



Government of the Cook Islands  
**Office of the Deputy Prime Minister**

**MEDIA RELEASE - strictly embargoed until 6.15pm**

**31 March 2020**

**Stimulus, solutions, support: Minister of Finance talks about the country's economic fightback**

In a live streamed address tonight, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Hon. Mark Brown talked about the Government's COVID-19 economic fightback plan.

“The Government’s approach to this crisis is one of stimulus, we are putting money into the economy through our workers and our businesses to keep it running during this downturn. We don’t know how long this will last. The Government will continue to assess its approach and develop solutions. But we must remember that this crisis may last for a period of six months or longer and that government needs to have the ability to keep providing support over that long period,” said Minister Brown.

“The Government has moved quickly and is focused on cushioning the blow for workers and businesses as we respond to this unprecedented global crisis. Our priority is ensuring that individuals and businesses in the Cook Islands receive support during this period.”

He said the Government was taking a phased approach to its economic response plan in response to an evolving situation. “No doubt another stage of the Economic Response Plan will need to be implemented in the coming months.”

The Ministry for Finance and Economic Management has been working with key stakeholders to speed up the timetable for payments. He advised:

- Wage Subsidy payments will begin from the week of the 6<sup>th</sup> April 2020
- Cash Grants will be paid out at the same time as the wage subsidy if your business meets the eligibility criteria; and
- Welfare payments will be paid out on the 16<sup>th</sup> April 2020.

“A payment system of this magnitude has never been done before in the history of our country, However, we ask that people have patience and show a little kindness to staff who are working as quickly as they possibly can to process these payments.”

There are a number of places people can access financial support:

- If you are an employee, newly unemployed, looking for work, or you want to enquire about receiving a welfare payment, please contact INTAFF ph 0800 2937 or visit them at Sinai Hall.
- If you have general questions about the application process for business grants, wage subsidies or self-isolation support, the Private Sector Task Force has set up a helpdesk at the Chamber of Commerce. Please phone them on 20925 or visit the office. If you do not have online capabilities the team can also help you apply for payments online.
- If you have tax related enquiries, or specific questions regarding your business application, contact the Revenue Management Division of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management by phone 29365.

“We encourage people to talk to your Banks, talk to RMD, talk to INTAFF, talk to the Private Sector Task Force if you have any uncertainties about any of the measures.”

Minister Brown confirmed the Government has been in discussion with the Asian Development Bank. “We know that the road to recovery will take longer than six months and we are working to find those financing options that we will need to allow our recovery.”

Tonight, the Minister also spoke about subsidised shipping arrangements to ensure the Pa Enea receive vital supplies. The Grinna departed Rarotonga on 30 March with cargo valued at \$150K for the people of Penrhyn. “We will continue to deliver cargo to all our islands,” he said. “As we go through these times of uncertainty, we must ensure that our people in the Pa Enea also receive a regular supply of goods.”

Currently, no passengers can travel to or from the Pa Enea without express approval from the Ministry of Health.

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