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Article rank | 20 Oct 2021 | The Cairns Post | ALISON PATERSON

Businesses set for new era

HARD DECISIONS AS VACCINATED VISITORS ENJOY EASING OF RULES

I can't force you but I want you to be safe
Elie Sopas

AS FNQ tourism operators work towards December 17 when the borders open to domestic and international visitors, Cairns businesses are formulating plans to keep staff, customers and the community safe.



Elie Sopas, owner of Plato Restaurant at The Pier (main); Inset Coral Sea Dreaming skipper Jan Zwick (Inset) with wife Claire and daughters Layla and Kaia. Main picture: Brian Cassey

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Elie Sopas, owner of Plato Restaurant at The Pier (main); Inset Coral Sea Dreaming skipper Jan Zwick (inset) with wife Claire and daughters Layla and Kaia.

Queensland will begin a phased border reopening for fully vaccinated people from November 19.

At the Pier in Cairns, Plato owner Elie Sopas said he was proud all of his staff at the restaurant had chosen to roll up their sleeves.

"I am blessed that all of my staff have been vaccinated," he said.

"I called them all together and said, 'we work in this industry, we work with the public and I want you all to be safe, I can't force you but I want you to be safe'."

But Mr Sopas said checking all his customers were vaccinated would be "very difficult".

"This is very precarious and could create a massive nightmare," he said.

"We could get assaulted or attacked on social media by anti-vaxxers.

"So yes, we would like to have everyone vaccinated, but I just want everyone to be safe."

Quicksilver Group chief executive Tony Baker said while the Premier's announcement was good news, they would be taking their time to reopen their popular Green Island resort.

"We will do a progressive reopening and look at starting resort accommodation a little earlier," he said.

"Managing expectations is challenging; there's lots of talk around how to manage unvaccinated customers but not a lot of case law."

Mr Baker said businesses would need to balance requirements from the state as well, so it was vital to receive clear directions for pandemic polices and procedures.

Experience Co chief executive John O'Sullivan said vaccination of staff and customers was the "pragmatic and safe" route to take as employee, customer and community safety was paramount.

"In light of the government's announcement we are currently looking at and reviewing our polices across our business units in Queensland and in other parts of Australia," he said.

"Obviously, we will have to make the call very soon, however, as part of our planning we decided that as of November 30, all our frontline workforce, contractors, part-time, full-time and casuals must be vaccinated."

Mr O'Sullivan said the company was more than likely heading towards a landscape where it would insist all its customers be vaccinated.

"We recognise that with some of our services we do see a lot of children," he said.

"So we need to work through those logistics."

Blu Marlin cafe co-owner Paul Harris agreed.

"Everyone has been pushing for information but there's no beef on the bones," Mr Harris said of the Premier's announcement on Monday.

"I think she should mandate everyone in the tourism sector which is Queensland's third largest industry to be vaccinated as she has with the nurses; everyone should be fully vaccinated if they want to work.

"But are we supposed to ask for vaccination passports?"

"Or will it be like having smoking or non-smoking areas. How will it work?"

Coral Sea Dreaming owner and skipper Jan Zwick said insisting on staff and customers to be fully vaccinated meant sailing in murky waters.

Mr Zwick, who said he was getting vaccinated, wanted the state government to mandate guidelines to keep operators, staff and the community safe.

"It would be the safest if the crew are fully vaccinated as well as the customers but we can't force everyone, it's a complex issue" he said.

"I'm in the process of getting vaccinated and I would welcome guidelines."

James Cook University Law Professor Elizabeth Spencer said the state government needed to be clear if businesses would be able to veto unvaccinated employees or customers.

"Tourism operators in the Far North want tourists back (and) a big part of this is ensuring the safety of all involved, including employees and clients," she said. "I think it is a big ask for them to navigate the legalities of possible measures and approaches."

Prof Spencer said measures had implications for privacy, freedom of association and discrimination.

"So businesses will be looking for guidance from health experts, government and also the experiences of our neighbours to the south and overseas," she said.

She said consistency was important.

"Vaccine passports and other measures currently being trialled in locations overseas are not only imposed by governments, but also businesses or other institutions," she said.

"From a human rights perspective such measures need to be reasonable, necessary, and proportionate – they need to take into account the potential for discrimination.



"What this means is that measures ought to be balanced and make provision for those who may be at risk of discrimination, for example, people with valid medical reasons for not getting vaccinated, marginalised groups, people with difficulties using technology and young people who may not have been able to access vaccination until recently."

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