



## BELIZE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

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# 4792 Coney Drive, 2nd Floor Withfield Tower, P.O. Box 291 , Belize City, Belize, Central America

**OUR REF: BCCI/PRES 35/08-2020**

August 28, 2020

COVID-19 National Oversight Committee  
c/o Office of the Prime Minister  
Belmopan City  
BELIZE

### **Re: Confidence-Building Measures for Business Continuity**

Dear NOC Members,

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID 19) has undoubtedly forced the global economy into an unprecedented balancing act: That is, balancing “lives” and “livelihoods”. The Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry (BCCI)’s Executive Council fully acknowledges that this is no simple task, as either decision carries its own set of ramifications.

As it presently stands, for instance, the Executive Council is appreciative of the parameters set by the present regulations (i.e. S.I. No. 121 and its amendment No. 122 of 2020). Considering the current wave of COVID-19 cases, which at the moment amounts to more than 750 active cases, representing roughly 10% of the total number of COVID tests carried out, the measures outlined in the aforementioned laws are prudent and should rightly continue as the “new normal” until the transmission rate returns comfortably below 5% of total tests performed. Such steps are pivotal to preserving “lives”.

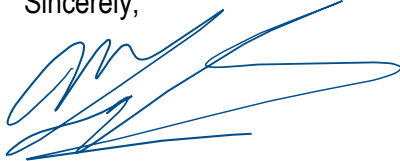
The business community, however, must speak on the matter of preserving “livelihoods”. As the recent release from the Statistical Institute of Belize (SIB) has demonstrated, unsurprisingly the Belizean economy shrank by more than 23% for the Second Quarter. Additionally, while there has not been an updated Labour Force Survey due to the pandemic, the number of applications under the Unemployment Relief Program is very telling as to the ripple effects faced by households. Truthfully, the Belizean entrepreneurs and workers—already reeling from a recession that commenced last year—can hardly sustain a repeat of the type of complete lockdown witnessed at the start of the Second Quarter.

Therefore, as your partners in development, the BCCI has attached to this letter a set of what we have dubbed “Confidence Building Measures for Business Continuity” (CBMBC). As stated above, the goal is not to subtract from the present regulations, but rather to build upon the same. It is intended to provide guidance on any future escalation of public health restrictive measures and treats a full lockdown as the ultimately last resort.

As always, we would be happy to discuss the contents of the CBMBC at your earliest convenience, as the way forward under this “new normal” underscores the need for even closer private-public sector communication and collaboration.

We thank you, in advance, for your consideration.

Sincerely,



**Marissa Longsworth (Ms.)**  
**President**

*Cc: Hon. Dean Barrow – Prime Minister (and Chairman of the NOC)*  
*Hon John Briceno – Leader of the Opposition*  
*Economic Recovery Committee*  
*Economic Development Council*



BUSINESS CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES

**A PROPOSED PRIVATE-PUBLIC SECTOR RESPONSE STRATEGY TO  
COVID-19**

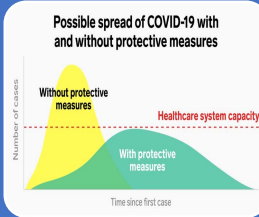


### **Cross-Cutting Confidence Building Measures for Opening Up**

The Confidence-Building Measures for Economic Continuity *during* COVID-19 are built upon the country-wide health regulations set by [Statutory Instrument \(S.I.\) Number 121](#) and its amendment [S.I. No. 122 of 2020](#). While these measures presented here are premised on the importance of maintaining business activity as much as possible, the government is encouraged to maintain the baseline outlined in the previously cited laws.



## Health



- Estimate and publicize Belize's "surge capacity" under different case load scenarios and indicate country's outstanding need that can be filled via Public Private Partnership;
- Use "surge capacity" information to inform a publicized phased-lockdown strategy;
- Estimate and publicize projections on peak periods;
- Invest in health system capacity nationwide for non-COVID and COVID related health sector demands;
- Review the testing protocols to allow private sector labs to conduct testing.
- Develop a Vaccination Plan, including a rapid-sourcing strategy, that will go immediately into action as soon as a vaccine is approved.

