

**PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**Economy and Infrastructure Committee**



# **Inquiry into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and events sectors**

Parliament of Victoria  
Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee

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# About the Committee

## Functions

The Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee's functions are to inquire into and report on any proposal, matter or thing concerned with agriculture, commerce, infrastructure, industry, major projects, public sector finances, transport and education.

As a Standing Committee, it may inquire into, hold public hearings, consider and report on any Bills or draft Bills, annual reports, estimates of expenditure or other documents laid before the Legislative Council in accordance with an Act, provided these are relevant to its functions.

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# Terms of reference

## **Inquiry into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and events sectors**

On 18 February 2021 the Legislative Council agreed to the following motion:

That this House requires the Economy and Infrastructure Committee to inquire into, hold public hearings in Melbourne and regional Victoria to identify key issues and areas of concern, and report by 30 June 2021, on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and events sectors and provide recommendations for State Government support measures that will restore the tourism and events sectors to their critical role in the Victorian economy and restore lost jobs.

# Chair's foreword

It is now more than 18 months since the first COVID-19 case was recorded in Australia. We have all been affected in some way by the global pandemic, and the unprecedented challenges it has brought. Victoria's tourism and events sectors are among the industries most affected by the impact of this virus.

The tourism industry relies on people being able to move about freely, and the events sector cannot exist without people being able to come together safely. Both of these have been difficult and at times impossible during the pandemic.

The Government-led effort to keep the public safe during 2020 meant making significant sacrifices, particularly for those in the tourism and events sectors. Fortunately, the tourism sector in Victoria began seeing the green shoots of recovery at the beginning of 2021. Although it must be noted that this recovery is not uniform across the whole state, with Melbourne still facing significant challenges due to the ongoing effect of border closures and lockdowns.

Unfortunately, the events sector is taking longer to recover. Victoria has long been the events capital of Australia. A remarkable range of skilled operators and technicians help our economy stay strong and bring joy, not just to Victorians but, as the Committee learnt, to people across the world. Just how important events are to us can be measured by how much we have missed them in our lives.

It is a sector we are rightfully proud of and one that deserves our support. With that support, I am convinced that our tourism and events sectors will bounce back strongly from this global pandemic and thrive once more.

I know that this has been a very difficult Inquiry for many people to participate in. On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank everyone who shared their experiences with us, including the ongoing uncertainty many face. Your courage in speaking up was greatly appreciated by every member of the Committee.

We also heard inspirational stories of hope from both the tourism and events sectors, businesses and workers who are determined to keep going. This determination makes me optimistic that the many talented people we are lucky enough to have here in Victoria, working in collaboration with the Government and a public eager to offer its support, will see our State recover strongly from the COVID-19 pandemic.

I would like to acknowledge the work of my fellow Committee members throughout this Inquiry. Thank you also to our secretariat staff, Christianne Andonovski, Cat Smith,

## Chair's foreword

Katie Helme, Holly Mclean, Alice Petrie and Patrick O'Brien, for producing this report in such a short timeframe.

I commend this report to the Parliament.

*Enver Erdogan*

**Enver Erdogan**  
**Chair**

# Executive summary

## Chapter 2—The COVID-19 pandemic: government responses and responsibilities

On 25 January 2020, Victoria reported the first case of COVID-19 in Australia. Since then, both the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments introduced support packages to assist the tourism and events sectors. The Commonwealth and all states and territories responded to the pandemic with a series of restrictions based on public health advice, including border closures, a ‘hotel quarantine’ system for international arrivals, lockdowns and density quotients and capacity limits for indoor and outdoor gatherings.

In Australia, the Commonwealth has a role in coordinating state and territory disaster relief and response, and has constitutional authority including in relation to financial grants and quarantine. The states and territories are primarily responsible for declaring and responding to emergencies and have broad powers to legislate matters regarding emergencies within their own borders.

The main form of financial support provided by the Commonwealth was the JobKeeper Payment scheme, which ended on 28 March 2021. The Victorian Government’s major support package was its Business Support Fund. More targeted support came in a number of other measures, including the Regional and Melbourne Travel Voucher Schemes and the Victorian Events Support Package.

## Chapter 3—The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Victoria’s tourism sector

Victoria’s tourism sector was experiencing strong growth prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a marked increase in international tourism in recent years. However, the loss of the international tourism market has been particularly significant. While domestic tourism has seen some recovery, the Committee learned that domestic visitation is often ‘profitless volume’. This has not compensated for the loss of international tourists.

A major challenge to the sector was sudden border closures. While health authorities are frequently required to make quick decisions, the threat of sudden border closures and uncertainty around the resumption of travel has undermined confidence within the tourism sector. The Committee learnt that the loss of operator and public confidence has seriously affected businesses.

The pandemic also exacerbated pre-existing problems in the tourism sector, and in particular, issues around skills shortages and a lack of affordable housing for tourism workers in regional areas. To adapt, businesses developed online capabilities and digital

functionality. Businesses reported that innovating and shifting business models to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic was a challenge, especially in regions with poor digital connectivity. As Victoria moves into a post-COVID travel world, the tourism industry needs support to continue innovating to meet new demands.

The effects of COVID-19 on mental health within the tourism sector are widespread. The Committee heard concerns that financial challenges and uncertainty facing the tourism sector will have ongoing effects on mental health. This issue is particularly serious in regional Victoria, due to a combination of physical and social isolation and the ongoing recovery from the 2019–20 bushfires.

The Committee considered tourist visitation in Victoria's key tourism regions and provided case studies for: Melbourne; the Great Ocean Road; Gippsland; the High Country; and the Murray region. All have faced huge declines in overnight, daytrip, international and domestic visitor spend, with the Great Ocean Road the region most adversely affected by COVID-19.

## Chapter 4—Government support provided to Victoria's tourism sector

The Victorian and Commonwealth Governments provided a range of support measures to redress the impacts of COVID-19 on the tourism sector, delivered through economic packages that include both general and industry-specific initiatives. The Victorian Government developed guidance for initiatives to foster recovery in the sector, set out under the *Visitor Economy Recovery Reform Plan*.

A key support measure provided by the Victorian Government was the \$2.6 billion Business Support Fund. The Committee heard from businesses that benefitted from the fund, however, limitations due to eligibility criteria meant that some businesses missed out on support. The Committee recommends that the Victorian Government consider options for support for businesses affected by COVID-19 that were ineligible under the fund.

The Regional Tourism Investment Fund has funded infrastructure projects in regional Victoria. The Committee heard that a similar fund for greater Melbourne would help reposition the city as a destination for tourists and that increasing funding under the program to develop new tourism products would encourage repeat visitation to both regional and metropolitan areas. The Committee recommends that the Victorian Government work with the tourism industry to identify ongoing infrastructure needs, including for greater Melbourne, that can be addressed by expanding the Regional Tourism Infrastructure Fund.

The Regional and Melbourne Travel Voucher Schemes provided a \$200 reimbursement where a person has spent at least \$400 on accommodation, experiences, tours and attractions. A limitation of the scheme was that the vouchers were released during peak holiday periods. The Committee makes recommendations around expanding the

scheme and providing a more targeted approach to reflect the different demands of each individual tourism region and encourage off-peak and mid-week visits.

The \$500 million Working for Victoria Fund helps businesses employ Victorian job seekers who lost their jobs due to COVID-19. The scheme was broadly praised by stakeholders to the Inquiry, particularly in arts and cultural tourism and in regional areas.

The Committee received various recommendations for assistance specific to the regions. To address these concerns, the Committee recommends that Visit Victoria undertake consultation with Regional Tourism Boards and local government to develop individual support packages, specific to each tourism region's strengths and needs.

Mental health support has been provided to small businesses under the Wellbeing and Mental Health Support for Victorian Small Business program. The Committee learnt that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health have been significant, and that improving mental health services will be critical to sustained regional recovery. The Committee makes recommendations around improving access to, and communication regarding, mental health support.

The Commonwealth's support to Victoria's tourism industry came mainly through the JobKeeper Payment scheme and aviation support programs. Many stakeholders to the Inquiry argued that while their businesses may not have survived without JobKeeper, the fact that some employees, such as casual and international workers, did not qualify for support was problematic. That the aviation program did not include key Melbourne and regional airports was a concern for many stakeholders, who saw it as disincentivising people to visit Victoria. For both programs, the Committee recommends the resumption or a second iteration of these schemes.

## Chapter 5—The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Victoria's events sector

The COVID-19 pandemic has done great damage to the events sector across Australia. Victoria's events industry has been hit the hardest to date due to strict public health measures, including prolonged lockdowns. These effects have been exacerbated by the events sector not being fully understood. The sector is often considered part of the visitor economy and while there are some crossovers with tourism and other sectors, in particular for major events, many businesses that run other types of events feel misunderstood by the Victorian Government and various industry bodies.

The Committee heard that the events sector generates around \$12 billion to the Victorian economy each year. Events also provide important social and cultural benefits, which help bring communities together and define Victoria as Australia's events capital. The Committee was provided with examples of large financial losses for businesses across the sector. It found that while the events sector generally understands why public health measures were implemented, it expects government support to aid its recovery.

Low confidence is a major barrier to the sector's recovery. In particular, the threat of further lockdowns is both preventing businesses from committing to organise events and making the public wary of buying tickets to events. This lack of confidence is further fuelled by the sector's inability to insure against having to postpone or cancel events because of COVID-19.

The loss of skilled workers is another threat to the recovery of the events sector in Victoria. Financial losses and ongoing uncertainty around when events will be able to resume mean many skilled professionals have already left the industry in search of work and financial security elsewhere. This situation has been made worse by the end of JobKeeper and the sector is concerned about its ability to encourage these workers to return.

As with the tourism sector, financial losses in the events sector have caused many business owners and workers great personal stress. The Committee recommends the Victorian Government provide ongoing, targeted mental health support for the sector.

## Chapter 6—Victoria's events sector: ongoing restrictions and government support

The events sector is subject to ongoing restrictions under the *Restricted Activity Directions (Victoria)* and the *COVID-19 Public Events Framework (PEF)*. In particular, the PEF provides guidance to event organisers and venues on the safe management of events in the COVID-19 environment. It requires event organisers to submit a COVIDSafe Event Plan or a completed self-assessment to the Victorian Government, depending on the size and complexity of the event. Some high-risk or more complex events require specific approval before they can proceed.

The Committee received wide-ranging evidence about the PEF, its development and current operation. Stakeholders from the events sector were critical of the timeframes for receiving feedback on event plans and advocated for this process to be accelerated. The sector also reported inadequate information and assistance channels within the Victorian Government in relation to the PEF and the current events environment. Of the restrictions within the PEF itself, density quotients and venue capacity limits impact the financial viability of many events, particularly where restrictions change rapidly in response to changing circumstances. These financial pressures are exacerbated by the additional financial costs of adherence to the requirements of the PEF. Many within the events sector told the Committee that more effective consultation with the sector during the PEF's development could have ensured that the document was clear, consistent and 'fit for purpose'.

While some of the reported issues have been addressed in later iterations of the PEF, including a more streamlined approvals process, the Committee makes recommendations around further improvements to its structure and related support.

A variety of support measures have been provided by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments to assist the events sector throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Key support has been in the form of general business and wage subsidy support—namely, the Business Support Fund and the JobKeeper Payment scheme. Some targeted support has been provided to particular areas within the sector, including through the National Business Events Program and the Victorian Events Support Package. While many businesses welcomed this support, some events sector stakeholders considered that they had been left relatively unsupported in comparison with other impacted sectors, such as tourism. Further, the Victorian Government’s *Visitor Economy Recovery Reform Plan* includes limited focus on the events sector and its long-term recovery.

The events sector continues to experience significant loss in revenue due to ongoing restrictions. For this reason, the Committee recommends advocacy to the Commonwealth Government for the reintroduction of the JobKeeper Payment, or a similar form of wage subsidy, for this sector.

## Chapter 7—Future support measures for the tourism and events sectors

There are a number of ongoing challenges for the tourism and events sectors and the Victorian Government moving forward. These include low operator and public confidence, particularly in terms of the risks around future public health restrictions. For the events sector, this is particularly stark in light of the inability to access event cancellation insurance. Tourism faces an uncertain future in terms of managing peaks in domestic tourism demand and having no firm date for when international borders will reopen. In addition, both sectors face workforce and skills shortages.

For the Victorian Government, the economic costs of supporting the state into the next phase of its recovery will be high. However, well-targeted investment will provide significant economic returns.

The Committee makes a number of recommendations to support the tourism and events sectors moving forward. In order to restore confidence to both sectors, it recommends that the National Cabinet’s plan to transition from a suppression strategy to a management strategy in conjunction with increases in vaccination rates be updated with ‘trigger’ dates and vaccination rates. It also recommends that the Victorian Government issue public guidance on how increases in vaccination rates would correspond with changes to state-based public health measures and policies, such as the *COVID-19 Public Events Framework*.

For the tourism sector, the Committee considers that support is needed to ensure that Destination Management Plans are in place and reflect each region’s individual needs for recovery. It also recommends the Victorian Government work with the Commonwealth Government to ensure that skilled tourism workers are prioritised for visas when international borders reopen.

In terms of the events sector, the Committee received evidence on the need for improved governance mechanisms for the sector, and in particular, more effective consultation processes. It makes a number of recommendations in this space, including review and revision of consultation processes, and establishment of an events advisory taskforce to advise the Victorian Government on the ongoing recovery needs of the sector.

In light of the ongoing lack of access to event cancellation insurance, the Committee considers that government action is needed to restore confidence and assist events businesses to get back to work. For this reason, it recommends that the Victorian Government address the fact that events cannot currently insure against the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is imperative that the Government act on this recommendation as a matter of urgency.

The Committee also recommends the Victorian Government consider introducing vouchers for events, similar to the tourism travel voucher schemes, in order to incentivise events within the state and encourage public attendance. Lastly, it recommends that the Victorian Government investigate options for filling skills gaps within the events sector through targeted apprenticeship programs or subsidised courses.

# Findings and recommendations

## 3 The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Victoria's tourism sector

**FINDING 1:** The closure of Australia's borders has been a successful component of the management of COVID-19 within Australia. However, it has exacerbated skills shortages in the tourism sector, especially hospitality, impeding the sector's ability to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. 42

**FINDING 2:** Demographic and economic changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic have seen an increase in the lack of affordable and available accommodation options for workers in the tourism sector in rural and regional Victoria. 43

**FINDING 3:** The highly contagious nature of COVID-19 makes it difficult for health authorities to provide much warning of lockdowns and border closures. The unpredictable nature of the pandemic has greatly damaged confidence in the tourism sector. 45

**FINDING 4:** The tourism sector has been forced to adapt and innovate in the short term as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. A focus on innovation should be a feature of ongoing support as the pandemic recedes. 47

**FINDING 5:** The tourism sector is experiencing ongoing mental health challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the impacts of associated public health measures. 49

**FINDING 6:** Investment in tourism infrastructure will play a key role in the sector's recovery and ensure it is competitive with other markets. 51

**FINDING 7:** While rural and regional tourism continues to benefit from the influx of Melbourne visitors, Melbourne's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic remains challenging, in particular, in the Melbourne CBD. 54

## 4 Government support provided to Victoria’s tourism sector

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** That the Victorian Government consider options for support that could be provided to businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and who have been ineligible for support under the Business Support Fund, including sole traders. **64**

**RATIONALE:** Many tourism businesses were ineligible for the Business Support Fund due to the structure of their business. **64**

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** That the Victorian Government consider extending the Outdoor Eating and Entertainment Package until the end of spring 2021. **65**

**RATIONALE:** The Outdoor Eating and Entertainment Package was a popular and successful tourism recovery package. Extending it to the end of spring would provide further needed stimulus to the tourism sector. **65**

**FINDING 8:** The Regional Tourism Infrastructure Fund was welcomed by the tourism sector. However, more support needs to be provided for tourism infrastructure projects in both regional Victoria and greater Melbourne. **67**

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** That the Victorian Government work with the tourism industry to identify ongoing infrastructure needs that can be addressed by an expansion of the Regional Tourism Infrastructure Fund. **67**

**RATIONALE:** Continued improvements in Victoria’s tourism infrastructure are needed to attract visitors back to the state. **67**

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** That the Victorian Government extend the Regional and Melbourne Travel Voucher Schemes. In extending these schemes, it should:

- consider ensuring the vouchers are redeemable during off-peak periods for each tourism region
- consider adapting the schemes to encourage mid-week visitation
- have regard to adopting a more nuanced approach to targeting the schemes towards the specific needs of each tourism region
- consider expanding the schemes to encourage interstate visitation to Victoria. **71**

**RATIONALE:** The Regional and Melbourne Travel Voucher Schemes were highly effective but were introduced when the tourism sector was in urgent need of support. Extending the schemes with these identified refinements would make further schemes even more effective in providing targeted stimulus to the sector. 71

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** That the Victorian Government explore options for providing funding for tourism infrastructure projects in greater Melbourne. 75

**RATIONALE:** Continued improvements to Victoria's tourism infrastructure are needed to attract visitors back to the state. 75

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** That Visit Victoria undertake consultation with Regional Tourism Boards and local government, including greater Melbourne, to develop individual support packages, including funding and future marketing campaigns, specific to each tourism region's strengths and needs. 75

**RATIONALE:** There has not been uniform recovery in the tourism sector across Victoria. Each region has recovered at a different rate and requires tailored support to continue their recovery. 75

**RECOMMENDATION 7:** That the Victorian Government increase mental health support for the tourism sector, including by:

- targeting mental health initiatives in regions with limited existing access to mental health resources
- improving communication around available mental health support within the tourism sector.

76

**RATIONALE:** Financial losses in the tourism sector have caused many business owners and workers great personal stress. The mental health toll of the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing and the Victorian Government should continue to provide necessary support for those who need it. 77

**FINDING 9:** The JobKeeper Payment scheme assisted in workforce retention, however, the ending of the scheme has caused concern about workforce retention in the tourism industry. 78

**RECOMMENDATION 8:** That the Victorian Government advocate to the Commonwealth Government for the resumption of the JobKeeper Payment scheme, or a similar form of wage subsidy, for industries that continue to face significant COVID-19 restrictions on their business and employment activity, such as the tourism sector. **78**

**RATIONALE:** The Commonwealth Government’s decision to end JobKeeper was based on macroeconomic conditions that do not reflect the ongoing economic challenges the tourism sector is enduring. **78**

**RECOMMENDATION 9:** That the Victorian Government advocate for the Commonwealth Government to implement a second Tourism Aviation Network Support Program that includes Melbourne and regional Victorian airports. **79**

**RATIONALE:** The Commonwealth Government’s process for choosing airports eligible for the Tourism Aviation Network Support Program was flawed. A second program should include Melbourne and also encourage travel to regional Victoria, as both were strongly damaged by the COVID-19 pandemic. **79**

## 5 The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Victoria’s events sector

**FINDING 10:** Many events businesses in Victoria do not feel represented by industry bodies because:

- the businesses have not felt that they needed representation prior to the COVID-19 pandemic
- some cannot afford to join industry bodies
- their business models do not align with the ‘visitor economy’ focus of some bodies, which stems from government policy.

**89**

**FINDING 11:** Events provide economic, social and cultural value to Victoria. **91**

**FINDING 12:** The events sector generally accepts that the Victorian Government’s public health measures have been justified by the COVID-19 health crisis. However, there is a view within the sector that the Victorian Government has a role to play in providing support to the events sector because its decisions have directly affected the sector’s viability. **93**

<b>FINDING 13:</b> The effects of lockdowns, border closures and other public health measures threaten the long-term viability of the events sector in Victoria.	97
<b>FINDING 14:</b> Events industry stakeholders identified border closures and uncertainty around hard lockdowns as key factors affecting operator and public confidence.	101
<b>FINDING 15:</b> The inability to insure against COVID-19 is a large barrier to the recovery of the events sector in Victoria.	103
<b>FINDING 16:</b> The loss of skilled workers is another threat to the recovery of the events sector in Victoria.	106
<b>FINDING 17:</b> The events sector needs ongoing, targeted mental health support following the damage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.	108
<b>RECOMMENDATION 10:</b> That the Victorian Government increase mental health support for the events sector, in recognition of the significant and ongoing mental health impacts experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional resourcing should ensure equal access to, and effective communication of, these services across the sector.	108
<b>RATIONALE:</b> Financial losses in the events sector have caused many business owners and workers great personal stress. The mental health toll of the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing and the Victorian Government should continue to provide necessary support for those who need it.	108
<b>FINDING 18:</b> Events in rural and regional Victoria are a significant economic driver and deliver important social outcomes for communities.	110
<b>FINDING 19:</b> As with rural and regional Victoria, events in Melbourne deliver important economic and social outcomes.	110

## 6 Victoria’s events sector: ongoing restrictions and government support

**FINDING 20:** Some event organisers feel that major events, particularly professional sport, are treated more favourably regarding restrictions and density limits. 116

**RECOMMENDATION 11:** That the Victorian Government ensure approvals timeframes for COVIDSafe Event Plans that require approval are expedited in order to provide necessary assurance to event organisers, with a maximum response time of four weeks for Tier 1 events and a maximum response time of two weeks for Tier 2 events seeking approval under the *COVID-19 Public Events Framework*. 119

**RATIONALE:** The Victorian Government has improved its approvals process for events. However, businesses need shorter timeframes to give them certainty that their events can occur. 120

**RECOMMENDATION 12:** That the Victorian Government ensure that the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions’ Public Events Team:

- can provide timely support and advice in relation to the *COVID-19 Public Events Framework* and the safe coordination and management of events
- establish additional mechanisms for communicating changes in restrictions and responding to common questions or issues with the events industry. This could include, for example, virtual information sessions and webinars.

122

**RATIONALE:** The unpredictable nature of the COVID-19 pandemic means changes to the *COVID-19 Public Events Framework* sometimes happen quickly. Event organisers need these changes communicated to them as quickly as possible. 122

**FINDING 21:** Stakeholders from the events sector did not believe they have been consulted in a way that allowed them to contribute to Victoria’s *COVID-19 Public Events Framework*. 128

**FINDING 22:** A comprehensive understanding of the events sector will better inform the guidance provided by the Department of Health and the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions. 131

**RECOMMENDATION 13:** That the Victorian Government publish clear guidance on the types of triggers for the imposition or lifting of density quotients and venue capacity restrictions in order to maintain and support business confidence. **131**

**RATIONALE:** Although the evolving nature of COVID-19 and the fact that each outbreak is unique makes predictions very difficult, wider sharing of the health advice regarding restrictions—including when lockdowns are likely to be imposed and lifted—would give the sector more certainty in planning events. **132**

**FINDING 23:** Many stakeholders in the events sector welcomed the financial support that has been provided by the Victorian Government. However, the sector broadly believes that more needs to be done to:

- provide targeted support to ensure its ongoing viability
- ensure businesses affected by future restrictions are supported
- identify and support those who did not receive support, such as some sole traders. **139**

**RECOMMENDATION 14:** That the Victorian Government advocate to the Commonwealth Government for the resumption of the JobKeeper Payment scheme, or a similar form of wage subsidy, for industries that continue to face significant COVID-19 restrictions on their business and employment activity, such as the events sector. **142**

**RATIONALE:** The Commonwealth Government’s decision to end JobKeeper was based on macroeconomic conditions that do not reflect the ongoing economic challenges the events sector is enduring. **142**

## 7 Future support measures for the tourism and events sectors

**FINDING 24:** The National Cabinet announcement of a transition from a suppression strategy to a management strategy for COVID-19 in line with increases in the proportion of vaccinated persons will provide much-needed assurance to the tourism and events sectors. **147**

**RECOMMENDATION 15:** That the Victorian Government work with National Cabinet to revise the *National Plan to transition Australia’s National COVID Response* to include dates and vaccination rates that will trigger changes to Australia’s national COVID-19 response to provide certainty for the tourism and events sectors. **147**

**RATIONALE:** The national requirement for jurisdictions to maintain zero community transmission has been a major reason for lockdowns. Removing this requirement will give the tourism and events sectors the confidence that small numbers of COVID-19 in the community will no longer lead to lockdowns or harsh restrictions. 147

**RECOMMENDATION 16:** That the Victorian Government provide public guidance on how public health mechanisms and policies will change in conjunction with the vaccination thresholds established under the *National Plan to transition Australia's National COVID Response*. 148

**RATIONALE:** Understanding how the Victorian Government will adapt its COVID-19 health response in line with increased vaccination rates will allow businesses in the tourism and events sectors to develop plans for their immediate future. 148

**RECOMMENDATION 17:** That the Victorian Government provide adequate financial and strategic support to Regional Tourism Boards to ensure that Destination Management Plans are in place in each region and that they reflect regional needs in terms of recovery and rebuilding in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. 149

**RATIONALE:** Destination Management Plans provide long-term management and strategies for Victoria's tourism regions. Plans should be developed or revised to focus on the specific recovery needs of each region. 150

**RECOMMENDATION 18:** That the Victorian Government advocate to the Commonwealth Government to prioritise for entry into Australia, when international borders fully reopen, those workers who can fill skills shortages in the tourism sector, including hospitality. Alternatively, this could form part of commercial trials for limited entry of economic visa holders under the *National Plan to transition Australia's National COVID Response*. 151

**RATIONALE:** Australia's partially closed borders have exacerbated skills shortages in the tourism sector in Victoria. Filling these shortages will help facilitate the rapid recovery of the sector. 151

**FINDING 25:** Events sector stakeholders identified a need for changes to be made to the governance structure as it relates to events. 157

**RECOMMENDATION 19:** That the Victorian Government establish an events industry taskforce to review and revise its consultation processes with the events sector in Victoria, in order to:

- identify departmental structural changes to facilitate ongoing consultation and inform the long-term recovery of the sector, including revision of the *COVID-19 Public Events Framework*
- recognise its value independently of tourism and other sectors
- provide clarity around the scope of the sector and its crossover with other sectors
- ensure small- and medium-sized businesses have a greater voice.

