

TOURISM RESTART TASKFORCE

Key Issues Meeting #3, 15 May 2020



Airline Recovery

To assist the Taskforce in better understanding the potential road to recovery for airlines and air routes, the meeting was joined by Andrew Hogg, Executive GM Eastern Markets and Aviation, Tourism Australia. Andrew presented an analysis of the key tourism routes into Australia, looking at countries that may open up sooner, but also being aware of difficulties around hubs/transit stops. TA had been in regular consultation with the airlines, understanding the need for them to be confident there will be demand before they can build capacity and grow flight frequency.

It was noted that IATA had predicted that, globally, airlines will be at 50% pre-COVID capacity by the end of 2020 and may only return to pre-COVID capacity by the end of 2022. Business travel and Visiting Friends and Relatives was expected to return quicker than leisure, and confidence to travel was key.

Airlines do not look at Australia as a single destination, and some capital city airports may receive flights quicker than others. This was also true domestically, where some destinations will see capacity partially restored more quickly

Managing the hygiene risk on planes and at airports was critical to restart and there was a discussion about the difficulties created by 1.5 m social distancing as this would make flights uneconomic. Some airports had proactively installed temperature checking. Managing the use of toilets on planes and reducing the food service were other practices that were part of making passengers feel safe.

The need for increased freight was a driver for reopening as over 85% of freight travelled on passenger aircraft. Bringing international students in for the second semester was also a key driver.

Easing of Restrictions

The Taskforce noted the announcements made by State and Territory Governments since the National Cabinet meeting last week. Some frustrations were expressed that a number of states had not announced the opening of hospitality venues, and that most states went no further than the national cabinet guidelines for venue capacity or travel restrictions. The Taskforce commented that it had not been properly explained why the limit for a gathering had been applied as a venue capacity even where they had multiple dining areas as there did not seem to be any health reason why. This restriction means that larger pubs and restaurants would remain closed, or still limit themselves to take away.

It was noted that the New Zealand approach had been to limit groups rather than total customers to 10, with social distancing of 1 m. It was hard to understand why health advice in that country, where they clearly also wanted to limit the spread of COVID, could result in restrictions that were much more conducive to better business and customer service outcomes than the Australian rules.

4 square metre rule

The Taskforce continued to express concern and frustration that having only 1 customer per 4 sq metres in hospitality dining areas was still included in both the national cabinet guidelines and most of the State and Territory requirements.

It was noted that ACCI had held extensive discussions with the National COVID Coordination Commission and other key agencies in Canberra and had presented evidence of why the rule was so limiting to venues. It was noted that the health authorities had not done an adequate job of explaining why this rule was needed on top of the 1.5 m social distancing rule. At seated venues, with household groups seated together, more customers could be served safely keeping the diners and groups 1.5 m apart than would be the case under the 4 sq m rule.

A letter from Business SA to the SA Government drawing that government's attention to the same issues was tabled and acknowledged as a good example of the importance of advocacy at both national and state/territory level.

Industry protocols

ACCI reported on the extensive negotiations they had been having with the NCCC and other lead agencies such as the Attorney General's department and Safe Work Australia to encourage governments to accept that safety can be assured through strong industry protocols rather than a "one size fits all" regulatory approach. Protocols will better educate and guide the industry sectors to safe practices in a way that deals with the specific issues for both workers and customers. The customer-facing nature of tourism businesses meant that the approach needed to be broader than just worker safety.

Timetable for Restart

The Taskforce reviewed a draft timetable for restart that illustrated the aspiration of the industry in each of the key segments including dining, pubs, events, domestic and international travel. The taskforce sought to include in the summary tourist attractions, ticketed events and cultural institutions and a revised draft will be reviewed at the next meeting. Cruises, along with other transportation options, would be included in domestic and international travel categories.

Crisis Response over 3 phases

The Taskforce noted the extensive input that had been provided by members of Aus Chamber Tourism Committee and Taskforce members to highlight the key issues in the 3 phases of the recovery process: hibernation, Immediate road out, and medium to long term issues. The importance of continuing JobKeeper for businesses still impacted by restrictions still in operation in September, such as larger events, cruises and international travel was strongly stated.

Next Meeting was set for Friday, 22 May 2020 at 3 pm, with guest Nev Power Chair of the NCCC.

In attendance:

- Dr Jeremy Johnson AM (Chair) (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry)
- The Hon. Bruce Baird AM (Business Events Sydney, TTF)
- Sarina Bratton AM (Ponant)
- Geoff Donaghy (BECA, ASM Global, ICC Sydney)
- Bob East (Tourism Australia)
- Nikki Govan (Star of Greece)
- Denis Pierce (Australian Tourism Export Council)
- Graham (Skroo) Turner (Flight Centre)
- Jacqui Walshe (The Walshe Group)
- John Hart (Australian Chamber – Tourism)

Apology

- The Hon. Martin Ferguson AM (Tourist Accommodation Australia)

Secretariat

- Jenny Lambert, Director – Tourism at ACCI
- Sophie Lebang, Policy Officer
- Krithika Gururaj, Senior Policy Advisor
- Jennifer Low, Policy Director WHS, ACCI

Observers

- John Parlett, Austrade
- Jarrod Mander, Tourism Australia
- Guest Andrew Hogg