## Business Measures



- Establish an occupational risk profile index to be used to inject predictability into the treatment of various occupations within business sectors based on their respective risk assessments;
- Based on risk profiles, establish business health protocols that coincide with the respective phases of Public Health Restrictions (PHR). These protocols should identify clear triggers for when PHRs are increased and when they are decreased. This is to remove subjectivity and arbitrariness in decision making,
- Expedite comprehensive tax reform as a means to strengthen the local economy, including land-border exit tax to encourage consumers to buy locally produced goods.
- Urgently implement the **Business Adaptation Fund to finance COVID 19 Bio Security Compliance** by businesses similar to that proposed in the Economic Recovery Strategy.

## Immigration



- Re-open airport only when necessary precautions have been put in place including tracking bands, tracking app and testing facilities ;
- Based on "surge capacity" and other key indicators within health care system, closely monitor the maximum number of international travellers permitted entry. This should work in tandem with health sector capacity for critical care, based on the assumption (as seen in other jurisdictions) that a set proportion of international travelers are likely to be COVID Positive.
- Keep land borders closed until neighboring countries' transmission become controlled. (Aim for 2021 opening). This, of course, does not relate to the movement of cargo and emergencies as already permitted under the current regulations.

## National Security



- Develop a quick response, 24/7 border monitoring regime, and patrol to counter contraband activity.
- Train and empower the police department to enforce occupation-sector-specific protocols for high-risk job categories.
- Invest in technology for effective border patrolling.



**Table 1—Opening-Up Measures**

Communication	Surge Capacity	Business Support Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With full public sector transparency, inform the public of Belize’s short- and medium-term “surge capacity” via a joint communication/public awareness campaign in which citizens are encouraged to be mindful of the health sector’s genuine capacity constraints.</li> <li>In collaboration with the private sector, conduct poll(s) to get a sense of the general citizenry’s understanding of the pandemic and the need to exercise responsible (preventative) measures. The poll should be done by region in order to identify areas where the most public awareness efforts would be needed (<i>please see Footnote No. 1 below for rationale</i>)<sup>1</sup>.</li> <li>Incorporate findings of “Listening Devices” (see WHO 2020 guidelines <a href="#">HERE</a>) as part of the strategy to ensure citizens, as much as possible, <b>intrinsicly</b> apply the appropriate health and safety measures.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using tools like the CDC’s <a href="#">Covid19Surge</a>, estimate Belize’s surge capacity under different transmission scenarios, so as to identify the current outstanding health sector needs at projected peak periods.</li> <li>In partnership with the Private Sector, develop and implement a plan aimed at boosting the health sector’s ability to manage an upsurge in COVID 19 cases, as well as prepare for any approaching peak (daily) patient load, whilst continuing to adequately manage Non-COVID health care demands. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This plan can include allowing private facilities to participate in the testing process.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Eventually a vaccine shall be developed. There needs to be a clear plan developed as to how sufficient vaccines will be sourced and disseminated throughout the Belizean population.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expedite the implementation and development of a business adaptation fund to finance businesses’ measures to become compliant with COVID-19 Bio-Security measures. (Businesses would need to access funding to be able to modify their physical infrastructure in some instances so as to comply with the Higher-intensity public health restrictions)<sup>2</sup>.</li> <li>In accordance with <i>Part II and Part III</i> of this document, develop a clear strategy that informs all business sectors (and/or occupational areas) of the expectations of Employers under various levels of restrictive public health measures.</li> </ul>

### **Part II—A Phased Approach to Closing Down the Economy**

Subject to the transmission rate for COVID 19, it cannot entirely be ruled out that Belize would need to return to extreme Public Health Restrictive Measures (“full PHR”) such as a complete lockdown of the country and its economy. Nevertheless, recognizing the economic harm (to both public and private sectors) that follows complete lockdowns, it is advised that a full PHR only be reconsidered under a phased approach in which pre-emptive measures are taken early and with the ‘buy-in’ of the business community and public at large (see note on “Listening Devices” in *Table 1*).