157

**RATIONALE:** The Victorian Government has had many meetings with stakeholders in the events sector. However, many stakeholders in this Inquiry, in particular small- and medium-sized businesses, felt they have not had the opportunity to consult with the Victorian Government to the extent that they would like.

157

**FINDING 26:** A single peak industry body for Victoria's whole events sector would simplify consultation with the Victorian Government.

158

**RECOMMENDATION 20:** That the Victorian Government, as a matter of urgency, consider the issue of the events sector's inability to insure against the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This should be done in consultation with the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority working in cooperation with the Insurance Council of Australia and representatives from the events sector. This should also consider the merits of establishing a shared risk underwriting scheme.

170

**RATIONALE:** The inability to insure against the impacts of COVID-19, particularly the risks associated with government-imposed health measures, is a major impediment to the recovery of Victoria's events sector. The Victorian Government can provide support to the sector by resolving this issue. The Committee adds that the Victorian Government should address this issue before the six-month deadline it has to respond to this report.

170

**RECOMMENDATION 21:** That the Victorian Government consider implementing a voucher scheme for events that are organised and take place within the state as a consumer incentive measure. This should be aimed at improving public confidence and promoting support for the events sector's recovery.

172

**RATIONALE:** Events vouchers can be as effective as tourism vouchers in rebuilding public confidence in, and providing stimulus to, the sector.

172

**RECOMMENDATION 22:** That the Victorian Government investigate options for supporting skills growth in the events sector through targeted apprenticeship programs or subsidised courses. This could be through inclusion of apprenticeship pathway and other courses for the events sector in the Victorian Government's Free TAFE for priority courses initiative, and in consultation with the events sector to identify priority needs. 174

**RATIONALE:** The events sector requires staff trained in very particular skills. Shortages caused by the COVID-19 pandemic must be filled for the sector to recover strongly. 174

# What happens next?

**There are several stages to a parliamentary Inquiry.**

## **The Committee conducts the Inquiry**

This report on the Inquiry into the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and events sectors is the result of extensive research and consultation by the Legislative Council's Economy and Infrastructure Committee at the Parliament of Victoria.

We received written submissions, spoke with people at public hearings, reviewed research evidence and deliberated over a number of meetings. Experts, government representatives and individuals expressed their views directly to us as Members of Parliament.

A Parliamentary Committee is not part of the Government. Our Committee is a group of members of different political parties (including independent members). Parliament has asked us to look closely at an issue and report back. This process helps Parliament do its work by encouraging public debate and involvement in issues. We also examine government policies and the actions of the public service.

You can learn more about the Committee's work, including all of its current and past inquiries, at: <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/eic-lc>

## **The report is presented to Parliament**

This report was presented to Parliament and can be found at: <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/eic-lc/inquiries/article/4637>

## **A response from the Government**

The Government has six months to respond in writing to any recommendations we have made. The response is public and put on the Inquiry page of Parliament's website when it is received at: <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/eic-lc/inquiries/article/4638>

In its response, the Government indicates whether it supports the Committee's recommendations. It can also outline actions it may take.



On 18 February 2021, the Legislative Council agreed to the following motion:

That this House requires the Economy and Infrastructure Committee to inquire into, hold public hearings in Melbourne and regional Victoria to identify key issues and areas of concern, and report by 30 June 2021, on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and events sectors and provide recommendations for State Government support measures that will restore the tourism and events sectors to their critical role in the Victorian economy and restore lost jobs.<sup>1</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused extraordinary economic and social disruption across both tourism and events sectors. The introduction of stringent health measures, such as social distancing, travel bans and lockdowns, required Victorian businesses to pivot, adapt or close. For the tourism and events sectors, where movement of people lies at the heart of their activities, businesses found it especially challenging to adapt to the restrictions. Both of these sectors have been some of the worst affected in Victoria and in need of support.

Advocates have reported difficulties accessing government support, or that the support provided was inadequate. Others raised concerns around the long-term recovery of their respective industries. This advocacy, around the unique challenges faced by the tourism and events industries, contributed to the establishment of this Inquiry.

## 1.1 The tourism and events sectors

The tourism sector refers to the individuals and businesses which both directly and indirectly support the delivery of visitor experiences, with the aim of driving visitation to and within the state.

While defining the events sector is somewhat less certain, it can be considered broadly as the individuals and businesses that organise, manage and deliver events in Victoria. The sector has also previously been known as the ‘special events’ industry, with special events referring to those events that are outside of a host’s normal business or activities.

In its 2016 *Victorian Visitor Economy Strategy* (Strategy), the Victorian Government incorporates tourism, events and related industries into the ‘visitor economy’. The Strategy defines this as:

the production of goods and services for consumption by visitors, which includes the industries that directly serve visitors, such as hotels, transport providers, tour companies

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<sup>1</sup> The Report was tabled in the Parliament on the first sitting day following 30 June 2021.

and attractions, as well as intermediaries and those involved indirectly, such as retail and food production.<sup>2</sup>

The Strategy states that traditional notions of tourism no longer reflect contemporary reasons for travel, including for business, work, education or medical services. The expanded ‘visitor economy’ aims to capture these within one policy area.<sup>3</sup> However, as noted by various stakeholders to the Inquiry, events can drive visitor demand, but this is not their primary purpose. Events provide broad economic, social and cultural value to the state.

In this report, the tourism and events sectors are considered separately, in recognition of their separate purposes and business models. However, the term ‘visitor economy’ is used where government data, policy or information relates to the combined tourism, events and related industries and cannot be disaggregated.

## 1.2 Inquiry process

Throughout the Inquiry, the Committee engaged with a wide range of stakeholders across both the tourism and events sectors to ensure it heard views that represented the diverse perspectives within those industries. However, due to the short Inquiry timeframe, it was not possible to provide all stakeholders who wished to speak to the Committee at a public hearing the opportunity to do so. With an approximate five-month period to gather evidence through the submission process, hold public hearings across metropolitan and regional Victoria, undertake analysis and produce a final report to the Parliament, there was limited capacity to hear from everyone who wanted to speak directly to the Committee.

The timeframe provided to the Committee to undertake this Inquiry reflects the urgent nature of the issues within the terms of reference, and as such, the Committee was unable to investigate every related issue in detail. The Committee has instead focused on the most urgent and pressing matters raised over the course of the Inquiry.

This Inquiry greatly valued the critical evidence provided by stakeholders through written submissions. It strongly relied on this evidence, in the same way as evidence received through public hearings, to inform this final report and recommendations to the Victorian Government.

In addition, many of the core governance and policy challenges for both State and Commonwealth Governments stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic—such as quarantine processes and facilities, vaccinations, border restrictions and contact tracing mechanisms—were raised consistently throughout the Inquiry. While these important issues have clear implications for the tourism and events sectors, some, such as hotel quarantine and Victoria’s contact tracing regime, have been examined in detail in other

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<sup>2</sup> Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, *Victorian Visitor Economy Strategy*, Melbourne, July 2016, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

inquiries and reports.<sup>4</sup> This report discusses the impacts of these broader challenges on the tourism and events sectors and makes related recommendations, but does not analyse them directly.

### 1.3 Outline of the report

As noted, in recognition of the distinct nature of the tourism and events sectors, the impacts and government support provided to each are considered separately within this report.

The report is divided into the following seven chapters:

- Chapter 1 introduces the Inquiry's terms of reference and outlines the Inquiry process.
- Chapter 2 provides an overview of the COVID-19 pandemic as it relates to the tourism and events sectors in Victoria, including a timeline of key events and the governance arrangements in place at both state and national levels. It also discusses the major forms of economic support provided to affected individuals and businesses.
- Chapter 3 discusses the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Victoria's tourism sector and highlights the distinct ways in which each tourism region has been adversely affected.
- Chapter 4 looks at the range of economic support measures implemented by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments to redress the impacts of COVID-19 on the tourism sector.
- Chapter 5 discusses the events sector, including its composition, governance and the economic, social and cultural contributions it makes to Victoria. It considers the impacts that COVID-19 has had on the sector.
- Chapter 6 outlines ongoing restrictions for events in Victoria, primarily through the *COVID-19 Public Events Framework*. It also discusses support provided by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments for the sector during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Chapter 7 outlines the main ongoing challenges facing the tourism and events sectors and the Victorian Government. It considers the importance of restoring confidence in these industries and discusses future support measures for their ongoing recovery.

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<sup>4</sup> See, Hon. Jennifer Coate AO, Board of Inquiry, *COVID-19 Hotel Quarantine Inquiry Final Report and Recommendations: PP No 191, Session 2018–2020*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, December 2020; Parliament of Victoria, Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, *Inquiry into the Victorian Government's COVID-19 contact tracing system and testing regime* December 2020.



## The COVID-19 pandemic: government responses and responsibilities

This Chapter provides an overview of the COVID-19 pandemic as it relates to the tourism and events sectors in Victoria. It begins with a timeline of key events and responses made by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments during the pandemic. It then maps how legislative and administrative frameworks have been implemented in response to COVID-19 at national and state levels. This Chapter ends with an overview of key initiatives and support packages provided by the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments to both sectors.

### 2.1 Timeline of key events for the COVID-19 pandemic response

Date	Key event
25 January 2020	Victoria reported the first case of COVID-19 in Australia
13 March 2020	The Prime Minister of Australia announced the decision to form a 'National Cabinet' in response to the COVID-19 crisis
16 March 2020	A State of Emergency was first declared in Victoria under the <i>Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008</i> (Vic). This declaration continued to be renewed throughout the pandemic
20 March 2020	Australian borders were closed to non-residents (with exemptions, such as for humanitarian reasons or business needs)
26 March 2020	Stage 2 restrictions were introduced across Victoria
30 March 2020	The Commonwealth JobKeeper Payment was announced as a wage subsidy for affected businesses
30 March 2020	Stage 3 restrictions were introduced across Victoria
8 May 2020	National 3-Step roadmap for a COVIDSafe Australia was released
28 June 2020	Victoria announced mandatory testing for all returned travellers in hotel quarantine
31 June 2020	Ten Melbourne postcodes entered stage 3 restrictions
2 August 2020	The Victorian Government declared a State of Disaster in Victoria
2 August 2020	Stage 4 restrictions commenced in metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire
5 August 2020	Regional Victoria entered stage 3 restrictions
13 September 2020	Regional Victoria moved to the 'second step' of reopening
16 September 2020	Regional Victoria moved to the 'third step' of reopening, which included the reopening of some venues and the resumption of regional travel
27 September 2020	Melbourne moved to the second step of reopening
27 October 2020	Regional Victoria and Melbourne entered the third step of reopening, which included the resumption of live music and the reopening of some venues

Date	Key event
8 November 2020	The State of Disaster expired and was not renewed
22 November 2020	Victoria moved to the last step of the roadmap to recovery, which included relaxed density restrictions, increased total venue capacity and the resumption of public events
22 November 2020	The <i>COVID-19 Public Events Framework</i> was released to assist event organisers to safely manage events
11 December 2020	The first round of the Regional Travel Voucher Scheme opened to encourage intrastate travel, which was followed by further rounds in January and March
1 January 2021	Victoria closed its border to New South Wales
12 February 2021	The Victorian Premier announced a 'circuit breaker' lockdown in response to a breach in hotel quarantine
22 February 2021	The COVID-19 vaccination program commenced in Victoria
26 February 2021	The circuit breaker lockdown ended
12 March 2021	Round one of the Melbourne Travel Voucher Scheme opened to encourage visitation to Melbourne
28 March 2021	The Commonwealth JobKeeper Payment scheme ended
27 May 2021	A seven-day circuit breaker lockdown was announced
3 June 2021	Restrictions were eased for regional Victoria, with the five reasons to leave home removed and no limit on the distance regional Victorians could travel from home
7 June 2021	The Victorian Government announced a \$32.2 million Regional Tourism Support Package
15 June 2021	The Victorian Government announced a \$20 million Victorian Events Support Package
30 June 2021	Some restrictions from the May circuit breaker lockdown remained due to concern about outbreaks in other parts of Australia

## 2.2 Government responses

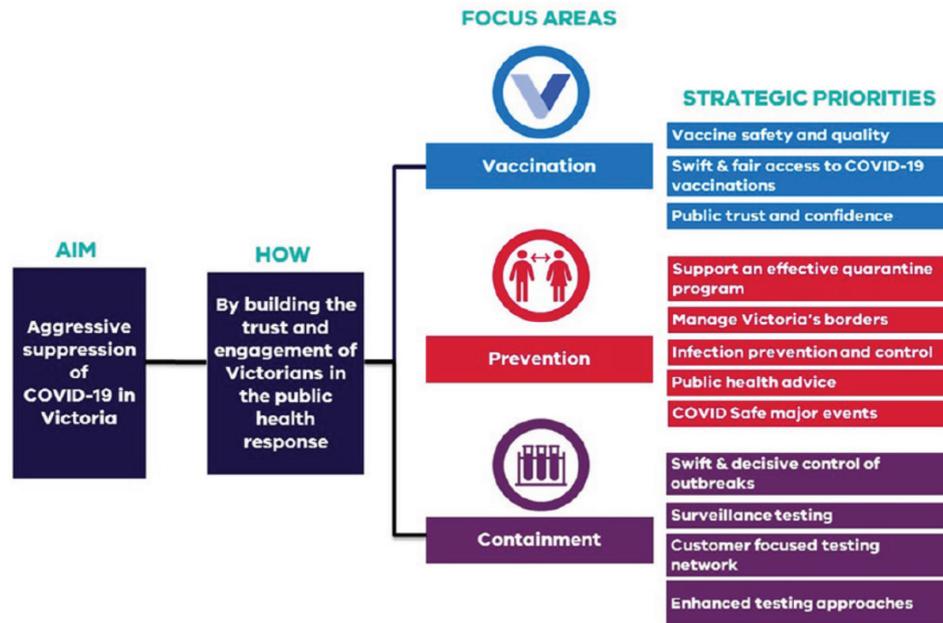
Various measures have been introduced to manage COVID-19 outbreaks in the state, each with wide-ranging impacts on Victorian residents. At a public hearing, Professor Brett Sutton, Victoria's Chief Health Officer, described the Victorian Government's approach as a 'continuous improvement model':

With each and every outbreak we have had in Victoria, we have looked to nuance and improve our response as much as possible, aiming to balance the risk of the reintroduction of COVID-19 into the community or indeed the amplification and transmission of COVID-19 while minimising impact and further hardship, recognising that there is no zero harm approach in managing COVID around the world. There is always hardship associated with the choices that need to be made. Victoria certainly embraced a continuous improvement model, adapting our response based on emerging information, changing circumstances and a deeper understanding of COVID-19 transmission as time has gone by.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Professor Brett Sutton, Chief Health Officer, Department of Health, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 28 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

The Victorian Government pursued an integrated approach to managing COVID-19, as outlined in Figure 2.1 below.

**Figure 2.1** Integrated approach to COVID-19 management



Source: Department of Health, PowerPoint presentation, supplementary evidence received 28 June 2021.

The following sections provide an overview of government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, including in relation to border closures, lockdowns, curfews, capacity and crowd density limits and hotel quarantine.

## 2.2.1 Border closures and restrictions

Border closures and restrictions were adopted by the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments to limit the spread of COVID-19.<sup>2</sup> While an accepted public health approach,<sup>3</sup> border closures have dramatically limited the operations of businesses across the tourism and events sectors.

### International border restrictions

International border restrictions are intended to stop the spread of COVID-19 cases acquired overseas, which have been the majority source of infection in Australia since late October 2020.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Parliament of Australia, Senate Select Committee on COVID-19, *First interim report*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, December 2020, pp. 14, 111.

<sup>3</sup> Karen Elphick, *National emergency and disaster response arrangements in Australia: a quick guide*, Department of Parliamentary Services, Parliament of Australia, 28 April 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Health, *Total COVID-19 cases in Australia by source of infection*, 2021, <<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/total-covid-19-cases-in-australia-by-source-of-infection>> accessed 23 June 2021.

On 1 February 2020, the Commonwealth Government banned foreign nationals in mainland China from entering Australia.<sup>5</sup> Further travel bans were implemented on foreign nationals travelling from Iran (1 March), Republic of Korea (5 March) and Italy (11 March).<sup>6</sup> On 16 March, the Commonwealth Government announced a ban on all cruise ships from foreign ports entering Australian ports.<sup>7</sup> From 20 March 2020, Australia closed its borders to all non-citizens and non-residents.<sup>8</sup> These restrictions have affected all international travel, which has, according to the Tourism, Events and Visitor Economy Research Unit of the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR), ‘effectively grounded international arrivals to a halt’.<sup>9</sup>

As at July 2021, Australia’s international borders remain closed, with some of the main exceptions including:

- Australian citizens
- permanent residents
- New Zealand citizens usually resident in Australia
- immediate family members of the above
- travellers who have been in New Zealand for at least 14 days before their date of departure.<sup>10</sup>

Anyone authorised to enter Australia must undertake a period of hotel quarantine, which is discussed in section 2.2.2 (however, the ‘travel bubble’ with New Zealand has a specific list of rules).

### Interstate border restrictions

All states and territories have imposed interstate border restrictions to varying degrees, to reduce the probability of COVID-19 being transmitted across jurisdictions. Unlike international border restrictions, which remain largely unchanged since March 2020, changes to interstate border restrictions have been numerous. Interstate border restrictions are based on public health advice from each jurisdiction’s health department, which are consistently updated to reflect the changing levels of risk.

5 National Security Committee of Cabinet, *Updated travel advice to protect Australians from the novel coronavirus* media release, 1 February 2020.

6 Brett Worthington, ‘Italy added to Australia’s coronavirus travel ban alongside China, Iran, South Korea’, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-11/coronavirus-australian-travel-ban-extended-to-italy/12045064>> accessed 12 July 2021.

7 Prime Minister of Australia, *Coronavirus measures endorsed by National Cabinet*, media release, 16 March 2020.

8 Prime Minister of Australia, *Border restrictions*, media release, 19 March 2020.

9 *Coronavirus (COVID-19) impact on Victoria’s Visitor Economy*, report prepared by Tourism, Events and Visitor Economy (TEVE) Research Unit, Victorian Government April 2021, p. 21.

10 Department of Health, *Coronavirus (COVID-19) advice for international travellers*, 21 June 2021, <<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/coronavirus-covid-19-restrictions/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-international-travellers>> accessed 21 June 2021; Department of Home Affairs, *COVID-19 and the border: Coming to Australia*, <<https://covid19.homeaffairs.gov.au/coming-australia>> accessed 21 July 2021.

By late July 2020, all states and territories except Victoria had closed their borders to residents of other jurisdictions.<sup>11</sup> Victoria was the last state to impose interstate border closures, partly closing its borders for the first time on 19 November 2020.<sup>12</sup>

Victoria's various restrictions have included testing, quarantine and travel permit requirements, with penalties and fines for non-compliance.

## 2.2.2 Hotel quarantine

On 27 March 2020, the Prime Minister announced that a 14-day 'hotel quarantine' system would house people returning to Australia. He said:

We will be living with this virus for at least six months [and] substantial numbers of returned travellers and small community outbreaks associated with travellers continue to contribute most of the significant further growth in COVID-19 cases in Australia.<sup>13</sup>

Although under Australia's Constitution quarantine is a federal responsibility,<sup>14</sup> it was agreed at National Cabinet that states and territories would run, and meet the associated costs of, hotel quarantine, with the expectation that this would be a temporary measure. Each jurisdiction had less than 48 hours to prepare a hotel quarantine system, with the announcement stating that the system was to be in place by no later than 11.59pm on 28 March 2020.<sup>15</sup>

The total cost of hotel quarantine to Victoria has not been made public, although the Hon Jaclyn Symes MP has stated that from July 2020 to 31 March 2021 the system cost \$442 million.<sup>16</sup>

The risks of hotel quarantine primarily centre on the use of shared spaces and ventilation—hotels are not designed with safe airflow in mind in the same way purpose-built quarantine facilities are—and the fact that they are usually located in densely populated urban settings.

A recent study of the hotel quarantine system conducted by health science experts identified 21 breaches between April 2020 and June 2021 in Australia:

- eight in New South Wales
- five in Victoria
- three in Queensland

11 Holly Mclean and Ben Huf, *Emergency Powers, Public Health and COVID-19*, report prepared by Parliamentary Library & Information Service, Parliament of Victoria, Victoria, 2020, pp. 50–52.

12 Benjamin Preiss and Craig Butt Rachael Dexter, 'Victoria closes border to South Australia after outbreak', *The Age*, 19 November 2020, <<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/victoria-achieves-20-days-without-a-new-covid-case-sa-s-first-day-of-hard-lockdown-20201119-p56fxg.html>> accessed 23 June 2021.

13 Prime Minister of Australia, *Update on coronavirus measures*, media release, 27 March 2020.

14 *Commonwealth Constitution*, s 51(ix).

15 Prime Minister of Australia, *Update on coronavirus measures*, media release, 27 March 2020.

16 Hon Jaclyn Symes MP, COVID-19 - Hotel quarantine program costs hearing, response to questions without notice received 17 June 2021.

- three in Western Australia
- two in South Australia.<sup>17</sup>

A further eight breaches were reported between 2 June and 1 July 2021: five in Queensland, two in New South Wales and one in Victoria.<sup>18</sup>

In October 2020, the final report of the National Review of Hotel Quarantine was provided to the National Cabinet by Jane Halton AO PSM. This review—also known as the Halton Report—made six recommendations, including: ‘Options for new models of quarantine should be developed for consideration by National Cabinet including a risk assessment of these options and an analysis of traveller suitability.’<sup>19</sup> At the time of writing this report, the Commonwealth Government had not built any new quarantine facilities in Australia for the purpose of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, the Hon Jennifer Coate AO led a Board of Inquiry into Victoria’s COVID-19 hotel quarantine program, with the final report provided to the Governor of Victoria on 21 December 2020. Among the report’s 81 recommendations were that clear control and accountability structures be put in place for the operation of the quarantine program, at ministerial and departmental levels; and that the Victorian Government develop functionality to implement a home-based model for some international arrivals.<sup>20</sup>

In May 2021, the Victorian Government presented the Commonwealth Government with plans for a purpose-built facility in Mickleham (roughly 30 kilometres north of Melbourne’s CBD). The proposal received Commonwealth approval in June with construction of the 1,000-bed facility predicted to be completed by the end of 2021.<sup>21</sup>

### 2.2.3 Lockdowns

The use of strong lockdown measures in Victoria (in particular, Stage 3 and Stage 4 ‘Stay at Home’ restrictions) have caused statewide social and economic upheaval. As Australia’s worst affected state, Victoria has imposed a total of four lockdowns for COVID-19 prevention and control:

- Lockdown one: 30 March–31 May 2020
- Lockdown two: 9 July–27 October 2020
- Lockdown three: 12–17 February 2021
- Lockdown four: 27 May–11 June 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Ameera Katar and Tony Blakely Driss Ait Ouakrim, ‘Hotel quarantine causes 1 outbreak for every 204 infected travellers. It’s far from ‘fit for purpose’’, *The Conversation*, 2 June 2021, <<https://theconversation.com/hotel-quarantine-causes-1-outbreak-for-every-204-infected-travellers-its-far-from-fit-for-purpose-161815>> accessed 27 June 2021.

