

STAFF BRIEFING RE: COVID-19

Monday 23 March 2020 | 2.30PM | Volunteer Services Car Park

Following the announcement of all rail services suspended at Puffing Billy Railway due to the COVID-19 health emergency, an all staff meeting was held and presented by Acting CEO, Bret Butler, to discuss the ongoing health and safety risk versus that of maintaining ongoing operations of the railway.

The Emerald Tourist Railway Board (ETRB) were asked to consider a proposal to address these concerns, and have endorsed a calendar year plan that comprises the following elements:

1. Suspend rail services as of Monday 23 March 2020 for a period of three months, with a view to reassessing on a monthly basis thereafter;
2. Implement a reduction in operational expenditure with primary changes including:
 - a. Operational costs – i.e. – advertising, excess fuel usage, consultants and stopping all possible non-critical expenditure
 - b. Reducing salary costs and liabilities in consultation with each individual member of staff, including a recruitment freeze, delaying replacement of vacant positions, pro-rata hours being worked and the reduction of leave balances.
 - c. Ceasing capital expenditure on all but a small number of key projects
3. Continue with the Lakeside Visitor Centre project, with a view to delaying the delivery of the second stage car park component;
4. Continue with the carriages and sills project, and;
5. Request for further State and Federal funding support to ensure the organisation is ready to promptly return to 364-day services when the COVID-19 high risk period passes

As always, in adversity there is opportunity. This period of shutdown provides an opportunity to get ahead in services like track, environment, building and rolling stock maintenance and implementing ombudsman's recommendations where possible. We would be pleased to look at staff redeploying to assist in some of these activities as is safe and appropriate to do so.

We cannot completely predict when any additional government measures may be enacted if at all, but we can assure you that we have planned and will continue to plan for all scenarios such that our people and the business are prepared.

With regard to maintaining up to date advice and communications, as a government owned entity, we are well placed with access to the latest advice on COVID-19 and the actions to be taken to manage any risk. In turn we will ensure that we maintain communications with you on at least a weekly basis.

Finally, we acknowledge that the events of recent days will be challenging for many and remind all to make use of the Employee Assistance Program if needs be. This is a free of charge service available to the team.



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QUESTIONS:

Q. Is there job security for everyone?

A. We are currently working through costs and have taken no positions on anyone whatsoever. Discussions will be held with staff on an individual basis on what arrangements best suit their needs. This will include consideration of the structure as to how we take leave, whether we can work from home or continue working safely onsite, including deployment to other areas as appropriate

Q. Are those who typically work weekends, required to continue working weekends?

A. A regular five-day, Monday to Friday, working week applies at this stage.

Q. External contractor projects – what might happen with the continuation of these, particularly those we need to ensure critical work continues?

A. If a project can be delayed to protect jobs, we will be advising contractors to do so. However, some contracts may benefit the business in the long term, and this will be reviewed regularly and on a case by case basis.

Please do not hesitate to ask any questions you may have to your manager, Human Services or Communications Executive, Sheena Dang, at sheena.dang@pbr.org.au.

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

With kind regards,

Bret Butler
Acting Chief Executive Officer
Puffing Billy Railway

