

Hospo pleads for Govt help now

Restaurateurs seek action on recovery plan and level 1 for SI

Rahul Bhattarai

As Auckland braces for two more weeks of level 3 lockdown, hospitality groups say their sector needs more targeted financial support now and the South Island needs to be dropped to alert level 1.

They did get a sliver of good news yesterday when Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said Finance Minister Grant Robertson intends to outline an “enhanced business support” package on Friday. But the mood will only have worsened among business owners in New Zealand’s biggest city.

With Auckland set to stay at the current alert level for the next two weeks, the Restaurant Association is calling for urgent action on its eight-point plan to assist hospitality.

Association chief executive Marisa Bidois said: “The Auckland hospitality industry continues to be disproportionately affected by the pandemic and it is time that our Government recognised this by providing financial relief that is specific and targeted to our sector.

“Wage subsidy and resurgence support payments are not enough – our businesses are on the brink and something more must be done.

“Whilst it’s good to see Northland moving down the alert levels, we really do need to see more support for those parts of the country operating under greater restrictions.”

Last month Bidois unveiled stage one of the “Future of Hospitality Road Map” which focused on reopening and sets out the immediate steps needed to support the full reopening of the sector in the short term, in line with broader

Covid developments.

In a submission to Robertson then, the association put forward eight practical ideas to get businesses back in action.

Among them is the industry’s call for the Government to continue the wage subsidy in level 2, a continued “lockout subsidy”, a one-off “reopening payment”, and various vouchers and incentives to encourage customers to support their local businesses.

Stages two and three, still under review, would focus on recovery and sustainability and outline guidelines for a profitable and sustainable hospitality business model.

Ardern said yesterday that Auckland will stay at level 3 with current restrictions for the next two weeks at least.

She could not say exactly how long it would be before restrictions eased further.

Hospitality NZ chief executive Julie White said the extension of level 3 is another blow to the already battered Auckland firms who will have no revenue for at least 11 weeks.

She said the industry also pleads with the Government to move the South Island to alert level 1.

“It was a relief for some businesses in Northland but frustration continues for oper-

ators from Waikato who will have to wait till Thursday to hear if they will be able to trade over the long weekend.”

Auckland Business Chamber chief executive Michael Barnett said the only good news from yesterday’s Covid-19 announcement was that the city would be hanging its hope on tailored support which the Government said they would release on Friday.

“To me, this is the only good news they’ve got,” Barnett said.

“The wage subsidy has already proven that it was not going to be enough to save businesses and what we have seen is that there is many

businesses out there who are just surviving in the sea of debt and are desperate to get back to work,” he said.

“And the reality is, this is just killing livelihoods.”