<sup>18</sup> George Megalogenis, ‘Opinion: Why the premiers have PM pincer on COVID’’, *The Age*, 3 July 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Department of Health, *National Review of Hotel Quarantine* report for Australian Government 23 October 2020, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Board of Inquiry Hon. Jennifer Coate AO, *COVID-19 Hotel Quarantine Inquiry Final Report and Recommendations: PP No 191, Session 2018–2020*, Victorian Government, Melbourne, December 2020, pp. 40–41, 6.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Melbourne COVID-19 quarantine facility approved as Commonwealth, Victoria agree on site’, *ABC News*, 25 June 2021, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-06-25/melbourne-mickleham-covid-quarantine-facility-to-be-built/100243456>> accessed 12 July 2021.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) noted that from July through to September 2020, the impact of second wave restrictions in Victoria saw employment and working hours at their lowest point in the COVID-19 period, down 6.5% and 13.8% respectively. During August and September, the number of daily jobs lost in Victoria was 1,200 per day, 52% of all jobs lost nationally since March.<sup>22</sup> At the end of September, while all other states were showing signs of economic recovery, Victoria's accommodation, food services and arts and recreation services were down 26.3%. At this time, around half of Australians working zero hours due to the economic disruption caused by COVID-19 were in Victoria.<sup>23</sup>

While lockdown measures have been a critically important tool in getting the virus under control, concerns regarding the overall emotional and fiscal impacts have been widely reported.<sup>24</sup> The Australian Financial Review reported the economic cost of Victoria's fourth lockdown at approximately \$125 million a day.<sup>25</sup> A finding from the Victorian Parliament's Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) *Inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic* has anticipated that 'greater support will be necessary in the future, due to the ongoing mental health impacts of the pandemic and associated lockdowns'.<sup>26</sup> PAEC's Inquiry also noted that the hardest hit industries have been hospitality and accommodation, and arts and recreation—all tourism- and events-related industries.<sup>27</sup>

Up to mid-2021, Victoria had been the only state to impose 'Stage 4' restrictions, enforced during the second 112-day lockdown, and subsequent lockdowns in 2021. According to a report released in April 2021 by DJPR, Victoria's economy was greatly impacted by Stage 4 restrictions. Interstate and intrastate overnight visitors to and within Victoria fell dramatically in August and September 2020, showing improvement in October. Greater job losses occurred in metropolitan Melbourne compared to regional Victoria due to tighter restrictions in the metropolitan area. However, easing of Stage 4 restrictions in Melbourne has seen a stronger recovery in employment compared to regional Victoria.<sup>28</sup>

22 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Recovery tempered by second wave impacts - September quarter 2020*, 2020, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/recovery-tempered-second-wave-impacts-september-quarter-2020#section-5-second-wave-impacts-in-victoria>> accessed 21 June 2021.

23 Ibid.

24 Parliament of Victoria, Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, *Inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic* February 2021, p. xvi; Katie Burgess, 'Economic cost of Victoria lockdown revealed', *The Canberra Times*, 6 August 2020, <<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6866917/economic-cost-of-victorian-lockdown-revealed>> accessed 24 June 2021.

25 Ronald Mizen, 'Victoria's lockdown hits sentiment, costs \$125 million a day', *Australian Financial Review*, 9 June 2021, <<https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/victoria-s-lockdown-hits-sentiment-costs-125-million-per-day-20210609-p57zhz>> accessed 7 July 2021.

26 Parliament of Victoria, Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, *Inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic* p. xxix.

27 Ibid., p. xviii.

28 *Coronavirus (COVID-19) impact on Victoria's Visitor Economy*, pp. 26–27.

## Lockdown rules

In a ‘Stage 3’ lockdown, strict rules are imposed to slow the spread of the virus, with a person usually only able to leave their home for one of four reasons:

- to purchase food and necessary supplies
- exercise and recreation
- medical care and caregiving
- study and work—if it can’t be done from home.<sup>29</sup>

During the fourth lockdown, a fifth reason was added, which was for the purposes of getting a vaccination, if eligible to do so.<sup>30</sup> In addition to the above requirements, a Stage 4 lockdown imposes additional constraints such as curfews, ‘radius restrictions’ (for example, not being able to travel more than 5 kilometres from your home) and a requirement that all work and study be done at home.<sup>31</sup>

Under each lockdown, all non-essential businesses were required to close. Tourism and events businesses are classified as non-essential.

## Curfews

From 6pm on 2 August 2020, Victoria entered a ‘State of Disaster’ and moved to Stage 4 restrictions, which enforced a curfew from 8pm to 5am each day.<sup>32</sup> During curfew hours, people were prohibited from leaving their home, with the exceptions of work, medical care, caregiving and emergencies.

On 5 August, restrictions eased from Stage 4 to Stage 3 in regional Victoria. In metropolitan Melbourne and the Mitchell Shire, the curfew remained in place for six weeks. On 13 September, the beginning of the curfew was moved to 9pm. Curfew restrictions ended as of 11.59pm on 27 September 2020.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Zena Chamas, ‘Victoria has introduced a curfew and stage 4 coronavirus restrictions for Melbourne, and stage 3 restrictions for regional Victoria. Here’s what that means’, *ABC News*, 3 August 2020, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-08-02/victorias-latest-coronavirus-restrictions-explained/12516182>> accessed 21 June 2021.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Victorians now have a fifth reason to leave home during lockdown — COVID-19 vaccination’, *ABC News*, 27 May 2021, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-05-27/victoria-melbourne-lockdown-vaccination-allowed-pfizer-over-40/100170132>> accessed 30 June 2020.

<sup>31</sup> Chamas, ‘Victoria has introduced a curfew and stage 4 coronavirus restrictions for Melbourne, and stage 3 restrictions for regional Victoria. Here’s what that means’.

<sup>32</sup> Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Report to Parliament on declaration of State of Disaster – Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic – Report 2: Report under section 23(7) of the Emergency Management Act 1986*, p. 4; Victoria, *Victorian Government Gazette*, No. S 384, 2 August 2020.

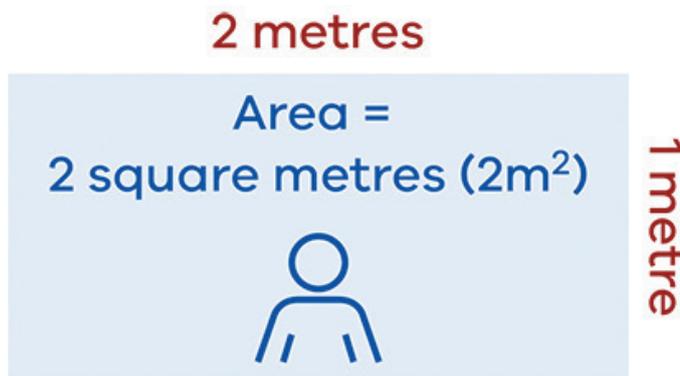
<sup>33</sup> Ben Smees, ‘Melbourne Covid curfew ends and restrictions ease, but Victoria introduces huge new fines’, *The Guardian*, 27 September 2020, <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/sep/27/melbourne-covid-curfew-ends-and-restrictions-ease-but-victoria-introduces-huge-new-fines>> accessed 21 June 2021.

## 2.2.4 Density quotients and capacity limits

Density quotients and capacity limits changed frequently throughout the pandemic, according to updated health advice contained in Victoria's *Restricted Activity Directions* (discussed further in section 2.4) and where Victoria is at in the roadmap to reopening (discussed further in section 2.4.2).

Density quotients limit the number of people allowed in each non-seated space, applying either a two, four or eight square metre rule. For example, the 'two square metre rule' only allows one person for every two square metres of available floor space. The primary purpose of these rules is 'to support physical distancing and minimise close contact between people to minimise the risk of COVID-19 transmission'.<sup>34</sup>

**Figure 2.2** Density quotients



Source: Victorian Government, *Two, four and eight square metre rules*, Melbourne, 9 April 2021.

Venue capacity limits were also introduced to support physical distancing and minimise close contact, by restricting the proportion of seated areas that could be used.

In November 2020, the Victorian Government introduced the *COVID-19 Public Events Framework* (PEF) to provide guidance on the safe management of public events. Public events and venues that want to operate at numbers above what is permitted in the *Restricted Activity Directions* must submit a COVIDSafe Event Plan under the PEF for government assessment. Working with the government, organisers can confirm capacity and density arrangements for venues.<sup>35</sup>

Event proposals are assessed against the PEF's three-tiered system, which is also updated according to public health advice (discussed further at section 2.4.2).

Under the framework, a density quotient of one person per two square metres applies to general admission and non-seated venues. Non-seated venues must calculate their density quotient based on the area that is publicly accessible to attendees (i.e. not the entire area of the venue).

<sup>34</sup> Victorian Government, *Two, four and eight square metre rules: Information on two, four and eight square metre rules to prevent infection in the workplace*, <<https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/four-and-two-square-metre-rules>> accessed 21 June 2021.

<sup>35</sup> Victorian Government, *COVID-19 Public Events Framework: V3.0*, 25 May 2021, pp. 2-4.

This approach to capacity limits considers several factors, including whether the venue or event:

- is indoors or outdoors
- has allocated or unallocated seating
- is set in a smaller or larger space
- serves alcohol
- is likely to have close physical interaction between attendees.<sup>36</sup>

## 2.3 Commonwealth governance

Australia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the complex lines of accountability and responsibility across different agencies and levels of government. The states and territories are primarily responsible for declaring and responding to emergencies, with each having broad powers to legislate on any matter to deal with emergencies within their own borders.<sup>37</sup> The Commonwealth does, however, have constitutional authority in relation to financial grants and quarantine arrangements, and has a role in the coordination of state and territory responses.

### 2.3.1 COVID-19 response decision-making

The Commonwealth has used its constitutional powers to respond to the COVID-19 crisis in three ways. First, through its constitutional quarantine power, it has conferred powers to issue directions and set requirements to prevent the spread of COVID-19 as a listed human disease. Second, through its constitutional grants power, it has provided financial assistance to the states and territories on 'terms and conditions' that the Parliament deems appropriate.<sup>38</sup> Third, through an asserted authority to coordinate emergency action, it has coordinated responses of the states and territories.<sup>39</sup> The following section looks at the use of the Commonwealth's coordination and quarantine powers. For a discussion of the delivery of financial assistance to Victoria from the Commonwealth, see section 2.5.2.

#### Coordination

Australia's emergency management structures allow Australian states and territories, with Commonwealth assistance, to coordinate and manage the response to, and recovery from, a national health crisis.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>37</sup> H. P. Lee, M. Adams, C. Campbell and P. Emerton, *Emergency Powers in Australia*, 2nd edn, Cambridge University Press, 2019, p. 7.

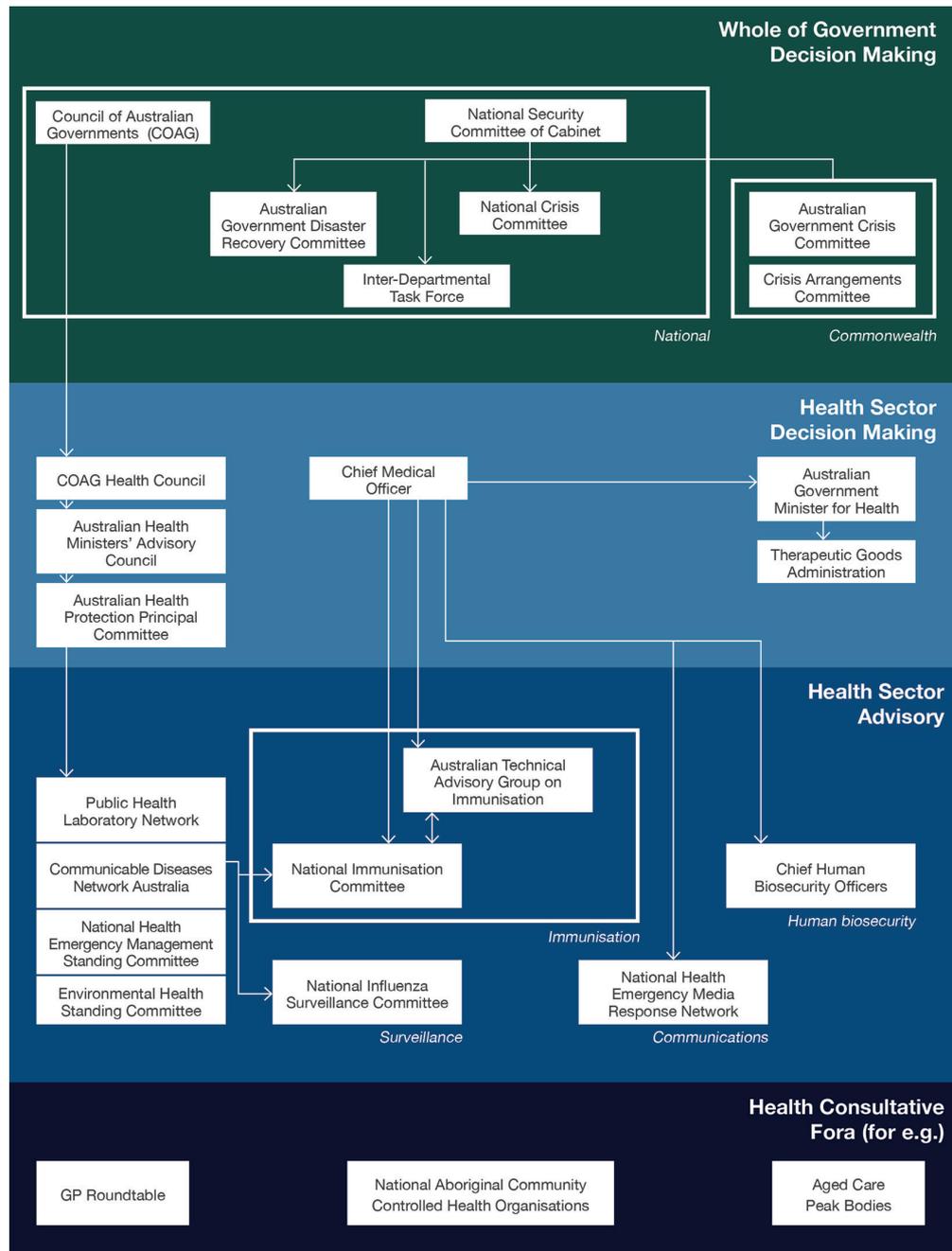
<sup>38</sup> Library of Congress, *Legal Responses to Health Emergencies: Australia*, report prepared by The Law Library of Congress, Washington DC, 2015, p. 14.

<sup>39</sup> Holly Mclean and Ben Huf, *Emergency Powers, Public Health and COVID-19*, report prepared by Parliamentary Library & Information Service, Parliament of Victoria, Victoria, 2020, p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> Karen Elphick, *National emergency and disaster response arrangements in Australia: a quick guide* Research paper series Department of Parliamentary Services Parliament of Australia, 28 April 2020, pp. 3–4.

The Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (AGCMF), illustrated in Figure 3, is the overarching, whole-of-government decision-making framework designed to be applicable in national public health crises. The AGCMF arrangements were applied in response to the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>41</sup>

**Figure 2.3** Whole-of-government, health sector, and health advisory committees involved in decision-making for an influenza pandemic



Source: Department of Health (2019) *Australian Health Management Plan for Pandemic Influenza*, Canberra, Commonwealth of Australia, p. 34.

41 Ibid., p. 3.

The Commonwealth Department of Health is the lead government agency responsible for national coordination of the health sector emergency response. Led by the Minister for Health, the Department works together with the State and Territory Governments to share information and ensure a consistent response across the country.

In parallel to the health sector are several key whole-of-government crisis committees and co-ordination mechanisms that implement the various crisis and pandemic plans. The Australian Health Protection Principle Committee (AHPPC) is the key committee coordinating the Australian health sector response. Chaired by the Chief Medical Officer—Australia’s designated lead health official—AHPPC comprises all state and territory Chief Health Officers and provides health advice to whole-of-government bodies.

A key feature of the Commonwealth Government’s COVID-19 response was the decision of the former Council of Australian Governments to form a National Cabinet, announced in March 2020. Comprising the Prime Minister, state Premiers, and territory Chief Ministers, the Cabinet has been used to coordinate action between the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments.<sup>42</sup> On 29 May 2020, the Prime Minister announced that the National Cabinet model would be made permanent, thereby abolishing the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).<sup>43</sup>

While the National Cabinet has made decisions designed to guide emergency responses to COVID-19, it is ultimately up to the states and territories to implement these decisions, using powers available under their own emergency and public health legislation (discussed further in section 2.4). The Victorian Government has, however, made decisions consistent with the National Cabinet in its response to the COVID-19 emergency.

The National Cabinet’s role in coordinating the health response across state boundaries has meant that its decisions affect industries that rely on the movement of people and open borders, including the tourism and events sectors.

### Quarantine power

Under the quarantine powers of the Australian Constitution, the Commonwealth has legislative capacity to respond to public health crises. The *Biosecurity Act 2015* (Cth) confers broad powers onto the Minister for Health to issue any directions that the Minister deems necessary to prevent or control the entry, emergence, establishment, or spread of a listed disease in Australia.<sup>44</sup>

After COVID-19 was added as a ‘listed disease’ on 21 January 2020 and a ‘human biosecurity emergency’ was declared on 18 March 2020, the Minister issued a number

<sup>42</sup> Parliament of Australia, Senate Select Committee on COVID-19, *First interim report*, p. 107.

<sup>43</sup> Prime Minister of Australia, *Update following National Cabinet meeting*, media release, 29 May 2020.

<sup>44</sup> *Biosecurity Act 2015* (Cth), ss. 44-45, 51; ch 8 p 2 div 2; 642.

of determinations to control the COVID-19 outbreak. Broadly, these restrictions have included:

- travel restrictions, for persons trying to enter or leave Australian territory
- requirements for persons not to enter designated areas
- regulations and restrictions around the movement of goods
- quarantining of people around Australia.

### 2.3.2 Pandemic response plans

The Commonwealth Government has a series of health emergency plans that deal specifically with pandemic response. These are implemented by the various committees, advisory bodies and departments mentioned above, with the plans outlining how state strategies should complement the broader national scheme. The Pandemic Influenza Plan is a key plan that was adapted in February 2020 to specifically manage the national COVID-19 response. This became the *Australian Health Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)* which has been designed as a ‘living document’ to guide the Australian health sector response.

A number of national documents and plans have been developed to help guide the states’ and territories’ COVID-19 responses. The guidance documents outlined below have assisted Victoria’s tourism and events sectors in minimising public health risks and transmission of COVID-19.

#### Roadmap to a COVIDSafe Australia

On 8 May 2020, National Cabinet approved the 3-Step Framework for a COVIDSafe Australia to put Australia back on the road to recovery from COVID-19. The steps are implemented by the states and territories based on their local COVID-19 context:

- Step 1—focuses on carefully reopening the economy, and giving Australians opportunities to return to work and social activities, including gatherings of up to 10 people, up to five visitors in the family home and some local and regional travel
- Step 2—builds on Step 1 with gatherings of up to 20 people, and more businesses reopening, including gyms, beauty services and entertainment venues like galleries and cinemas
- Step 3—will see a transition to COVIDSafe ways of living and working, with gatherings of up to 100 people permitted. Arrangements under step 3 will be the ‘new normal’ while the virus remains a threat. International travel and mass gatherings over 100 people will remain restricted.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Prime Minister of Australia, *Update on coronavirus measures*, media release, 8 May 2020.

### **Framework for National Reopening**

Building on the 3-Step Framework for a COVID-Safe Australia, on 13 November 2020, the National Cabinet finalised its *Framework for National Reopening*. The framework's objective was to provide consideration and guidance 'to nationally reopen to a state of COVID Normal,' whenever it is safe to do so, by Christmas of 2020. It also underscores the need for continued health vigilance while providing a path to easing the physical and mental burden on Australians.<sup>46</sup>

According to a Fact Sheet produced by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, all states and territories bar Western Australia agreed to the Framework. Western Australia did not agree, taking issue with the domestic border and international arrival proposals.<sup>47</sup>

On 2 July 2021, National Cabinet announced its *National Plan to transition Australia's National COVID Response*. This plan is discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

### **Roadmap for Reactivating Live Performance Venues and Events**

On 20 November 2020, the Commonwealth Government unveiled a three-step roadmap to reactivate venues and events. The Roadmap, which prioritises the protection of public health, provides a general guide for resuming such activities in Australia, helping the states and territories determine the size of events and the requirements of COVIDSafe event plans.<sup>48</sup>

## **2.4 Victorian governance**

### **2.4.1 COVID-19 response decision-making**

The Victorian Government has expansive powers under its public health and emergency management legislation that allow for actions to be taken to respond to the COVID-19 emergency. Its decision-making capacity is constrained by the powers guaranteed by the Australian Constitution, discussed above in section 2.3.1.

Despite minimal constraints on its powers, Victoria's decisions have been largely consistent with the National Cabinet and align with the *Australian Health Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)*. The following section provides a broad overview of the use of Victoria's public health and emergency powers in response to the crisis.

<sup>46</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *Framework for National Reopening*, November 2020, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 'Roadmap to a COVIDSafe Australia: Headline Measures Fact Sheet', 26 November 2020, p. 6.

<sup>48</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, 'Roadmap for reactivating live performance and events', November 2020.

## Emergency Management Act

The *Emergency Management Act 2013* (Vic) (Emergency Management Act) establishes governance arrangements for the management of emergencies in Victoria. This Act, together with the *COVID-19 Pandemic Plan for the Victorian Health Sector* (COVID-19 pandemic plan), *Emergency Management Manual Victoria*, the *State Health Emergency Response Plan* and the *State Operational Arrangements for COVID 19*, outline Victoria's emergency management arrangements.

Under these arrangements, the Department of Health is primarily responsible for responding to a public health emergency and has implemented plans specifically related to the COVID-19 response.

The Emergency Management Act establishes Emergency Management Victoria (EMV), which leads emergency response and oversees plans that outline governance across sectors in Victoria. The Emergency Management Act also provides for the appointment of the Emergency Management Commissioner, who is responsible for coordinating activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

EMV manages the State Control Centre, which is Victoria's primary control centre for the management of emergencies. On 10 March 2020, the State Control Centre was directed to oversee Victoria's COVID-19 response.

On 3 April 2020, the Victorian Government established the Crisis Council of Cabinet as the core decision-making forum on all matters related to the COVID-19 emergency, including implementing the decisions of the National Cabinet.

On 2 August 2020, using the powers conferred by the Emergency Management Act, the Victorian Premier declared a State of Disaster, following consultation with relevant ministers. Under these directions, Victoria Police was given greater powers and more resources to enforce relevant public health directions. The State of Disaster expired on 8 November 2020 and was not renewed.

## Public Health and Wellbeing Act

Victoria's *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* (Public Health and Wellbeing Act) gives the Chief Health Officer powers and responsibilities for managing risks to public health arising from outbreaks of infectious disease.

On 16 March 2020, the Chief Health Officer declared a 'State of Emergency' under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act, after it was considered that COVID-19 constituted a 'serious risk to public health'.<sup>49</sup> To date, the State of Emergency has been extended thirteen times, and is currently set to expire on 16 December 2021. After the initial declaration, the Chief Health Officer was given powers to issue directions and set

<sup>49</sup> Justice Connect, *How the Victorian Government's Emergency Restrictions on COVID-19 (Coronavirus) work*, 22 June 2021, <<https://justiceconnect.org.au/resources/how-the-victorian-governments-emergency-restrictions-on-coronavirus-covid-19-work>> accessed 8 July 2021.

requirements in order to eliminate or reduce the risks of the virus. This differs from the State of Disaster declaration noted above, which confers broader powers to the Minister of Police to direct and control the disaster response.