Fundamentally, the achievement of a phased lockdown that looks at the four key areas noted above (i.e. “Health, Business, Immigration, and National Security) must be governed by a data-driven methodology that makes use of pivotal indicators. Clearly, the health sector’s “surge capacity” indicators take a pre-

<sup>1</sup> **NOTE:** Excerpt from WHO GUIDELINE (2020, p. 12) (see [HERE](#)): “The voices of individuals and communities are a valuable resource for transition planning. ... Countries should put in place appropriate “listening devices” (e.g. surveys, online polls) that allow health authorities to gauge population response and behaviour in an ongoing and real-time manner. These can be used to explore perceptions, acceptance of restrictions, mental and physical health, behaviours, information needs and misperceptions. This intelligence enables health authorities to anticipate how the public will react, to pilot test measures with certain segments of the population, and to adjust and mitigate early and fast.”

<sup>2</sup> **NOTE:** The Economic Recovery Plan recently launched by GOB has a Post-COVID Adaption Fund; however, given the likelihood that the pandemic may be with us longer than originally assumed, it would be more practical for the allotment of such funds to be made sooner rather than later. The Economic Recovery Strategy can be found here: <https://www.pressoffice.gov.bz/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Economic-Recovery-Strategy.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1WrVCOXkV5KXNIXZF2VOUmqVcpsUbm5L2eUYEjiQANy7LXmoRNQGHdnsc>



eminent role in these considerations. The Phased approach below provides a general road map, the details for which ought to be established via a public-private consultative process.

PHASED APPROACH TO INCREASED PHR MEASURES			
Phases	Health Sector Triggers	Immigration Triggers	National Security
Green Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In line with WHO Guidelines, health system can absorb at least a 40% increase in new cases.</li> <li>Less than 5% of tests for the last 14 days have been positive.</li> <li>Within three weeks of the last peak, there has been a decline in the rate of new infections by at least 50%.</li> <li>At least 80% of new cases are traceable via contact lists and can be linked to specific clusters.</li> <li>Continuous decline in the number of hospitalizations and ICU admissions of confirmed and probable cases at least for the last 14 days.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The numbers of international travellers who test positive in Belize are at or below a prescribed threshold (for example, only <b>0.3%</b> of total arrivals test positive).</li> <li>All relevant tracing, tracking (including the tracking App), and testing facilities <i>continue to be</i> adequately set up at the airport and other immigration touch points. That is, the airport is fully compliant with the stipulations of the Belize Tourism Board (BTB)'s Guidelines for Re-Opening of the Tourism Sector Post-COVID 19 (p. 18) (see <a href="#">HERE</a>).</li> <li>All functioning tour operators are compliant with the Belize Tourism Board (BTB)'s Tour Operators' COVID 19 Guidelines (see <a href="#">HERE</a>).</li> <li>All open hotels and restaurants are compliant with the Belize Tourism Board (BTB)'s Hotels and Restaurants COVID 19 Guidelines (see <a href="#">HERE</a>).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incidences of border jumping curtailed substantially (by more than 50%) over the last 14 days).</li> </ul>
Orange Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In line with WHO Guidelines, health system can absorb at least 20% increase in new cases.</li> <li>Between 5% and 8% of tests for the last 14 days have been positive.</li> <li>Within three weeks of the last peak, there has been a decline in the rate of new infections by at least 10%.</li> <li>Less than 80% of new cases are traceable via contact lists and can be linked to specific clusters.</li> <li>The number of hospitalizations and ICU admissions of confirmed and probable cases at least for the last 14 days have increased beyond an established threshold.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The numbers of international travellers who test positive when travelling in Belize exceed a prescribed threshold (for example, only <b>0.7%</b> of total arrivals test positive).</li> <li>All relevant tracing, tracking (including the tracking App), and testing facilities <i>continue to be</i> adequately set up at the airport and other immigration touch points. That is, the airport is fully compliant with the stipulations of the Belize Tourism Board (BTB)'s Guidelines for Re-Opening of the Tourism Sector Post-COVID 19 (p. 18) (see <a href="#">HERE</a>).</li> <li>At least 70% of functioning tour operators are found to be compliant with the Belize Tourism Board (BTB)'s Tour Operators' COVID 19 Guidelines (see <a href="#">HERE</a>).</li> <li>At least 70% of open hotels and restaurants are found to be compliant with the Belize Tourism Board (BTB)'s Hotels and Restaurants COVID 19 Guidelines (see <a href="#">HERE</a>).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incidences of border jumping curtailed moderately (down by less than 50% over the last 14 days).</li> </ul>
Red Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In line with WHO Guidelines, health system <b>cannot</b> absorb at least 20% increase in new cases.</li> <li>More than 8% of tests for the last 14 days have been positive.</li> <li>Within three weeks of the last peak, there has been an increase in the rate of new infections by at least 10%.</li> <li>Most new cases cannot be traced via contact lists and cannot be linked to specific clusters (full community spread).</li> <li>The number of hospitalizations and ICU admissions of confirmed and probable cases at least for the last 14 days have increased beyond an established threshold.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The numbers of international travellers who test positive when travelling in Belize exceed a prescribed threshold (for example, only <b>1.0%</b> of total arrivals test positive).</li> <li>All relevant tracing, tracking (including the tracking App), and testing facilities continue to be adequately set up at the airport and other immigration touch points. That is, the airport is fully compliant with the stipulations of the Belize Tourism Board (BTB)'s Guidelines for Re-Opening of the Tourism Sector Post-COVID 19 (p. 18) (see <a href="#">HERE</a>).</li> <li>Less than 70% of functioning tour operators are found to be compliant with the Belize Tourism Board (BTB)'s Tour Operators' COVID 19 Guidelines (see <a href="#">HERE</a>).</li> <li>Less than 70% of open hotels and restaurants are found to be compliant with the Belize Tourism Board (BTB)'s Hotels and Restaurants COVID 19 Guidelines (see <a href="#">HERE</a>).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incidences of border jumping are not effectively curtailed.</li> </ul>



