INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 outbreak has caused a global health emergency and a global economic slowdown impacting millions of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) around the world, including the Pacific region. Travel bans and restrictions on gatherings have particularly affected businesses in the Pacific, with tourism playing a major role in local economies.

Pacific Trade Invest (PTI) has commissioned Fifth Quadrant, an independent research agency, to run a regular survey to understand the ongoing effects of COVID-19 on the Pacific’s private sector. The fourth wave of PTI’s “Pacific Business Monitor” surveys includes responses gathered from 29 June -12 July 2020 from 134 businesses across the Pacific Islands.

This report includes data from the top three Pacific countries that provided responses, giving insights into the nuances between different Pacific countries and the effect COVID-19 is having on the private sector.

It is a long road ahead and through the regular PTI Pacific Business Monitor surveys, the objective is to provide governments, donors and stakeholders with valuable data on how businesses in the Pacific are coping.

ABOUT PACIFIC TRADE INVEST

The PTI Network is an agency of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and is the Pacific’s leading trade and investment promotion agency.

With offices in Australia, China and New Zealand, the PTI Network develops and promotes trade and investment across international markets.
COVID-19 continues to have a negative impact on businesses as borders remain closed. The level of impact COVID-19 is having on businesses is on par with the last two waves, with just under two-thirds reporting a very negative impact.

In line with previous waves, over two-thirds of businesses continue to report a significant decline in revenue due to COVID-19.

As negative impact on business and revenue has remained steady this wave, perception of the local economy remains relatively steady as well, with 90% continuing to report a negative impact on the local economy.
72% are confident that their business will survive the COVID-19 crisis (down from 74% last wave).

When will revenue return to pre-COVID-19 levels?

- 18% expect it in 2020 (15% last wave)
- 36% expect it in 2021 (40% last wave)
- 20% expect it in 2022 or later
- 1% expect it never
- 25% don't know/hard to predict

Positively, more businesses are expecting to return to business as usual revenue this year. However, one-quarter are still not sure (25% vs. 17% last wave), indicating there is still uncertainty in the market.
ACTIONS TAKEN TO REDUCE COST/DAMAGE TO BUSINESS

59% 56% 58% 49% 49% 50% 52% 50% 49% 50% 39% 42% 37% 29% 24% 29% 24% 22% 17% 18% 34% 33% 26% 22% 12% 17% 18% 20% 19% 16% 14% 6% 7% 9% 7%

- Reduced other operational costs
- Reduced working hours
- Reduced staff numbers
- Diversified products/services
- Reduced staff wages
- Pivoted the business to sell/do more online
- Requested rent relief
- No actions taken

52% reported that there are barriers preventing them from actioning initiatives to support their business, down from 56% last wave.

BARRIERS TO ACTIONING INITIATIVES

- Lack of finance/revenue/cashflow
- Closed borders/lockdown
- Lack of government support/stimulus
- Lack of knowledge & skilled staff

TOP 4 CHALLENGES

93% NOT KNOWING HOW LONG THE CRISIS WILL LAST
90% IMPACT OF CLOSED INTERNATIONAL BORDERS
89% POOR CASHFLOW
81% IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN IN YOUR COUNTRY

TOP 4 INITIATIVES NEEDED TO ACTION NOW

57% NEED FINANCIAL SUPPORT
33% DIVERSIFY BUSINESS
31% REVIEW/UPDATE FINANCIAL POSITION
29% REVIEW/UPDATE BUSINESS STRATEGY

“Lack of employees due to Covid-19, and there is low sales and revenue and so less salary taken as a result there is no creativity made on the business.”

– SME, Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing, Solomon Islands

“The Government’s response to Covid-19 has yet to be felt or implemented. Despite talks of Covid-19 Assistance, we have not really seen the types of assistance. IRC Tax incentives have not happened, Govt subsidies have not happened but we have to remain neutral and await Govt response.”

– SME, Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing, PNG
**GOVERNMENT SUPPORT**

**HAS YOUR BUSINESS ACCESSED ANY SUPPORT?**

- **Yes, the government has provided some support**: 25% (WAVE 1), 32% (WAVE 2), 37% (WAVE 3), 37% (WAVE 4)
- **Not yet, but we will require support from the government**: 29% (WAVE 1), 29% (WAVE 2), 38% (WAVE 3), 29% (WAVE 4)
- **Our government has not provided any support to businesses**: 15% (WAVE 1), 11% (WAVE 2), 15% (WAVE 3), 15% (WAVE 4)
- **No support required**: 15% (WAVE 1), 15% (WAVE 2), 15% (WAVE 3), 15% (WAVE 4)
- **Don’t know**: 3% (WAVE 1), 1% (WAVE 2), 0% (WAVE 3), 4% (WAVE 4)

