

Mount Isa Coaches have been able to continue serving their community with the help of COVID-19 Jobs Support Loans



+ COVID-19 Loans helping keep vital jobs in outback Queensland

Thousands of mine workers, school children and sports teams who depend on Mount Isa Coaches for transport in the outback town will be able to return to work, school and sport on board the essential service after COVID-19 travel restrictions ease.

A Queensland Government COVID-19 Jobs Support Loan was the 'perfect safety net' for Mount Isa Coaches co-director Alan Mathieson to help him continue supporting 10 local employees and maintain business operations.

The loan scheme administered by the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (QRIDA), provides finance of up to \$250,000 for businesses and non-profit organisations impacted by COVID-19 to assist with carry-on expenses such as employee wages, rent and rates and other expenditure.

Mr Mathieson said COVID-19 restrictions had forced the business to adapt but the wheels were still turning and those in the outback town were still able to get to work. He said while some services, such as town tours, had stopped, the buses were still an essential service.

Things are a little different on board the 20 coaches, which hundreds of mine workers depend on to get to work every week, with stringent cleaning in place and social distancing among passengers and staff.

"Given the tyranny of distance, the service was needed to transport people from our remote area to the coast. We would take rugby teams to the coast and the majority of people needed to move around. We provided that opportunity and a cost effective option so people were not isolated," Mr Mathieson said.

"The immediate effect of COVID-19 was we thought that was it, everyone had been isolated and had to shut up

shop but we then understood what was essential and we are allowed to adapt and change our business to suit the restrictions put in place.

"As long as it's done so safely, we are an essential service so we are cleaning and due to social distancing, instead of one bus we need three."

Mr Mathieson said the COVID-19 Jobs Support Loan allowed all 10 staff to retain their positions which provided vital flow-on effects to the Mount Isa community.

"We have been able to look after our staff. We have kept everybody on and that's thanks to the QRIDA loan. It is certainly helping with working capital and cash flow month to month and it means we will get through the next six month period," he said.

"It has given us extra breathing space in trying to forecast where the business was heading and we can maintain drivers and wages through the highs and lows. Keeping that consistency has given us all peace of mind because cash flow trickles down through the whole community. You don't realise how far a dollar goes in a community until times like these."

Mr Mathieson said he was able to complete the application within half an hour and the loan was approved within days.

"I found it extremely easy. I thought it was a simple process to apply for the funds which take that uncertainty and worry out of what has happened and with such good terms. It was the perfect safety net," he said.

For more information see www.qrida.qld.gov.au/covid19jobssupportloans or **Freecall 1800 623 946**.

QRIDA is delivering the \$1 billion COVID-19 Jobs Support Loan Scheme on behalf of the Queensland Government.

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