



THE COOK ISLANDS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

JULY / AUGUST 2021 | ISSUE 11



FROM THE CHAIR

A MESSAGE FROM FLETCHER MELVIN

Kia Orana,

One of the key issues and concerns of our business community (apart from the recent outbreak in NZ and the resulting impact on our borders) is in the area of labour. While we had heard estimates of a shortage of around 1,000 workers, the results from the survey which was a collaboration between the Chamber, Tourism, and the Tourism Industry Council, showed a picture of around 500 workers. The data will assist identify how many jobs in which industry sectors are currently vacant from the respondees. Now we have that information we can hone in on solutions. We are already in discussions with a number of NZ and Australian contacts to see how we can bring workers in, and we will now look at training opportunities for local workers in the areas that there is a shortage. When our borders once again open to visitors from NZ we need to try and ensure their experience as a visitor is not impacted as far as possible by the shortage of labour. It certainly does not help having recruiters from NZ and the Cook Islands enticing workers to NZ. While we fully understand and accept that every individual needs to look after their own interests, we are looking at the helicopter view, and the last thing we need as a Country is to have more Cook Islanders leave and potentially make a home in NZ. So, let's hope we don't lose any more people and the compelling argument to remain living in our beautiful islands overrides the temptation to leave.



PHOTO: TV NZ

YOUR OFFICIAL MONTHLY ROUNDUP NEWSLETTER

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CHAMBER@COMMERCE.CO.CK

FROM THE CEO

A MESSAGE FROM EVE HAYDEN



We have been so busy on our many projects, this impacted on our ability to produce a newsletter in July, so apologies for that. We are currently dealing with a lot of questions/clarifications with respect to labour and immigration. As the Chair has mentioned above, we do have a tight labour market, and this is putting pressure on employees and employers as they struggle with the work-loads and get up to speed with the new policy directives from MFAI and INTAFF. With the border now closed again for an unknown period of time, we immediately commenced discussions with MFEM about timing and structure of assistance in the pipeline. This assistance has now been announced which is the reinstatement of the Business and

Sole Trader grants. More on this below. With the surge in tag-in activity mentioned later on in this newsletter, this has also put pressure on our staff, but it is great to see the numbers and it is a good reminder of why tagging in is relevant and essential, and the best time to tag in was always two weeks ago!

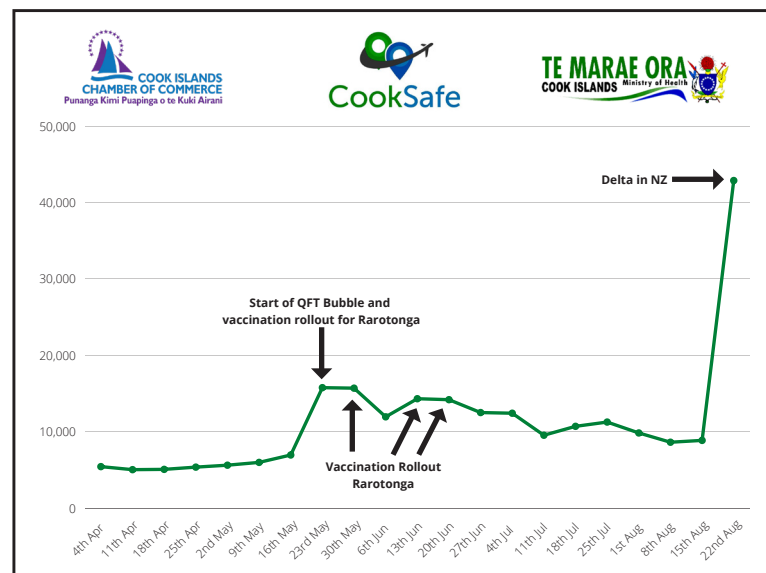
PSTF AND BUSINESS SUPPORT

Our business support continues even after the end of grants and subsidies, and we continue to have walk-ins, phone calls and emails, asking questions about rules, where to go for information, how to start a business, potential foreign investors, training requirements, what grants may be available, and to get updates on those that have not yet received their final grants. The team will be formally recording the contacts made in future using the new CRM (see further info about that later in this newsletter).

Now that the reinstatement of the wage subsidy and Sole Trader grants have been announced, we are fielding calls and requests for assistance. Please see <https://bit.ly/WageSubsidyFactSheet> to view the Wage Subsidy Reinstatement Fact Sheet or <https://bit.ly/SoleTraderFactSheet> for the Sole Trader Grant Fact Sheet. Please contact Andrea for assistance on 20925 or pstf@commerce.co.ck

COOKSAFE AND COOKSAFE+

With the recent border closure, and with many businesses now making in tagging-in or signing in mandatory, not surprisingly, we saw huge surge in activity. Our team are available for any issues encountered with devices, and we still fully support the idea of each location having a “CookSafe Champion” –



someone who has the responsibility for ensuring the device is good to go. It doesn't take much to encourage visitors, just a friendly word or two - more tag-ins mean more protection if required. If you encounter a device that is not working and you don't get a great response from reporting it directly, please take the time to send us a quick email on cooksafe@commerce.co.ck to tell us where the device is so that we can go and check. We are conducting regular audits, and are aggregating data so that we can see what devices at what locations are getting regular tag-ins (or not).