**Satisfaction with government response**

- **Very Negative**: 55% (WAVE 1), 31% (WAVE 2), 24% (WAVE 3), 24% (WAVE 4)
- **Slightly Negative**: 44% (WAVE 1), 44% (WAVE 2), 28% (WAVE 3), 19% (WAVE 4)
- **No Impact**: 51% (WAVE 1), 28% (WAVE 2), 19% (WAVE 3), 19% (WAVE 4)
- **Slightly Positive**: 43% (WAVE 1), 24% (WAVE 2), 19% (WAVE 3), 19% (WAVE 4)
- **Very Positive**: 8% (WAVE 1), 4% (WAVE 2), 8% (WAVE 3), 8% (WAVE 4)

**PERSONAL WELL-BEING**

**WELL-BEING OF THE COMMUNITY**

- **Very Negative**: 89% (WAVE 1), 86% (WAVE 2), 83% (WAVE 3), 80% (WAVE 4)
- **Slightly Negative**: 46% (WAVE 1), 47% (WAVE 2), 52% (WAVE 3), 38% (WAVE 4)
- **No Impact**: 43% (WAVE 1), 39% (WAVE 2), 31% (WAVE 3), 42% (WAVE 4)
- **Slightly Positive**: 8% (WAVE 1), 8% (WAVE 2), 7% (WAVE 3), 8% (WAVE 4)
- **Very Positive**: 3% (WAVE 1), 8% (WAVE 2), 5% (WAVE 3), 5% (WAVE 4)

**PERSONAL FINANCIAL SITUATION**

- **Very Negative**: 61% (WAVE 1), 64% (WAVE 2), 60% (WAVE 3), 55% (WAVE 4)
- **Slightly Negative**: 45% (WAVE 1), 41% (WAVE 2), 40% (WAVE 3), 44% (WAVE 4)
- **No Impact**: 25% (WAVE 1), 23% (WAVE 2), 29% (WAVE 3), 30% (WAVE 4)
- **Slightly Positive**: 6% (WAVE 1), 4% (WAVE 2), 7% (WAVE 3), 7% (WAVE 4)
- **Very Positive**: 9% (WAVE 1), 9% (WAVE 2), 4% (WAVE 3), 8% (WAVE 4)

**MENTAL HEALTH**

- **Very Negative**: 16% (WAVE 1), 23% (WAVE 2), 20% (WAVE 3), 11% (WAVE 4)
- **Slightly Negative**: 8% (WAVE 1), 8% (WAVE 2), 5% (WAVE 3), 5% (WAVE 4)
- **No Impact**: 8% (WAVE 1), 8% (WAVE 2), 8% (WAVE 3), 8% (WAVE 4)
- **Slightly Positive**: 4% (WAVE 1), 4% (WAVE 2), 7% (WAVE 3), 7% (WAVE 4)
- **Very Positive**: 9% (WAVE 1), 9% (WAVE 2), 4% (WAVE 3), 8% (WAVE 4)

The proportion of those reporting the pandemic is having a negative impact on community well-being is declining slowly but steadily. Positively, the proportion of those expecting a very negative impact has declined to 38%.

The pandemic continues to have a significant impact on business decision-makers personal financial situation, with 82% reporting a negative impact. Positively, 13% believe the pandemic is having a positive impact.

The negative toll on mental health continues to ease, with 55% now reporting a negative impact on their mental health. Those reporting a very negative impact has dropped by half to approx. one in ten (from one in five last wave).
PERSONAL WELL-BEING CONT...

% FELT WORRIED OVER THE LAST 2 WEEKS*

- 86% Always
- 75% Most of the time
- 32% Sometimes

% FELT ANGRY OVER THE LAST 2 WEEKS*

- 61% Always
- 48% Most of the time
- 50% Sometimes

% FELT OPTIMISTIC OVER THE LAST 2 WEEKS*

- 94% Always
- 74% Most of the time
- 75% Sometimes

% FELT HAPPY OVER THE LAST 2 WEEKS*

- 95% Always
- 73% Most of the time
- 91% Sometimes

METHODOLOGY

This is the fourth wave of PTI’s Pacific Business Monitor surveys.

Responses were collected 29 June - 12 July 2020.

A wide selection of industry sectors are represented.

The information in this report is based on 134 respondents from across the Pacific region.

5-minute questionnaire

All surveys completed online.

All respondents are decision-makers/owners in small and medium-sized businesses.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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