

TOURISM RESTART TASKFORCE



Key Issues Meeting #12, 25 September 2020

On commencement, the Chair noted the loss of the Hon John Fahey AC and acknowledged his contribution to public life.

Industry Update

The Taskforce expressed deep frustration over the reoccurring message that tourism is going OK as some tourism businesses, particularly in the regions close to metropolitan areas are doing well from intrastate tourists. While a small proportion may be busy, this is by far not indicative of the entire industry. Hospitality businesses in most of the cities were doing particularly poorly as were regions and businesses which were previously highly reliant on international tourism. The ABS Tourism Satellite statistics starkly illustrated the extent of job losses.

State Borders and Certainty Framework

The Taskforce discussed a number of recent announcements, including the South Australian border reopening to New South Wales and increased capacity for outdoor events in Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia. All new announcements were welcomed, with the hope that other states and territories would follow suit with further restrictions easing.

The Taskforce discussed the draft certainty framework initially developed by ACCI but now backed by a range of industry groups including the BCA and AiG. Currently, National Cabinet is focused on defining a COVID hotspot which is an important element of the draft framework and will be the centre of discussions at the next National Cabinet meeting on the 16th of October 2020.

Tourism Restart Plan

The Taskforce reviewed the Proposed Tourism Restart Timetable 2.0, which reflects what industry feels are realistic restart targets for governments and health authorities to consider given the current COVID conditions. The timetable focuses on restriction easing in Victoria, followed by state border reopening and international travel restart, both inbound and outbound. The Taskforce discussed the timetable, including noting that the 2 sq m rule for dining while implemented in some jurisdictions, has not adopted in all states and territories and needs to be included in the timetable. Subject to the insertion of dining, the timetable was approved.

The Taskforce was updated on progress with the business events proposal, including welcoming the \$50 million package to help kick-start the \$36 billion business events sector, which has been decimated by COVID-19. The Taskforce discussed the restrictions on business events, which in most jurisdictions include only seated alcohol service and no dance floors or cocktail functions. These restrictions continue represent vast inconsistencies between various types of events, as exemplified by a comparison of the same venue which hosted a business event restricted to 120 guests, while an arts event the night before was permitted to host 500 guests. The difference between a controlled event such as a business event and social events needs to be further highlighted to ensure appropriate restrictions are implemented.

International Travel Restart

In relation to international travel restart, the Taskforce reviewed the International Travel Restart proposal which presents a staged plan for reopening, which focuses on three key elements the international arrival passenger caps, leaving Australia and a plan for restart of international travel – “safe corridors”. The Taskforce noted to more hopeful commentary from the Prime Minister surrounding international travel

restart which will help progress this proposal. Australian Chamber – Tourism provided an update from the Friends of Tourism event, attended by the Minister for Trade, Tourism & Investment, the Hon Simon Birmingham where there was good support for this restart proposal.

International travel restart was dependent on the preparedness of airlines and airports, and a better understanding was needed about those activities. In particular, testing mechanisms and control of passenger flow to keep separated quarantine passengers from the hoped for travellers arriving who will not require quarantine such as from New Zealand. The potential success of rapid testing could also make a significant difference.

It was identified that one common approach was needed from all of tourism to ensure that the government was not needing to review multiple pathways to international travel Restart.

Tourism Support

The Taskforce commented on the follow up engagement with the Minister for Trade, Tourism & Investment and the letter to the Prime Minister regarding potential support for tourism in the upcoming budget. The Taskforce noted the overall sentiment received from government that the upcoming budget would focus on entire economy issues instead of industry specific support.

Tourism Future State Planning

Given the absence of a timetable beyond July, or greater certainty, the industry is in desperate need of a realistic outlook till the end of 2020 and beyond. The Taskforce discussed the updated Future State Planning Framework, which now includes four possible scenarios, all which take into account external factors such as the status of government restrictions, the health/ vaccine situation and customer travel habits. The scenarios are designed to help gauge the implications for the industry in the long run under various conditions, such as how many businesses will remain if international travel remains closed for another year should there be a third COVID wave. The Taskforce agreed that more industry insight is needed to help guide the understanding of the implications of the various scenarios, especially in relation to business insolvency under various circumstances. The Taskforce discussed the importance of survey work to seek from businesses directly what the implication so various conditions will be on their future.

Next Meeting was set for Monday, 19 October 2020 at 3 pm.

In attendance:

- Dr Jeremy Johnson AM (Chair) (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry)
- 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)
- Denis Pierce (Australian Tourism Export Council)
- Graham (Skroo) Turner (Flight Centre)
- Jacqui Walshe (The Walshe Group)
- John Hart (Australian Chamber – Tourism)

Apologies

- The Hon. Bruce Baird AM (Business Events Sydney, TTF)

Secretariat

- Jenny Lambert, Director – Tourism at ACCI
- Jen Low, Director WHS, ACCI
- Victoria Matterson, ACCI
- Sophie Lebang, ACCI

Observers

- Margaret Bowen, DFAT
- Leigh Sorensen, TA