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Media Release

Travel restrictions to Malta: Misguided and erroneous decisions taken by Government - MEA

The Malta Employers' Association stated that the travel restrictions being imposed by many countries to travellers coming to Malta are mainly the result of misguided and erroneous decisions taken by government. In particular, the UK restrictions on travellers to Malta now rule out an early tourism recovery.

The Association said that it is tragic that, after so much sacrifice made by companies, employees, hospital staff and vulnerable persons, success was registered and the situation was in control. Government also introduced a well designed stimulus package to keep the economy running through the summer months. In response to the package, the MEA had stated that: *'The effectiveness of this package will depend on the business response to these fiscal injections, and also on **the need to strictly enforce public health measures to keep the numbers of infected persons to a minimum and thus prevent a relapse which will be damaging and costly***'.

Government has opted for selective consultation with lobbyists, resulting in a misguided repositioning of Malta's tourism product. The result is that hotels are reporting massive cancellations, the catering industry faces bleak prospects once the voucher spree subsides. Government will now have to pump more millions to keep the economy running. Many companies are losing business, and families their livelihood because of the capricious lobbying of a few operators who stood to gain from turning Malta into a party island.

The Association said that it was in favour of opening the airport and to target tourists which would have posed minimum risk of contagion, concurrent with strict control of mass events held locally. If such a strategy had been adopted, there is a high probability that the current situation would have been avoided, and Malta would still be welcoming tourists from safe destinations in a controlled environment. Although this would not have been a guarantee that the number of covid cases would not have increased, Government would not have been held to account and the chances of a fast economic recovery would have been higher. It was also generally acknowledged that tourist arrivals were expected to be low compared to

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previous years, but now the outcome of this scenario will be much worse than the alternatives.

As things stand, affected companies will be expecting an extension of the fiscal measures to keep them running and to prevent massive layoffs in the coming months, which will cost government and taxpayers millions. It is hoped that the funds allocated by the EU will be sufficient to support industry and jobs until the situation improves.