The *Restricted Activity Directions* (Victoria) are the primary set of rules governing the behaviour of people and businesses in response to the emergency. Among other restrictions, the *Restricted Activity Directions* enforce movement, travel, capacity and density quotients. These directions are some of the main restrictions that impact operations of the tourism and events sectors. They have been continuously amended throughout the pandemic to reflect the changing level of risk to public health, with various plans and frameworks guiding their implementation.

From September to December 2020, restrictions under Victoria's *Restricted Activity Directions* eased as the state gradually came out of lockdown. However, this easing of restrictions was short lived, as outbreaks and subsequent 'circuit breaker' lockdowns saw various iterations of the *Restricted Activity Directions* introduced throughout 2021.

### **Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act**

Victoria's *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the Charter) establishes a framework of rights and freedoms that apply to all persons in Victoria. It requires public authorities, including the Victorian Government, to carry out their responsibilities consistently with these rights and freedoms. Importantly, rights can be limited under certain conditions.<sup>50</sup>

In emergency situations, the Charter's rights continue to apply. New laws must include a statement of compatibility which establishes whether the legislation limits human rights and whether such a limitation is justified under the circumstances. The Victorian Parliament's Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee assesses statements of compatibility and reports to the Parliament on the human rights compatibility or otherwise of legislation.

#### **2.4.2 Pandemic response plans**

Victoria has a series of pandemic response plans outlining how the various state bodies and agencies should implement the directions made under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act. The COVID-19 pandemic plan was published on 10 March 2020 to guide the response to the COVID-19 pandemic across the Victorian health sector. For tourism and events, Victoria has several plans guiding the implementation of the *Restricted Activity Directions* which impact the sectors, outlined below.

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50 *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) s 7.

## Victoria's 'roadmap to reopening'

On 6 September 2020, the Victorian Government released its roadmap for easing restrictions, with separate roadmaps for 'how we live' and 'how we work' in regional Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne. The roadmaps outlined four steps towards reopening that Victorians must take before reaching 'COVID normal', when a low case threshold is met.

On 6 December 2020, the Premier announced the 'COVIDSafe Summer', which updated Victoria's roadmap with separate approaches for metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria.

Current guidance on 'how we live' and 'how we work' is consistent with the COVIDSafe settings, which are updated regularly.<sup>51</sup>

## COVID-19 Public Events Framework

On 22 November 2020, the Victorian Government introduced the PEF. Its purpose is to guide event organisers and venues that wish to operate above and beyond what is permitted under the *Restricted Activity Directions* (Victoria) from the Chief Health Officer and/or do not have a COVIDSafe Plan.<sup>52</sup>

The PEF, which is being continually updated in line with Victoria's COVIDSafe settings, outlines how different public events can take place according to their size, complexity and risk. Event proposals are assessed against the PEF's three-tiered system, to determine whether the event can be registered straight away, or if it will need to be formally approved by the Victorian Government. The PEF was most recently updated on 25 May 2021.

The PEF, including the approvals process, density quotients and venue capacity restrictions, is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

## Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan

On 21 April 2020, the Victorian Government announced its *Visitor Economy and Recovery Reform Plan* (VERRP). The plan aims to:

ensure Victoria maintains and grows its visitor economy market share through and beyond recovery, quickly increasing economic activity. It will do this with new projects, a speedy recovery of the domestic market, and by building a resilient industry that supports long-term growth.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> See, <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au>.

<sup>52</sup> Victorian Government, *COVID-19 Public Events Framework*, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan*, Government of Victoria Melbourne, 2021, p. 13.

The plan sets out the Government's strategic priorities for the statewide recovery of the tourism and events sectors, and outlines some of the key government initiatives to foster recovery in the sectors.

The VERRP is discussed in more detail in Chapters 4 and 6, including in terms of specific support measures provided for the tourism and events sectors.

## 2.5 Government support packages

The COVID-19 crisis has seen the fastest and largest fiscal response to an economic event in Australian history, with several hundred policy interventions announced across all levels of government to date.<sup>54</sup>

### 2.5.1 ANZSIC classification

Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC) is the classification assigned to a business entity and industry group based on their primary business activity. For the tourism and events sectors, there is no neat correlation with a single ANZSIC code or division, with a large range of ANZSIC codes encapsulating their activities.<sup>55</sup>

Understanding the ANZSIC system is important for two reasons. First, the ABS uses the ANZSIC framework for its economic collections and compilations of data. As Australia's official source of national statistics, the ABS has collated important statistics that quantify the impacts of COVID-19 on Victorian industries.

Second, the ANZSIC framework is sometimes used to define which entities are eligible for government COVID-19 support initiatives. As stated in Chapter 6, delivering funding based on ANZSIC codes is an issue for the events sector as it does not have a standalone ANZSIC code.

Recent ABS data based on ANZSIC codes shows that between the beginning of the pandemic and 22 May 2021, tourism- and events-related industries suffered the greatest losses, with Victoria the worst affected jurisdiction in Australia.<sup>56</sup>

### 2.5.2 Commonwealth initiatives

The following sections provide an overview of some of the key support measures provided by the Commonwealth Government. For a complete overview of support measures for the tourism and events sectors, see Appendix B.

<sup>54</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Recovery tempered by second wave impacts - September quarter 2020*.

<sup>55</sup> For an example of ANZSIC codes applicable to the events sector, see Save Victorian Events, *Submission 7*, Appendix 4.

<sup>56</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Weekly Payroll Jobs and Wages in Australia: Week ending 22 May 2021*, 2021, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/weekly-payroll-jobs-and-wages-australia/week-ending-22-may-2021>> accessed 12 July 2021.

## JobKeeper Payment scheme

Australia's largest economic response to the pandemic was the JobKeeper Payment scheme, announced on 30 March 2020. A 'wage subsidy program designed to keep Australians employed as large parts of the economy went into hibernation', JobKeeper has been the lifeline for many businesses and workers across the country. The support package originally provided a fortnightly payment of \$1,500 to eligible employees of businesses that could demonstrate a sufficient decline in revenue during the pandemic.<sup>57</sup>

On 8 April 2020, legislation to support the Government's JobKeeper Payment scheme passed both Houses of the Australian Parliament. At this point, the Commonwealth Government forecast that the JobKeeper program would cost \$130 billion, with around 6 million people to access the scheme.<sup>58</sup>

Employer enrolment did not commence until 20 April 2020, with the first payments by the ATO to employers in arrears made from the first week of May 2020. On 22 May, the Commonwealth Government announced that there had been a massive costing error which had led to an overestimation of the expected cost of JobKeeper. It re-estimated at that time that about 3.5 million people would receive JobKeeper, at the cost of around \$70 billion.<sup>59</sup>

On 28 September 2020, the JobKeeper scheme was extended until 28 March 2021.<sup>60</sup> The extension was broken into two extension periods:

- extension 1 from 28 September 2020 to 3 January 2021
- extension 2 from 4 January to 28 March 2021.

For each extension period, a decline in turnover test applied, with a different rate of JobKeeper Payment established. At the beginning of the second extension period, payments were reduced depending on the number of hours an employee usually worked in that period. The rates were \$1,200 per fortnight for employees who worked more than 20 hours per week and \$750 per fortnight for employees who worked less than 20 hours per week, up to 3 January 2021. This was reduced to \$1,000 per fortnight and \$650 per fortnight respectively from 4 January 2021.<sup>61</sup>

The JobKeeper Payment scheme finished on 28 March 2021. The Reserve Bank of Australia highlighted that while active, JobKeeper saved at least 700,000 jobs.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Parliament of Australia, Senate Select Committee on COVID-19, *First interim report*, p. xiii.

<sup>58</sup> Hon. Josh Frydenberg MP, *\$130 billion JobKeeper Payment passes the Parliament*, media release, Commonwealth Government of Australia, 8 April 2020.

<sup>59</sup> Parliament of Australia, Senate Select Committee on COVID-19, *First interim report*, pp. 73, 78.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>61</sup> Australian Taxation Office, *JobKeeper extension*, 2021, <<https://www.ato.gov.au/general/jobkeeper-payment/jobkeeper-extension-announcement>> accessed 22 July 2021.

<sup>62</sup> Hon. Josh Frydenberg MP, *JobKeeper*, media release, Treasury 2021.

## Commonwealth Inquiry

The Senate Committee Inquiry into the Australian Government's Response to the COVID-19 pandemic made an interim finding that 'the Australian Government expanded JobKeeper in a way which unnecessarily and deliberately excluded over one million Australian workers from the scheme.'<sup>63</sup> In response to queries regarding this exclusion of particular workers, the Treasurer argued that 'we had to draw the line somewhere', and further stated that the limited time available to develop the program was also a factor.<sup>64</sup> These exclusions remained in place despite the announcement of the costing error, which determined that JobKeeper would cost \$60 billion less than anticipated.

## Groups excluded from JobKeeper payments

The JobKeeper program excluded casual employees who could not demonstrate 12 months of continuous employment with the same employer as at 1 July 2020. In evidence provided to PAEC, most jobs lost during the pandemic were part-time or casual, with the 12-month exclusions making it 'less effective at supporting casuals'.<sup>65</sup> According to the Inquiry into the Australian Government's Response to COVID-19, this exclusion meant that approximately 40% of all casuals (1 million people) were unable to access the program.<sup>66</sup>

This impacted the tourism and events sectors particularly, due to the casual or ad hoc nature of much of the sectors' jobs. For example, for accommodation and food businesses, 64% of employees are employed casually.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, despite the industry being among the worst hit by the COVID-19 restrictions, exclusions for casual workers meant that large numbers of these workers were not eligible for payments. On 7 May 2020, an article by the Australian Financial Review noted that 'only half the hospitality sector had enrolled for the government's JobKeeper payments'.<sup>68</sup>

The Committee notes, however, that some workers were able to access the Commonwealth Government's JobSeeker Payment. This payment supports individuals who are looking for work, and replaced the Newstart Allowance in March 2020. The JobSeeker Payment was accompanied by the Coronavirus Supplement, which was worth \$550 per fortnight between 27 April and 24 September 2020.<sup>69</sup> The amount of the combined payments for this period nearly doubled the payment amount of the previous Newstart Allowance.

<sup>63</sup> Parliament of Australia, Senate Select Committee on COVID-19, *First interim report*, p. xx.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>65</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, *Inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic*, p. 81.

<sup>66</sup> Parliament of Australia, Senate Select Committee on COVID-19, *First interim report*, pp. 73–74.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>68</sup> David Martin-Guzman, 'Only half of hospitality sector taking up JobKeeper', *The Australian Financial Review*, 7 May 2020, <<https://www.afr.com/work-and-careers/workplace/only-half-of-hospitality-sector-taking-up-jobkeeper-20200507-p54qoe>> accessed 12 July 2021.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Klapdor, *Statistical Snapshot: The impact of COVID-19 on JobSeeker Payment recipient numbers by electorate: Research Paper Series, 2020-1*, Parliamentary Library, Parliament of Australia, 8 September 2020, p. 4.

JobKeeper is discussed further in Chapters 4 and 6, in terms of support provided for the tourism and events sectors respectively.

### Tourism Aviation Network Support Program

Another major initiative for the tourism industry was the Tourism Aviation Network Support Program, announced on 2 April 2021. A major component of the \$1.2 billion package was 800,000 half-price airfares to get Australians travelling and supporting tourism business operations.<sup>70</sup> As the initiative included Avalon Airport (near Melbourne), it was well received by some of the Melbourne-based tourism businesses. However, other businesses noted that that these airfares encouraged more outbound travel from Victoria than inbound. For regional tourism operations, a key concern was that that it encouraged people from Melbourne, who might otherwise have visited Victoria's regions, to travel interstate.<sup>71</sup>

Felicity Mariani, Chief Executive of the Victoria Tourism Industry Council, described the Commonwealth Government's half-price flights initiative as a 'challenge.' She said:

the federal government's half-price airfares, which really encourage people to leave Victoria and predominantly head to Queensland and Tasmania as the two states which receive most of the value out of those half-price airfares. I think we do have challenges with encouraging visitation into our regions through to the end of May, but certainly I would agree the winter period is when we are really going to need the largest element of support.<sup>72</sup>

The Tourism Aviation Network Support Program is discussed further in Chapter 4.

## 2.5.3 Victoria

The following sections provide an overview of some of the key support measures provided by the Victorian Government. For a complete overview of support measures for the tourism and events sectors, see Appendix B.

### Tourism vouchers

In December 2020, the Victorian Government announced a Regional Travel Voucher Scheme, comprising 80,000 regional travel vouchers valued at \$200 each for eligible Victorians. Offered as an incentive to explore the state and boost the regional economy, the vouchers were released on a 'first come first served' basis over three rounds, outlined in Table 2.1 below.

<sup>70</sup> Prime Minister of Australia, *Tourism and Aviation's Flight Path to Recovery*, media release, 11 March 2021.

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, Damien Cerantonio, Managing Director, Great Ocean Road Resort, Public hearing, Anglesea, 12 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>72</sup> Felicia Mariani, Chief Executive Officer, Victoria Tourism Industry Council, Public hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30.

**Table 2.1** Regional Travel Voucher Scheme rounds

Round	Registrations open	Eligible travel period	Claim period and cut off date
1	11 December 2020, 10.00 am —allocation exhausted	12 December 2020 to 22 January 2021	4 January 2021 to 5 February 2021
2	20 January 2021, 10.00 am —allocation exhausted	27 January 2021 to 1 April 2021	11 March 2021 to 15 April 2021
3	30 March 2021, 10.00am — allocation exhausted	6 April 2021 to 11 July 2021	10 May 2021 to 18 July 2021

Source: Victorian Government, *Regional Travel Voucher Scheme*, 2021, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/regional-travel-voucher-scheme>> accessed 30 June 2021.

The Regional Travel Voucher Scheme was extended to tourism operators in metropolitan Melbourne under the Melbourne Travel Voucher Scheme in March 2021. The travel period for this scheme began in March and ended in May 2021, with a total of 40,000 vouchers allocated under the first round of the program.

According to the 2020–21 Victorian Budget, \$27.9 million was allocated for the Regional Travel Voucher Scheme in the 2020–21 financial year.<sup>73</sup> Information provided to PAEC from DJPR states that the program’s objectives have been met.<sup>74</sup>

The support provided to the tourism sector through the Regional and Melbourne Travel Voucher Schemes is discussed further in Chapter 4.

### Business Support Fund

Victoria’s Business Support Fund was launched in March 2020. Grants worth \$10,000 were provided to small businesses which either closed or were highly impacted by the lockdown restrictions.<sup>75</sup> The PAEC *Inquiry into the Victorian Government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic* found that over 129,000 businesses have been supported through three rounds of the Business Support Fund, sharing in over \$2.6 billion worth of grants.<sup>76</sup> In evidence to the Committee, Felicia Mariani from the Victoria Tourism Industry Council noted that, according to their surveys, many people within the industry found the Business Support Fund to be ‘incredibly helpful in sustaining their business ... in conjunction with JobKeeper’.<sup>77</sup>

Grants provided by the fund were delivered over three rounds. In the first round, the eligibility criteria were that businesses:

- employed people
- had a turnover of more than \$75,000

<sup>73</sup> Department of Treasury and Finance, *Victorian Budget 2020/21 Paper No. 3*, Melbourne, 2020, p. 14.

<sup>74</sup> Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, *2021-22 Budget estimates general questionnaire, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions*, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne, 2021-2022, p. 49.

<sup>75</sup> Business Victoria, *Business Support Fund reassessments*, 2021, <<https://business.vic.gov.au/contact-us/business-support-fund-reassessments>> accessed 22 June 2021.

<sup>76</sup> Parliament of Victoria, Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, *Inquiry into the Victorian Government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic* p. xviii.

<sup>77</sup> Felicia Mariani, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

- had a payroll of less than \$650,000
- held an Australian Business Number (ABN) as at 16 March 2020 (date of the State of Emergency declaration)
- were engaged in carrying out the operation of the business in Victoria on 16 March 2020
  - operated in an industry sector that had been subject to closure or highly impacted by shutdown restrictions announced by the Victorian Government, or
  - were enrolled as eligible participants in the Commonwealth Government's JobKeeper Payment scheme.<sup>78</sup>

The Victorian Ombudsman received over 550 complaints about the first round of funding, prompting an investigation. Complaints received by the Ombudsman included:

- Delays in providing outcomes.
- Poor communication with applicants about the status of their application. Status updates were provided via email. In some instances, applicants say they did not receive the email.
- Some applicants who were unsuccessful for a grant say they did not get an invitation to apply for the expanded fund.
- Some applicants received incorrect information from the Department's call centre.
- Applications can only be done online. This makes it difficult for business owners with limited computer skills.<sup>79</sup>

DJPR responded to recommendations made by the Ombudsman in its subsequent report,<sup>80</sup> taking measures to provide outcomes within 14 days to individuals whose applications were wrongly handled.<sup>81</sup>

The first round of the fund closed for applications on 1 June 2020.

In August 2020, following the announcement of stricter lockdown measures, the Victorian Government announced the Business Support Fund Expansion Program.<sup>82</sup> This program provided access to one-off grants of \$10,000 for impacted businesses located in metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire, and one-off grants of \$5,000 for impacted businesses in other regional areas.<sup>83</sup> The fund closed for applications on 14 September 2020.

<sup>78</sup> Business Victoria, *Business Support Fund reassessments*.

<sup>79</sup> Victorian Ombudsman, *Complaints about financial grants for small business* <<https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/our-impact/case-examples/complaints-about-financial-grants>> accessed 22 June 2021

<sup>80</sup> See, Victorian Ombudsman, *Investigation into the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions' administration of the Business Support Fund*, Melbourne, April 2021.

<sup>81</sup> Business Victoria, *Business Support Fund reassessments*.

<sup>82</sup> Business Victoria, *Business Support Fund – Expansion*, March 2020, <<https://business.vic.gov.au/grants-and-programs/business-support-package/business-support-fund>> accessed 22 June 2021.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

On 13 September 2020, the Victorian Government announced \$822 million for the third round of the Business Support Fund. Depending on payroll size, eligible businesses could receive grants of \$10,000, \$15,000 or \$20,000.<sup>84</sup> The fund closed for applications on 23 November 2020.

Some stakeholders told the Committee that there had been delays in receiving payments through the Business Support Fund. The Committee considers that it is important that businesses receive grants swiftly.

The support provided to the tourism and events sector through the Business Support Fund is discussed further in Chapters 4 and 6.

### **Business Costs Assistance Program**

On 12 February 2021, in a bid to curb the state's growing COVID-19 outbreak, Victoria entered a circuit breaker lockdown. To help businesses with costs incurred as a result of the public health restrictions, the Government announced the first round of the Business Costs Assistance Program. The \$92 million program, delivered as part of the Victorian Government's \$143 million Circuit Breaker Action Business Support Package, offered grants of \$2,000 to small businesses, including sole traders.<sup>85</sup> The first round closed for applications on 16 March 2021.

To help businesses most affected by the second circuit breaker lockdown introduced on 27 May 2021, the Government announced its approximately \$500 million Circuit Breaker Business Support Package. As part of this package, a \$371 million second round of the Business Costs Assistance Program was announced, providing grants of either \$2,500 or \$5,000 for eligible businesses. The fund closed for applications on 24 June 2021.

### **Sole Trader Support Fund**

On 14 September 2020, the Victorian Government announced the \$100 million Sole Trader Support Fund. The Fund was put in place to help businesses survive the continued lockdown restrictions, with around 30,000 eligible businesses set to receive a grant of \$3,000 to be used towards overhead costs and their transition to COVID Normal.<sup>86</sup> In order to be eligible, applicants were required to work within specific sectors and operate from a commercial premises as a tenant.

The fund closed for applications on 30 December 2020. It is discussed further in Chapter 6.

<sup>84</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Guidelines: Business Support Fund 3: Coronavirus (COVID-19) assistance to business*, <[https://business.vic.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/1936294/Business-Support-Fund-3-guidelines.pdf](https://business.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1936294/Business-Support-Fund-3-guidelines.pdf)> accessed 23 July 2021, p. 1.

<sup>85</sup> Business Victoria, *Business Costs Assistance Program*, 2021, <<https://business.vic.gov.au/grants-and-programs/circuit-breaker-action-business-support-package/business-costs-assistance-program>> accessed 22 June 2021.

<sup>86</sup> Business Victoria, *Sole Trader Support Fund*, 2021, <<https://business.vic.gov.au/grants-and-programs/business-resilience-package/sole-trader-support-fund>> accessed 22 June 2021.

## Victorian Events Support Package

In May 2021, the Victorian Government announced the \$20 million Victorian Events Support Package. A component of the Circuit Breaker Business Support Package, it comprises five programs aimed at bolstering businesses and supporting the events industry. These include:

- Sustainable Events Business Program
- Impacted Public Events Support Program
- Independent Cinemas Support Program
- Live Performance Support Program – Suppliers
- Live Performance Support Program – Presenters.<sup>87</sup>

The programs provide grants to support eligible small- to medium-sized businesses and sole traders, including restaurants and cafes, event suppliers, accommodation and non-essential retailers. The package has been welcomed by some businesses in Victoria's events industry, who saw it as providing more targeted financial support than other support schemes that distributed grants across a wide range of sectors. Other events sector stakeholders believed it to still be too broad. This package is discussed further in Chapter 6.

## Groups who missed out on support

While the funding initiatives discussed above—in conjunction with the additional support measures set out in Appendix B—went a long way in supporting impacted businesses across the state, specific eligibility criteria across the various funds meant that there were groups who did not qualify for support. Consistently, the Committee heard that some sole traders and some types of small business owners were excluded.

The Business Support Fund, Business Costs Assistance Program and the Sole Trader Support Fund all excluded businesses not registered for Goods and Service Tax (GST). This was an issue for many sole traders and small businesses with an annual turnover of less than \$75,000, who are not required to register for GST. Media coverage focused on the message that businesses that were 'too small' or did not earn enough to begin with, were ineligible for support.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Business Victoria, *Circuit Breaker Business Support Package*, 2021, <<https://business.vic.gov.au/grants-and-programs/circuit-breaker-business-support-package#>> accessed 1 July 2021.

<sup>88</sup> Yara Murray-Atfield, 'Victorian businesses and sole traders miss out on lockdown grants because they don't earn enough', *ABC News*, 7 June 2021, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-06-07/victorian-small-businesses-miss-out-on-covid-lockdown-grants/100193348>> accessed 22 June 2021.

2

For the Business Support Fund, in addition to the GST exclusion, all three rounds of support made it a requirement for businesses to have at least one employee in order to access the fund. This exclusion was yet another hurdle that disproportionately impacted small business owners and sole traders, leaving some with no financial support.<sup>89</sup>

While the \$100 million Sole Trader Support Fund was a lifeline for many, the requirement that sole traders operate from a commercial premise meant that many sole traders, including those who worked from home, were ineligible for grants.

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<sup>89</sup> Stephanie Palmer-Derrien, 'Tight eligibility criteria could exclude small businesses from Victoria's lockdown payments', *SmartCompany*, 4 June 2021, <<https://www.smartcompany.com.au/coronavirus/victoria-grant-covid-19-businesses-stood-down-staff-not-eligible>> accessed 22 June 2021.

# 3 The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Victoria's tourism sector

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been significant for Victoria's tourism sector. Visitation both to and within the state slowed from early 2020, with significant disruption and uncertainty regarding the safe resumption of travel a key issue for the industry throughout the remainder of the year. The closure of international borders has had wide-ranging impacts, with domestic tourism unable to fully compensate for this loss when travel was eventually able to resume.

Longstanding issues around workforce retention and skills shortages have been exacerbated by the border closures and the limited access to JobKeeper Payments as a result of the casual nature of work in the sector. Some businesses were able to explore innovative means of adapting their work and services, however, it appears that the nature of tourism demand will continue to evolve as a result of the pandemic. Importantly, while Victoria has experienced a welcome spike in visitation across the state in 2021, stakeholders note that the impacts of the pandemic will be long-term, and full recovery will take a number of years.

This Chapter outlines the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Victoria's tourism sector. In particular, it discusses:

- the sector's performance prior to the onset of the pandemic
- the major state-wide impacts of the pandemic on the sector
- key case studies from Victoria's tourism regions
- the effectiveness of the support measures implemented by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments to redress the impacts of the pandemic and provide for the sector's recovery.

