

TOURISM RESTART TASKFORCE

Key Issues Meeting #15, 21 January 2021



Summary of National and State Announcements

The Taskforce expressed concern about States and Territories failing to adhere to the National Framework for Reopening, with States and Territories still closing borders to whole States, despite there only being localised outbreaks. It was noted that Australian Airports Association research showed more travelers are concerned about being stranded interstate as a result of rapid border closures, than are worried about contracting COVID.

Debrief on meeting with Minister for Trade, Tourism & Investment

The Taskforce discussed the key issues arising from the meeting on Monday with the Minister. The most prominent issue was support for hospitality, events and tourism businesses post JobKeeper, recognising that these are industries most impacted by Government restrictions. The NZ model of Government loans was touted as one option, however, there are some initial reports of high levels of bureaucracy. The Taskforce resolved to investigate this.

International Tourism Restart

The Taskforce acknowledged the work being done in an attempt to get agreement from the Federal Government on classifying travellers by degree of risk, depending on where they are coming from and restarting travel where the risk can be managed. The international restart proposal sent to Government was discussed which is based on parameters around risk, and would require the willingness of partners, for example airports and State Governments, to see if particular airports and routes could be dedicated to servicing passengers based on risk. They could have different caps, based on risk too. The experience of Tennis Australia in the lead up to the Australia Open shows why this would be a better approach, as players from all countries would not be bundled together but separated based on degree of risk.

It was noted that there was a strong priority to help Australians seeking to return, which would be a constant demand on the limited caps. If the grading of passengers was adopted by the Government, this would enable Australians from lower risk jurisdictions to come home in greater numbers outside of, or under a separate, caps.

Guest Speaker- Frances Lisson, DFAT, International Restart Group

Ms Lisson spoke of the DFAT group's two-track focus on reopening to certain countries and identifying priority cohorts. The Group are keen to look at bringing back international students and developing travel bubbles.

However, the outbreaks in the last few weeks involving the UK strain of the virus has made things more difficult domestically with state borders coming back up and this has hindered their work.

The Taskforce asked about what was necessary to enable travel going forward, and whether there was a particular metric or benchmark. Vaccines were identified as the key to resumption of travel but it was noted that they are not a silver bullet as they may not impact on reducing transmission, so quarantine will still be necessary. Very focused on working with likeminded countries around recognition standards that will enable confidence so we can get back to better movement of people. The virus being better contained overseas will also assist.

The DFAT Group is looking closely at other countries and ensuring they have up to date and accurate advice around their management of COVID-19, in order to classify countries by risk, and get as many into the green or amber classification, to consider travel corridors. Pacific countries are being prioritised, due to low risk. However, not just looking at whether they have cases, but also the testing regime.

The Taskforce welcomed the opportunity to keep lines of communication open but affirmed how frustrated the tourism industry felt in the lack of whole-of-government commitment to provide a path to travel restart that provided avenues more promising than a statement that international travel will not restart in 2021. There needs to be more hope than this.

Tourism Post March Support

The Taskforce circulated a proposal to members for Government support for tourism beyond March. The paper recognises this is broader than just tourism, including a range of businesses. It was acknowledged that the most important thing are principles which highlight that the best support governments can deliver is greater certainty in domestic borders, a path to restart international travel and effective vaccine roll out. The proposal seeks to target the support to those still heavily impacted by Government restrictions and will deliver high economic, job creation into future. Ongoing support is an issue of fairness. These businesses have been most impacted by restrictions and are suffering through no fault of their own. They need this in order to survive and available to operate post-COVID. It is crucial to maintain the skilled workforce.

The paper considers options for what support measures could look like and levels of support including turnover benchmarks and the level of support per employee. The proposal continues the idea of wage subsidy, retains the existing delivery mechanism of JobKeeper and the Taskforce seeks the support of the whole sector to demonstrate a unified approach.

Insurance

Insurance remains a concern, and ACCI are advocating on this with Government. The industry is welcome to feed in their experience. The ASBFEO report was noted and stressed Government intervention is needed to underpin and correct market failure.

Next Meeting will be the 26th February.

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

Secretariat

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

Observers

- Margaret Bowen, DFAT
- Victoria Maigre, Tourism Australia
- Emily Dann, National COVID Commission Advisory Board

Guest

Frances Lisson, DFAT International Restart Group