

# TOURISM RESTART TASKFORCE



## Key Issues Meeting #4, 22 May 2020

### Meeting with National COVID Coordination Commission

The Taskforce was joined by the Chair of the National COVID Coordination Commission (NCCC) Nev Power and Head of Treasury's COVID Business Liaison Unit (CBLU), Charlotte Tressler. Nev acknowledged the value of the contribution being made by ACCI in working with the NCCC on protocols and restart options.

The NCCC Chair said that its work had shifted from crisis management mode, such as dealing with insufficient PPE, to "living with the virus" phase which included getting the right protocols for business so that they can reopen without seeing large outbreaks. It was important to do this in a progressive but disciplined way so that the virus does not return to the extent that things need to close down again.

The NCCC has raised issues with the health officials that were important to tourism such as the 1 person per 4 sq m rule and the cap on customers. This had given the NCCC a good insight into the health concerns including the epidemiological risk of the virus spreading in large groups.

For some states, the restrictions were being eased quicker than expected, but some are adopting a more conservative path. There were also issues around vulnerable communities, such as remote indigenous communities, that was driving a cautious approach. The tourism industry was strongly encouraged to raise their issues at State government level, as it was increasingly clear that each state was choosing its own path.

#### *More certainty Needed*

The Taskforce sought the support of the NCCC for a more certain timetable for Step 3 and beyond, to encompass international travel and events larger than 100 people. The NCCC said that these two areas were difficult from a health point of view and encouraged the industry to look at the risk mitigators that can be put in place for gatherings larger than 100. The distinction between a controlled business event and other types of events was discussed. International travel was going to be the hardest and appealing for Australians to holiday at home was a priority. The Taskforce Chair pointed out that for domestic tourism to play a stronger role, lifting the state border closures was essential.

For JobKeeper to play an ongoing role, the NCCC needed more data to plead the case to go beyond September.

#### *Capacity Caps for hospitality*

With the announcement from the NSW Government of the increase from 1 June from 20 people to 50 people, it was acknowledged there had been some progress but more was needed to reflect the size of venue. ACCI was to continue to work with the NCCC, but action by the industry to progress the hospitality restart proposal with the state governments was critically important.

### Meeting with the Minister for Trade, Tourism & Investment

The Taskforce was then joined by the Tourism Minister, Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham. He expressed his appreciation for the work of the Taskforce and noted the massive blow to tourism from first the bushfires and then COVID. It was one of the first industries hit and will be the last to completely restart. The government will be mindful of the tapering of JobKeeper in industries that continue to be suffering from restrictions in place.

The Minister said in focusing on rebuilding demand, removing the state border closures was a key issue. He commented on the promotional work commenced by Tourism Australia and also acknowledged the important work done by industry to make tourism businesses COVIDSafe.

The Taskforce raised the issue of the 4 sq m rule and put forward the alternative hospitality restart proposal which was related to capacity. The Minister noted both the practical and financial implications of the rule and although the JobKeeper wage subsidies made the financial barriers easier, this was not going to last forever so better models were needed. The industry hospitality restart proposal might be an important step on the road to normality and he was happy to canvas it with the SA Premier and at federal level.

#### *JobKeeper*

This important support was set up in a short time frame. The Minister said that the review scheduled for June provided an opportunity for greater analysis, and to look at options going forward such as it not operating at a flat rate, or may not be for all staff, or it might continue for businesses still restricted by things such as the barrier on international travel. This will all be part of the review process, and he encouraged the Taskforce to provide feedback, keeping in mind there may be a point where JobKeeper may not be as broad but will be more targeted.

#### *Restart Timetable Certainty for International*

The Minister acknowledged it will be a cautious approach for travel: domestic, then NZ and only after that has happened safely will travel beyond that be considered.

#### *Business Events*

Protocols and controls for business events is an important distinction, and internet connectivity speed for events that include both physical and virtual presence are key elements. The Minister noted that Australia has enhanced its reputation as a safe destination, and this will be helpful in encouraging people to come back and to attract events to Australia.

#### *Domestic Expedition Travel*

The Minister agreed that there is a sensible distinction between the small, boutique, expedition operators and the cruise industry. Small, boutique expedition vessels have the capacity to operate in remote and regional areas of Australia, and he was happy to work with the industry to be inclusive in the restart for domestic tourists on expeditions in such localities as the Great Barrier Reef, Kimberley and Tasmania.

#### **Timetable for Restart**

The Taskforce reviewed the revised timetable for restart. It was agreed to separate the ticketed events from meetings >100 to reinforce the distinction between a controlled business event and other events. It was also noted that, given the feedback from both the NCCC and the Minister, the international travel timetable (other than NZ and the Pacific) should show progression from October rather than hard starts. With those changes, it was agreed that the Taskforce should advocate for restart certainty in accordance with the timetable.

**Next Meeting** was set for Friday, 29 May to be joined by NBN to discuss digital transformation issues.

**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)
- The Hon. Martin Ferguson AM (Tourist Accommodation Australia)
- Nikki Govan (Star of Greece)
- Denis Pierce (Australian Tourism Export Council)
- Jacqui Walshe (The Walshe Group)
- John Hart (Australian Chamber – Tourism)

**Apology**

- Graham (Skroo) Turner (Flight Centre)
- Bob East (Tourism Australia)

**Secretariat**

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

**Observers**

- Karen Jacobsen, Austrade
- Jarrod Mander, Tourism Australia

**Guests:**

- Minister for Trade, Tourism & Investment, Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham
- Nev Power, Chair of the National COVID Coordination Commission (NCCC)
- Charlotte Tressler, Head of Treasury's COVID Business Liaison Unit (CBLU)