## 3.1 The tourism sector in Victoria

As noted in Chapter 1, Victorian Government policy uses the term 'visitor economy' to refer to the varied goods and services that drive visitation, including both tourism and events.

The tourism sector is a broad industry comprising a range of businesses and activities which support the direct and indirect delivery of visitor experiences and consumption.

Tourism encompasses other sectors which provide for the production of goods and services for consumption by visitors. This may include, for example, accommodation

providers, transportation businesses, hospitality, tour companies and attractions.<sup>1</sup> Noting the far-reaching impacts of the pandemic, the Committee takes a broad view of the tourism sector to include businesses which support the tourism supply chain.

### 3.1.1 Value and trends

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Victoria's tourism sector was experiencing strong growth. Tourism contributed approximately \$29.4 billion to Gross State Product (GSP) in 2018–19. It generated employment for about 263,300 people, or 7.8% of total state employment.<sup>2</sup> Between 2011 to 2016, Victoria consistently outperformed both New South Wales and Queensland in terms of sector growth.<sup>3</sup> In 2018–19, tourism supported approximately 206,000 jobs, representing 7% of total employment across the state.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, Victoria had been experiencing a marked increase in international tourism in recent years, predominantly stemming from Asian markets.<sup>5</sup> International tourism in Victoria grew by 5.7% per year between 2009–10 and 2013–14—significantly higher than the 2.8% growth that was experienced nationally.<sup>6</sup>

In the period from 2013–14 to 2018–19, tourism's contribution to GSP grew by 45.1%. Figure 3.1 shows the year-on-year increase in GSP for this period.

**Figure 3.1 Victorian tourism GSP growth performance**



Source: Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Victoria's Visitor Economy: 2018–19 State Tourism Satellite Account Results*, Melbourne, May 2020, p. 1.

1 Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, *Victorian Visitor Economy Strategy*, Melbourne, July 2016, p. 6.  
 2 Tourism Research Australia, *State Tourism Satellite Accounts, 2018–19: Tourism's value to Victoria*, Canberra, 2020, p. 2; Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Victoria: State Tourism Summary: Year Ending September 2020*, 2021, p. 1.  
 3 Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, *Victorian Visitor Economy Strategy*, p. 6.  
 4 Ibid.  
 5 Ibid., p. 8.  
 6 Ibid., p. 13.

As a result of ongoing growth in visitors to Victoria, investment in the tourism industry has been consistently valued at over \$40 billion over the past three years.<sup>7</sup>

In July 2016, the Victorian Government released the *Victorian Visitor Economy Strategy* (Strategy), based on consultation and research undertaken in the Victorian Visitor Economy Review.<sup>8</sup> The Strategy sets out the key priorities in the sector for maximising future growth, including a goal of increasing visitor expenditure to \$36.5 billion per year by 2025 and creating approximately 115,000 tourism jobs.<sup>9</sup> To achieve these goals, the review identified priorities across a range of policy areas and made several key recommendations, including:

- Facilitating investment in tourism products and services.
- A focus on regional Victoria across all activities including investment facilitation, events, marketing and coordination.
- Marketing activity that leverages all major visitor segments.
- A wider calendar of events that encourages visitor dispersal across Victoria.
- Visitor experiences tailored to the preferences of visitors from Asia.
- Investing in key public infrastructure and roads.
- Supporting direct international flights to Melbourne.
- Supporting business owners to improve business practices and connect with skilled staff.
- A coordinated and consistent approach to governance and strategy across Government.<sup>10</sup>

The Strategy was designed to work in tandem with the Commonwealth Government's *Tourism 2020 Strategy*,<sup>11</sup> which sets out national priorities across the tourism sector in relation to growth targets, challenges and opportunities.<sup>12</sup>

### 3.1.2 Governance

There are a number of key stakeholders who contribute to the governance of Victoria's tourism sector. Within the Victorian Government, the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events and the Minister for Regional Development share oversight of the sector, with the latter having particular responsibilities in relation to regional tourism. The Ministers are supported by a number of government agencies, and in particular, the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR). DJPR's Tourism, Events and Visitor Economy branch works to strengthen the state's tourism and events profile and

<sup>7</sup> Austrade, *Travel by Australians, year ending September 2020, 2021*.

<sup>8</sup> Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, *Victorian Visitor Economy Strategy*, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

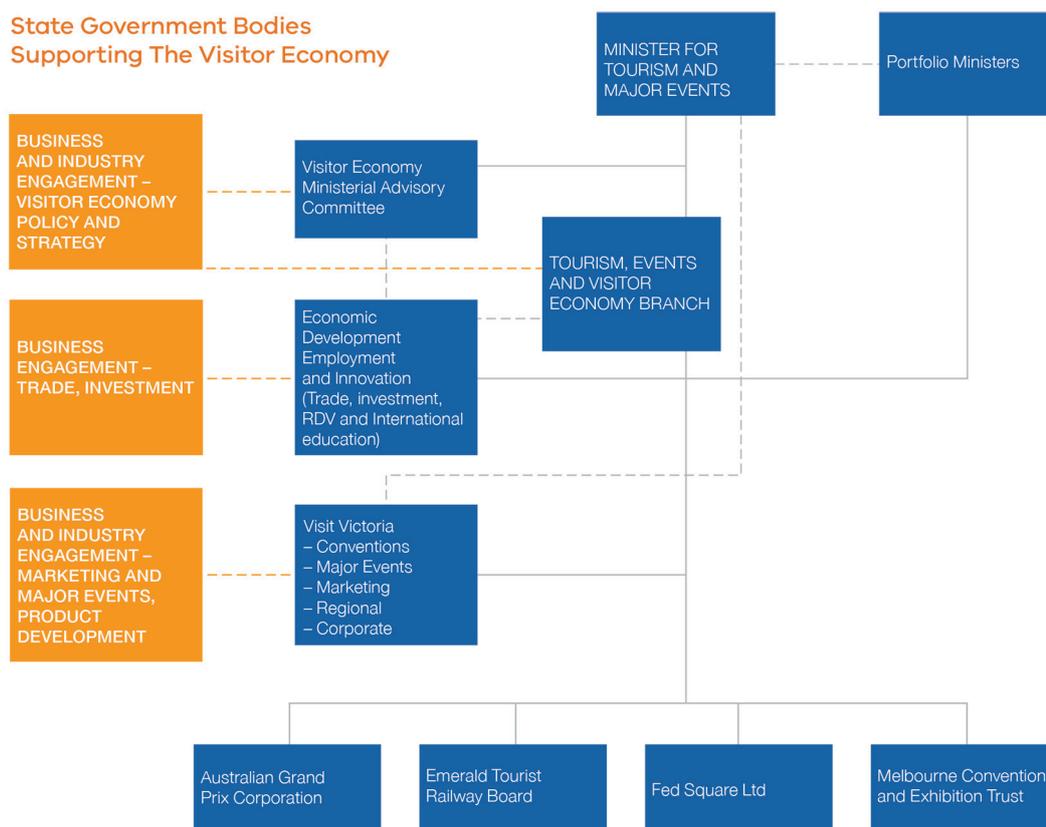
<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Austrade, *Tourism 2020* Commonwealth Government December 2011.

influence strong economic outcomes. The Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events will also be supported by a new advisory committee established by the *Victorian Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan*.

Visit Victoria—the state’s tourism and events company, created following a 2015 tourism review—undertakes broad marketing communication activities to promote the state as a ‘leading tourism and events destination’.<sup>13</sup> The Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events has portfolio responsibility for Visit Victoria, with the Premier of Victoria as the sole shareholder.

**Figure 3.2 Governance structure for the visitor economy**



Source: Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, *Victorian Visitor Economy Strategy*, Melbourne, July 2016, p. 29.

The Victorian Government works collaboratively with local governments, who play an important role in managing the visitor economy within their respective regions. Additionally, the Government works with Regional Tourism Boards (RTBs) to develop approaches to strategic planning within their regions. Enhancing RTBs was a core priority outlined in the Strategy.<sup>14</sup> The Victorian Government undertook to collaborate with RTBs to develop and improve the consistency and quality of Destination Management Plans, which set out core strategic priorities for each region for the

<sup>13</sup> Visit Victoria, *Marketing*, <<https://corporate.visitvictoria.com/marketing>> accessed 23 June 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, *Victorian Visitor Economy Strategy*, p. 29.

coming decade. The Committee notes that not all regions have developed a Destination Management Plan, nor is there yet a state wide plan.

The governance of Victoria's visitor economy is also supported by industry associations, such as the Victoria Tourism Industry Council (VTIC). These organisations provide key private sector leadership which inform the Victorian Government's response to the industry.

The Commonwealth Government also plays a role in the governance of Victoria's tourism industry, through providing international marketing support and leading national regulatory and policy directions.<sup>15</sup>

## 3.2 Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

The impacts of COVID-19 have been wide-ranging across the Victorian tourism sector. The Committee notes that the pandemic has created a number of new problems and exacerbated existing issues which challenge the short-, medium- and long-term recovery of the sector. This section outlines the key impacts of COVID-19 on the tourism sector and the challenges which continue to hinder its recovery.

### 3.2.1 Economic and financial impacts

#### Travel, visitors and tourism expenditure

Since March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented deep and long-lasting economic and financial issues for Victoria's tourism sector. In particular, the international tourism market experienced the largest declines as a result of the global pandemic. This market had previously been a major component of Victoria's visitor economy, which had experienced strong growth from Asian markets in the years prior to the pandemic.<sup>16</sup> Recent forecasts from Tourism Research Australia had predicted that international tourism would contribute approximately 56% of growth in visitor expenditure over the next decade.<sup>17</sup> However, international travel declined sharply. In the six months ending June 2020, international overnight spend in Victoria was \$2.4 billion. When compared to the six months to June 2019, this is a 46% decline in spend, or a loss of \$2.1 billion.<sup>18</sup> The Committee notes that these numbers would have declined even further in the following six-month period, during which time international travel ceased altogether.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 11–12.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Business Victoria, *Value of Victoria's tourism industry*, 2020, <<https://www.business.vic.gov.au/tourism-industry-resources/tourism-industry/value-of-victorias-tourism-industry>> accessed 10 March 2021.

<sup>18</sup> *Coronavirus (COVID-19) impact on Victoria's Visitor Economy*, report prepared by Tourism, Events and Visitor Economy (TEVE) Research Unit, Victorian Government April 2021, p. 21.

Declines in international tourism have meant that the industry is now catering to just the domestic tourism market, which has shown strong demand.<sup>19</sup> However, against this backdrop, the closure of state borders prevented the resumption of ordinary levels of interstate travel and intrastate tourism was hindered by successive lockdowns. During the six-month period prior to June 2020, Victoria recorded a 54% decline in interstate overnight visitation. While Austrade initially predicted that Australia's 'proactive management approach' to the pandemic would be a key factor in protecting domestic tourism demand,<sup>20</sup> progressive state border closures and diverse restrictions between states have prevented a resumption to ordinary levels of domestic tourism.

In this way, although the past nine months has seen some recovery in the sector as Australians are unable to holiday overseas, domestic tourism has been unable to compensate for the loss of the international tourism market. VTIC noted that domestic tourists generally take shorter and more frequent trips, and spend less, than international visitors. In the absence of international tourists, the average spend in the June 2020 quarter was just \$385 per person, compared with \$648 per person in June 2019.<sup>21</sup>

Liz Price, General Manager of Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism, described this trend in terms of 'profitless volume', where high visitor numbers do not necessarily translate into high spend. She said:

We saw a lot of [intrastate visitors] that wanted to get out into big spaces where there were no crowds, but they brought everything with them, and they did not necessarily spend in commercial businesses. So we have got to realise visitor numbers do not always equate to visitor spend, and we have got to be using visitor spend as the metric, not volume ... the international overnights do spend significantly more than domestics and they do our attractions.<sup>22</sup>

This issue is discussed in more detail in an analysis of Victoria's tourism regions in section 3.3 below.

The decline in both international and domestic tourism greatly damaged the Victorian economy. At the end of December 2019, the Victorian visitor economy was worth \$32.5 billion and employed over 250,000 workers directly or indirectly. However, by the end of December 2020, total visitor spend had fallen to just \$13 billion. This represented a 60% decline and the lowest spend for the past 15 years.<sup>23</sup> Victoria was the worst affected state in the country in terms of its tourism sector, far exceeding the national average of 42% decline.<sup>24</sup>

19 Austrade, *Tourism Investment Monitor 2019-20: Australian tourism investment and COVID-19 impacts*, 2021, <<https://www.tra.gov.au/data-and-research/reports/tourism-investment-monitor-2019-20/australian-tourism-investment-and-covid-19-impacts>> accessed 9 March 2021.

20 Austrade, *Travel by Australians, year ending September 2020*.

21 Victoria Tourism Industry Council, *Submission 99*, p. 5.

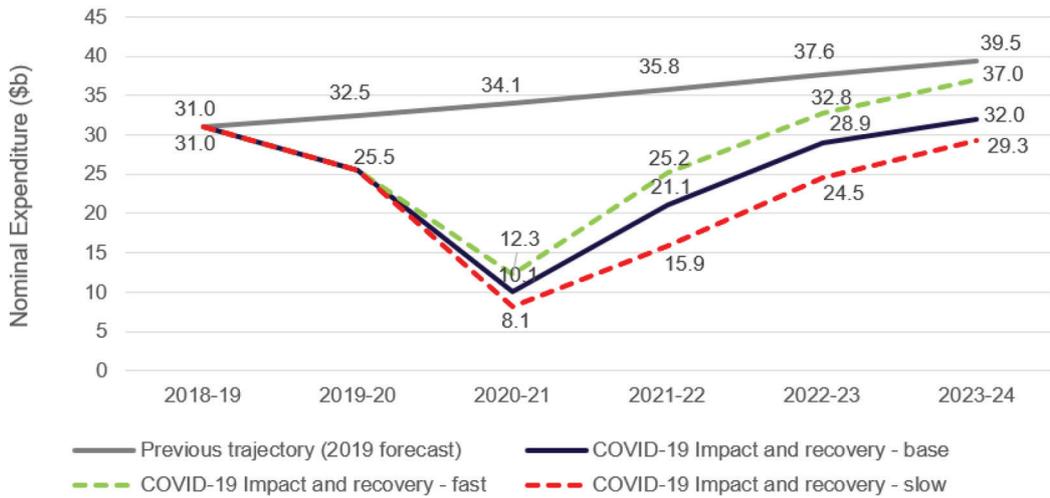
22 Liz Price, General Manager, Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism, Public hearing, Anglesea, 12 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

23 Felicia Mariani, Chief Executive Officer, Victoria Tourism Industry Council, Public hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 27; Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, pp. 3-4.

24 Business Victoria, *Domestic and regional research*, 2021, <<https://business.vic.gov.au/business-information/tourism-industry-resources/tourism-industry-research/domestic-and-regional-research>> accessed 16 July 2021.

Future recovery in visitation and tourism expenditure is projected to be slow. While some other states experienced an intrastate and interstate tourism boom, in the December 2020 quarter Victoria continued to see a fall in both intrastate trips and visitor spend, despite the easing of restrictions.<sup>25</sup> Total tourism expenditure is not expected to return to pre-pandemic levels until at least 2024. Figure 3.3 shows Victoria's projected tourism expenditure over the next three financial years.

**Figure 3.3** Projected tourism expenditure 2018 to 2024



Source: Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan*, p. 5.

### Job losses

Decreases in visitation and visitor expenditure significantly impacted on jobs and wages. Business Victoria provides that from the week ending 14 March 2020 to the week ending 14 November 2020, Victoria had the most substantial change in tourism-related payroll jobs of all states and territories, declining by 5.4% (compared to the national average decline of 2.9%).<sup>26</sup> VTIC estimated that in February 2021, only 58% of tourism businesses were trading at ordinary levels, with 35% operating at reduced hours and 7% remaining closed entirely.<sup>27</sup>

Jobs in service industries which support the tourism sector, such as hospitality and accommodation, experienced extreme effects. In particular, accommodation and food services experienced the most significant decline in jobs, falling by over 22% between March and November 2020.<sup>28</sup> In evidence to the Committee, the Accommodation Association predicted that these job losses are unlikely to be regained for at least four years.<sup>29</sup> Figure 3.4 displays the changes in employee jobs per industry between March and November 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Tourism Research Australia, *National Visitor Survey Results: December 2020: Year ending December 2020, 2020*, <[https://www.tra.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/185/TRA\\_NVS\\_December\\_2020.pdf.aspx](https://www.tra.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/185/TRA_NVS_December_2020.pdf.aspx)> accessed 5 July 2021.

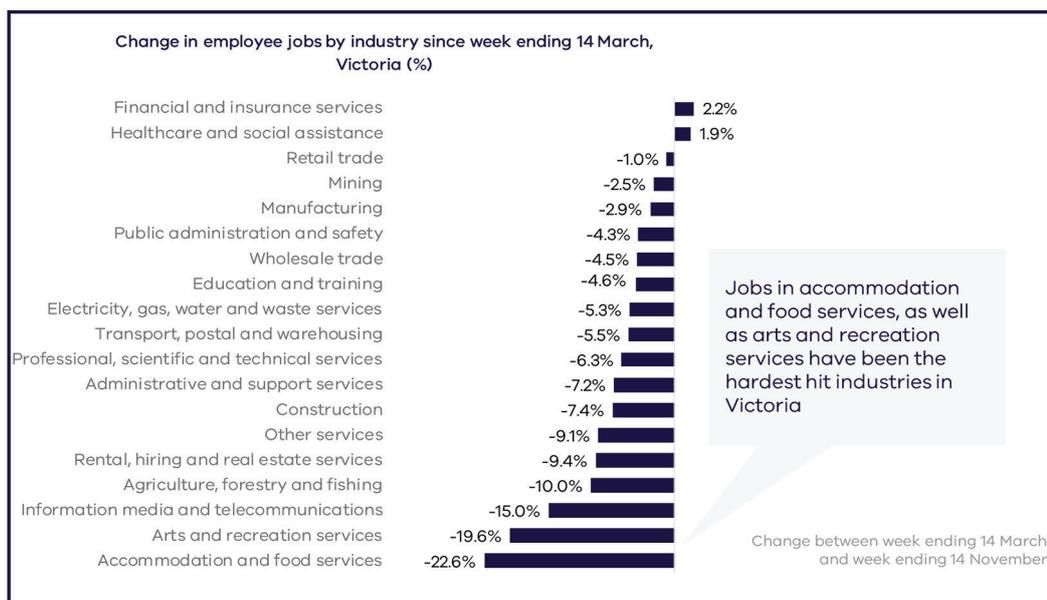
<sup>26</sup> *Coronavirus (COVID-19) impact on Victoria's Visitor Economy*, p. 28.

<sup>27</sup> Victoria Tourism Industry Council, *Submission 99A*, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> *Coronavirus (COVID-19) impact on Victoria's Visitor Economy*, p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> Accommodation Association, *Submission 109*, p. 4.

Figure 3.4 Change in employee jobs by industry



Source: Business Victoria, *Coronavirus (COVID-19) impact on Victoria's Visitor Economy*, April 2021, p. 28.

Many businesses within the tourism industry noted that they were only able to retain staff due to the support provided by government support programs, and in particular, the Commonwealth JobKeeper Payment scheme.<sup>30</sup> In its submission, VTIC stated that 88% of tourism businesses have received some form of government support during the pandemic.<sup>31</sup> Of these, VTIC said that 93% had accessed the JobKeeper scheme, with 57% continuing to rely on it to support employment in their businesses in February 2021.<sup>32</sup>

Many stakeholders to the Inquiry noted that JobKeeper had been a 'lifeline' for tourism businesses.<sup>33</sup> For example, TravelManagers, a tourism company which employs home-based personal travel managers, stated that it had lost over 120 of its members due to COVID-19. Despite this loss, TravelManagers argued:

There are thousands of jobs on the line because of domestic and international [border] closures and for those companies, together with their employees who have been able to access it the JobKeeper payment has been a lifeline. It has enabled employees and contractors to maintain ties with their companies and business associates while supporting themselves and their families.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism, *Submission 87*, p. 2; Maribyrnong City Council, *Submission 108*, p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> Victoria Tourism Industry Council, *Submission 99A*, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, *Submission 137*, pp. 1-2; Victoria Tourism Industry Council, *Submission 99*, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> TravelManagers Australia, *Submission 71*, p. 2.

While JobKeeper enabled some businesses to retain employees until March 2021, it masked many of the real impacts of COVID-19 on the tourism sector.<sup>35</sup> In this regard, it remains unclear what the full effects of the pandemic may be on jobs and wages. VTIC stated that more than a third of tourism businesses were poised to cut jobs by up to 50% or more and a further 13% were expecting to close when JobKeeper ended on 28 March 2021.<sup>36</sup>

Yarra Ranges Tourism raised concerns about the impact the end of JobKeeper would have on small businesses going forward:

The end of Jobkeeper support for the tourism, events and hospitality sectors will sadly mean businesses must cut staff and downsize or close because of ongoing low consumer confidence in travel and tourism businesses who've already been left in a weaker position since the pandemic and lockdowns. ...The end of JobKeeper majorly impacts these sectors, particularly operators of tours and experiences, many of them small to medium-sized family businesses.<sup>37</sup>

Regarding the uncertainty around future job losses in its region, the City of Whittlesea stated:

The impact on jobs has been severe, with almost 4,000 job losses recorded in the retail trade and accommodation and food services sector which support the city's visitor economy. With the discontinuation of JobKeeper, the sector is predicted to lose more than 7,000 jobs ... It is still too early to fully understand the full implications of these losses, however as the visitor economy provides entry level jobs for the community, it can be assumed that the impact to this sector has contributed to an increase in youth unemployment.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, Orlando Berne expressed concern about the future of his business, Hit The Road Tours, following the end of JobKeeper, noting that not all parts of the economy are recovering strongly:

In December, with the reopening of the interstate borders, it came a light at the end of the tunnel, and the business were back to 30% of what was doing during the pre-Covid times. But the cluster in NSW just before Christmas, and the subsequent open/closing borders since then, has put again a lot of uncertainty in the business. And now, JobKeeper is gone.

Today we got the news that the unemployment number has fallen again in Australia, and this is great. We see businesses thriving, happily back, maybe stronger than they were before Covid, and if on one side I'm very happy to see that, on the other just adds more frustration: Others are thriving, but we still have no idea how we are going to pay the bills next month.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Western Melbourne Tourism Inc, *Submission 104*, p. 10; Greater Bendigo City Council, *Submission 118*, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> Victoria Tourism Industry Council, *Submission 99A*, p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> Yarra Ranges Tourism, *Submission 125*, p. 12.

<sup>38</sup> Whittlesea City Council, *Submission 95*, p. 2. See also, Port Phillip City Council, *Submission 107*, p. 2; Maribyrnong City Council, *Submission 108*, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> Hit The Road Tours Australia, *Submission 76*, p. 1.

Western Melbourne Tourism noted rising financial pressure in the absence of 'the support of JobKeeper and banks calling in deferred loan payments', describing the impact as a 'second whammy' that would lead to further job losses and business collapse.<sup>40</sup> The City of Greater Bendigo stated that the local accommodation sector had concerns around its ability to remain open in the absence of JobKeeper, and is concerned about future 'snap' lockdowns or a third wave of COVID-19. It noted that this sector had been predominantly 'unable to pivot during the height of the pandemic'.<sup>41</sup>

Further, one submission stated in relation to the outdoors tourism industry:

Without JobKeeper payments the company would have been heavily in debt, however we have still not returned to pre-COVID income levels. Now that JobKeeper has finished, unless Australians are encouraged to get back out there and support domestic tourism and large-scale school programs, more redundancies may have to be made. In Dec 2019 we employed over 100 staff and now employ 30.<sup>42</sup>

### 3.2.2 Workforce retention and skills shortages

Workforce retention and skills shortages are key problems facing the tourism sector. In particular, the industry has experienced an acute loss in skilled and semi-skilled workers who left the industry due to the uncertainty and job insecurity created by COVID-19.

