



16th February 2017

Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia  
Committee Secretariat  
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To the Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia,

**RE: Inquiry into Opportunities and Methods for Stimulating the Tourism Industry in Northern Australia**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into your inquiry.

The Tourism and Events Industry makes a significant contribution to the Northern Australian regional economy. The tourism industry is still a relatively small sector compared to the mining and agricultural sectors in terms of economic impact but it is a sustainable long term it is seen as part of a sustainable long-term pathway towards a diversified and vibrant economy. It is pleasing to see that the terms of reference for the inquiry are broad, as the tourism industry touches on many different areas of the economy.

I will outline the roles and responsibilities of the Outback Queensland Tourism Association; followed by a discussion on the areas of importance we have identified to stimulate tourism growth and the economy across Northern Australia.

**OUTBACK QUEENSLAND TOURISM ASSOCIATION**

Outback Queensland Tourism Association (OQTA) is the peak destination marketing body representing Outback Queensland; one of thirteen such Regional Tourism Organisations (RTO's) in Queensland. Outback Queensland Tourism Association operates as a private sector membership-based organisation. Members include a diverse range of industry and government stakeholders, from local shops to iconic events. Outback Queensland Tourism Association covers 65% of the state of Queensland.

Queensland's Outback is a vast, rugged and unspoilt destination, offering a variety of natural, cultural and historical attractions. National parks and the natural features of the landscape cater for a range of special interest activities, including inland fishing, dinosaur 'digs', fossicking, bird watching and four wheel driving as well as some of the world's best star gazing and rural experiences. The destination boasts numerous authentic heritage attractions and vibrant country towns that bring the legends and the stories of the 'outback' to life.



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Queensland's Outback is famous for its characters, culture, history and ancient landscapes, where visitors feel the genuine Aussie embrace of a vast network of welcoming communities. The destination boasts numerous authentic heritage attractions and vibrant country towns that bring the legends and the stories of the 'outback' to life.

Over the past three years visitation to the Outback region increased 12.3% to 539,000. There were increases in all key domestic visitor types, with holiday visitors leading the charge and reaching a record high 227,000 visitors. Holiday visitors increased 27.6%, those visiting friends and relatives increased 18.2% and business visitors increased 5.7%.

In a world where ecological habitats are disappearing, the unique natural assets of the Queensland Outback will become a strong drawcard.

*Domestic and international tourism comprising: recreational, environmental, cultural, educational, and industrial tourism;*

## **KEY ITEMS FOR TOURISM GROWTH IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIA**

### **INDIGENOUS OFFERINGS**

Australia's Indigenous culture sets us apart from countries around the world. We need to build Indigenous offerings so that the culture and its relationship with our extraordinary landscapes, combine to provide travellers with a truly unique experience in Outback Queensland. An Indigenous experience is now an essential element of the Australian tourism experience. We recommend that local Indigenous groups are encouraged to provide authentic Indigenous cultural experiences to tourists through product development.

### **PRESERVATION OF NATURAL ATTRACTIONS**

We need to preserve natural attractions in the region for generations to come and make them more accessible with sealed roads. Roads leading to Lark Quarry and the Age of Dinosaurs near Winton for example, become inaccessible when it rains causing significant issues for those travelling with caravans who become stuck at their current location or bogged when they try and get out, which in turn cuts up the access road and causes damage that needs to be fixed for the safety of other travellers. There are many locations right throughout Outback Queensland who face these same access issues.

### **EDUCATIONAL TOURISM**

Educational tourism is one of the fastest growing areas of the travel and tourism industry. An increase in educational experiences is needed to promote authentic Australian history to domestic and international students. In order to accommodate educational groups, larger accommodation facilities and amenities are required, which would be beneficial when hosting larger events thus



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enabling towns to better handle an irregular influx of tourists. We require interpretive signs in major foreign languages including Mandarin and Cantonese to guide and assist international tourism.

The North West region of Outback Queensland is rich in dinosaurs and dinosaur experiences. The building of associated infrastructure such as parking space, picnic and rest room facilities, walking trails and guided tour facilities are needed to support this tourism niche. Coordination and cross promotion with dinosaur attractions across the region including the Australian Age of Dinosaurs, Lark Quarry Dinosaur Trackway, Richmond's Kronosaurus Korner and the Riversleigh World Heritage Fossil Site offers significant potential for growing the dinosaur experience for domestic and international travellers. Funding is needed to support palaeontologists and dinosaurs digs to discover and extract more dinosaurs and provide education tourism opportunities.

## **INDUSTRIAL TOURISM**

An increase in Industrial Tourism with more interpretive centres and historical offerings about the resource sector in Northern Australia is an opportunity for growth. Outback Queensland is home to mineral deposits of coal, lead, zinc, copper and graphite. These areas need to be made more accessible to tourists through interpretation utilising signage, web sites, product development and training of staff. The Outback at Isa is a prime example of successful Industrial Tourism with their historical mine site tours. A range of infrastructure and viewing platforms are required to respond to tourism growth.

