

DESTINATION
GOLDCOAST.

9 December 2022

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
jscfadt@aph.gov.au

To Whom It May Concern,

RE: Inquiry into Australia's tourism and international education sectors

As we, like so many globally, continue to rebuild from the ramifications of COVID-19 displacement, I write to you today on behalf of Gold Coast's tourism industry to offer a submission to the Australian Government for the Inquiry into Australia's tourism and international education sectors.

Destination Gold Coast (DGC) is a not-for-profit membership-based destination marketing organisation which has been representing the city for over 48 years. Tourism is one of the chief economic sectors on the Gold Coast through a gross regional product contribution of \$5 billion and employing 44,000 people in 10,000 tourism related businesses. As the region's peak tourism body, DGC advocates on behalf of more than 500 members and the 26,000 businesses that contribute to the Tourism and Economic Diversification Component of the General Rate collected by the City of Gold Coast.

In 2019, we were a \$5.9 billion industry welcoming more than 14.4 million visitors. However, as a result of the pandemic, the Gold Coast alone lost more than \$5.6 billion in tourism revenue, 31 million nights and some 10 million visitors. Let's also not forget the 12,000 skilled people who supported our workforce and many of whom were international students and working holidaymakers.

COVID-19 has been the catalyst for many industries to reassess and look at new and innovative ways to remain sustainable. And this year, we welcomed the release of Australia's long-term national strategy to grow the visitor economy, THRIVE 2030, having been part of the consultation process. We look forward to continuing to work with the Australian Government, our partners and industry to drive our region's position and support the initiatives highlighted in this plan.

We have remained engaged with the Australian Government and local Members of Parliament on the key priorities that need to be addressed for Gold Coast's tourism and international education sectors and appreciate the opportunity to submit this directly to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade.

The immediate focus of the new Australian Government has been the cost of living and climate change. DGC hopes that the Government can now turn its attention to the business of productivity and growth for the tourism, education, and business events sectors.

We are seeking your support for the industry as follows:

1. Increase support for the tourism workforce, and skills and improve Australia's visa competitiveness.

Destination Gold Coast acknowledges the Australian Government's announcements to improve this process to date and any avenues to accelerate visa reform, including a thorough review of visa processing and pricing, with a view to enhancing Australia's competitiveness as a tourist destination and simultaneously attract more international working visitors, students, skilled migrants, and backpackers would be welcomed.

The Gold Coast is home to three renowned universities, and we recognise the significant contribution of international students to our tourism workforce and so direct linkages to further their education or obtain employment opportunities in Australia are welcomed.

At the same time, childcare continues to be a significant risk and inhibitor for the tourism industry given its ability to impact our already decimated workforce here on the Gold Coast. The tourism workforce immediately needs Ministerial collaboration for cross portfolio action with swift solutions to support our inadequate childcare system with the surety of care for families.

2. Affordability of commercial insurance for tourism related businesses.

According to many of our tourism, hospitality and accommodation businesses who endured the effects of the pandemic, some have also been directly exposed to the impacts of natural disasters and other increased inflationary pressures coming from building supplies constraints and skills shortages. To compound this, what was already a headwind for businesses pre-pandemic, commercial property and liability insurance costs have risen exponentially or are unavailable entirely. A consistent national approach to ensuring that tourism businesses have access to affordable commercial insurance is critical.

3. Prioritise transport infrastructure to connect South East Queensland in the next 10 years.

Gold Coast's population is estimated to grow by 15,000 people each year, reaching 1 million by 2045, so it is important that seamless transport and infrastructure is installed to connect the city from north to south, east to west. The 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games also presents a significant opportunity for urban advancement and spotlight treatment on South East Queensland and Australia at large.

So, we need to be investing now in priority projects such as the light rail extension through to Coolangatta and Gold Coast Airport and faster heavy rail through to Brisbane to connect our linear city and eastern seaboard. The light rail in particular has continued to go from strength to strength here on the Gold Coast, clocking in more than 65 million trips since it opened and growing in popularity with locals and visitors alike, which gives us confidence it will continue to be a highly used public transport mode into the future.

We look forward to the light rail's third stage Broadbeach to Burleigh track being delivered and opening in 2025, but we cannot be complacent, and we must keep going. That is why we urgently need all levels of Government to put funding on the table for stage four before it's too late and the city bursts at the seams.

4. Investment for demand-driving initiatives to support tourism activity.

- a. Matched funding for the next generation of iconic attractions, and tourism and events infrastructure on the Gold Coast as supported and put forward by the City of Gold Coast.
- b. Consider additional funding for Destination Gold Coast for another round of the Recovery for Regional Tourism Program administered via Austrade with a focus on international capability and accessibility for tourism businesses.

5. An aviation attraction fund to support a competitive market for air services to both capital and regional destinations including the Gold Coast.

The aviation sector in Australia, including airlines and airports, represent essential infrastructure not just for tourism but for the entire community.

- a. Support the development of new international air routes to diverse markets for both tourism and trade purposes. International visitors represent an important make up of Gold Coast's visitor economy, and prior to COVID-19, drew more than 1.3 million overseas travellers who contributed over \$1 billion in expenditure.
- b. Restore pre-pandemic international aviation capacity turbocharged with a subsidised flight or incentive scheme. Gold Coast Airport has so far restored 68 per cent of international connectivity against pre-COVID levels but we know airline capacity to Australia has decreased in recent years and holidaymakers are more worried about their finances which presents new challenges for our industry.

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6. Expand the Business Events Bid Fund Program and opportunities for the business events sector.

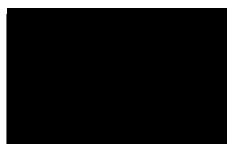
Demand for hosting business events on the Gold Coast has increased significantly over the past 12 months and so far, more than \$199 million in economic benefit has been confirmed from now through to 2030, and this continues to build by the day. Business events are a high yield segment of the visitor economy, bringing direct and indirect economic impact to the Gold Coast, which in 2019 alone contributed \$570 million locally. Opportunities for further collaboration between industry and the Australian Government would be welcomed through the expansion of the Business Events Bid Fund Program and the need for more research and data to highlight the contribution of business events to the economy.

The business events sector is also critical to driving weekday visitation and flattening the demand curve on the Gold Coast. Investment in an expanded convention centre is also a priority to not only cater for the sector's growing demand but to ensure the Gold Coast can secure larger conferences and conventions.

Further initiatives including financial support for workforce upskilling, reduction on fees, aviation attraction, incentive schemes and demand-driving infrastructure programs are a critical lifeline to strengthening Australia's international re-entry and supporting key tourism regions including the Gold Coast to rebound stronger than ever post-pandemic.

On behalf of the Gold Coast tourism industry, we appreciate your time in reviewing this submission and welcome you here in destination in the immediate future to discuss these challenges and subsequent opportunities.

Kind regards,



Adrienne Readings
Chair



Karen Bolinger
Interim CEO