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# Tourism's plea to plan for opening

KEY tourism operators have implored the Queensland government to set a bold border reopening target to capture the Christmas and New Year holiday markets.

Some of the biggest players in the Cairns and Port Douglas tourism sectors have joined forces to encourage Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk to "name a deadline" and build on vaccination momentum that could offer the business community a roadmap.

Quicksilver boss Tony Baker, CaPTA group directors Ben and Michael Woodward and Sailaway owner Steve Edmondson said Ms Palaszczuk should commit to reopening to the rest of Australia by December, in the hope it will motivate Queenslanders to get the job.

"We need some targets to hit so we know what we are working towards," Mr Baker said. "A deadline will give us an indication as to when we can see easing of restrictions and interstate borders, because we also need time to prepare our businesses for that.

"Our key markets need time to prepare their holidays."

Mr Edmondson said it was time the state government "bit the bullet" and targeted a December 1 reopening, giving people in Queensland at least six weeks "to get prepared".

"We have been painfully slow to realise we need to catch up with vaccinations," he said.

"I think we should open up exactly on December 1.

"This will keep the momentum going and offer a sense of urgency," he said.

"If we don't have those timelines, we could be stuck on 67 per cent vaccination rate for a year and never get there."

Tourism Tropical North Queensland chief Mark Olsen said "Christmas would be cancelled" for tourism operators unless the state produced a clear strategy.

"There are six public holidays during the Christmas period, which significantly increases costs for businesses and with less people around it will be cost-prohibitive to open," he said. "The tourism industry desperately needs an influx of visitors in summer to retain jobs and keep businesses trading until borders open.

"Equally important for our economy will be a roadmap to give consumers the confidence to book and businesses the ability to secure staff and plan when to open."

Ben Woodward agreed, saying consumer confidence in Melbourne and Sydney had been shattered this year by the harsh lockdowns.

He said giving southern holiday-makers hope they could plan trips to the Far North was "getting desperate".

"We need to get consumer confidence to a point where they are confident of booking holidays up here again," he said. "For that to happen, we need a clear plan and road map out and there hasn't been a clear direction on this yet.

"We are getting vague comments from the Premier about how everyone needs to get vaccinated, which is great, but there is no clear messaging after that of what it means if everyone is.

"So let's set a deadline." Assistant Tourism Minister Michael Healy said his government understood "and sympathised" with the desire from Far North operators to get a fixed reopening date.

However, the Cairns MP echoed Ms Palaszczuk's sentiments that "keeping people safe and getting people vaccinated" was the first priority.

"I wish it was that easy, but this is a pandemic, and we know it's not that easy," he said. "We know what the tourism industry wants and trust me, we will be opening up and there will be people entering (from the southern states).



"I suspect the evidence is overwhelming that we will have Covid in the community when that happens, so we need every single person to play their part and get vaccinated."

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