### Part III—Health Restriction Protocols for the Business Sector

While *Part II* of this document outlines the triggers for the various *Phases*, this section looks specifically at the impacts on the Business Community. This is designed to allow Employers, Business Support Organizations such as the Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) to better predict and collaborate with GOB throughout the various phases. Most importantly, the development of the types of guidelines proposed in this section would enable employers to appreciate and anticipate what is expected of them. Additionally, the advent of such a strategy would reduce the level of arbitrariness that is associated with past shutdown procedures.

IMPACTS ON THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY at EACH PHASE	
Green Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All businesses remain open, while remaining compliant with standard health protocols such as physical distancing, sanitation, etc. as established by S.I. No. 119 of 2020. This relates specifically to sections 19 (1) and (2) of the aforementioned S.I. that stipulates: “For the purposes of preventing, controlling, containing and suppressing the spread of the infectious disease COVID-19, every business, office or establishment allowed to operate under these Regulations, including government offices, shall abide by social distancing protocols if the square footage of that business or office allows for persons to maintain a distance of six feet from other persons. [...] <b>IF the square footage of a business or office ... allows for persons to maintain a distance of six feet from other persons, that business ... shall- (a) ensure that all customers <u>and</u> staff maintain physical distancing of no less than six feet in or outside their business; (b) <u>determine the number of persons that may be permitted in that business or office ... at any one time, provided that the determined number is <u>proportionate</u> to the square footage of the business or office and the social distancing protocols to be observed</u>”</b></li> <li>Remote work, where possible, is encouraged.</li> <li>Notwithstanding S.I. No. 119, based on <b>Occupational Risk Profile Index (ORPI)</b> to be developed collaboratively between the private and health sector, OFFICE and WORK SPACES for occupations/business sectors with <b>ORPI Scores</b> greater than an agreed-upon threshold (e.g. <b>75 points</b>) could be required to obtain a compliance certification prior to reopening. The higher level of scrutiny could be justified due to the likelihood of higher transmission rates given the nature of the occupation. The protocol should include especially <b>strict</b> adherence to occupants-per-square feet thresholds set by the “Total Office Occupancy” and “Total Customer Capacity” formulas:           <math display="block">\text{Total Office Occupancy} = \frac{\text{Net Work Area}}{40 \text{ sqft}}</math> <p style="text-align: center;">Where <i>Net Work Area</i> = total area less space occupied by amenities and used by customers<sup>3</sup></p> <p>Failure by individual businesses <b>above the set ORPI threshold</b> to abide by the set threshold could lead to that individual business being ordered closed by the authorities for a predetermined period of time (e.g. 2 weeks in the first instance). To comply with the protocol, such businesses (if possible) should employ remote work and/or a shift system, IF it is that the physical space does not allow for the number of employees.</p> </li> <li>In terms of customers, the capacity could be based <b>on 100%</b> of total (net) customer capacity as derived by a predetermined formula:           <math display="block">\text{Total Customer Capacity} = \frac{\text{Net Customer Area}}{40 \text{ sqft}}</math> </li> <li>The TCC must be conspicuously posted for the benefit of both customers and authorities.</li> <li>All other businesses below the established threshold would be subjected to no additional, mandatory protocols except that which is found within S.I. No. 119 of 2020.</li> </ul>
Orange Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All businesses remain open, while remaining compliant with standard health protocols such as physical distancing, sanitation, etc. as established by S.I. No. 119 of 2020.</li> <li>Remote work, where possible, <b>is made mandatory</b>, with the Employer required to establish a schedule/roster for days in which employees would be in the physical workspace. This schedule should be made readily available for inspection by appropriate authorities. Additionally, this system, developed in consultation with the private sector, should first include a formal warning mechanism for the first offence, with subsequent offences penalized with gradually increasing severity (this too to be agreed to via a consultative process).</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> **NOTE:** The converse to the Net Work Area is the Net Customer Area, which is the space not occupied by employee stations and amenities. This should be maintained. **Also, please note that the 40 sq ft is derived from the rounded product of 6ft x 6ft which is the prescribed minimum physical distance to be maintained between persons.**





