

MEDIA RELEASE

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Razing of fortress New Zealand welcome news for Canterbury business

The Prime Minister's announcement today of a phased border reopening is welcome news for Canterbury businesses who have been grappling with severe skills shortages and a constrained labour market over the last two years.

"The biggest challenge facing business as a result of the closure of New Zealand's border has been accessing a sufficient supply of workers and the ability for exporters to remain connected to their overseas customers - today's announcement is a step in the right direction to easing the pressure," says Leeann Watson, Chief Executive of Canterbury Employers' Chamber of Commerce.

"Reconnecting with the rest of the world and addressing the constrained labour market by attracting new skills to New Zealand is the first step in our economic recovery as COVID-19 becomes a normal part of our day-to-day lives. Other countries have welcomed immigration as part of their economic recovery plans, and we need to move quickly to ensure New Zealand can be globally competitive.

"The Government has indicated there are significant changes to immigration coming and we want to see an emphasis on supporting employers. Rapidly increasing the speed of processing visa applications particularly through the new Accredited Employer Work Visa scheme is crucially important. The process needs to be quick, simple and straightforward.

It is positive to see that skilled workers will be able to enter New Zealand in March, however the requirement of 1.5x median wage is adding unnecessary wage pressure to business. Skilled workers should be allowed in based on their skill, and nothing else.

"We would have liked to hear that tourists would be welcomed back to our shores earlier than October, given the huge impact a lack of tourism is having across our region. It reinforces the need for the Government to provide clear information and financial support to those sectors that continue to be hit by restrictions. A date for the end of isolation requirements will be crucially important for our tourism sector, so they can start to plan for the return of visitors.

"We have an opportunity to boost our economic growth as we reconnect with the world, but we have to remain competitive and attractive to not only workers overseas but those in New Zealand."

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For more information, or to arrange an interview, please contact:

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The Canterbury Employers' Chamber of Commerce (The Chamber) is a not-for-profit membership-based service organisation that has been the home and voice of business in the Canterbury region since 1859. Comprised of over 2,900 member organisations that represent over 70,000 employees, The Chamber's purpose is to empower people in business by providing advisory and consultancy support in employment relations, human resources, health and safety, international trade, manufacturing, migrant support, research and development grants, and training and development in many areas. www.thechamber.co.nz