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Strike down border order

Queensland braces for \$27b hit as blockade bites hard

EXCLUSIVE
JEREMY PIERCE

CALLS from fed-up Queenslanders to end the state's border blockade have reached fever pitch as businesses brace for a \$27 billion blow from the coronavirus pandemic.

While Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk yesterday offered some hope of a relaxation to border restrictions at the end of the month, it cannot come soon enough for businesses already reeling from a three-month shutdown that has cost the state billions.

Almost 85 per cent of more than 5000 respondents to a courier-mail.com.au poll yesterday agreed that borders should reopen immediately as Prime Minister Scott Morrison again implored states, including Queensland, to end the debilitating restrictions.

It comes as South Australia, Western Australia, the Northern Territory, the ACT and Tasmania are expected to start their own travel bubble within weeks. Queensland may be included.

A day after extraordinary claims by the Queensland Government that the closure of the borders had not caused financial hardship for businesses, new data projections from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland (CCIQ) forecast a \$27 billion blow caused by the response to the coronavirus outbreak.

Stopping short of the claims made by lawyers opposing a High Court challenge against the border closures, State Health Minister Steven Miles said that it was difficult to distinguish what restrictions were responsible for specific financial pain for business.

However, the border shutdown has already cost the state's tourism



industry an estimated \$2.5 billion from the absence of interstate travellers, while travel giant Flight Centre has lost about \$1 billion in domestic holiday bookings for the June quarter. Flight Centre boss Graham Turner said it defied logic to suggest the border closure was not directly responsible for financial pain for ventures deprived of business from 20 million Australians living interstate.

"There would be hundreds of thousands of businesses feeling the effects of this decision," he said.

"I don't know what their logic is."

Public support for the border closures has plummeted since hordes of protesters defied social distancing regulations at the weekend.

The results of another poll, which asked if the Palaszczuk Government had "lost the plot" over the border closure, saw 87 per cent from a group

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Flight Centre boss Graham Turner

of more than 900 people vote "yes".

Queensland Tourism Industry Council chief executive Daniel Gschwind said the longer the border closure continued, the more people would be aggrieved.

"For some businesses, reopening the borders is literally a matter of survival," he said.

"We're talking about an effect worth billions of dollars and as we feel the cold chill of the ongoing restrictions, more and more people are

wanting the borders to reopen."

CCIQ general manager of advocacy and policy Amanda Rohan said reopening the borders was becoming a matter of increasing urgency.

"To say there has been no economic impact due to border restrictions is ludicrous. The Premier has stated a border review is scheduled at the end of the month, but why can't that review be brought forward?"

She also called for urgent relaxation of trading restrictions for ve-



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Coolangatta Surf Club operations manager Stacey Hammond and general manager Steve Edgar. Picture: Nigel Hallett

nues limited to just 20 customers at a time. The Surf Club Coolangatta is one of hundreds of border businesses at the mercy of the border closures.

The club, which has been closed since March, will reopen its doors on Saturday in the knowledge that 5000 of its members live across the border.

Surf club general manager Steve Edgar said the border closure was one of a litany of challenges affecting the much-loved local venue.

"We're in dire danger," he said. "We've got the school holidays coming up which is a very important time for interstate visitors from down south, we've got a 300-seat restaurant which we can only put 60 people in and we've got 5000 members living across the border who would love to come here for lunch but they can't.

"There's no way we're going to make any money by reopening at the moment, but we just felt like we

needed to do something or get left behind. "If things don't change, we'll be dead in three months."

The Prime Minister yesterday used Question Time to urge all domestic state borders to come down by next month - specifically calling out Queensland, Tasmania, SA and WA.

"We need to get planes flying around Australia and if you want to see planes flying around Australia, we need to open up these domestic

borders," he said. After earlier warning that the borders could stay shut until September or beyond, Ms Palaszczuk yesterday gave the most encouraging sign yet that the interstate bans could finally be relaxed in the weeks ahead. "Of course, where we can ease further restrictions, we will do so," she said. "I think the end of the month gives us a really good signal... about how much further we can ease restrictions."