

MEDIA RELEASE



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Singapore Airlines Withdrawal A Canary In A Coalmine

Singapore Airlines' decision today to permanently withdraw flights between Canberra and Singapore is indicative of the large and growing challenges the ACT faces, local business groups have warned today. They have called for political leaders to commit to appointing a Minister for Business.

In the wake of the airlines' announcement, business leaders have urged all sides of politics to get on with the task of protecting the local economy. They say more needs to be done, and done now.

"There are mounting warning signs now taking place that the ACT economy is heading into long-term damage," Canberra Business Chamber CEO Graham Catt said today. "Singapore Airlines have withdrawn from Canberra. We now have the 3rd highest rate of payroll job unemployment in the country. And last week international ratings agency Standard & Poor's supported Master Builders concerns that the ACT government will probably fail to deliver about 20 per cent of its projected infrastructure work. These are all lead indicators of looming long-term problems. The canary in the coalmine is singing loud and clear."

Australian Hotels Associations CEO Anthony Brierley echoed these concerns. "We are now being hit by major shocks that are threatening both large and small businesses across the city. Jobs are being lost and existing support measures are insufficient. Government processes and decisions are delivering results. The result? Jobs are being lost and businesses are being damaged severely. Long-term investment by private firms now risks becoming pointless."

Business leaders are calling for a number of immediate actions. "If we had a single Business Minister devoted full-time to the business of promoting business in the ACT, that would help," Property Council of Australia (ACT division) Executive Director Adina Cirson said. "One person leading a team of dedicated government officials focussed solely on assisting businesses, and available every day to talk to the business community. We don't have that at present, and no party seems to be offering it."

Master Builders ACT CEO Michael Hopkin said, "We need the next ACT Government to engage closely with industry and community stakeholders to urgently address this problem. We are competing globally for scarce private sector investment, and the ACT Government should be prioritising local job creation in the post-COVID economic recovery."

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