

11 June 2021

Mr Martin Ferguson AM
Chair, Reimagining the Visitor Economy Expert Panel
via email visitoreconomy@austrade.gov.au

Dear Mr Ferguson,

We write to you on behalf of the Backpacker and Youth Tourism Advisory Panel “BYTAP”. BYTAP was established under ATEC in 2001 as the peak national representative body for the Australian inbound backpacker and youth adventure tourism industry. Our sector is a broad one representing the interests of youth and adventure tourism across the country including Victoria. We work closely with state based peak bodies including Adventure Tourism Victoria (ATV). More information about BYTAP can be found in the appendix of this submission.

By way of context, the value of the youth tourism sector to Australia is significant in terms of spend, length of stay, and dispersal. The Working Holiday Maker (WHM) reciprocal cultural exchange scheme that Australia has with 44 countries usually brings around 200,000 young visitors here each year and generates \$3.2bn.¹ The average WHM spends 149 nights in Australia, including travel to many regional areas, frequently funding their extended travels by filling temporary labour supply shortages in sectors such as agriculture and tourism.

When the pandemic hit in early 2020, the inbound youth tourism sector was one of the most heavily impacted in the broader tourism industry. Many WHMs and international students returned to their home countries, with less than 40,000 WHMs currently remaining in Australia. Early estimates indicate that the average losses in inbound tourism receipts are in the range of \$2bn per month². Many

¹ Tourism Australia Working Holiday Maker Snapshot (2019 calendar year) tourism.australia.com/en/markets-and-stats/industry-sectors/youth.html

² [Tourism Transport Forum Estimated Impact of Coronavirus on the Australian Visitor Economy](#); [Tourism Research Australia - Tourism Businesses in Australia, June 2018](#).

operators have mothballed their operations or shut up shop completely - even today, large backpacker and youth hostels in capital cities remain closed.

Thankfully youth travel is one of the most resilient of all tourism segments, and market indicators suggest a strong restart when Australia's international border reopens. Longer term there are a number of recommendations we would like to propose as part of a longer-term plan for our tourism economy. These include the recommendations to of the Parliamentary Senate hearing into the Working Holiday Maker Scheme, combined/co-ordinated marketing & education targeted at domestic youth by STO's, RTO's & LTO's as well as a focus on the "cultural exchange" ethos behind the WHMV scheme.

In the past 12 months much has been done to encourage Australian youth to travel within Australia. We support government initiative to foster youth travel and believe a greater emphasis on this needs to be fostered in the schools as a valuable post HSC option where there is often still a push towards immediate entry into tertiary education. Offering youth genuine experiences particularly indigenous experiences is critical. We also believe that youth are more aware of their carbon footprint so a greater emphasis on sustainable travel is critical.

To nurture domestic tourism there needs to be greater collaboration between industry and STO's and Tourism Australia. At times there is a myopic focus on each state's 'own patch' versus a collaborative approach with a mutual end goal. This goes hand in hand with a need to invest again in visitor research. We need to know more about our visitors, what drives their choices. In the case of WHMs, we need to know the types or work they want to do, what experiences they want and importantly how well we deliver on these.

In the youth sector Australia's visitor visa system is comparable to that of traditional Working holiday destinations such as the UK or US however BYTAP supports the recommendations coming from the 2020 Inquiry into the Working Holiday Maker Program. The final report's recommendations included increasing the WHM age limit to 35, considering the removal of 462 country visa caps and expanding the eligibility for the seconds working holiday Visa. BYTAP supports these recommendations as part of a longer-term strategy to attract this segment.

Lastly, we note the discussion paper reference to labour shortages. These shortages are currently impacting the agricultural, tourism, childcare (au pairs) and hospitality sectors and will continue to do so. BYTAP believes that greater consideration should be given to expanding the 408 visa to allow a greater number of sponsor agencies to recruit visitors for a 12-24 period to help fill sectors experiencing labour shortages. The National Skills Commission currently has a list of industries facing shortages that may not be easily filled by the returning WHM cohort.

Following the GFC, this sector proved its resilience & underpinned the international tourism rebound for Australia. It is a high value sector & foundation for tourism receipts into other travelling sectors that should not be taken for granted.

In closing we thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to the government about the youth sector. We are happy to provide further information.

Yours sincerely,



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BYTAP Representative



BRENDAN MACKENNA
BYTAP Representative

ABOUT BYTAP

In 2001, The Australian Tourism Export Council (ATEC) established the Backpacker Tourism Advisory Panel "BTAP", later becoming BYTAP with the inclusion of 'youth'. The panel is the peak national representative body for the Australian inbound backpacker and youth adventure tourism industry with representation from industry in addition to state backpacker associations, such as Adventure Queensland, Adventure Tourism Victoria (ATV) and the Backpacker Operators' Association of NSW (BOA). BYTAP works closely with Tourism Australia and various national, state and regional tourism peak bodies to elevate the profile of youth tourism.

The role of BYTAP is to:

- Act as the critical link between the backpacker and youth adventure industry, the states and territories and federal government in the interpretation of segment-specific issues;
- Represent the interests of the backpacker segment to other industry organisations, government and the community on a national level;
- Facilitate an active and effective policy forum where key industry stakeholders present issues for development and action;
- Raise the profile of the backpacker and youth adventure tourism sector;
- Lead the way in the on-going development of growth strategies to maximise the contribution of the backpacker and youth adventure market to Australia.

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