are completed in small teams of three to four people, social distancing of one person per four square metres can be easily achieved.

Infill Development Site Safety

We should also note that high-rise and high-density construction sites are often managed and run by large commercial builders, who are well managed and resourced to ensure that the most rigorous procedures are adhered to by all entering and working on site. Whilst we recognise that the unique settings of these worksites present challenges, it must be acknowledged that even in these circumstances these sites have observed the ‘one person per four square metres’ right from the outset of the pandemic. Despite increased concerns about working in these environments, statistics have proven these environments to be low risk.

Industry Best Practice

Examples of how our industry has demonstrated the ability to remain operational through several COVID-19 shut-down periods include:

- Developed the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidelines for the building, construction, and development industry, which have been adopted and agreed by unions and industry associations and endorsed by the Building Industry Consultative Council. The Guidelines are also overseen by WorkSafe, DHHS and the Victorian Building Authority;
- Implemented proactive management measures such as onsite voluntary testing, temperature testing and use of masks, and detailed workforce training, briefing and communication;
- Demonstrated through rigorous data that the physical characteristics of worksites, coupled with the implementation of the Worksite Guidelines, present an extremely low risk of COVID-19 transmission and there have been minimal cases linked to these settings;
- Adapted to operating with increased workplace controls and systems, checks and balances being in place;
- Remained open to and encouraged WorkSafe and the Department of Health and Human Services involvement in taking a more hands-on role; and
- Commissioned and managed an ongoing multicultural COVID Safe communications campaign, with tools, resources, and guidance for employers to ensure all their employees know and understand their COVID Safety responsibilities.

As a result of this proactive and effective management, data from 28 July 2020 – when Victoria reported 384 new cases of coronavirus and the total case number state-wide at 9,049¹ – shows that:

- Construction workers appear to account for only 0.02% of people who have tested positive for COVID-19 to date (according to analysis done by DHHS' Industry Liaison Officer for the building, construction and development industry); and
- Construction employees are more than five times less likely to contract COVID-19 than the total Victorian population.

This data was accurate at a peak time in the pandemic for Victoria, when the building, development and construction industry was clearly able to operate and remain COVID Safe under Stage 3 restrictions, and the civil industry was clearly able to operate and remain COVID Safe under Stage 4 restrictions. The clear lack of worksite transmission of cases during these times further demonstrates the effectiveness of measures taken across our industry.

¹ Department of Health and Human Services, Coronavirus update for Victoria - 28 July 2020, <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-update-victoria-28-july-2020>

Key recommendations

We understand the 5-Day Circuit Breaker Shut-Down was considered a necessary measure for our State to successfully break the circuit of transmission in a short period of time. However, we want to work with the Victorian Government to ensure well informed decisions are made and apply longer-term strategies that help support decisions when determining the State's next steps in a pandemic response.

We are contactable on angela@udiavic.com.au and jkilgour@ccfvic.com.au to proactively engage with your teams to develop early clear staged responses for rapid communication to industry if future shut downs are imposed.

Yours sincerely



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