For any queries, pop into the Chamber and the team will be happy to help – phone 20925 or email cooksafesafe@commerce.co.ck.



Information Tables					
Week of	26th July - 1st Aug	2nd - 8th Aug	9th - 15th Aug	16th - 22nd Aug	To date
QR User Registration	2,680	2,235	1,781	1,809	31,216
Scanner Registration	0	3	2	26	899
Number of Tag In's	9,851	8,638	8,878	42,884	350,379
CookSafe+ Downloads	Android: 192	Android: 250	Android: 288	Android: 59	11,778
	Apple: 493	Apple: 533	Apple: 675	Apple: 249	

NZ PROVIDES \$2 MILLION FUNDING FOR PRIVATE SECTOR

New Zealand is providing a further \$2 million in additional funding to support the recovery of the private sector, in partnership with Business Link Pacific (BLP) and the Chamber. We are grateful for this assistance and funding, which will be channelled through BLP's Pacific SME Finance Facility which the Chamber administers. The Finance Facility will fund additional adaptation grants to help stabilise our businesses affected by COVID-19 as well as offering concessional loans through BCI which will assist in long-term recovery and growth. The Business Link Pacific Team were due to be in Rarotonga this week to have further discussions and to finalise the delivery of assistance, but unfortunately they have had to postpone their visit. Once these details are finalised, we will communicate to all.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Business Link Pacific (BLP)

Keisha is doing a great job of expanding our reach to assist businesses who would benefit from the Business Health Check and Diagnostic Tools available through BLP. Understanding some of the gaps in your business helps with us then identifying what assistance is available through the In-country Business Advisors Services Providers (BASP's). While the second round of the Adaptation Round has now closed, we are confident that there will be an expansion of this programme and concessional finance will form part of that. Key BLP representatives will be here in Rarotonga next week, and we look forward to catching up with them in person. We will be organizing meetings with successful recipients of the adaptation grants and some of the businesses that have accessed assistance through the BASP's.

We held a virtual meeting last week for all of the registered BASP's and the team from BLP in New Zealand to discuss where the programme is at and to explain the linkage between using the Business Health Check Tools, the BASP's, Adaptation Grants, and Concessional Financing.

We were also presented with some summary information to the end of June 2021 about some of the programmes

- There have been 33 approved subsidies for business advisory projects, with the average subsidy being 78% of the cost, and an average subsidy value of \$3,516 each
- A total value of services of \$148,299 with a total subsidy of \$116,022
- Further 16 business advisory projects have been commissioned for grant validations with a total subsidy value of \$18,470 and an average value of \$1,154 each
- 13 Business Diagnostic Reports have been completed by the Chamber
- 30 SME's have completed the online Business Health Checks
- 12 SME's have completed the online Business Continuity Planners
- 85 Grant Applications were submitted in Round 1 with 22 successful applicants

- Of that 13 grants valued at \$84,750 have been paid, more are in the pipeline
- 63 Grant Applications have been submitted in Round 2 and assessments are underway.

This review was well attended, and there was ample opportunity during the lunch that followed to network.

So, don't be shy, contact Kiesha to see how she can help you access some of this assistance.

Email: training@commerce.co.ck or call 20925.

ILO – SOLE TRADERS PROJECT



This project is now coming to completion, and we have now assisted over 240 small business owners to understand more clearly how to keep business records and how to become and keep compliant with tax and superannuation. We have had great feedback about our courses to date. We had some money left over, and ILO have approved us using this to deliver courses to another outer island. MFEM identified that Mangaia has some new businesses who may need assistance, so we will work through to determine the need and make arrangements if that is what the businesses would like.

ILO – MIGRANT WORKERS PROJECT

This project which centered on forming a working committee to look at ways to improve the transfer process for workers and to help facilitate connections for workers to employers. Since the project's inception, we have also been working closely with Government and the Worker's Representative to iron out the issues for workers who are out of contract and wish to stay in the Country. A Migrant Technical Workers Committee has been set up and is now assessing applications for transfer where the past employee has not agreed to a transfer. This initiative is not intended to allow a transfer of worker to occur if the (current) employer is compliant and the employee is still in contract. The cases we have largely been dealing with have involved non-compliant employers and/or out of contract employees.

It is a good reminder to ensure you have your employment agreements current and to ensure that you as an employer are meeting the obligations you have with respect to the Employment Relations Act and the Immigration Act.

PACIFIC TRADE & INVEST NZ (PTI)

The Trade Commissioner for NZ and other key representatives were to be visiting us here in Rarotonga next week, but have now had to postpone. We were looking forward to progressing our discussions in assisting Cook Islands Businesses get their product to market. The Chamber was also going to facilitate a Let's Talk Export workshop while the delegation was here and although now postponed, we look forward to rescheduling when we can. The workshop was going to help businesses to really understand what is required to export and to have a checklist and process document that is an easy to follow output.