One outdoors tourism organisation told the Committee:

We are struggling to find skilled staff and hire new employees as many have moved out of the outdoor education/tourism field to other work. There is a national shortage of guides and field instructors at the moment as many changed industries when outdoor centres closed down due to COVID last year.<sup>43</sup>

While the tourism industry has experienced something of a resurgence in 2021, industry stakeholders noted that attracting skilled workers to return to the sector is an ongoing challenge. This has largely prevented tourism businesses from being able to service the uptick in demand. In the context of accommodation services, the Accommodation Association stated:

Accommodation and Food Services employment is projected to recover from the major impact of COVID-19 and associated restrictions. Employment in the industry declined by 105,400 (or 11.2 %) from February to November 2020, but is projected to rebound strongly, increasing by 139,900 (or 16.8 %) over the five years to November 2025 ... This rebound is exacerbating the need for skilled and semiskilled workers. Needs that the domestic population cannot feasibly fill in the timeframes.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Western Melbourne Tourism Inc, *Submission 104*, p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> Greater Bendigo City Council, *Submission 118*, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 48*, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Accommodation Association, *Submission 109*, p. 16.

The Association stated that skilled workers, such as chefs, are particularly in short supply as they are 'questioning the insecure employment provided by the industry and the competition from restaurants, clubs, pubs and aged care is fierce as business returns'.<sup>45</sup> This fear was echoed by Rupert Shaw who noted that his business, Bright Brewery, has been unable to recruit workers, including chefs. Mr Shaw particularly noted that this issue has been exacerbated by the lack of international visitation to the alpine region, including backpackers and temporary workers.<sup>46</sup>

Many submitters similarly pointed to the lack of international visitation and strict visa requirements as aggravating factors which contribute to ongoing skills shortages in the sector. In its submission, the Committee for Melbourne argued:

Across the visitor economy sector, staff have been made redundant and have left the industry. Visiting working holiday and skilled visas weren't supported during COVID and this forced many to leave the country. This is creating a shortage across the industry due to Covid-19.<sup>47</sup>

The high concentration of casual and seasonal workers in the sector makes workforce retention particularly challenging. As casual workers did not qualify for JobKeeper payments, many could not retain their roles and have subsequently left the industry.<sup>48</sup> Greater Dandenong Council highlighted this issue, drawing on the example of a local business, the Melbourne Cable Park in Bangholme. It stated:

The Park found limited benefit from JobKeeper. Staff could not attend on-site and the nature of the Park's business was that they could not operate off-site. Moreover, many of the Park's 50 staff had not been with the tourist destination for more than one year and are casual. As a result, most were not covered by JobKeeper. While the business had about 12 staff who qualified, a number of these subsequently left the business. The Park ended up with 8 or 9 on JobKeeper, when they could operate.<sup>49</sup>

Staff retention beyond the cessation of JobKeeper has been an issue of great concern to stakeholders to the Inquiry. Yarra Ranges Tourism argued that there is little incentive for staff to return to their roles, following the end of the scheme and this may result in even deeper staff shortages. The organisation noted:

JobKeeper also resulted in employees remaining with an employer with no intention of returning to work, leading to an influx of resignations as businesses began reopening. Some businesses felt they'd been abandoned by the employees they did their best to support. Staffing shortages in some of the regional areas is severe, leaving businesses to take on untrained and inexperienced staff to survive, a potential hazard to the high quality experience customers are used to in our region.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Bright Brewery, *Submission 41*, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Committee for Melbourne, *Submission 113*, p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> Bright Brewery, *Submission 41*, p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> Greater Dandenong Council, *Submission 61*, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Yarra Ranges Tourism, *Submission 125*, p. 13

The industry also highlighted that the decline in volunteers has impacted the functioning of tourism businesses. For example, Latrobe City Council stated:

In the tourism sector there is also a reliance on volunteers. Visitor Information Centres, attractions and other information services are often staffed predominantly by volunteers, many of whom are retired and in older demographic. These individuals are in the high-risk categories for COVID-19 and many have been reluctant to return to their volunteer roles until an appropriate level of vaccination has been achieved.<sup>51</sup>

It is important to note that workforce retention and skills shortages have been long-standing challenges for the sector, across the state, nationally and internationally. Accordingly, redressing these issues were core components of both Austrade's *Tourism 2020* strategy and Victoria's *Regional Tourism Review*.<sup>52</sup> The pandemic has only served to highlight and worsen these challenges. In this regard, in December 2020, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) identified skills shortages as one of the key long-term issues facing policymakers in mapping recovery across tourism sectors.<sup>53</sup>

Noting that these have been chronic issues facing the industry, many stakeholders to the Inquiry emphasised the need for long-term planning to redress their impacts. For example, Western Melbourne Tourism noted:

Skills gaps and labour shortages have been a persistent issue for the growth and development of the tourism industry, not only in Victoria and nationally, but internationally. This is in part due to the diversity of tourism businesses, the predominantly SME composition of the sector, but also the seasonal nature of many tourism businesses and the difficulty of sustaining workforces in the context of fluctuating demand. Across Victoria, the problem has been chronic.<sup>54</sup>

To assuage these issues, Western Melbourne Tourism argued that regional workforce reviews may be required to identify the specific causes within each regional context, citing reviews that have been undertaken in the Mornington Peninsula and the Ballarat region as key examples.<sup>55</sup>

**FINDING 1:** The closure of Australia's borders has been a successful component of the management of COVID-19 within Australia. However, it has exacerbated skills shortages in the tourism sector, especially hospitality, impeding the sector's ability to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>51</sup> Latrobe City Council, *Submission 147*, p. 5.

<sup>52</sup> Austrade, *Tackling labour and skills issues in the tourism and hospitality industry*; Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Regional Tourism Review: Consultation Findings* Victorian Government 2019, p. 7.

<sup>53</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Rebuilding tourism for the future: COVID-19 policy responses and recovery*, 2020, <<https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/rebuilding-tourism-for-the-future-covid-19-policy-responses-and-recovery-bced9859>> accessed 10 June 2021.

<sup>54</sup> Western Melbourne Tourism, *Submission 104*, p. 8.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

### 3.2.3 Accommodation

In addition, stakeholders identified the lack of available and affordable housing for tourism workers in rural and regional areas is another factor which has contributed to workforce retention issues and skills shortages. As with skills shortages, this problem existed before COVID-19 but has become worse over the past 18 months.

In the context of the Victorian alpine resorts, Elaine Burridge, Manager, Economic and Community Development at Alpine Shire Council, told the Committee:

There is not enough accommodation available in the Alpine shire for long-term rentals. A high number of short-term holiday rentals across the shire, coupled with increased demand, is causing a shortage in housing availability ... Holiday accommodation is definitely essential to our local economy, but we have reached an imbalance where the high numbers of short-term rentals are causing strain on our communities and businesses. The flow-on effect is enormous ... There are workers out there who have a job but simply cannot find local accommodation and businesses who are absolutely crying out for staff but cannot recruit staff because they have got nowhere to live. This in turn is impacting the sustainability of our local economy.<sup>56</sup>

In the King Valley, Michael Dal Zotto, owner of Dal Zotto Wines, explained how accommodation shortages create a high staff turnover for his business. He said:

A lot of those houses have been turned into B & Bs, which sounds wonderful, but then all our longer term accommodation has disappeared so people are travelling—typically travelling from Wangaratta to come to work in the region, which is around about a 40-minute drive. It is not so bad during the day, but if you are doing vintage and you are a winemaker and you are working night shifts starting at 1.00 am or 11.00 pm and then leaving at 4.00 am, or you might be leaving at 7.00 am or 6.00 am and you have worked through the night, those sorts of things become a little bit, well, difficult, and they are okay for a while but then they wear thin. So then you find you have a higher turnover of staff.<sup>57</sup>

The Committee heard similar concerns about the lack of affordable housing for workers in western Victoria and Gippsland.<sup>58</sup>

**FINDING 2:** Demographic and economic changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic have seen an increase in the lack of affordable and available accommodation options for workers in the tourism sector in rural and regional Victoria.

<sup>56</sup> Elaine Burridge, Manager, Economic and Community Development, Alpine Shire Council, Public hearing, Bright, 28 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 12.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Dal Zotto, Owner, Dal Zotto Wines, Public hearing, Bright, 28 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

<sup>58</sup> Andrew Mason, Chief Executive Officer, Corangamite Shire Council, Public hearing, Camperdown, 13 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2; Martin Richardson, President, Paynesville Business and Tourism Association, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 16 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

### 3.2.4 Operator and public confidence

The threat of sudden border closures and snap lockdowns has been an ongoing threat to rebuilding confidence in the tourism sector and a contributing factor preventing its full recovery. VTIC stated that 81% of its members have indicated that snap state border closures were seriously affecting their operations. It noted that a further 64% of its members referenced the lack of consumer confidence to travel as the primary reason for their business struggles.<sup>59</sup> VTIC argued that this lack of confidence is the primary reason that interstate tourism has not been able to fill the void left by international tourism.<sup>60</sup>

TravelManagers Australia noted that border closures have decimated consumer confidence and prevented tourists from making bookings. The organisation stated:

Each time a state implements a border closure it results in the processing of further cancellations and consumer loss of confidence. As an industry we had started to see some green shoots in December which were largely wiped out with the Northern Beaches cluster and resultant closure of State borders. More recent events such as the pre-Easter lockdown of greater Brisbane have shown that domestic borders are likely to continue to periodically close with short notice and the work done to arrange a client's holiday has to be undone taking many hours with no remuneration.<sup>61</sup>

The lack of forewarning of border closures and snap lockdowns was an issue of significant concern for industry stakeholders. However, the Committee acknowledges that the highly contagious nature of a new virus such as COVID-19 means health authorities must make decisions quickly, especially because of Australia's low vaccination rates. As Professor Catherine Bennett, Chair in Epidemiology at Deakin University, told the Committee:

Initially in a pandemic we are almost by definition flying blind. We often have a delay in finding out what the virus is that we are working with, what the challenges are going to be, how transmission actually occurs and the best methods for control.<sup>62</sup>

The Committee also notes that when decisions were made quickly to lift restrictions there were criticisms that businesses were not given enough notice.

Border closures had particularly significant impacts on regional areas close to state borders. For example, Indigo Shire Council argued that the region was badly hit by sudden and frequent border closures, noting that:

Indigo Shire is proximate to the New South Wales border and border closures resulted in a significant reduction in intra-regional visitation. In addition, local employers were impacted due to reliance on cross-border employees being unable to fulfil roles within

<sup>59</sup> Victoria Tourism Industry Council, *Submission 99A*, p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> Felicia Mariani, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 28–29.

<sup>61</sup> TravelManagers Australia, *Submission 71*, p. 1.

<sup>62</sup> Professor Catherine Bennett, Chair in Epidemiology, Faculty of Health, School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 28 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 1.

our Shire. Improved cross-border agreements will enable more effective, localised solutions to mitigate future significant disruptions to staffing and supply chains.<sup>63</sup>

In its submission, Murray Regional Tourism similarly argued:

The direct losses have been compounded by the loss of confidence by consumers particularly with the ongoing challenges associated with the likelihood of further travel restrictions and border closures from our key source markets of Melbourne (66% visitors!), NSW (22% of visitors!) and South Australia (16% visitors) which our region is so heavily reliant upon.

Economic estimates developed for the Murray region based on the lockdowns suggest the visitor economy could get back to 60% of pre COVID record result by the end of 2021 with a further 2 years required to get back to the results of 2019.<sup>64</sup>

Submitters further noted that it is likely that as more border closures and lockdowns occur, confidence in the sector will decline even further. Regarding lockdowns, the City of Bendigo argued for a more nuanced statewide approach to be taken:

Businesses have been particularly negatively impacted by the uncertainty created by COVID-19. This was highlighted by comments that the state-wide February 2021 five-day lockdown had a greater impact on businesses than previous lockdowns, as it occurred just when business confidence was being restored.

It will be critical that should there be any further outbreaks in metropolitan Melbourne, there is a system in place that does not lockdown the rest of the state unnecessarily. That was a key challenge during the second lockdown in particular, as regional areas recovered and transmission remained stable, keeping these economies under the same restrictions as Melbourne was inequitable.<sup>65</sup>

At the time of writing this report, Victoria had declared regional New South Wales an 'orange zone'. This meant that people could not enter Victoria from regional New South Wales unless they obtained a permit, agreed to isolate upon arrival and got a COVID-19 test within 72 hours. However, residents of regional communities were exempt from these requirements.

Particular means of improving operator and public confidence are discussed further in Chapter 7.

**FINDING 3:** The highly contagious nature of COVID-19 makes it difficult for health authorities to provide much warning of lockdowns and border closures. The unpredictable nature of the pandemic has greatly damaged confidence in the tourism sector.

<sup>63</sup> Indigo Shire Council, *Submission 5*, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> Murray Regional Tourism, *Submission 122*, p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> Greater Bendigo City Council, *Submission 118*, p. 6.

### 3.2.5 Business innovation and adaptability

Many businesses within the tourism sector were faced with the challenge of having to innovate and shift their business models to adapt to the challenges posed by COVID-19. In particular, stakeholders to the Inquiry noted that they had adapted their business operations to pivot towards accommodating for domestic, rather than international, markets. The Great Southern Tourism Route stated:

Throughout 2020 until now the effects of COVID 19 of course have been immense. The resilience, adaptability and positive attitude of many tourism operators as they have struggled to survive has been nothing short of amazing. Where they saw an opportunity to pivot their business they did and their support for colleagues and peers has been impressive.<sup>66</sup>

The need to develop online capabilities and digital functionality was a core challenge faced by many businesses in adapting to the pandemic. In particular, businesses struggled to quickly build digital capability, including connecting to sales channels, understanding markets and promoting products and regions.<sup>67</sup>

For example, in evidence to the Committee, Barry Wurlod outlined the digital capabilities that his business, Keayang Maar Vineyard, was required to develop throughout the pandemic. Mr Wurlod stated that he launched his sales entirely online in August 2020, when he was unable to physically open the premises.<sup>68</sup>

The Committee notes that e-commerce is hampered in some regions by poor digital connectivity and mobile 'black spots'. The Committee heard that this is the case in parts of Indigo Shire and western Victoria.<sup>69</sup>

In relation to business innovation in the Great Ocean Road region, Tourism Greater Geelong and The Bellarine was hopeful about the opportunity that this pivot presented for tourism businesses in the future. The organisation stated:

A recent industry snapshot survey indicated a third of consumers had transitioned their habits to casting online bookings with many businesses having to increase or enhance their online booking capability and use third party sites they have not traditionally needed.

The successes of these adaptations have seen many businesses continue such services in an ongoing capacity. This is an opportunity for the industry to hit the reset button and address the challenges and opportunities of the past through forced need for adaptation. We need to support this and foster future innovation amongst the industry so they can continue to meet the needs of the new normal.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Great Southern Touring Route, *Submission 50*, p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan*, Government of Victoria Melbourne, 2021, p. 9.

<sup>68</sup> Barry Wurlod, Owner, Keayang Maar Vineyard, Public hearing, Melbourne, 13 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25.

<sup>69</sup> Guy Wilkinson, Economic Development and Investment, Indigo Shire Council, Public hearing, Bright, 28 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 40; Liz Price, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 15.

<sup>70</sup> Tourism Greater Geelong and The Bellarine, *Submission 84*, p. 7.

Similarly, South Gippsland Shire Council provided a positive outlook for innovation within the industry:

We have witnessed significant innovation from many of our businesses, who have adapted through initiatives such as implementing online shopping, takeaway and mobile offerings and also implementing a range of virtual experiences, and we know that other businesses across our shire and our region would benefit from support to similarly learn and grow and innovate.<sup>71</sup>

Beyond the immediate requirement for tourism businesses to adapt, there will be long-term effects for businesses, including the need to adapt to a fundamentally changed industry. In its submission, for example, VTIC argued that the pandemic has raised questions about the ability of the sector to adapt to future challenges as the market continues to experience long-term changes. VTIC stated:

Our industry needs to build its capability to meet the challenges of the months and years ahead. That includes capabilities related to digital presence, using research to inform business decisions, and repositioning for a changed market.

The COVID-19 experience provided stark evidence of the need for every operator to have a strong digital presence and functionality. Those skills need to be actively developed across our industry to maximise our contribution to the economy. We also know that parts of the sector will need to operate in a fundamentally changed way post COVID-19. Those businesses are going to need support repositioning, reskilling and rebranding.<sup>72</sup>

VTIC argued that there has been a fundamental shift in the tourism market in the post-pandemic world. Accordingly, VTIC argued that long-term changes must be made by businesses to ensure they respond effectively, stating:

Consumer preferences will shift in a post-COVID travel world and they will be seeking new and different travel experiences that align to their values and priorities. As operators look to respond to these changing needs and expectations, they will require assistance to deliver new or improved experiences and products.<sup>73</sup>

**FINDING 4:** The tourism sector has been forced to adapt and innovate in the short term as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. A focus on innovation should be a feature of ongoing support as the pandemic recedes.

<sup>71</sup> Kerry Ellis, Chief Executive Officer South Gippsland Shire Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 16 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

<sup>72</sup> Victoria Tourism Industry Council, *Submission 99A*, p. 15.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

### 3.2.6 Mental health

Research continues on the mental health effects of COVID-19.<sup>74</sup> In Australia, many people have experienced a decline in their mental health since the beginning of the pandemic.<sup>75</sup> These effects have been particularly felt across the tourism and hospitality sectors. A study undertaken by Victoria University found that almost half of survey respondents in the tourism sector struggled with mental health challenges, and had limited access to health services or were reluctant to seek help from such services.<sup>76</sup> Stakeholders to the Inquiry particularly emphasised that the financial challenges and uncertainty facing the tourism sector will have ongoing negative effects on mental health as well as the importance of redressing these effects.<sup>77</sup> For example, the City of Greater Dandenong stated that:

Unfortunately, it is impossible to quantify the significant impact to the mental health of business owners and their staff, that the COVID 19 pandemic caused and whilst it is easier to report figures on financial impact and job losses, it should not be understated the effect that COVID has had on the mental wellbeing of individuals within the tourist and events sector as well as the patrons who were not able to attend events.<sup>78</sup>

Studies indicate that people with high job insecurity, including small business owners, suffered high levels of stress due to COVID-19. For example, the Black Dog Institute estimates that job insecurity and the perception of job insecurity may increase the rates of anxiety and depression threefold.<sup>79</sup> Throughout the course of this Inquiry, the Committee heard that small and medium business owners within the tourism sector have been particularly badly affected. Tourism Greater Geelong and The Bellarine argued that:

Mental health and wellbeing will be a significant side effect to COVID-19 and one that will impact small to medium business owners most, those who have invested their life into these businesses. The drawn-out impacts of mental health and wellbeing of those invested in and working within the tourism and events industry will be long lasting and extend well beyond the expectations for economic and visitor recovery.<sup>80</sup>

A number of submitters also raised concerns about mental health in relation to individuals and businesses in rural and regional areas, particularly noting how physical and social isolation exacerbates stress.<sup>81</sup> For example, the Committee heard about

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, Hannes Zacher and Cort W. Rudolph, 'Individual differences and changes in subjective wellbeing during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic', *American Psychologist*, vol. 76, no. 1, 2020, pp. 50–62.

<sup>75</sup> Black Dog Institute, *Mental Health Ramifications of COVID-19: The Australian context*, Sydney, 2020, p. 2.

<sup>76</sup> Victoria University, *Building the resilience of tourism destinations to disasters: The 2020 Victorian Bushfires and COVID-19 Pandemic April 2021*, Melbourne, 2021, p. 10.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Indigo Shire Council, *Submission 5*, p. 2; TravelManagers Australia, *Submission 71*, pp. 1–2; Victorian Alpine Resorts, *Submission 75*, p. 3; Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism, *Submission 87*, p. 4; Destination Gippsland, *Submission 91*, p. 1; Elaine Burridge, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11; Wangaratta Rural City Council, *Submission 126*, p. 3; Yarra Ranges Tourism, *Submission 125*, pp. 10–11.

<sup>78</sup> Greater Dandenong Council, *Submission 61*, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> Black Dog Institute, *Mental Health Ramifications of COVID-19: The Australian context*, p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> Tourism Greater Geelong and The Bellarine, *Submission 84*, p. 4.

<sup>81</sup> Victorian Alpine Resorts, *Submission 75*, p. 3; Bess Nolan-Cook, Chief Executive Officer, Tourism North East, Public hearing hearing, Bright 28 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19.

Victorians who had already experienced extreme stress and trauma during the 2019–20 bushfires.<sup>82</sup> Elaine Burrridge from Alpine Shire Council, told the Committee:

The social impact—the impact of bushfires and COVID-19, particularly during lockdowns, will have a lasting impact on the mental health of our residents and business operators. The ongoing uncertainty of the COVID environment is adding to that mental strain that is already there ... Our communities were lucky not to be hard hit by fire on the ground last year, with only one home being lost in the Alpine shire, while communities in our neighbouring municipalities of Towong and East Gippsland shires have suffered more physical damage. The impact for our communities was really in that economic, social and psychological space.<sup>83</sup>

Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism raised particular concerns about targeting response programs to ensure that they reach the people who need support, arguing:

The pandemic has created unprecedented levels of stress and exacerbated many of the challenges of operating a small or micro business in a remote location. The investment in mental health programs has been well received however significant work still needs to be undertaken to ensure these programs are reaching some of our most vulnerable businesses and supporting them through the challenges this crisis continues to have. Supporting businesses that continue to be faced with uncertainty about their future viability, supporting them through tough decisions with staff management and recognising that for many micro businesses the intrinsic link between their business viability and their capacity to meet personal financial obligations.<sup>84</sup>

This report addresses mental health in more detail, including a recommendation, in section 4.1.10.

**FINDING 5:** The tourism sector is experiencing ongoing mental health challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the impacts of associated public health measures.

### 3.2.7 Tourism infrastructure

Another longstanding issue hindering the ability of Victoria's regions to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic is tourism infrastructure. This includes bike paths, hiking trails and other tourist attractions.<sup>85</sup> The Committee heard that declining tourism infrastructure is making it difficult for Victoria, particularly regional Victoria, to attract visitors.<sup>86</sup> In its submission to the Inquiry, the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry stated:

<sup>82</sup> Destination Gippsland, *Submission 91*, p. 1; Elaine Burrridge, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

<sup>83</sup> Elaine Burrridge, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

<sup>84</sup> Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism, *Submission 87*, p. 4.

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, Greater Shepparton City Council, *Submission 100*, p. 5; Paynesville Business and Tourism Association, *Submission 105A*, pp. 2–3; Walhalla and Mountain Rivers Tourism, *Submission 106*, p. 1; Captains Cove Waterfront Apartments Paynesville, *Submission 130*, p. 1; Public Galleries Association Victoria and National Exhibitions Touring Support Victoria, *Submission 115*, p. 3.

<sup>86</sup> Captains Cove Waterfront Apartments Paynesville, *Submission 130*, p. 1.

Victoria is lucky to be home to a number of high-quality natural assets such as the Great Ocean Road, the Grampians and Philip Island. However, compared to other states in Australia, we are not adequately leveraging them and strategically investing in supporting infrastructure to maximise visitor attraction and consequently their spend. The Government needs to work with the sector to strategically invest in the required levels of infrastructure throughout the state to amplify the growth of the tourism and events industry. This infrastructure should help ensure that there is adequate amenity at all major locations and develop emerging locations. It should also include sufficient public transport where possible.<sup>87</sup>

Although this issue is not a direct result of the pandemic,<sup>88</sup> COVID-19 has brought renewed attention to it and concerns about the sector's short-, medium- and long-term recovery. At a public hearing, Michael Leaney, proprietor of Walhalla's Star Hotel, explained to the Committee:

Lots of our government infrastructure, whether that be walking track, whether it be facilities provided by government, has not had any maintenance for over 20 years, or limited maintenance for 20 years, and is in a very poor condition. So as an operator we have found that post COVID and post people coming back domestically it has been very difficult to encourage people to get out and do the activities because a lot of them are just closed.<sup>89</sup>

Further, concerns were raised in relation to the postponement of infrastructure projects due to COVID-19 restrictions and the implications this will have on the long-term recovery of the tourism sector. For example, Damien Cerantonio, owner of the Great Ocean Road Resort, noted that a large proportion of off-peak travel to—and hotel occupancy in—the Great Ocean Road region relies on infrastructure projects. Mr Cerantonio noted that stalling projects in response to COVID-19 may also inhibit the sector's recovery. Discussing long term recovery in the Great Ocean Road region, he also advocated for a diversification of tourism offerings:

to help us with our occupancy, especially at this time of year, in that off-peak period, some infrastructure projects, whether that is roads or bridges—that is all going to help. But I take that further with big projects: we do not just want it being infrastructure. We need new tourism attractions in our regions that are going to help bring people here for the next 100 years, and these attractions need to be not 100 per cent relying on international travellers or 100 per cent relying on domestic travellers.<sup>90</sup>

In a joint submission, the Victorian alpine resorts emphasised the danger of overreliance on private investment in tourism infrastructure and advocated for increased funding from the Victorian Government. They argued that:

<sup>87</sup> Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, *Submission 137*, p. 3.

