

TOURISM RESTART TASKFORCE

Key Issues Meeting #17, 26 March 2021



Summary of National and State Announcements

The Taskforce welcomed the significant reduction in domestic restrictions, noting QLD and VIC having also announced changes this week, with VIC reinstating international flights. 28 days without a local case. Will place additional pressure on having hotel quarantine working. QLD has a new local active case, impacting the CBD.

NSW other restrictions easing on Monday but most progressive is SA with 3 people in 4sq m being announced for rollout next week.

Post March Support

The Chair acknowledged the comprehensive lobbying by John and Jenny on the support package which put forward a range of measures- some support, some stimulus. From our perspective there were some disappointing aspects in the announced package, and these are detailed in the papers. Specifically, the failure to include specific measures to support Sydney and Melbourne.

Following on from the Post March Support package announcements, we have put together a supplementary package which is aimed at next budget cycle, with view to adding in some additional support mechanisms, especially around including major cities. This proposal is seeking a compact between 3 levels of government around the cities, to ensure the promotion of city stays from the TA campaign will promote peoples' take up of these packages.

Other recommendations included an extension of the Zoos and Aquariums package, support for other travel operators including travel agents, and support for businesses to re-engage staff.

We continue to hear from the sector about the difficulties in finding staff and these staffing shortages are not just restricted to regional areas or those with lower trade. In the areas where the recovery is going well, many businesses continue to be constrained by lack of staff.

An update on cruising was provided. There remains a lot of concern about domestic cruise operation, and we recognise this is a beneficial activity to service cities. Discussion ensued around the lack of cruise visitation and the impact this has on ports, including regional ones. However, the industry feels there is no real progress being made. The Framework for a phased in approach was put forward by the Government in December but is yet to progress, and this was attributed to some States raising issues around their roles and responsibilities with shipping. The NT Government is also no longer allowing cruise crew to quarantine at Howard Springs. Ultimately for cruising to recommence, an exemption to the Bio-Security determination is required.

The industry was also critical of the rollout of the Business Events package and this needs additional modification.

IR Flexibility Omnibus Bill

The Acting Chair provided an update on the IR Bill. Item came to agenda around a question on the casual issue and fallout from WorkPac cases. One measure we advocated strongly was around casuals, with a revised definition for casual work and new integrity measures to recognise their status. Flip side is further obligation for casual conversion to part time, with some exemptions for small business.

Other key measures we were supportive of failed to pass, including flexibility around work hours. However, there may be potential to further include some of these measures award by award down the track.

Vaccine Rollout

ACCI has prepared a new report which incorporates the Restart agenda, but adds in vaccine data and identifies the issues with the rollout.

The Government is predicting to meet the expected rollout timeline. However, this may be based on people only having received the first of their two Astra-Zeneca vaccination shots by this date, instead of both.

This is based on the most recent rollout plan from Government, from the 14th March.

Senate Estimates has seen some discrepancies between the commentary from Professors Kelly and Murphy, especially around use of vaccine passports being speculative at this stage. This is contrary to what DFAT are saying.

Likely Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) and Business will drive the return to international travel, as opposed to leisure. But Europe so far behind in rollout and in the third wave.

Impact on Tourism Restart Timetable

Based on the vaccine information to date, the Taskforce agreed on no changes to the restart plan and timelines yet. However, this will be dependent on local vaccine manufacture capabilities, given the supply from Europe is not forthcoming.

In addition to this, we have no current data on vaccine hesitancy. Health have not done any further surveys, however, we recognise this could have changed with the Astra-Zeneca concerns in Europe around blood clotting.

Updating Reopening Framework

The Reopening Framework document was released in November last year by the Government and is now being updated to reflect the changing level of risk and to determine at what stage certain changes can be made, to provide greater certainty. This work is being led by PM&C.

A first draft has been provided to Peak business groups and conversations have been held with PM&C and Treasury. We are advocating for greater business certainty and a loose timeline at the very least. Proportionality of response was the other key issue with certainty.

Second draft due to be completed end of this week by PM&C and will go to First Secretaries Meeting for review early next week before consideration by National Cabinet.

The framework recognises the risk has changed. There is now a greater understanding of the virus, and knowledge of managing the virus, plus data around the efficacy of the vaccines. The aim is for this framework to be considered at National Cabinet at their 9th April meeting.

Tourism Restart

Our priority is for certainty around reopening. This includes considering not only the levels of restrictions that are imposed, but also those built in to the COVID-safe plans that haven't yet been updated. The Restart work incorporates the OECD testing framework. Including digital recognition of a persons' vaccination evidence or test results would further provide security.

The NZ reciprocal arrangement was discussed, and we are awaiting an announcement to be made on 6th April, with an expectation it should reopen around 19th, with Air New Zealand scheduling flights from then. It is expected it is just aviation not maritime.

Other Business

Regarding the supplementary support package, we are seeking agreement across the organisations and working to this end.

Proposal for the next meeting to focus on the next steps.

A discussion around insurance will be scheduled on the next agenda too, with the intention to draw in experts on this before we have an informed discussion.

Next Meeting

Dates to be circulated. Recommended either 23rd April or 7th May.

Meeting closed at 4.20pm.

In attendance:

- Dr Jeremy Johnson AM (Chair) (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry)
- Sarina Bratton AM (Ponant)
- Geoff Donaghy (BECA, ASM Global, ICC Sydney)
- The Hon. Martin Ferguson AM (Tourist Accommodation Australia)
- Denis Pierce (Australian Tourism Export Council)
- 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

Observers

- Megan Aponte-Payne, DFAT
- Emily Dann, National COVID Commission Advisory Board
- Victoria Maigre, Tourism Australia