

OFFICE OF FAIR TRADING

Improving safety and fairness for Queensland businesses and consumers

Help for businesses and consumers during COVID-19

We know there is a lot of information circulating regarding COVID-19 right now, but we wanted to share an update on how we're handling things at the Office of Fair Trading (OFT).

The OFT is endeavouring to continue service delivery in an uninterrupted way and at this stage I'm pleased to say we are achieving this. Some of our staff are working from home and we hope to have more doing so shortly. We understand that businesses, licensees and not-for-profits may need special consideration during the COVID-19 outbreak. Here are some of the things we are doing for you at the moment.

Help for businesses and licensees

If you are having difficulty meeting an OFT lodgement due date because of an impact from COVID-19, email our Industry Licensing unit to let us know. We are deciding applications for special consideration on a case-by-case basis and one of our officers will contact you as soon as possible.

If you need to renew your licence or registration, our online form lodgement and payment portal remains available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You will also be able to login at any time to track the status of your licence or certificate renewal with us.

If you are a security provider, you can't work if your licence has expired unless you have already submitted your renewal and you are waiting for it to be processed. Email our Industry Licensing unit if you have any questions. We have also given a special dispensation for security providers unable to undertake required refresher training because of COVID-19.

The tattoo industry has been particularly affected by the government changes, with all tattooing no longer allowed to continue to help reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19. To assist licensees we are providing new and renewal applicants with options for refunds to help them manage the situation.

For the real estate industry we have issued guidance on restrictions relating to auctions and the conduct of open house inspections.

During this crisis we have also reviewed our compliance and enforcement framework. While we continue to expect businesses to do the right thing and observe the rules, we will take current circumstances into consideration in taking any enforcement action against traders for minor or unintended contraventions.

Consumer complaints received by the OFT about matters which involve COVID-19 impacts will be assessed on a case by case basis, noting the primary aim of the changes introduced by the government are to restrict the spread of the virus, and consideration will be given to the circumstances the marketplace is facing due to the situation.

The main message to licensees and indeed businesses in general, is to talk to us if you are experiencing difficulties in complying with your governing legislation or OFT requirements.

Incorporated Associations, Charities and Not-for-profits

The Associations Incorporation Act 1981 requires an association's AGM to be held within 6 months of the end of their financial year. However, in the current circumstances, the Chief Executive will allow associations a grace period of a further 6 months if required to hold its AGM without the need for an association to make a written application.

In effect, this may result in the term of a management committee being longer than is provided for in the rules, but given the current circumstances the OFT is of the view the majority of members will approve of this. Of course, Associations are encouraged to consider whether there are alternative options for holding the AGM remotely through the use of technology.

It is important that associations continue to engage with their members and keep them informed of changing situations and events.

Consumers

We are very conscious that crises such as these bring out both the best and unfortunately sometimes the worst in people. At the OFT we will continue to accept consumer complaints and will prioritise those which allege issues related to COVID-19 such as scamming, price gouging, misleading or deceptive conduct, and other matters where individual traders or entities attempt to take advantage of consumers.

In relation to price gouging, we fully appreciate that prices can increase in line with supply and demand issues and other externalities, and we encourage consumers to talk to traders before escalating issues. We also encourage consumers to be discerning and seek out information from reliable sources rather than accepting commentary and opinion circulated via social media as facts.

We have posted information on refunds and remedies and how the current crisis may impact consumers who have paid for cancelled travel and events. We encourage traders and consumers to talk to each other about these issues before lodging complaints with the OFT.

Our team is ready

Our staff have been working hard to ensure that whether you walk into one of our locations throughout the State, call, email, or write to us, it is business as usual when dealing with the OFT.

If circumstances change in coming months we will keep you informed via our website so be sure to keep an eye on it for more information. You can also follow us on facebook or twitter

More information

We are very aware of and saddened by the impact of the virus on the marketplace. A \$4 billion economic relief package is being implemented to provide assistance to Queensland workers, business and households to manage the impacts of the COVID-19. Find out how to access assistance on the Queensland Government website.

The Queensland government has developed resources and fact sheets for industry to help understand and prepare for COVID-19 impacts.

Check our website regularly for updates, stay safe, listen to the expert advice and look after each other (at a social distance).

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bauer". The signature is stylized with a large initial "B" and a horizontal line under the "u".

Brian Bauer

Executive Director

Office of Fair Trading