

An Taoiseach Michael Martin TD
Government Buildings
Merrion Street
Dublin 2

17 November 2020

Re: Need to Move to Easing National Restrictions

Dear Taoiseach,

I write to you to outline the very serious and urgent concerns of business in the current phase of Covid related restrictions and how Government policy decisions and communications must immediately include prior and meaningful engagement with the businesses most impacted.

The current measures impact upon a large swathe of businesses through restrictions on retail deemed to be non-essential, food and drink services, hospitality, international travel and office based environments. The blanket suppression of these sectors continues to lack any refinement despite learnings and evidence accumulated since last March. This approach lacks empathy and is at this point in the crisis creating much greater economic and social damage than is necessary.

Opening businesses in a controlled manner would be a far safer option than keeping everything closed and seeing restrictions ignored by the general public. The six weeks of Level 5 restrictions, in addition to prior weeks of restrictions in many counties, has had the desired effect of bringing about a substantial decline in the targeted metrics. Greater enforcement is required to drive the metrics down further.

While Ibec fully acknowledges the continuing need for vigilance, the manner of communications in the media from members of NPHET continues to be a source of uncertainty and irritation for businesses and the public in making necessary plans for the coming crucial period of Christmas. This pattern, now seemingly embedded, in limiting the choice for Government is one we understood you and colleagues were going to address.


It is intolerable after all the months of adaption and perseverance that at the promised 4 week review the Government is not setting out the easing of restrictions on the businesses upon which the resources of the State ultimately depend. Our members take their role in suppressing the virus seriously and have demonstrated their commitment to, and investment in, doing so since we started addressing this crisis together in March. They also have the data and insights across the sectors to show how to have a safe easing of measures and to secure the livelihoods and very survival of many small and medium enterprises.

Consistent with the stated suppression strategy, Ibec calls on Government to take the following approach:

- Engage with business as a key stakeholder in this crisis prior to any decision being taken.
- Create an early communications channel with business rather than courting restrictions through media briefings for the general public.
- Prioritise the reopening of the following three sectors in relation to Christmas trading: retail, hospitality and travel.
- A sequential easing of restrictions to begin from the last week of November for both retailers and the supply chain providers into hospitality. This should be a Level 3 opening by the start of December, transitioning to Level 2 by early December. This reopening is an imperative to underpin Government's strategy to ensure congregations are avoided in retail outlets and districts by giving more time to allow the inevitable rush to be diminished. Likewise, for effective hospitality reopening the supply chains need certainty and advance notice.
- Provide that international travel can proceed on the basis of the EU colour coding zones and appropriate testing. Antigen testing is needed to be part of the arsenal of testing along with PCR testing.
- Ensure the importance of the Return to Office ambition is not lost in this phase. As the current Restriction Levels provide for no substantial return until well into 2021, it must be a priority to have these Level Restrictions modified in order to support business planning for the return of a much higher percentage of office workers early in 2021.

We request that you would meet with the Board of Ibec as a matter of urgency as confidence in the *Plan for Living with Covid 19* and the guidance within the Level Restrictions is diminishing within the business community.

Yours sincerely,



Danny McCoy
CEO

CC: Leo Varadkar, Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment
Minister Eamon Ryan, Department Climate Action, Communication Networks and Transport
Minister Stephen Donnelly, Department of Health
Minister Paschal Donohoe, Department for Finance
Minister Michael McGrath, Department for Public Expenditure and Reform
Martin Fraser, Secretary General, Department of An Taoiseach
Dr. Orlaigh Quinn, Secretary General, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
Mark Griffin, Secretary General, Department of Climate Action, Communications and Environment
Colm O'Reardon, Secretary General, Department of Health
Derek Moran, Secretary General, Department of Finance
Robert Watt, Secretary General, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform