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Mornington Peninsula businesses woefully unprepared for Covid-compliant summer

Without time to prepare, Mornington Peninsula traders and customers will be “crash test dummies” when summer hits.

Briony Hutton Committee for Mornington Peninsula

 3 min read September 29, 2021 - 11:00AM [Mornington Peninsula Leader](#)

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Holiday-makers are expected to flock to the Mornington Peninsula when lockdown restrictions ease across Greater Melbourne. Picture: Andrew Batsch

The Mornington Peninsula's status during the pandemic has been a hot topic.

Traders and residents have questioned the logic and fairness of the LGA being tied to metro Melbourne's hard lockdowns while Victorian regions have been afforded greater freedoms.

The Committee for Mornington Peninsula has campaigned throughout the health crisis for a rethink of the peninsula's classification.

On Tuesday the committee's executive officer Briony Hutton said local businesses were "woefully unprepared" for mandatory vaccine passports.

And, like parts of regional Victoria, traders should have the chance to trial the system before the summer stampede.

GIVE US SAME PRIVILEGES AS REGIONAL VICTORIA

As travel and capacity limits ease, Melburnians and regional Victorians making their annual pilgrimage to the Mornington Peninsula will find that the shops and restaurants are woefully unprepared for mandatory vaccine passport check-ins.

If our businesses thought tensions were high during the introduction of mandatory QR-code check-ins last summer, wait until customers attempt to enter Peninsula premises as the crash dummies for this new mandatory program during peak tourism season.

Without access to our own vaccinated economy trial, we will mount another fumbling start to a disturbed tourism season ahead.

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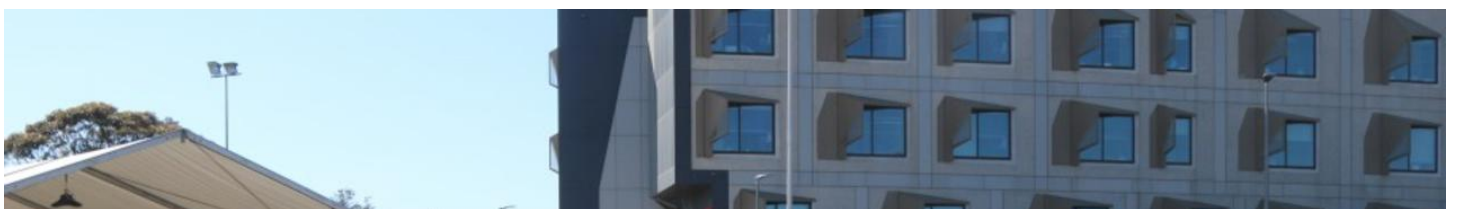
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Few local businesses are confident they will reap the overdue benefits of a traditional tourism season from Grand Final Weekend until the Easter Holidays.

Talking to local business owners, it is clear many are just hanging on, and with an uncertain future post the 80 per cent vaccination milestone.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Committee for Mornington Peninsula has called on the Victorian Government to classify the LGA as part of regional Victoria for the purposes of public health directives.

This recognises the fact that for most of the year preceding September, there were no Covid cases on the peninsula, yet 77 days of lockdown.





Peninsula Health reached 250,000 Covid tests on September 2. Picture: Peninsula Health

The Mornington Peninsula has consistently had half the number of Covid cases (212 total cases) compared with our regional neighbours in Greater Geelong (425 total cases), yet counterintuitively, Greater Geelong has been locked down for approximately half the time of the Mornington Peninsula.

The peninsula has also had far fewer exposure sites than Greater Geelong, due to many local Covid cases either becoming infected through itinerant work, or recuperating in their second homes upon diagnosis, safely at arms' length from families.

Well managed, this has meant few exposure sites on the Peninsula.

Greater Geelong exited its week-long snap lockdown on Monday with 43 exposure sites – eight of which are Tier One – while the Peninsula remains in metropolitan lockdown with no officially listed exposure sites.

However, on Tuesday, a doctor at the Rosebud Respiratory Clinic reported exposure sites that had so far evaded the Department of Health and Human Services website due to an overwhelmed Victorian contact tracing system.

If this is the case, it is unlikely to be a problem unique to the peninsula, but exacerbated by the visitation we continue to receive each long weekend and home schooling cycle, which is made easier by our metropolitan classification and unenforceable border with Greater Melbourne.

The peninsula has kept pace with Greater Geelong on vaccination rates – 80.1 per cent single dose vaccinations of the adult population, compared with 81.2 per cent.

According to recent data, the Mornington Peninsula's adult single dose vaccination rate sits 9.1 per cent higher than the metropolitan Melbourne average and 0.7 per cent higher than the regional Victorian average.

We look forward to the bringing together of metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria under the Victorian Government's latest road map at 80 per cent of the fully vaccinated adult population, but there is no longer a reasonable argument for keeping the Mornington Peninsula segregated from regional Victoria until that point.

If our vaccination rates, historical case load data or current active case numbers are not determining factors

for inclusion in regional Victorian restrictions, then what is?

At some point, common sense must prevail.

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