PACER PLUS

Following on from our zoom consultation meeting a couple of months ago, the University of Adelaide has now released a Rapid Needs Assessment Report. This report was designed to inform the initial and on-going work of the newly formed Pacer Plus Implementation Unit. It sought to identify the most common and highest priorities of each of the Pacific Island Countries that have ratified the agreement.

The following is a summary of the identified priorities for the Cook Islands:

- Assistance and capacity building with Rules of Origin module for ASCUDA (the Automated System for Customs

Data; Additional specific customs training modules; Review of customs procedures and development of a single window implementation plan

- Trade portal enhancement, including for transparency and sustainability (it was noted that there had been limited private sector participation in the development of the portal and this has resulted in a low level of use by targeted beneficiaries).
- Implementation of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures; Value-addition, including processing plant, organic standards and recognition; Technical Barriers to Trade legal framework and assistance with technical regulations and procedures;
- Trade In Services, including expanding alternative types of tourism i.e. long term visitors and remote workers; strengthening tourism services including regulatory updates and health-related training; services data improvement; creative industries services sector commercialisation and assistance; financial services sector regional study on cooperation and regulatory reform; business services sector skills and regulatory assessment and training/internships
- Update investment framework, including regulatory review, data collection and diaspora investment strategy development
- Development of an E-commerce strategy, knowledge exchange and feasibility study
- Technical assistance for formal public-private dialogue mechanisms on trade policy
- MSME support for export clusters and export readiness training

PRIVATE SECTOR DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE (PSDI)

ADB have commissioned a study across 6 Pacific islands, Cook Islands, Fiji, Palau, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu, to identify opportunities to address access to finance constraints for Pacific tourism operators. The study will:

- (a) Outline key resources of tourism financing in each Country
- (b) Assess the difficulties faced by both financiers and tourism-focused businesses
- (c) Recommend actions to increase access to tourism financing

From this study, recommendations will be made to consider the development of finance products or other financing solutions targeting tourism-focused businesses. The study is expected to be concluded by the end of this year.

SUPPORTING THE RECOVERY BY MSME'S IN THE PACIFIC

This ADB-led and funded project is aimed to support micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSME's) to recover from the economic effects of Covid-19, and become less vulnerable to a prolonged economic downturn. The Technical Assistance will help build and enhance the capabilities of MSME's to recover and grown in the post-pandemic period by (i) strengthening the enabling environment and (ii) improving access to business development services and finance. So, what does all that mean? We have a meeting scheduled this week to find out more. But from the Chambers point of view, it looks like we will be getting support in order to give more support to businesses.

CHAMBER GENERAL

AGM – finding an auditor who was both available and affordable has been a challenge this year. We have now secured one and the audit is underway. This may mean that our AGM may not be held until September by the time the Board approve the audited accounts and the required notice is given to hold our AGM. We will keep you posted. Customer Relationship Management System – We now have the new system up and running and you may have heard from Lynne who has been calling all of our Members to obtain additional information about your business. This will help us tailor our Membership Services and ensure we are logging contacts so that we can report on what

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most of our queries are, what training requirements are most required and how we can tailor our services. Our long-awaited website is imminent. We have started populating the new site with content now and are expecting to launch this by the end of the month – Watch this space!

BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

SHOWCASE YOUR BUSINESS IN OUR NEWSLETTERS, PLEASE EMAIL YOUR INTEREST TO CHAMBER@COMMERCE.CO.CK



Kia Orana our names are Craig and Debra Graham. The proud owners of Café Jireh, home of the famous custard squares and much much more. We came to live in the Cook Islands approximately 6 years ago, having holidayed here as early as 1992. Once our last child was off to university, we decided it was time to pack the bags and head off to the Cook Islands, and enjoy a little bit of paradise, leaving the kids behind.

Once we were installed in Café Jireh we found

there was lots to do and rearrange, adding our touch. Well, we added to it to much and a monster was born. An increase in the range, including gluten free slices and our frangipani cake, were an overnight success. We increased our refrigerated display capacity and introduced a new range of pies, frittatas and quiches. These also became a success. Even the famous “All Day Breakfast” menu was given a spruce up. Year upon year Café Jireh has grown, except during our unplanned boarder closure. Even then we stayed open with our local customer base supporting us. Meitaki Ma’ata to you all. Even though we are in the early stages of the boarder opening we are seeing growth on the same months in 2019.

We are also please to see a return of our trade customers, now they are also back up and running. For the last 3 years we having been supplying other cafes, bars, tour companies and resorts with a selection of our range. If you have a need for a special product, come and talk to us.

It is no secret that café Jireh is up for sale. I think the sign on the door gives it away. We have decided it is time for some one else to tame the monster, and we get back to enjoying a little bit of paradise. So, we are off on a new adventure with Cook Islands Real Estate, including launching the new property management division. As most of you already know us, come and have a talk.

Who said you are too old for a change in life?



DATES OF INTEREST

Wage Subsidy Commences 23rd Aug

Chamber AGM Sept (date tbc)

For September Wage Subsidy and Sole Trade Grants are available from 1st Sep