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Re: Application for Exemption for Garden Retail Operations Under Covid 19 Level 3 Restrictions

Background

Garden Retailers have significant restrictions at Covid Level 3. While they are able to trade plants using 'click and collect', this method has proven to be unsuitable for the sale of plants. As a result, plant sales are just 30% of what is expected at this time of year. We are entering a critical time for garden retail, with Labour Weekend being the largest trading weekend of the year and the spring - early summer period bringing in 60% of annual plant sales.

The realisation that the Auckland / Waikato regions may be heading for an extended L3 shutdown through the most critical time of the year has intensified the concern and urgency to find more effective ways for people to safely access garden plants over the coming months.

It is well known that gardening and the use of plants in homes is beneficial to families and whanau, supporting mental health, access to healthy food and as a physical activity. Further, home gardening provides a way for family and whanau to engage in purposeful, productive activities while isolating at home. Supporting home gardening will support the Governments Covid 19 health objectives.

To enable garden retailers to provide the quantity of plants required by the public they are seeking the ability for the public to be able to access and pick up plants in open outdoor areas, using a more effective system that 'click and collect'.

The garden retail sector is gravely concerned that if unchanged the ongoing Level 3 restrictions will have a serious financial impact from the loss of the value of unplanted seedlings they have invested in.

Request:

That the Covid 19 Order allows that customers of garden retail businesses are allowed to enter the outdoor areas of the business premises for the purpose of retrieving or collecting pre-ordered plants.

Situation:

After 16 weeks operating the Click & Collect system, garden retailers have concluded that is inappropriate for both retailers and customers. Customers are not comfortable ordering plants online or unseen and the logistics of taking orders and retrieving plants for customers is uneconomic for garden centres. Click and collect plant sales are just 30% of normal volumes in the stores operating at Level 3.

Labour weekend is the largest trading day of the year for garden centres. Many report that they will not be able to operate a click and collect system on this day. Lost sales in the critical period between now & mid November cannot be recovered later in the year.

Disruptions to seedling propagation through the Level 4 lockdown are still impacting garden retailers. In addition, there are large volumes of unsold stocks in garden centres that will need to be destroyed if they are not sold in the coming weeks.

Garden centres have a unique advantage in that they have large open, outdoor areas and good air movement. This avoids risks related to indoor air, crowding, browsing and the risk of contact when moving around. All other areas can be effectively segregated and closed off.

Enabling customers to enter outdoor areas of garden centres to collect plants.

After placing an order online, or when arriving in the carpark, the public would walk directly into the open, outdoor areas of the premises where the plants are presented. The customer would exit the premises and pay for the plants at a till located at the exit or perimeter.

There are significant benefits in this approach:

- With the exception of entering the premises to retrieve plants, all other parts of the ordering and sales process are carried outside the perimeter of the premises and in adherence to the current Covid 19 rules.
- This will enable people to access plants and to use the benefits of gardening to support families & whanau through the Covid 19 restrictions would be maximised for the community.
- People can access a wider range of plants far easier than in the current and click & collect method.
- The number of people in the site may be restricted to ensure distancing and safety rules are effective. Distancing and safe traffic flow may be easily maintained.
- Interaction with staff will be minimal and at a safe distance.
- Far more people would be encouraged to purchase plants using this method and would have access a far wider range of plants than is possible through Click & Collect.

Covid 19 safety

NZ Plant Producers has developed a set of Covid 19 safety protocols that will enable the garden retailers industry to communicate and reinforce the importance of safety, particularly with the new Delta strain. and the public to undertake these proposed activities in a controlled and safe manner. These protocols are operating successfully in horticulture (vegetable, fruit & vine) nurseries, NZ Plant Producers is supporting the

Regards,



Matthew Dolan
Chief Executive
New Zealand Plant Producers Incorporated

Supporting Information

The home garden provides many benefits during the Covid 19 crisis, particularly for families and whanau isolated at home.

These benefits are currently minimized in the Level 3 regions as the Click and Collect trading method means that the public do not have adequate access to plants and seedlings to enable them to engage in gardening in a meaningful way.

In addition, and importantly, gardening and 'self-help' opportunities provided by growing one's own food even to a limited extent, provide mental health benefits to counteract anxiety and depression at a time where many are facing threats to their livelihoods and their health.

Bedding plants, vegetable punnets, herbs, seed and fruit trees are primarily available in garden centres. It's important that home gardeners can access these items over the coming spring and summer gardening months.

The Benefits

- There are strong links backed by research on the connection between gardening and mental health
- Gardening promotes physical fitness and wellbeing and counteracts sedentary behaviors in a 'lockdown' i.e. "outdoors getting fresh air and exercise in our bubble"
- Many in society (elderly, marginalized, low income) depend on supplementation from the 'home grown pantry' to be able to feed themselves after the 'bills are paid'
- Reports from COVID lockdown "Thank goodness I had my vege garden, I could eat without having to go to the supermarket so often"
- Without this opportunity to access garden plants due to trading restrictions, we are engendering 'learned helplessness' whereby individuals see no ability to act to lessen their vulnerability.

Managing the Risk

- The outdoor areas of Garden Centres are a low risk environment to the spread of COVID-19.
- Garden Centres are generally large and spacious to allow room to place large numbers of plants & make them available to the public
- Aisles or paths are generally at least two metres apart for the above reason
- Garden Centres are mainly 'outdoor spaces' likely to disperse droplets should these occur from a cough or sneeze to very low concentrations versus indoor areas
- Garden Centres are not likely to have anywhere near the foot traffic density and queues of other types of retail premises
- Customers of Garden Centers are likely to be the 'cautious' i.e. generally female and older than the average shopper
- Resources to be busy 'at home' will keep people occupied and happy to be at home which helps hugely to combat COVID-19 transmission risk due to 'boredom outings'
- With protocols in place we most likely sit at the 'least risky' end of the spectrum of retail businesses and have a strong and cohesive industry representation capable of communicating with members and reinforcing best practice protocols with our members
- Via NZPPI we are also integrated with our suppliers, which means protocols can run from point of plant production right through to the end consumer, a unique and powerful advantage in combatting COVID-19

Garden Retail Stores Requested to Operate at Level 3

Outside In
Palmers Albany
Palmers Pakuranga
Palmers Remuera
Plantarama Garden Centre
Sunhill Garden Centre
The Urban Garden
Kings Takapuna
Kings Takanini
Kings Remuera
KingsSt Lukes
Kings Forrest hill
Kings Botany Downs
Kings Silverdale

Mega Warkworth
Mitre 10 Whangaparaoa
Mitre 10 Browns Bay
Mega Albany
Mitre 10 Helensville
Mega Westgate
Mega Henderson
Mega Glenfield
Mega New Lynn
Mitre 10 Ponsonby
Mitre 10 Onehunga
Mega Botany
Mitre 10 Beachlands
Mega Mt Wellington
Mega Takanini
Mega Pukekohe
Mega Manukau
Mega Te Rapa
Mega Te Awamutu
Mega Cambridge
Mega Ruakura
Mitre 10 Otorohanga
Mitre 10Te Kuiti
Mitre 10 Waiuku
Hammer Hardware Welsford
Hammer Hardware Devenport

Bunnings Stores:

Northshore Warehouse
Glenfield Warehouse
Silverdale Warehouse
Westgate Warehouse
Botany Warehouse
Manukau Warehouse

Takanini Warehouse
Mt Wellington Warehouse
New Lynn Warehouse
Mt Roskill Warehouse
Grey Lynn Warehouse
Hamilton South Warehouse
Te Rapa (Hamilton)
Warehouse