

TOURISM RESTART TASKFORCE

Key Issues Meeting #16, 26 February 2021



Summary of National and State Announcements

The Taskforce welcomed the significant reduction in domestic restrictions and were hopeful this would provide more optimism for domestic tourism resumption. The increase to 75% capacity for Melbourne CBD was also welcomed, as this would help revive the local economy.

The Taskforce discussed the decision of the AFL to resume for the 2021 season with 50% capacity crowds.

Post March Support

With JobKeeper concluding at the end of March, the need for Post March support for businesses still impacted by Government restrictions has been the main focus over last few weeks. Substantial negotiation has been undertaken, with ACCI and members meeting with the Treasurer, Minister for Tourism and other key influencers as well as working with other tourism bodies to get consistency. Through all discussions in the last week it was clear a wage subsidy style proposal was not getting traction in Government, who have expressed their clear opposition.

Discussion ensued about support requirements for different sectors, with aviation and business events being eligible for customised support. It was clear that a revised package needed two elements: Support in the form of cash, grants and/or loans directly to a business was still dramatically impacted, a stimulus for those businesses that have the opportunity to trade out of difficulties provided that the domestic tourism environment improves. For example the Inbound Tour Operators, Travel Agents and others heavily reliant on international travel and little scope to pivot to domestic still need a greater level of support, as it will still be some months away before international travel is restored.

Vaccine Policy

The vaccine rollout marks the next stage in the COVID recovery and has a number of significant implications, potentially providing greater certainty for state borders to remain open and for international restart to commence.

The Government has appointed Phil Gatjens to head up a Taskforce to consider the changing risk environment as the vaccine continues to be rolled out. This will include assessments of the risk around community transmission and hotspots, recognising the further progressed the rollout is, the change in level of risk.

The Taskforce recognised that the health advisors early worries about ICU beds and hospitals being overwhelmed have been superseded by concerns that there is any community transmission at all. The "goalposts" have changed, and this has created community concern which has also changed their expectations. This has implications in understanding how the vaccination roll out will impact health advice, as there is no doubt that the vaccine will reduce hospitalisations.

There continues to be mixed messages about the impact of vaccines on international restart with a divergence in views presented between the senior health officials.

A challenge arises as it is not yet proven the extent to which the vaccine will prevent community transmission and the uptake by people will be a factor as well. Close observation of the variants is also

needed as there will need to be ongoing evaluation as to effectiveness of certain vaccines on new strains. Trying to anticipate this and see how Health may deal with these situations will be important.

The Taskforce noted the planned use of vaccines as means to address clusters of community transmission. This may see localised outbreaks addressed by a 'ring centring' approach, and vaccinating people instead of locking them down.

It was highlighted that there needs to be a more positive focus on the benefits of the vaccine rollout. Instead, we are seeing the media making a fuss over single incidents. There is a need for more positive messaging.

Restart Timetable

The Vaccine rollout plan has potentially provided far greater certainty for the restart timetable. ACCI has updated the proposed restart timetable with the vaccine timetable.

Increasingly Australia is in the position where there will no longer be any justification for lockdowns, especially once the most vulnerable have been vaccinated, expected by April. However, news on the New Zealand front is not looking overly optimistic, with ski operators expecting just domestic travellers, due to the emerging Auckland cluster.

As the rollout progresses, the risk profile will adjust. When applied for domestic travel restrictions, by 1 August there should no longer be any justification for restrictions. This logic could then be extrapolated out to cover the international restart. It is expected that outbound sentiment will drive public sentiment here, with people likely to be eager to travel once they have been vaccinated.

The Taskforce discussed the work being undertaken by DFAT on safe travel zones, based on the OECD framework. This proposes a regime that categorises travel from low, medium and high risk. There remains an ongoing issue with the management of caps of returning Australians, however, once the vaccine is fully rolled out, this should cease to be a barrier.

The Taskforce endorsed the revised timetable.

Next Meeting will be 26th March 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)
- Nikki Govan (Star of Greece)
- Graham (Skroo) Turner (Flight Centre)
- Jacqui Walshe (The Walshe Group)
- John Hart (Australian Chamber – Tourism)

- Bob East (Tourism Australia)

Secretariat

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

Observers

- Margaret Bowen, DFAT
- Victoria Maigre, Tourism Australia
- Roslyn Bell, NCC

Apologies

- The Hon. Martin Ferguson AM (Tourism Accommodation Australia)
- Denis Pierce (Australian Tourism Export Council)