

TOURISM RESTART TASKFORCE

Key Issues Meeting #14, 20 November 2020



Summary of National and State Announcements

The Taskforce expressed concern about the situation in South Australia, particularly with the reactionary closure of borders by other States and Territories. While the closure was largely the result of misinformation, it will take some time to revert to pre-shutdown restrictions. One of the purposes of the National Framework released by National Cabinet only two weeks previously was to guide jurisdictions to take action that was targeted and proportionate, and in this respect some of the State and Territory governments failed to comply with this intent.

International Tourism Restart

The Taskforce acknowledged the sobering outlook facing the restart of international travel, with the massive spikes in cases in Europe and North America making it especially hard to get traction. With the exception of New Zealand, the Prime Minister has acknowledged the Government is yet to identify another country that can be classified as low risk.

As a result of the SA cluster, the NZ bubble has been hindered, with reciprocal rights not currently under consideration from New Zealand. It is concerning that the NZ Prime Minister has indicated that Australia's lack of commitment to an eradication strategy could further inhibit opening up to quarantine free travel from Australia to NZ.

The news on the vaccine front has been positive, with a number of contenders likely to be able to rollout from the end of this year, and this has become the priority of CBLU.

It was confirmed the Prime Minister and his Japanese counterpart, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga discussed the potential for a travel bubble between Australia and Japan. Although these negotiations are ongoing, the rise in cases in Japan will mean that no decision will be imminent. Conversations between the various Chambers are focused on similar style arrangements with other countries as currently exists with New Zealand, and how digital apps could be utilised to track and trace in these scenarios.

The taskforce discussed the potential for using some of the rapid tests that are now available, however, to date only one has been approved by the TGA.

The taskforce discussed alternatives to hotel quarantine, however, the Prime Minister has noted no successful alternative has been approved as yet, nor was it under consideration to shorten the quarantine period to less than 14 days.

Guest Speaker- the Hon. Peter Dutton MP

The Hon. Peter Dutton MP, Minister for Home Affairs indicated recommencement of international travel at scale would be unlikely without a vaccine, as the limitations of caps and quarantine places in hotels would prevent widespread travel, especially given the Australian Government has prioritised the return of Australian citizens, so these places are needed for these travellers.

The Minister welcomed questions from taskforce members, and spoke of the Prime Minister's priority to have state and territory borders reopened by Christmas, and indicated a willingness for use of digital data collation to assist in this, identifying this as the priority focus outside the vaccine, to help enable

travel. He also recognised the importance of international students and looking at solutions to allow for their safe return, without a situation where they are using shared facilities (such as university halls of residence). Hotels at this stage remained the safest options for quarantine.

One of the challenges with managing inbound and quarantine is that flight manifests are often difficult to be up to date due to no-shows and people who travel on standby. Home Affairs is looking at a range of digital upgrades to improve this data accuracy. He also suggested that private sector technology solutions may be able to assist in checking and tracing.

The Minister outlined the role of states in determining the reopening of their borders for cruise ships through the AHPPC and the difficulty that sector will have restarting. He agreed that the smaller expedition cruise ships may be able to be progressed and offered to look into this further. He also spoke of the need to increase inbound travel caps, before outbound could be raised, in order to ensure people could return to Australia.

Domestic Tourism Update

The Taskforce acknowledged the positive news in domestic travel, with Qantas reporting significant increases in flight bookings. However, the speed at which hard borders were reinstated with the SA outbreak is of real concern, threatening the certainty people need to book travel. Achieving this certainty is a key priority.

Tourism Restart Plan

The taskforce noted the responsibility for increasing the caps on arrivals rests with the State Health Officers, with states continuing to make unilateral decisions. However, increasing the caps alone will not be enough to restart international tourism as travel that requires quarantine is not realistic for leisure tourists. The sobering message from the Minister around the need for a vaccine first was clear.

The decision of the Victorian Government to push back their acceptance of international travellers by another week was noted.

Next Meeting will be in mid-January 2021.

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)

Secretariat

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

Observers

- Margaret Bowen, DFAT
- Victoria Maigre, Tourism Australia

Guest

The Hon. Peter Dutton MP, Minister for Home Affairs

Apologies

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