*The role of peak bodies, local communities, and all levels of government in developing and promoting tourism opportunities nationally and internationally, including regulations and workforce issues that may inhibit tourism development;*

## **PEAK BODIES**

Outback Queensland Tourism Association plays an essential role as the regional tourism organisation responsible for implementing marketing strategies to promote Outback Queensland as a travel destination. Outback Queensland Tourism Association also has an important role in representing the region in any discussions with Government or any other authorities to assist in planning, developing and promoting the region and to protect the interests of the region. At a local level OQTA promotes, assists and encourages the training of employers and employees so that they may be enabled to provide better and more efficient service to tourists and other visitors. More funding is needed for training opportunities in the region. Funding for RTO's is critical in ensuring individual regions can be marketed as travel destinations, with experienced staff on the ground to deliver results.

In Northern Australia, Councils are an integral partner in the development and promotion of tourism. Accredited Visitor Information Centres in Outback Queensland are run by Councils who employ both staff and volunteers to deliver this service to travellers. Councils are also responsible



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for road maintenance in their Shire and provide financial and in kind support for both major and community events in their region. Every year demountable toilets and showers are brought in for the Julia Creek Dirt and Dust Festival for example. Funding for more permanent and portable amenities across the Outback region is required to help events grow and cater for large numbers of travellers. Accreditation for remote Visitor Information Centres needs to be reviewed.

We recommend structural reform for Regional Tourist Organisations throughout Australia and believe that the Federal government should play a part in introducing a levy through the GST to provide funding for State Tourism Organisations and Regional Tourism Organisations across Australia.

## **ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT**

Funding for product development for new products and refreshment of existing products is the cornerstone for the success of tourism in Outback Queensland. Without appropriate products or services that are relevant to visitor demand the industry cannot survive.

Low cost loans available to operators to kick start a tourism business is needed in Northern Australia. There is potential for businesses to be successful but operators do not have the financial capacity to make a large initial investment in regional and remote communities. Operators also need to be supported with business plans and marketing plans to help drive direction and success in their business.

## **WORKFORCE ISSUES**

There is a high turnover of staff in Outback Queensland due to the isolation. Remote incentives such as housing, electricity, health care and airfares need to be available to ensure staff stay on. In the Outback our remote areas have difficulty attracting workers in the tourist season, with backpackers filling these gaps. The introduction of the backpacker tax will have ramifications for the tourism industry in Northern Australia. Backpackers will be less likely to work and travel throughout Australia if they have less money. The tourism industry needs to maintain its strong links with backpackers who ultimately hold the industry together. The backpacker tax will negatively impact the Outback – an area that is already struggling with negative impacts from the extended drought. We recommend that backpackers working in remote Australia be tax exempt.

*Communication and transport infrastructure (particularly air, sea, road and rail transport and port infrastructure) which may facilitate and grow tourism.*

## **IMPROVED TRANSPORT ACCESS**

Improved road, rail and air infrastructure and services for access and connectivity between regions within the Outback is required to build and sustain tourism and local communities. Sealed roads to



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provide better access for travellers to the Outback, and to decrease transport times and costs for transport companies will assist the agricultural and mining sectors as well as tourism.

Less than one quarter of Queenslanders have been to the Queensland Outback. Barriers to visitation cited by Queenslanders include 'lack of appeal', 'prefer a different sort of holiday', 'nothing to do there', 'too rugged' (i.e. unsafe or uncomfortable), 'too hard to get to' and 'too hard to get around'.

Queensland has set an ambitious target of doubling overnight visitor expenditure to \$30 billion by 2020. When the Outback hits the 2020 growth target it will generate in excess of 192,490 additional visitor numbers. These additional visitors will impact on road and air access. Maintenance and growth of rail capacity to increase the experience of tourism by rail remains a priority for the outback. Regional airports will need to cater for a higher volume of passengers.

#### **IMPROVED DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS**

People are changing the way they access and trust information in an online world. The Outback needs to embrace a multichannel approach to communication and promotion by building business skills and capacity to deliver new virtual travel/experiences in the form of providing rich information.

It is essential both from a business and consumer point of view to have stable, fast mobile and data communication services. Restricted communication networks have an impact on the safety of remote area travellers. Travellers simply expect full mobile and data coverage throughout Australia.

Small to medium enterprises in outback areas, struggle to keep up to date with digital changes along with day to day business operations. One on one business mentoring for social media marketing and website development, assist businesses develop and maintain their online profiles, enabling them to better market their businesses.

#### **SUMMARY**

By addressing the barriers to tourism growth and focusing attention on strategic items highlighted, the tourism industry in Northern Australia will continue to grow. Outback Queensland Tourism Association once again thanks the Joint Standing Committee for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into Opportunities and Methods for Stimulating the Tourism Industry in Northern Australia.

Yours faithfully

**General Manager, OQTA**

