

21 July, 2021

Urban Taskforce welcomes moves to re-open construction industry

Some good news for the property construction industry – urgent meetings with the most senior officials from Treasury, Infrastructure NSW, the Department of Planning and the Department of Premier and Cabinet have seen the first big steps towards correcting the construction industry shutdown travesty.

Each of the Peak industry representative has been involved and it is clear that the NSW Treasurer is keen to get things back on track. Hearing today that the Premier is also expecting to see the construction industry back into operation on July 31 is great news.

Urban Taskforce has called for the government to follow some basic steps to avoid the mayhem that followed Saturday's knee-jerk shutdown decision (which we now know was not recommended by Health officials):

- Set a firm plan for re-opening
- Give plenty of notice (this week if possible)
- Consider staged opening as early as next week (the Victorians called this a "pilot light operation starting with 25% of the workforce on-site)
- Give health sector, cabinet and community confidence that what is being done is safe
- Ensure effective communication and plans for all sectors of the construction industry including all communities within the workforce

It is great to see that the government is now preparing an overarching plan to progress towards a full re-opening of the construction industry by 31 July. Industry made clear that we would very much welcome any requirements for the re-opening of sites to be made available to us ASAP and be locked in.

Urban Taskforce stresses that the construction sector is not a "tap" which you can turn on and off at a whim.

An early, staged opening would allow for:

- Site preparation
- Site safety and security associated with re-start
- Delivery of supplies (logistics firms, plant and equipment and material suppliers would all need to be brought into the loop here)
- Establishment of all new COVID safety measures including signs and site protocols
- On large infrastructure sites, PCR Covid testing for construction workers may be recommended for a once in 7 day test – pending health advice on the need and the capacity of the health system to cope (given the need for community and priority workforce testing)

The government is considering the opening all construction industry sectors simultaneously. This is common sense and welcome. A staged set of opening requirements which are "fit for purpose" are being developed.

Urban Taskforce remains concerned that some in the government appear to miss-understand the reason for the shutdown. It was a clumsy effort to limit the mobility of people around the city – with zero reference to actual worksites being locations where COVID-19 has been transmitted or passed on.

Government officials have acknowledged that construction sites are actually NOT a problem in relation to spreading COVID. This is backed up by the Health Exposure Web-site.

The existing strict COVID-19 safety protocols that have served the construction industry so well to date will be strengthened and additional compliance measures will be applied.

The NSW government has responded to the community and industry backlash and is now listening to all the right people. We will continue to work with government to develop a balanced proposal for the re-opening of the industry. These measures will then be considered by Cabinet, in context and without panic.

The comments above can be attributed to Tom Forrest, CEO, Urban Taskforce.

The **Urban Taskforce Australia** is a property development industry group, representing Australia's most prominent property developers and equity financiers.

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