<sup>88</sup> Improving tourism infrastructure was a core component of the 2016 Victorian Visitor Economy Strategy. See Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, *Victorian Visitor Economy Strategy*, p. 6.

<sup>89</sup> Michael Leaney, Proprietor, Walhalla's Star Hotel, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 16 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 16.

<sup>90</sup> Damien Cerantonio, Managing Director, Great Ocean Road Resort, Public hearing, Anglesea, 12 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 2–3.

business failure in the alpine resorts is far more significant than in other tourism destinations as it leads to a gap in the offering that will not be readily filled by an alternate operator. In the Northern Resorts, where nearly all tourism infrastructure and services are delivered by the private sector, such business failure will have devastating consequences, impacting not only the immediate but long-term viability of the resorts.<sup>91</sup>

Investment in regional tourism infrastructure is discussed further in relation to the Regional Tourism Investment Fund in Chapter 4.

**FINDING 6:** Investment in tourism infrastructure will play a key role in the sector's recovery and ensure it is competitive with other markets.

### 3.3 Victoria's tourism regions

The impacts of COVID-19 on Victoria's tourism industry were particularly significant in tourism-dependent regions. However, the impacts on each region differed vastly across the state. The Committee notes that such variation results from a number of factors, including pre-existing issues facing the region, existing funding and the nature of tourism that they each rely on.

Liz Price from Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism cautioned against accepting the narrative that 'regional Victoria has recovered and that it is booming', adding that 'different regions, different destinations and different business types are all recovering at different paces and all have quite unique challenges'.<sup>92</sup>

Figure 3.5 shows the state's twelve tourism regions. Table 3.1 provides a comparison of visitation numbers in each of the regions between 2019 and 2020.

<sup>91</sup> Victorian Alpine Resorts, *Submission 75*, p. 4.

<sup>92</sup> Liz Price, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 10-11.

Figure 3.5 Map of Victorian tourism regions



Source: Business Victoria, *Regional visitation*, 2021, <<https://www.business.vic.gov.au/tourism-industry-resources/research/regional-visitiation>> accessed 14 March 2021.

Table 3.1 Breakdown of tourist visitation in Victoria's regions

Region	International (overnight)		Domestic (overnight)		Total	
	2019 (thousand)	2020 (thousand)	2019 (thousand)	2020 (thousand)	2019 (thousand)	2020 (thousand)
Melbourne	2,967	578	11,435	3,543	14,403	4,121
Great Ocean Road	243	57	2,776	1,604	3,019	1,660
Murray	61	10	2,642	1,449	2,703	1,459
Goldfields	56	8	2,281	1,050	2,337	1,057
Gippsland	86	15	2,212	1,728	2,298	1,774
Peninsula	73	18	2,085	1,269	2,158	1,287
High Country	33	np	2,075	835	2,108	841
Geelong and the Bellarine	63	16	1,669	936	1,732	953
Yarra Valley and the Dandenong Ranges	65	14	1,158	559	1,223	573
Grampians	57	16	1,108	674	1,165	690
Phillip Island	57	15	1,084	585	1,141	601
Daylesford and Macedon Ranges	20	np	908	374	928	380

Source: Visit Victoria, *Answers to questions on notice*, hearing 19 May 2021, p. 1.

The following sections are case studies of Victoria's regions that provide evidence of region-specific impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. These case studies also outline some of the key support measures provided by local governments in those areas (see Chapters 4 and 7 of this report for more recommendations aimed at the tourism sector in Victoria).

### 3.3.1 Melbourne

Capital cities around Australia were hit hardest by the pandemic. During 2020, capital cities experienced a 52% decline in overnight trips and a 60% decline in visitor spend. This contrasts strongly with regional areas, which saw a 30% decline in trips and a 28% decrease in visitor spend. The disparity between metropolitan and regional areas continues to increase, despite the resumption of some interstate tourism.<sup>93</sup>

Against this national backdrop, Melbourne experienced the worst effects of any other capital city due to the state's ongoing lockdowns. In the year ending March 2021, Melbourne suffered a 52% decline in visitor spend and a 42% decline in overnight trips. During this period, regional Victoria enjoyed a 23% increase in visitor spend and a 6% increase in overnight trips.<sup>94</sup>

The impacts on Melbourne are particularly troubling noting its centrality to broader sector recovery. In this regard, Melbourne's recovery is a key priority set out in the *Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan*, which notes that Melbourne's recovery 'has statewide implications, because Melbourne is the main driver of Victoria's visitor economy'.<sup>95</sup>

It is projected that Melbourne's recovery will be slower than regional Victoria, largely due to the city's reliance on international and interstate tourism.<sup>96</sup> The city derives 72% of its visitor spend from these two sources.<sup>97</sup>

Local governments within Melbourne implemented a range of strategies to redress the impacts of COVID-19 on local businesses. For example, Port Phillip City Council noted that, working closely with Visit Victoria and VTIC, the Council was able to deliver a COVID-19 recovery package focused on supporting local hospitality services. It included funding for reduced registration fees for food premises; waiving footpath trading fees; establishing a grants program to support marketing for experiential activities and an initiative aimed at addressing vacant shop fronts.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Tourism Research Australia, *National Visitor Survey Results: December 2020*.

<sup>94</sup> Tourism Research Australia, *National Visitor Survey Results: March 2021: Year ending March 2021*, 2021, <<https://www.tra.gov.au/data-and-research/reports/national-visitor-survey-results-march-2021/national-visitor-survey-results-march-2021>> accessed 5 July 2021.

<sup>95</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan*, p. 6.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Victoria Tourism Industry Council, *Submission 99*, p. 3.

<sup>98</sup> Port Phillip City Council, *Submission 107*, pp. 2-3.

**FINDING 7:** While rural and regional tourism continues to benefit from the influx of Melbourne visitors, Melbourne's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic remains challenging, in particular, in the Melbourne CBD.

### 3.3.2 Great Ocean Road

The Great Ocean Road region spans six local shires, including Surf Coast, Colac Otway, Corangamite, Warrnambool, Moyne and Glenelg. The region supports approximately 11,200 tourism jobs and has an estimated annual visitor spend of \$1.5 billion.

Business Victoria indicates that the Great Ocean Road region was the most adversely affected Victorian region by COVID-19. The region saw the largest total decline in tourism spend of any Victorian region, shrinking to \$1.1 billion or 25% in the six months ending June 2020, compared to the same period in 2019. It also saw the largest declines both in domestic and international overnight visitors in 2020, decreasing by 40% and 57% respectively.<sup>99</sup>

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Great Ocean Road region was reliant on international tourism, which made up a significant portion of its visitation and spend numbers. Tourism offerings in the region focused on this market, which meant that it was difficult to pivot to the domestic market when travel eventually began to resume. Liz Price from Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism gave the example of a recently-opened wildlife centre that provided a high-level tourism offering, but which had low visitation numbers due to it being geared towards international travellers, as domestic visitors 'do not go and do our attractions and experiences'.<sup>100</sup> Carolyn Woods, owner of By Moonlight, an accommodation business situated at Moonlight Head, described her strong reliance on international guests. She stated that the ongoing closure of international borders created uncertainty for the business' future.<sup>101</sup> In terms of sector recovery in the region, Liz Price advocated for efforts to 'build back better' and invest in tourism offerings that cater towards domestic as well as international tourism.<sup>102</sup>

Another issue facing the region has been the cancellation of school camps due to COVID-19 restrictions.<sup>103</sup> Submitters noted that, in addition to the decline in international tourism, this has contributed a significant decline in midweek visitation to the region.<sup>104</sup> Geoff Caldwell, Director of Camping at Baptist Camping Victoria, described the impact that the cancellation of school camps had throughout 2020, including in terms of the uncertainty for future terms and the long lead-in times needed

<sup>99</sup> Business Victoria, *Coronavirus (COVID-19) impact on Victoria's Visitor Economy*, report prepared by Tourism, Events and Visitor Economy (TEVE) Research Unit, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, 2021, pp. 9, 11.

<sup>100</sup> Liz Price, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 11–12.

<sup>101</sup> Carolyn Woods, Owner, By Moonlight, Public hearing, Camperdown, 13 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

<sup>102</sup> Liz Price, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 13.

<sup>103</sup> Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism, *Submission 87*, p. 3; Glenelg Shire Council, *Submission 112*, p. 2.

<sup>104</sup> Mick Sheehan, Owner, Southern Exposure, Public hearing, Anglesea, 12 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 18.

for organising school camps. However, he noted that schools 'have come back stronger' in 2021.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, Matt Bowker, Director of Kangarooobie, a farm and school camp in Princetown, stated that 'demand is very high' in terms of school camps.<sup>106</sup>

Similar to other areas, businesses within the Great Ocean Road region reported labour and housing shortages, which affect the tourism offerings they are able to provide.<sup>107</sup>

Local governments in the region implemented a range of support measures for the tourism sector. These included funding programs aimed at boosting the local economy, and hardship arrangements.<sup>108</sup>

### 3.3.3 Gippsland

The Gippsland region spans six local shires, including Bass Coast, Baw Baw, East Gippsland, Latrobe City, South Gippsland and Wellington. The region supports 13,000 tourism jobs and has an estimated visitor spend of \$1.3 billion.

Due to the pandemic, Gippsland saw a decline in domestic and international overnight visitors in 2020, decreasing by 21% and 65%, respectively, from the previous year.<sup>109</sup> These impacts were felt in the wake of recovery efforts following the 2019–20 Victorian bushfire season, as well as more recent storms and flooding in 2021.<sup>110</sup> As a result, tourism businesses across Gippsland face high financial stress and mental health concerns.

Terry Robinson, Chief Executive Officer of Destination Gippsland spoke of the high number of younger workers, many of whom are casual or part-time, in regional and rural towns. In relation to this cohort, he stated:

They just do not get their shifts, they do not get paid, they drift off and do other things, and so the longer impacts from the economic side are hurting young people right across all of the towns.<sup>111</sup>

Darren Howe, Deputy Mayor of Latrobe City Council, similarly acknowledged the casual nature of the workforce, as well as the reliance on backpackers within the local tourism industry. He noted that the loss of backpackers had been compounded by a similar demand for these workers in the agriculture sector, 'resulting in competition for limited numbers of casuals and transient workers'.<sup>112</sup> Further, as noted in section 3.2.2,

<sup>105</sup> Geoff Caldwell, Director of Camping, Baptist Camping Victoria, Public hearing, Anglesea, 12 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 41–42.

<sup>106</sup> Matt Bowker, Manager, Cape Otway Lightstation, Public hearing, Camperdown, 13 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 13.

<sup>107</sup> See, for example, Geoff Caldwell, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

<sup>108</sup> Corangamite Shire Council, *Economic Stimulus and Support Package*, 2021, <<https://www.corangamite.vic.gov.au/Community/Public-Health-and-Wellbeing/COVID-19/covid-stimulus>> accessed 16 June 2021.

<sup>109</sup> Business Victoria, *Coronavirus (COVID-19) impact on Victoria's Visitor Economy*, pp. 9, 11.

<sup>110</sup> Terry Robinson, Chief Executive Officer, Destination Gippsland, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 16 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 1.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Cr Darren Howe, Deputy Mayor, Latrobe City Council, Public hearing, Melbourne, 16 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

the sector relies heavily on volunteers, including for visitor information centres and attractions, many of whom are 'retired and are in the older demographic'. A reluctance to return to their roles 'until an appropriate level of vaccination has been achieved' adds further pressure to labour shortages.<sup>113</sup> Martin Richardson, President of the Paynesville Business and Tourism Association, provided that regional housing shortages are preventing new workers from coming to the regions.<sup>114</sup>

Stakeholders told the Committee that visitation had returned in 2021, partly as a result of support from Victorian travellers. Kerryn Ellis, Chief Executive Officer of South Gippsland Shire Council, stated that this support had 'enabled the region to create innovative ways to deliver small, medium and larger scale events and experiences'.<sup>115</sup> However, Michael Leaney from Walhalla's Star Hotel advocated for more investment in infrastructure to encourage visitation, as 'the infrastructure that is surrounding us is in a very, very poor shape indeed'.<sup>116</sup>

Gippsland's Destination Management Plan provides a strategy for visitor economy growth and recovery, including through investing in demand-driving activities and attractions. Terry Robinson noted that there are various initiatives in the Plan that are yet to be implemented, but that will 'form the basis of submissions and future grant applications and all the programs that are being set up from the tourism recovery package'.<sup>117</sup>

Local governments in Gippsland implemented a range of initiatives to redress some of the impacts of COVID-19 on their local communities. For example, in evidence to the Committee, South Gippsland Shire Council outlined some of the initiatives that it has worked on in collaboration with the Victorian Government and industry. These included maximising the Working for Victoria program, supporting business innovation, and maximising use of outdoor dining.<sup>118</sup>

### 3.3.4 High Country

The High Country is a region in Northern Victoria which includes seven shires (Alpine, Benalla, Indigo, Mansfield, Murrindindi, Towong and Wangaratta) and the three major alpine resorts of Falls Creek, Mount Buller and Mount Hotham. The region supports 31,000 tourism jobs or 31% of the region's employment and the value of regional tourism is \$1.1 billion.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Martin Richardson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

<sup>115</sup> Kerryn Ellis, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

<sup>116</sup> Michael Leaney, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 16.

<sup>117</sup> Terry Robinson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

<sup>118</sup> Kerryn Ellis, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 35–37; Renae Littlejohn, Director Economy and Community, South Gippsland Shire Council, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 16 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 36–37.

The High Country's total tourism spend was \$490 million during 2020, a decline of 61% from the previous year. Domestic overnight tourism decreased by 58% from January to July 2020, compared to the previous six months.<sup>119</sup> Bess Nolan-Cook, Chief Executive Officer of Tourism North East, provided an overview of the impacts for the region:

Devastatingly, the pandemic arrived a month after the 2020 bushfires, which cost the region an estimated \$200 million in the peak summer trading season, leaving tourism industry operators without a financial cushion for the year ahead. The lockdowns and restrictions associated with the pandemic from March to December 2020 resulted in an estimated loss of \$400 million over the June quarter, \$700 million in the September quarter and a further \$200 million in the December quarter. Most notably impacted were the accommodation sector, the creative industries and the alpine resorts, where a significant proportion of on-mountain businesses derive 100 per cent of their revenue over winter. The loss of earnings in these industries in many cases has crippled their capacity for recovery, causing serious financial distress and mental health challenges, including social isolation.<sup>120</sup>

The Victorian alpine resorts provided in a joint submission that the 2020 winter season experienced visitation 90% lower than predicted numbers, impacting the profitability and viability of the resorts.<sup>121</sup> At a public hearing, Amber Gardner, Chief Executive Officer of Mount Hotham Alpine Resort, explained that the resorts operate on a self-sustained funding model where product delivery 'has to draw from revenue from our stakeholders via rent and service charges ... and also from our visitors'. She described the challenges created by a combination of limited visitor numbers and a stakeholder base struggling to pay bills.<sup>122</sup>

The impacts of COVID-19 have also exacerbated the existing financial pressures faced by communities who have experienced recent severe bushfire seasons. For example, the Committee heard that there is difficulty accessing affordable bushfire insurance in the alpine regions.<sup>123</sup>

Further, the towns in the alpine region rely heavily on visitation numbers to the resorts, meaning that there have been significant flow-on effects for many businesses across the region.<sup>124</sup>

Like other regions, Victoria's alpine regions report both labour and housing shortages.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>119</sup> Business Victoria, *Coronavirus (COVID-19) impact on Victoria's Visitor Economy*, p. 9.

<sup>120</sup> Bess Nolan-Cook, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19.

<sup>121</sup> Victorian Alpine Resorts, *Submission 75*, p. 1.

<sup>122</sup> Amber Gardner, Chief Executive Officer, Mount Hotham Alpine Resort, Public hearing, Bright, 28 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

<sup>123</sup> Stuart Smythe, Chief Executive Officer, Falls Creek Alpine Resort, Public hearing, Bright, 28 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 5.

<sup>124</sup> Elaine BurrIDGE, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*; Rupert Shaw, Operations Manager, Bright Brewery, Public hearing, Bright, 28 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25.

### 3.3.5 Murray

The Murray region spans six local shires, including Wodonga, Moira, Campaspe, Gannawarra, Swan Hill and Mildura. The region supports 18,000 tourism jobs and has an estimated visitor spend of \$2 billion.

The Murray region saw the second largest total decline in domestic overnight tourism spend of any Victorian region, shrinking by \$127 million or 38% in the six months ending June 2020, compared to the same period in 2019. The region saw one of the largest declines in both domestic and international tourism with 40% and 67% decreases, respectively.<sup>126</sup>

The proximity to the New South Wales border caused significant issues for a number of towns in this region due to border closures and differing public health measures being introduced across state borders. In its submission, Echuca Moama Tourism stated:

The impact of the NSW Border closure and the Melbourne lockdown from the 132 accommodation responses indicated approximately \$45 million was lost from cancellations across 131 businesses some as high as \$1million and other at the other end of the scale at \$20K.<sup>127</sup>

Murray Regional Tourism stated in its submission that the 'sustained border closures, permits and associated restrictions' have led to a 'disproportionate rate of recovery' for the region as compared to other areas in Victoria and NSW.<sup>128</sup> Further, it noted that the lockdowns in early 2021 occurred during the peak visitation period, during which the tourism industry would 'generate a significant portion of profit which enables them to remain viable in the quieter winter period'.<sup>129</sup>

Kathryn Mackenzie, Chief Executive Officer of Echuca Moama Tourism, stated that the Murray region has a significant reliance on intrastate tourism, particularly from Melbourne visitors (accounting for 66% of the region's visitors). As a result, lockdowns within the state, including those for just the Melbourne metropolitan area, have a large impact for the Echuca Moama area.<sup>130</sup> As in other parts of Victoria, Ms Mackenzie noted the 'massive skills shortage' in the Murray region for the tourism sector.<sup>131</sup>

Councils in the region provided a variety of support measures for the tourism sector. For example, Moira Shire Council introduced 'Why Leave Town' gift cards for local retail outlets and is producing an industry development program in conjunction with local business leaders.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>126</sup> Business Victoria, *Coronavirus (COVID-19) impact on Victoria's Visitor Economy*, pp. 9, 11.

<sup>127</sup> Echuca Moama Tourism, *Submission 136*, p. 2.

<sup>128</sup> Murray Regional Tourism, *Submission 122*, p. 5.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>130</sup> Kathryn Mackenzie, Chief Executive Officer, Echuca Moama & District Tourism Development Association, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 2 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 1.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>132</sup> Moira Shire Council, *Response to COVID-19: Business, community & individual financial support*, (n.d.), <<https://www.moira.vic.gov.au/files/content/public/business/business-support/moira-shire-support-covid-19/moira-support-for-business-and-community-f.pdf>> accessed 16 July 2021.

# 4 Government support provided to Victoria's tourism sector

A range of support measures were implemented by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments to redress the impacts of COVID-19 on the Victorian tourism sector and provide for its short-, medium- and long-term recovery. This Chapter provides an overview of some of the key response measures and their efficacy.

## 4.1 Victoria

As outlined in Chapter 2, the Victorian Government implemented a variety of economic response measures through subsequent economic packages, including both general and industry-specific initiatives. The Business Support Package was launched in March 2020. The package provides broad support to businesses, including funding for the 'night time economy' to assist the hospitality sector; mental health support for small businesses; business mentoring and support for regional tourism operators to provide refunds to consumers.<sup>1</sup>

The Business Resilience Package was announced in September 2020.<sup>2</sup> The package provides varied support for businesses across a variety of industries. Of particular relevance to the tourism sector, this included the Business Support Fund; grants for licensed hospitality venues through the Licensed Hospitality Venue Fund; support for adapting to outdoor dining through the Outdoor Eating and Entertainment Package; and support for the alpine resorts.<sup>3</sup> It also included rent relief measures for sole traders renting commercial premises and funding for small businesses in the Melbourne CBD.<sup>4</sup>

Businesses were also able to access tax and cashflow support, such as deferrals of payroll tax for smaller businesses and fee waivers for liquor licenses under this package.<sup>5</sup>

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1 Business Victoria, *Business Support Package*, 2021, <<https://www.business.vic.gov.au/support-for-your-business/grants-and-assistance/business-support-package>> accessed 15 March 2021.

2 Hon Daniel Andrews MP, Premier of Victoria, *Supporting Victorian Businesses On Our Road To COVID Normal*, media release, Melbourne, 13 September 2020.

3 Business Victoria, *Business Resilience Package — September 2020*, 2021, <<https://business.vic.gov.au/grants-and-programs/business-resilience-package>> accessed 22 July 2021.

4 Business Victoria, *Melbourne City Recovery Fund*, 2020, <<https://www.business.vic.gov.au/support-for-your-business/grants-and-assistance/business-resilience-package/melbourne-city-recovery-fund>> accessed 10 March 2021.

5 Business Victoria, *Business Resilience Package*, 2021, <<https://www.business.vic.gov.au/support-for-your-business/grants-and-assistance/business-resilience-package>> accessed 15 March 2021.

In February 2021, the Victorian Government announced the Circuit Breaker Support Package for industries impacted by the five-day 'circuit breaker' lockdown.<sup>6</sup> The package was designed to aid struggling businesses, noting that the JobKeeper Payment scheme had ended. Forming part of this package, the Victorian Accommodation Support Program provided grants to tourism accommodation providers who experienced cancellations, and full refunds for stays scheduled to take place during the circuit breaker restrictions.<sup>7</sup>

In June 2021, the Government also initiated the Regional Tourism Support Package. This package provided further funding for the Regional Travel Voucher Scheme, additional financial support for business costs and additional support for the alpine resorts.<sup>8</sup>

The following sections outline the Victorian Government's recovery plan for the tourism sector, as well as core support measures which were discussed by industry stakeholders. They critically assess opportunities for improvement.

#### 4.1.1 Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan

On 21 April 2021, the Victorian Government launched its *Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan* (VERRP). The VERRP sets out the Government's strategic priorities for the statewide recovery of the tourism sector. It is supported by \$633 million in investment over four years, with the aim of driving \$35 billion in annual visitor expenditure and supporting 300,000 jobs up to June 2024. The VERRP addresses a number of key challenges facing the sector. Figure 4.1 provides a snapshot of the key themes included in the VERRP.

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6 Minister for Industry Support and Recovery, Hon Martin Pakula MP, *Support For Businesses Impacted By Circuit Breaker Action*, media release, Melbourne, 21 February 2021.

7 Business Victoria, *Victorian Accommodation Support Program*, 2021, <<https://www.business.vic.gov.au/support-for-your-business/grants-and-assistance/circuit-breaker-action-business-support-package/victorian-accommodation-support-program>> accessed 15 March 2021.

8 Business Victoria, *Regional Tourism Support Package*, 2021, <<https://business.vic.gov.au/grants-and-programs/regional-tourism-support-package>> accessed 13 July 2021.

**Figure 4.1** Key themes of the Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan

Source: Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, p. 13.

Under the guidance set out in the VERRP, the Victorian Government committed to implementing a range of short-, medium- and long-term initiatives to foster recovery in the sector. Key initiatives identified by the Government include:

- \$149 million to deliver flagship tourism infrastructure projects across Victoria that can create a halo effect and spur private investment and new products in surrounding areas.
- \$100 million for a Regional Tourism Investment Fund with support available for enabling infrastructure, priority private-led projects and nature-based products on public land.
- \$46 million of immediate investment to deliver 30 smaller-scale 'shovel ready' tourism products—as part of the Regional Tourism Investment Fund—Stimulus Round.
- \$106.5 million for marketing, industry skills and development.
- \$152 million to secure more events through the Major Events Fund.
- \$44 million for the Regional and Melbourne Metro Travel Voucher Schemes to encourage travel across the state.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, p. 14.

