

## **Terms of Reference**

### **Inquiry into Australia's tourism and international education sectors**

Response from the Griffith Institute for Tourism, with contributions from academics and members of the Industry Advisory Board. The views presented in this submission are of individual experts, not the views of Griffith University.

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The tourism and international education sectors are significant contributors to the Australian economy. These sectors contracted significantly following the emergence of COVID-19 in 2020 and the subsequent closure of international borders. Noting that Australia has since opened its borders, the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT) will inquire into the international education and tourism sectors as critical contributors to the post-COVID-19 recovery of the Australian economy, with a focus on:

#### **(i) in relation to tourism:**

- **The challenges and opportunities for growth in tourism and how Australia can reassert itself as a leader in the international tourism sector**

#### *Comments:*

- Flexible visa conditions associated with travel for international education, global nomads, and Working Holiday Makers would undoubtedly serve as a conduit for Australia to reassert itself as a global tourism sector leader. Also, multi-entry visas for critical markets (e.g., India), particularly those visitors associated with VFR and education (e.g., parents of students). The cost of visas from some markets in Asia is high compared to other countries and a significant drawback for large groups such as incentive visitors. New Zealand has waived such fees.
- Significant investment in attracting sports events to Australia (e.g., FIFA Women's World Cup, Rugby Men's and Women's World Cups, Commonwealth Games, and Olympic and Paralympic Games) positions sport as a critical opportunity and pillar in Australian tourism for the next decade.
- Climate change awareness significantly impacts long-haul travel. Growth in visitor numbers will take much work to achieve. Hence, fostering long-stay trips, dispersal to regional destinations and increased expenditure rather than generating more tourists.
- Since small and micro-businesses employ 90% of the tourism workforce, training young people to develop skills in small business management and entrepreneurship and incentives to get young people to start up new businesses in these industry sectors are needed. Micro-credential training for tourism, hospitality and events businesses, government departments and NFP in digital and innovation skills, as well as small agribusiness, to improve the visitor experience is also relevant. The recent micro-credential grants offered by the Commonwealth Government were limited to STEM sectors and did not include critical economic sectors, including tourism. In

addition to the extra TAFE places, the Government should be supporting industry-led training programs that help ensure that students are better suited to industry positions.

- An all-inclusive strategy to transition the tourism industry to develop and offer carbon-neutral holidays to Australia should be an aspirational goal to persuade international long-haul travellers to consider a trip to "the other side of the world".
- Given the growing concerns about the environmental impact of long-haul travel, particularly for some European countries, Australia needs to do much more to demonstrate what it is doing to reduce the industry's carbon footprint.
- As the tourism industry, in general, and hospitality, in particular, relies on international students for an essential part of its workforce, a review of the number of hours that international students can work each week is needed.
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- **The effectiveness of recent tourism campaigns overseas**

*Comments:*

- Substantial funds are invested into direct 'traditional' marketing to a small selection of critical international target markets. Investment into virtual and immersive tourism experiences.
- **The promotion of regional Australia as a world-class international travel destination**

*Comments:*

- The growth of international tourism, particularly in regional areas, is restricted by limited investment in infrastructure, with the urgent need for dedicated tourism infrastructure schemes to support sustainable development required at the federal level.
- Sports events held in regional cities (e.g., the 2026 Commonwealth Games) provide an opportunity to showcase non-traditional parts of Australia to the world.
- Foster the development of international business events being held in critical regional centres to increase the awareness of regional destinations
- Develop regional centres with higher market attractions and accommodation to shift the predominance of the grey nomad segment to a scape long weekend to the capital city market.
- The growth of indigenous tourism will only occur if an established framework for engagement, consultation and infrastructure development embeds tourism knowledge.
- Authentic training opportunities for indigenous leaders to operate in the tourism sector.
- Resilient destinations must deal with infrastructure disruptions and accommodate weather changes when elements significantly impact weather-dependent experiences, including coastal beach-based destinations, snow resorts, and national parks.

- Collaboration with local Aboriginal stakeholders (not segregated or add-on) facilitated reconciliation, knowledge sharing, and incorporating indigenous interpretation into tourism. The idea of a dedicated national team to assist the development of indigenous-operated and owned tourism businesses and products (administrative, financial, operative support) is critical. Identifying and responding to tourism skills and training needs, removing barriers, and creating new opportunities. Draw on traditional knowledge to better manage natural resources upon which so much of our tourism is based.
  - Improve the frequency of air services to key regional destinations. The Opera House, Reef, and Rock are three key attractors for international visitors. Still, the frequency of airline services between these destinations since Covid has made it difficult for international visitors to get to each of them.
- **The role of Australia as a hub in support of tourism in the Asia Pacific region**

*Comments:*

- There are challenges to positioning Australia as an international 'tourism hub' in the Asia Pacific Region, considering the tyranny of distance, climate change impact due to long-haul air transport, and cost of accommodation considering strong domestic demand.
  - Despite the global pressures and changes in consumer preferences, there has been limited support to innovate and create more sustainable models (economically, environmentally and socially). The aviation sector needs help to be proactive in redesigning itself for the future. Australia has some leading and showcasing examples that it could shout about – both through airlines testing biofuels and going electric to airports leading on carbon neutrality.
  - Brisbane has a 24/7 airport with the largest runway capacity in Australia and 20 minutes of proximity to the city, and the number one closest port to the world's largest Asian markets.
  - The 2008 Aviation White Paper failed to open up the far North (i.e., Broome, Darwin and Cairns) for international routes. Better incentives will need to be in place to utilise capacity in these airports better and create regional hubs.
- **Other related matters that may assist in the inquiry**

*Comments:*

- Set up a council of a few experts to advise the Prime Minister and Cabinet on Tourism and the Visitor Economy, like the National Science and Technology Council.
- Create academic research grants via the Australian Research Council to support research on mega-events legacy, sustainable and regenerative tourism.
- Develop technology to monitor and advise tourists in case of emergency incidents where evacuation is needed. This initiative will help promote Australia as a safe, resilient and prepared destination.

- Establish a 'Friends of Tourism' amongst politicians to lobby for improvements in the tourism industry. Such a grouping has been most successful in the past and dramatically supports the Minister of the day.
- Thrive 2030 only has economic targets, which does little to demonstrate that Australia is concerned about the social and environmental consequences of the industry. This needs to be addressed.