

TOURISM RESTART TASKFORCE

Key Issues Meeting #5, 29 May 2020



Meeting with NBN

The Taskforce was joined by the National Industry Engagement Manager of NBN, Chris Gregory and Segment Lead for Education, Tourism and the Arts Jennifer Ganske. Chris Gregory provided an update on the latest NBN upgrades focusing on reliability. He said that in the week prior to Easter there were 42,000 new connections which was the highest ever. Since more people started working from home, there had been a 100% increase in normal traffic during the day, but still a 30% headspace in capacity. Half of all Australians in their survey had increased their on-line shopping; 70% said they wanted to support their local businesses but were not able to due to the lack of online options. He noted that 3 million NBN business customers were still on consumer grade connections. Jennifer Ganske said that NBN was focusing on digital in regional Australia.

The Taskforce commented that a significant challenge comes from running events, including hybrid events with virtual as well as physical presence. At present, there were no major issues with the NBN service but compared to other competing business events countries, speed of the service was not as great. Jennifer noted that hybrid events in regional Australia with a broadcasting model was a very topical issue in the current crisis.

The Taskforce questioned whether NBN was in a good place to manage the post-COVID world with higher demand for on-line activity. Chris Gregory assured them that they continue to upgrade both physical infrastructure and connectivity speed.

Finally, Chris Gregory provided the Taskforce with an overview of the \$150 million relief package which included assistance for SMEs who were unable to meet their monthly bills which is available until September although may be extended. The second part of the package waives wholesale fees of upgrading from consumer to business packages available until January.

State and Territory Movement and Gathering Restrictions

The Taskforce noted the announcements during the week, including the prospect that some states will allow dining up to 50 in each dining area of a large venue which was a significant step forward.

The closure of State Borders remained a priority issue. It was concerning that a number of State Governments had shifted from the arguments that it is based on health advice to justification built around the number of their own citizens that holidayed interstate, and the opportunity for them to holiday at home. This was questionable as the drivers in the choice of holiday destination did not always lead to a substitution, and that it was unlikely that people would spend as much on holidays within their state resulting in a reduction in tourism spend overall.

It was noted that in WA and Queensland, the local industry had been focused on ensuring the intrastate borders and movements restrictions were lifted.

It was agreed that the Taskforce needed to focus on delivering the message that for domestic tourism to restart and bounce back the opening of state borders was a fundamental issue.

JobKeeper

In reviewing the range of uses raised by members of relevant to restart, the extension of JobKeeper for tourism was seen as one of the highest priorities. Support was for the current system to be extended rather than changing any of the eligibility such as for casuals.

The positive comments about the possibility of JobKeeper extension made by the Minister in the last week were noted, although there had been mixed messages during the week as to whether there will be extensions. The general view was that if it was to be extended at all, then tourism was the most likely recipient given the closedown of most activities and travel bans.

ACCI's JobKeeper proposal including the extension of JobKeeper for travel and tourism businesses was noted. The Taskforce indicated they wish to engage further on this issue at their next meeting.

Priorities for Action

In reviewing the other issues raised in the summary table, it was agreed that the Taskforce would focus on a few core priorities, rather than pursuing a wide range of issues. The broader range of issues would be best left to ACCI and the members to pursue in its budget submissions to government. The core issues for the Taskforce would be State Borders, easing of restrictions (restart proposals including the numbers of people allowed in venues), JobKeeper, and the Restart Timetable including international travel recommencement.

Timetable for Restart

The Taskforce noted the significant interest by media and industry with the release of the Taskforce timetable. Overwhelmingly the feedback from industry had been positive. Although there had been some questions over the proposed restart timing for events over 100 people, this was noted as being more about increasing the understanding of the issues. Also, social events such as weddings had been raised but it was agreed that it was not the role of the Taskforce to include these event types in its tourism timetable. The Live Performance industry was providing more input into the proposed timing for ticketed events and this would be provided to the Taskforce once received.

Australia/New Zealand/Pacific Travel Bubble

A report was provided on the advocacy to date on the Travel Bubble, including the heightened media interest. There had been considerable success in putting the "proof of concept" proposal being advanced by Aus Chamber Tourism and other key stakeholders including the ACT Government and Canberra Airport for flights to start as early as 1 July between Wellington and Canberra. This proposal was designed to sharpen the focus on restarting sooner than otherwise may have been achieved with other routes.

Next Meeting was set for Friday, 6th of June with a focus on JobKeeper. After this meeting, the frequency will revert to fortnightly.

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)
- The Hon. Martin Ferguson AM (Tourist Accommodation Australia)
- Nikki Govan (Star of Greece)

- Graham (Skroo) Turner (Flight Centre)
- Jacqui Walshe (The Walshe Group)
- John Hart (Australian Chamber – Tourism)

Apology

- Denis Pierce (Australian Tourism Export Council)

Secretariat

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

Observers

- Lynne Ashpole, Austrade
- Jarrod Mander, Tourism Australia

Guests:

- National Industry Engagement Manager of the NBN, Chris Gregory
- Segment Lead for Education, Tourism and the Arts of the NBN Jennifer Ganske