

7 July 2020

AUSTRALIA – TRAVEL ACROSS IT, NOT OVER IT

It's no newsflash to any of us that the long distance, tour, charter and express sector has been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The tourism sector is flatlining in the wake of national and international travel bans, isolation, physical distancing measures and border shut-down.

The coach sector has gone from carrying more than 500,000 passengers every day to being at a virtual standstill. The sector has no clear path to recovery with many operators forced to park up coaches, thousands of mini-bus services and 70% of mum and dad operators may have to shut up shop.

Despite the current environment, many with whom I have spoken, remain positive, even in the direct line of fire. An impressive and commendable outlook particularly when it is difficult to envisage a positive turnaround for at least 12 to 18 months. So much of our coach sector provides a domestic tourist and community services (charter) to every-day Australians. It is important to acknowledge the vital contribution of the coach sector to the local economies across cities, towns and regional centres across Australia, and the important role it can play in the recuperation of the economy.

It is important to note that a large percentage of the coach travel economy is generated from domestic tourists and local charter (eg. sports, local groups and educational). The National Visitor Survey (NVS) year ended March 2018, clearly reflects this with 3,161,000 domestic trips that were taken by coach compared with 292,000 international visitors; 34% of the total international visitors also chose to travel across Australia, to see regional Australia.

The BIC has been very busy over the past few months working with the Federal Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, the National Covid-19 Coordination Commission (NCCC) and consulting to the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. A significant part of our Covid-19 work program is providing impact reports and key recommendations. The BIC has a number of key initiatives for the coach sector and we have written formally to the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, all Premiers, Treasurers, Transport and Tourism Ministers on a number of occasions. This was recently ramped up with a national media campaign with a call to action from governments on a rescue package for our sector.

Our top 3 rescue proposals are:

1. Immediate financial assistance to provide a full diesel rebate (as happens in the mining sector).
2. The extension of JobKeeper for our industry beyond September. For the purposes of eligibility for government support and initiatives, the services undertaken in the regulated (government contracts) and deregulated (coach tours and charter) environments need to be considered as separate "business units" or entities.
3. Consideration of a travel rebate for fares to encourage Australians to travel by coach across the nation, not over it. This potentially will also provide a significant injection into the local economy of regional towns across Australia.

We have also called for cooperation and support from the National Cabinet and Departments of Education to provision a return to school tourism/excursions as part of the normal curriculum.

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View from Canberra



The BIC has also been working closely with the national Tourism Restart Taskforce (TRT) and the Tourism Chamber (ACCI) of which BIC is a member. The TRT is a committee of tourism and hospitality organisations headed up by ACCI, Austrade, Federal Treasury and the National Covid-19 Coordination Commission. The aim of TRT is to provide advice to the Australian government. On July 4, the Taskforce reported back to the Australian government on how best to restart tourism and related operations in Australia. The report did not hold back on its review of the \$125 billion tourism dollars at stake and provided a concise look at the issues across all sectors (including our coach sector) and indicated to government that “coach tourism has been decimated by the Covid-19 pandemic”.

The tourism restart plan can be downloaded from the Industry Hub (ozebus.com.au/covid) and is well worth your time to read. The Hub is essentially a resource centre for Industry in these times of Covid-19 but importantly contains a number of campaigns, reports and various activities that the BIC has undertaken to help Industry through this difficult period. I encourage you to share the link to the Hub (ozebus.com.au/covid) with your peers and associates.

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