



7 May 2020

Cr Margaret Strelow  
Mayor  
Rockhampton Regional Council  
232 Bolsower St  
Rockhampton QLD 4700

**BY POST/EMAIL** – [mayor@rrc.qld.gov.au](mailto:mayor@rrc.qld.gov.au)

Dear Mayor,

**RE: Congratulations and development industry employment during coronavirus outbreak**

We would like to take this opportunity to offer the Institute's sincere congratulations on your recent success in the local government elections. The Urban Development Institute of Australia Queensland (the Institute) has long valued its productive working relationship with you and we look forward to continuing our relationship with you over the coming four years. We also take this opportunity to acknowledge and recognise Rockhampton Regional Council's home builder grant to attract investment into the region.

The Institute is the peak body for the property development industry in Queensland. Powered by a unique Research Foundation and a regional branch network comprised of 11 branches throughout Queensland, the Institute is ideally placed to provide you and your council expert advice on a range of matters relevant to the local development industry and its role in our economy.

As you may also be aware, our industry contributes to 9% of regional employment in the Central Queensland region employing 6,217 people directly and a further 7,333 indirectly.<sup>1</sup> Whilst these jobs have always been important to quality of life in Rockhampton, there has rarely been another time when it has been as critical to save these jobs and secure the economic future of residents throughout the region.

For this reason, we would like to brief you on some key issues arising from the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and recommend initiatives which we believe will be key to our community weathering this difficult time and eventually being well positioned to recover. In writing, we would also like to acknowledge that council is already taking many steps to support the community as well as shouldering the responsibility to continue essential services.

The Institute holds significant concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on local employment in our industry. With many industry firms now under considerable pressure on several fronts, difficult

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<sup>1</sup> Urbis for the Urban Development Institute of Australia Queensland, March 2018

decisions are being made about the continuation of projects, the launch of new projects as well as the longer-term sustainability of businesses. For this reason, and further to our letter to council of 19 March 2020 and the Institute's *Project Bounce Back, a COVID-19 Industry Action Plan* (attached) we propose additional measures to keep the property development industry working. We particularly wish to emphasise the initiatives below that council can put in place quickly, within the framework of existing programs, and which will have a material impact on saving industry jobs in a short time frame.

#### **Offer an Infrastructure Charges Incentive Scheme**

The Institute has often highlighted council's incentive strategies to councils throughout the state, including the deferral of infrastructure payments.

The Institute encourages council to extend the life of the incentive strategy and consider expanding it to encapsulate residential development and land uses to stimulate the local construction and property development industry and respond to COVID-19.

Infrastructure charges discounts are a common way for local government to stimulate and shape economic development and have well established implementation mechanisms in councils throughout the state. Offering Infrastructure Charges waivers and discounts would provide critical support to company cashflow shoring up industry jobs throughout our region.

#### **Halving all development related fees**

This reduction in costs would allow the industry to keep applications rolling, thereby creating a pipeline of project work ready for economic recovery and jobs creation. It would also reduce the financial burden for projects at a critical time and assist directly with retaining their workforce. Mackay Regional Council has been proactive in this regard announcing this measure as part of their first COVID-19 stimulus package and we strongly encourage council to consider this option to further stimulate construction activity.

#### **Continuing and maintaining plan sealing and bonding applications**

Many projects across the region are currently at this critical stage, with the project at 'peak' debt and awaiting final processing of plan sealing and release of bonds. Delays to this process will be catastrophic for industry cash flow and our ability to sustain employment. We encourage council to speed up their processes ahead of statutory timeframes during this period to save jobs.

#### **Ensure all inspections continue**

Council should commit to all inspections continuing whilst ensuring appropriate arrangements are put in place to achieve social distancing. We urge council to continue to conduct these necessary inspections to ensure the industry can continue to operate and deliver development during this uncertain period.

#### **COVID-19 in general**

We reiterate the importance of taking action to keep the property development industry moving to safeguard jobs, enable a bounce back of activity, and minimise damage to the economy as much as possible. We understand that these times present many challenges for council and we are very keen to offer our assistance to work towards an economic recovery strategy for Rockhampton.

To this end Central Queensland Branch President, Gideon Genade will shortly be in touch to arrange a time convenient to you.

We thank you for taking the time to consider our letter during this difficult period. The Institute offers its assistance wherever we can to ensure the property industry continues to operate in the current circumstances. If you have any questions, please contact Manager of Policy, Martin Zaltron ([mzaltron@udiaql.com.au](mailto:mzaltron@udiaql.com.au)) on (07) 3229 1589.

Yours sincerely,  
**Urban Development Institute of Australia Queensland**



Kirsty Chessher-Brown  
**Chief Executive Officer**



Gideon Genade  
**Central Queensland Branch President**