	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Notwithstanding S.I. No. 119, based on <b>Occupational Risk Profile Index (ORPI)</b> to be developed collaboratively between the private and health sector, OFFICE and WORK SPACES for occupations/business sectors with <b>ORPI Scores</b> greater than an agreed-upon threshold (<b>e.g. 50 points</b>) should be required to obtain a compliance certification prior to reopening. The higher level of scrutiny could be justified due to the likelihood of higher transmission rates given the nature of the occupation. The protocol should include especially <b>strict</b> adherence to occupants-per-square feet thresholds set by the “Total Office Occupancy” and “Total Customer Capacity” formulas:           <math display="block">\text{Total No. Workplace/Office Occupants} = \frac{\text{Net Work Area}}{40 \text{ sqft}}</math> <p>Where <i>Net Work Area</i> = total area less space occupied by amenities and used by customers</p> <p>Failure by individual businesses <b>above the set ORPI threshold</b> could lead to that individual business being ordered closed by the authorities for a predetermined period of time (e.g. 2 weeks). To comply with the protocol, such businesses (if possible) should employ remote work and/or a shift system, <b>IF it is that the physical space does not allow for the number of employees.</b></p> </li> <li>In terms of customers, the capacity could be based <b>on 50%</b> of total (net) customer capacity as derived by a predetermined formula:           <math display="block">\text{Total Customer Capacity} = \frac{\text{Net Customer Area}}{40 \text{ sqft}}</math> </li> <li>The TCC (at 50%) must be conspicuously posted for the benefit of both customers and authorities.</li> <li>All other businesses below the established threshold would be subjected to no additional, mandatory protocols except that which is found within S.I. No. 119 of 2020.</li> </ul>
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# The Belize Chamber of Commerce & Industry



## HEALTH

- Estimate and publicize Belize's "surge capacity" under different case load scenarios and indicate country's outstanding need that can be filled via Public Private Partnership;
- Use "surge capacity" information to inform a publicized phased-lockdown strategy (See recommended approach to phased lockdown below);
- Estimate and publicize projections on peak periods;
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## SUCCESS



## BUSINESS MEASURES

- Establish an occupational risk profile index to be used to inject predictability into the treatment of various occupations within business sectors based on their disparate risk assessment;
- Based on Risk Profile, establish business health protocols that coincides with respective Phases of Public Health Restrictions (PHR). These protocols should identify clear triggers for when PHRs are increased and when they are decreased. This is to remove subjectivity and arbitrariness in decision making.
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## IMMIGRATION

- Re-open airport only when necessary precautions have been put in place including tracking band, tracking app and testing facilities;
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- Develop a quick response, 24/7 border monitoring regime, and patrol to counter contraband activity.
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- Invest in technology for effective border patrolling.

## Cross-Cutting Confidence Building Measures for Opening Up

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