## 4.1.2 Business Support Fund

The Victorian Government provided economy-wide financial support to small and medium business most impacted by COVID-19 via the Business Support Fund.

The fund provided one-off grants to eligible businesses with payrolls of up to \$10 million through two streams, including:

- Stream one: Available to small businesses that meet the standard eligibility criteria and operate in industry sectors that have been subject to closure or highly impacted by the *Restricted Activity Directions* issued by the Deputy Chief Health Officer, including the tourism sector.
- Stream two: Available to small businesses in any other sector that meet the standard eligibility criteria and are enrolled as eligible participants in the Commonwealth Government's JobKeeper Payment scheme.

There have been three rounds of the program to date, with eligibility varying slightly between rounds.<sup>10</sup> However, it generally included that businesses operate within Victoria, employ staff, hold an ABN, and meet stipulated turnover and payroll amounts. Later rounds also had a requirement that businesses be registered for Goods and Services Tax (GST).<sup>11</sup> The program required partnerships and sole traders to employ persons other than themselves to qualify for the program.

In April 2021, the Victorian Ombudsman released the report of the *Investigation into the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions' administration of the Business Support Fund*. The report noted a number of issues in the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions' (DJPR) administration of the fund, including in terms of how applications were assessed. In line with the Ombudsman's recommendations, the Victorian Government invited some applicants who were previously found to be ineligible to apply for reassessment.<sup>12</sup>

Funding provided under the program totaled more than \$2.6 billion. This included \$369 million for accommodation and food services businesses, \$50 million for arts and recreation services businesses, and \$27 million for travel agency and tour arrangement services businesses.<sup>13</sup>

Tourism businesses across Victoria received grants via the Business Support Fund, through all three rounds of the program. The Victoria Tourism Industry Council (VTIC) estimates that 45% of its members benefitted from the Business Support Fund.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See, Victorian Ombudsman, *Investigation into the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions' administration of the Business Support Fund* April 2021, pp. 14–15.

<sup>11</sup> Business Victoria, *Third round of the Business Support Fund*, 2021, <<https://business.vic.gov.au/grants-and-programs/business-resilience-package/business-support-fund-3>> accessed 13 July 2021; Business Victoria, *Business Costs Assistance Program Round Two*, 2021, <<https://business.vic.gov.au/grants-and-programs/circuit-breaker-business-support-package/business-costs-assistance-program>> accessed 13 July 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Business Victoria, *Business Support Fund reassessments*, 2021, <<https://business.vic.gov.au/contact-us/business-support-fund-reassessments>> accessed 13 July 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Victoria Tourism Industry Council, *Submission 99A*, p. 8.

The program was particularly accessed by businesses in regional Victoria. For example, a survey conducted by Murray Regional Tourism found that in November 2020, 28% of surveyed tourism operators in the Murray region had accessed the first round of the fund and 20% had accessed the second round.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the benefits provided by the Business Support Fund, there are some limitations to its operation. In particular, the strict eligibility criteria may limit the broad application of the program to some businesses who may be most severely impacted by the pandemic. The Committee particularly notes that partnerships and sole traders are excluded from the program unless they hire individuals other than themselves. During the course of the Inquiry, the Committee heard that this requirement has had a significant impact on those excluded tourism businesses.<sup>16</sup> For example, By Moonlight, a short-term accommodation business located in Moonlight Heads, was unable to receive support under the program. In evidence to the Committee, By Moonlight argued:

State government COVID-19 business support was crucial for our industry, but unfortunately By Moonlight did not qualify due to our partnership business model. As a husband and wife team working within our business seven days a week, we were advised on numerous occasions, 'Your business is not eligible for the current round of support packages from the Victorian government'. The inequity we and many other small businesses faced was so unfair.<sup>17</sup>

Another accommodation business, the Lake Anderson Caravan Park, highlighted the lack of support provided to partnerships, noting:

We are set up as a 'Partnership' ... This was a hinderance through Lockdown and resulted in not qualifying for Government assistance in many ways. If you were a company, you were fine – even if you didn't have employees, you were a sole director. The Victorian Government ended up making a change later to 'Sole Traders', still, partnerships missed out. Only one of us could receive Job Keeper because we were a partnership ... The Victorian Government had a predetermined idea that in order to be a business you had to have employees. We had to employ people in order to qualify for help.<sup>18</sup>

The inability of certain businesses to access grants under the Business Support Fund led many to rely on other sources of support. For example, South Gippsland Shire Council noted that some sole traders in the region did not qualify for Victorian Government support and this resulted in an overreliance on JobKeeper Payments.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> As quoted in: Echuca Moama Tourism, *Submission 136*, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example: Easy Weddings, *Submission 82*, pp. 7–8; Carolyn Woods, Owner, By Moonlight, Public hearing, Camperdown, 13 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 32–33; Damien Young, *Submission 78*, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Carolyn Woods, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

<sup>18</sup> Lake Anderson Caravan Park, *Submission 60*, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> South Gippsland Shire Council, *Submission 44*, p. 5.

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** That the Victorian Government consider options for support that could be provided to businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and who have been ineligible for support under the Business Support Fund, including sole traders.

**RATIONALE:** Many tourism businesses were ineligible for the Business Support Fund due to the structure of their business.

### 4.1.3 Outdoor Eating and Entertainment Package

The Outdoor Eating and Entertainment Package was a \$58 million package of business grants created to aid businesses to adapt their operations to enable outdoor dining. Grants of \$5,000 were available to licensed and unlicensed hospitality businesses to pay for practical equipment or training, marketing or other expenses to adapt to the new operations. The program ran from 14 September to 12 December 2020.<sup>20</sup>

Many submitters to the Inquiry stated that this initiative has been highly successful. In particular, councils praised the coordination between local and state governments in delivering the program. For example, Strathbogie Shire Council stated:

The supply of funding and assistance to businesses and Councils to enable and encourage outdoor dining during the pandemic was a success. It drew customers out to dining venues which otherwise may have closed, unable to open, or unviable. The programme and campaign worked well. Continuing support for outdoor dining initiatives would be welcome in Strathbogie Shire.<sup>21</sup>

Alpine Shire Council expressed appreciation for the program, stating that it was 'very well received'.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Renae Littlejohn, Director Economy and Community at South Gippsland Shire Council, outlined the positive impact that the program had on the local community, stating:

Probably another highlight for our organisation was undertaking the outdoor dining program. It enabled us really to work individually with our chambers of commerce. We took a slightly different approach to our neighbours. We tended to work independently, allocating certain funds based on the size of our towns—for example, our four largest towns we allocated a total cost of \$25 000, and that enabled them to activate spaces where people could actually reinvent a space—the community collectively could reinvent a space—for people to come and dine and just experience a new outdoor dining experience with family and friends. That was really well received. And we also embarked on a marketing component alongside the physical space. That is

20 Business Victoria, *Outdoor Eating and Entertainment Package Business Grants*, 2021, <<https://business.vic.gov.au/grants-and-programs/business-resilience-package/outdoor-eating-and-entertainment-package>> accessed 5 July 2021.

21 Strathbogie Shire Council, *Submission 111*, p. 3.

22 Elaine Burrige, Manager, Economic and Community Development, Alpine Shire Council, Public hearing, Bright, 28 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 12.

something that we are currently really enjoying. We have got smaller towns such as Fish Creek that actually had beautifully handcrafted furniture made by local artisans as well. So we engaged local businesses, we activated spaces—we re-energised and repurposed spaces that were not otherwise utilised and that the community could not really envision as spaces of opportunity—and we worked in partnership with our chambers. Apart from providing that one-on-one support, that chamber of commerce and business association support was critical in implementing that program, and we are still working very closely with the community groups to continue that program.<sup>23</sup>

At a public hearing, Guy Wilkinson from Indigo Shire Council commended the opportunity that the program provides for local and state governments to collaborate. He advocated fast-tracking the roll-out of similar initiatives in the future.<sup>24</sup>

The Committee notes that this program was created largely to respond to density limits in dining venues that restricted their capacity to operate. Noting that density limits are subject to ongoing fluctuation, with lockdowns continuing in the first half of 2021, consideration should be given to extending the program. Such an extension should be executed in close collaboration with local governments to ensure that businesses are effectively targeted. Further, it should promote ensuring that outdoor dining remains viable across seasons, including the winter period.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** That the Victorian Government consider extending the Outdoor Eating and Entertainment Package until the end of spring 2021.

**RATIONALE:** The Outdoor Eating and Entertainment Package was a popular and successful tourism recovery package. Extending it to the end of spring would provide further needed stimulus to the tourism sector.

#### 4.1.4 Other business support

Additional funding was provided to tourism-related businesses through a number of other programs.<sup>25</sup> For example, in June 2021, funding was provided in the form of the Business Support Cost Assistance Program Round Two Tourism Supplement (Tourism Supplement). The Tourism Supplement provided an additional allocation of \$11.8 million to support eligible tourism businesses to manage the impact of circuit breaker restrictions.<sup>26</sup> The supplement was provided to eligible tourism businesses, including accommodation, attractions and tourism operators, in the form of an additional \$4,500 payment.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Renae Littlejohn, Director Economy and Community, South Gippsland Shire Council, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 16 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 36–37.

<sup>24</sup> Guy Wilkinson, Economic Development and Investment, Indigo Shire Council, Public hearing, Bright, 28 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 38.

<sup>25</sup> For a list of programs and other support measures provided by the Victorian Government, see Appendix B.

<sup>26</sup> Business Victoria, *Regional Tourism Support Package*.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

A number of tourism-related follow-up programs were also run, including programs targeted at related industries, such as hospitality and accommodation. Examples include:

- \$40 million Regional Tourism Accommodation Support Program, which supported accommodation providers in regional Victoria, the Yarra Valley, the Dandenong Ranges and the Mornington Peninsula impacted by lockdowns and state border restrictions. More than 3,900 tourism businesses accessed this program.
- \$20 million CBD Business Support Fund, including the \$10 million CBD Small Hospitality Grant Program to support small and medium hospitality businesses in Melbourne.
- \$30 million Hospitality Business Grant Program to support food service businesses affected by 'stay at home' restrictions.<sup>28</sup>

Additional funding was also provided in the form of circuit breaker payments, including a \$143 million Circuit Breaker Action Business Support Package launched in February 2021 and a more than \$500 million Circuit Breaker Business Support Package launched on 30 May 2021 to assist businesses affected by the circuit breaker restrictions.

#### 4.1.5 Regional Tourism Investment Fund

Under the Regional Tourism Investment Fund's \$46 million stimulus round, the Victorian Government has funded 30 new infrastructure projects across Victoria's tourism regions.

While the fund has made some significant steps towards improving tourism infrastructure in regional Victoria, Melbourne has not been included in the major infrastructure projects. In its submission, NORTH Link suggested that a similar fund be created for greater Melbourne 'to encourage and support new tourism investment and generate new employment opportunities'.<sup>29</sup>

While acknowledging the important steps that the Victorian Government has made with the fund, VTIC pointed to some gaps for further development:

The State Government's investment into regional tourism infrastructure and the Regional Tourism Investment Fund are major and welcome steps to support the delivery of game-changing infrastructure and product in the regions. However, there are opportunities to support further product development – including in greater Melbourne, as we re-position our destination to attract international and interstate tourists and business travellers.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> NORTH Link, *Submission 96*, p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> Victoria Tourism Industry Council, *Submission 99A*, p. 16.

Another key gap identified with the funding provided under the Regional Tourism Investment Fund is the narrow scope of infrastructure projects. In this regard, some critical sectors have been excluded from funding opportunities. For example, VTIC suggested that the categories of infrastructure projects could be expanded to include regional airports.<sup>31</sup>

Murrindindi Shire Council called for increased funding to be provided to support outdoor tourism activities under the program. The Council argued:

The Regional Tourism Investment Fund played a key role in supporting many shovel ready tourism projects across Victoria and further such programs are required in order that Victoria continues to develop new tourism product to attract new and repeat visitation to its regional and metropolitan destinations.<sup>32</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 3, stakeholders told the Committee that inadequate tourism infrastructure across Victoria's regions has hindered their ability to recover. Investment in this area will play a key role in ensuring that the state's tourism offerings are better targeted towards domestic visitation and are competitive when international tourism resumes. The Committee considers that the Regional Tourism Infrastructure Fund could play a key role in facilitating this growth. In relation to stakeholder commentary on the program, it considers that the fund could be expanded to a broader range of projects to support more facets of Victoria's tourism sector.

**FINDING 8:** The Regional Tourism Infrastructure Fund was welcomed by the tourism sector. However, more support needs to be provided for tourism infrastructure projects in both regional Victoria and greater Melbourne.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** That the Victorian Government work with the tourism industry to identify ongoing infrastructure needs that can be addressed by an expansion of the Regional Tourism Infrastructure Fund.

**RATIONALE:** Continued improvements in Victoria's tourism infrastructure are needed to attract visitors back to the state.

## 4.1.6 Regional and Melbourne Travel Voucher Schemes

In December 2020, the Victorian Government launched the Regional Travel Voucher Scheme (regional voucher scheme) to drive visitation to regional areas in the first half of 2021. The scheme provides vouchers for a \$200 reimbursement where a person has spent at least \$400 on accommodation, experiences, tours or attractions. The vouchers can be used in regional Victoria, including the Yarra Valley, Dandenong Ranges,

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Murrindindi Shire Council, *Submission 140*, p. 2.

Mornington Peninsula and the Victorian alpine region. There is no quota for the number of vouchers that may be used in any location. A total of 80,000 vouchers were allocated under the scheme. The regional voucher scheme has had three rounds to date, each covering certain eligible travel periods, including:

- round 1, released on 11 December 2020 which covered travel periods from 4 January to 5 February 2021
- round 2, released on 20 January 2021 which covered travel periods from 11 March to 15 April 2021
- round 3, released on 30 March 2021 which covered travel periods from 10 May to 18 July 2021.

To supplement the regional voucher scheme, on 12 March 2021 the Victorian Government opened the Melbourne Travel Voucher Scheme (Melbourne voucher scheme). The scheme provides similar travel vouchers to instead be used in metropolitan Melbourne, with 40,000 vouchers initially allocated under the program.<sup>33</sup> The vouchers were able to be used during the eligible travel period between 16 April and 20 May 2021. Both schemes aim to encourage intrastate tourism and are only accessible to Victorian residents.

The voucher schemes proved popular among Victorians and the tourism industry.<sup>34</sup> As at 20 April 2021, 71,061 vouchers had been claimed under the two voucher schemes, valued at a total of \$14.21 million.<sup>35</sup> DJPR estimates that both voucher schemes have encouraged visitor spending of more than \$113 million.<sup>36</sup>

The Committee acknowledges that the tourism voucher schemes were, by necessity, established quickly at a time when Victoria was coming out of a long lockdown. So while the schemes have provided many benefits to tourism businesses, there are also some limitations to their operation. The first major limitation has been the focus on driving peak period visitation.<sup>37</sup> The first two rounds of regional vouchers were released during the summer months which are peak periods for many tourism businesses, when visitation would usually already be high. Further, the Melbourne vouchers were made available only up to mid-May 2021 with only one round of vouchers to date.

Several stakeholders to the Inquiry commented on these limitations. For example, Yarra Ranges Tourism argued:

The first round of the travel vouchers were launched for travel from the end of December to the end of January for any new or pre-existing booking for a minimum of a

<sup>33</sup> Victorian Government, *Melbourne Travel Voucher Scheme*, 2021, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/melbourne-travel-voucher-scheme>> accessed 15 March 2021.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Stonnington City Council, *Submission 68*, p. 2; NORTH Link, *Submission 96*, p. 4; Committee for Melbourne, *Submission 113*, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, p. 14.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example: Damien Cerantonio, Managing Director, Great Ocean Road Resort, Public hearing, Anglesea, 12 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 6–7; Liz Price, General Manager, Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism, Public hearing, Anglesea, 12 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 13, 7.

two-night stay ... Unfortunately this period was already highly booked and much of the scheme went on travel that would have happened anyway. Therefore unlikely to have elicited any change in consumer behaviour to travel.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, Tamara Cook stated in relation to her business, the Captain's Cove Waterfront Apartments Paynesville:

The news of the regional travel vouchers was exciting, but for us they were released at a time when we were already fully booked. There was a huge benefit to the consumer, but whether there was a benefit to business and whether that did stimulate income, I am not entirely sure. I would have loved to have seen it for last weekend, because I had no-one here. Just to give you a bit of an idea, our long weekends are normally four-night minimums for \$400 a night. I had two-night minimums for \$160 a night and I could not fill them. But if those regional travel vouchers were available, I think that definitely people would have taken advantage of that.<sup>39</sup>

In addition, noting that Melbourne may require long-term support due to its reliance on international tourism, it is unclear why only one round of Melbourne travel vouchers has been released to date. The Accommodation Association argued that providing an additional round of Melbourne travel vouchers would be vital to support Melbourne's recovery. The Association recommended that an additional allocation of \$8 million be provided to fund a second round promoted through a \$1 million marketing campaign.<sup>40</sup> This suggestion was also supported by NORTH Link, who argued that:

A dedicated 'Greater Melbourne' marketing campaign involving a second round of travel vouchers would help rebuild consumer confidence, create awareness of destinations and encourage spending.<sup>41</sup>

The Committee also learnt that off-peak periods vary across regions. For example, the off-peak period in the Great Ocean Road region is generally the winter months.<sup>42</sup> By contrast, the Victorian alpine resorts emphasised that they experience peak travel periods during these months.<sup>43</sup> Noting this diversity, the Committee suggests that future approaches to the voucher schemes may require a more nuanced approach that accounts for the different needs of Victoria's regions and metropolitan Melbourne.

Another limitation to the voucher schemes identified during the course of this Inquiry is the lack of focus on driving mid-week visitation. The core markets that undertake mid-week travel often provide the highest yielding visitor spends. However, these markets may be the slowest to recover. In this way, many stakeholders argued that boosting mid-week travel should be a key priority in the region.

<sup>38</sup> Yarra Ranges Tourism, *Submission 125*, p. 16.

<sup>39</sup> Tamara Cook, Manager, Captain's Cove Waterfront Apartments Paynesville, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 16 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>40</sup> Accommodation Association, *Submission 109*, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> NORTH Link, *Submission 96*, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> Brett Ince, Executive Director, Tourism Greater Geelong & The Bellarine, Public hearing, Anglesea, 12 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

<sup>43</sup> Elaine Burrige, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 13.

Great Ocean Road Resort's Damien Cerantonio explained that traditionally, the majority of mid-week travel to the Great Ocean Road region has come from international visitors. Mr Cerantonio stated:

To run a successful accommodation business in regional Victoria you cannot simply rely on our peak seasons or weekends to survive. Prior to COVID-19 the Great Ocean Road Resort's guests consisted of 70 per cent domestic, with 30 per cent being international travellers. However, if you break this down further, in our off-peak period, May to October, our breakdown was split 50 per cent domestic and 50 per cent international. And if you break it down even further, our midweek bookings in our off-peak period had a breakdown of 70 per cent international and 30 per cent domestic. These statistics highlight the importance of international travellers to regional tourism businesses, especially in our off-peak season.<sup>44</sup>

Noting the importance of midweek travel to regional industry, the Committee considers that additional effort should be made to rebuilding travel during these periods, particularly noting that international tourism will not return for some time.

Other stakeholders suggested that there may be scope to expand the voucher programs to allow interstate visitors to access the schemes. For example, Yarra Ranges Tourism argued:

Furthermore, the Travel Voucher Incentive Scheme would have yielded much greater return as a market intervention if there was a specific program for interstate or even international (when available) travellers, who stay longer. This would also provide a point of difference to visit Victoria in the colder months of winter, which traditionally see many Victorians leave the state for warmer climates.<sup>45</sup>

While the purpose of the voucher schemes is to encourage intrastate tourism, the Committee notes that similar programs in other states have been accessible to interstate travellers. For example, the Australian Capital Territory's *Choose CBR* scheme enables visitors from anywhere in Australia to access vouchers for local businesses.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, while South Australia's *The Great State Experience* vouchers are targeted at South Australians, a small number of vouchers are available to interstate travellers.<sup>47</sup> The Committee suggests that consideration should be given to expanding the Victorian voucher schemes to include interstate tourism.

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<sup>44</sup> Damien Cerantonio, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Yarra Ranges Tourism, *Submission 125*, p. 16.

<sup>46</sup> ACT Government, *Choose CBR digital vouchers*, 2021, <<https://choosecbr.act.gov.au/about-choosecbr-information-customers>> accessed 22 July 2021.

<sup>47</sup> Government of South Australia, *Great State Voucher*, <<https://southaustralia.com/voucher>> accessed 18 June 2021.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** That the Victorian Government extend the Regional and Melbourne Travel Voucher Schemes. In extending these schemes, it should:

- consider ensuring the vouchers are redeemable during off-peak periods for each tourism region
- consider adapting the schemes to encourage mid-week visitation
- have regard to adopting a more nuanced approach to targeting the schemes towards the specific needs of each tourism region
- consider expanding the schemes to encourage interstate visitation to Victoria.

**RATIONALE:** The Regional and Melbourne Travel Voucher Schemes were highly effective but were introduced when the tourism sector was in urgent need of support. Extending the schemes with these identified refinements would make further schemes even more effective in providing targeted stimulus to the sector.

### 4.1.7 Visit Victoria initiatives

Visit Victoria developed a range of marketing campaigns throughout 2020 to facilitate recovery from COVID-19. For example, the 'Click for Vic' campaign was launched in August 2020. This comprised an online directory featuring 1330 Victorian businesses to promote the online consumption of Victorian products and services.

Visit Victoria stated that the Click for Vic campaign succeeded in driving online consumption of Victorian products. Visit Victoria stated that the campaign has achieved more than \$2.3 million in public relations value (advertising value equivalency), achieved 48% campaign recognition, and achieved wide attention with 29,391 #clickforvic hashtags used by consumers and industry.<sup>48</sup>

Stakeholders to the Inquiry complimented the Click for Vic campaign. For example, Carolyn Woods, owner of By Moonlight, stated: 'I thought Click for Vic was excellent in terms of local producers and things like that getting out there. I really like that slogan.'<sup>49</sup>

In addition, the 'Stay close, go further' campaign was launched in November 2020. The campaign targeted intrastate tourism between metropolitan and regional areas, including the Melbourne CBD, High Country and Gippsland. Visit Victoria noted that 36% of the target audience undertook at least one travel-related action as a result of seeing the campaign, surpassing the initial target of 20%.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Visit Victoria, Inquiry into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and events sectors hearing, response to questions on notice received 9 June 2021, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Carolyn Woods, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 34.

<sup>50</sup> Visit Victoria, response to questions on notice, pp. 3-4.

Lastly, the 'Visit Melbourne' campaign was launched in February 2021. The campaign is targeted at supporting interstate travel to Melbourne. Visit Victoria estimates that 56% of those exposed to the campaign are more likely to consider visiting Melbourne.<sup>51</sup>

Stakeholders to the Inquiry were broadly positive about the role that Visit Victoria has played in aiding the industry to recover. Tourism Greater Geelong and The Bellarine outlined the importance of adequately resourcing Visit Victoria, saying:

Visit Victoria requires the marketing resources to have an impact on key markets and encourage travel to the state for new reasons. Melbourne and major events had been the hero of the interstate story for a long time. Exploring new markets and highlighting the compelling reasons to visit Victoria are imperative as the competition for domestic travel among destinations across the country becomes tougher.<sup>52</sup>

The organisation highlighted the importance of tailoring marketing campaigns to each region, outlining the potential for Visit Victoria to collaborate with Regional Tourism Boards (RTB):

Regions need support in telling their own stories better and working to drive awareness of the product and experiences available outside the capital city. Intrastate still presents the best opportunities for regions; Victorians love regional Victoria. The Regional Tourism Boards need support to stay top of mind and be a legitimate option against the aggressive marketing efforts coming from other states.<sup>53</sup>

Similarly, Western Melbourne Tourism suggested that Visit Victoria's campaigns must have a greater understanding of local context and should be expanded to promote more locations. The organisation argued:

There are considerable efforts to being undertaken to promote Melbourne, including ongoing Visit Victoria intrastate and interstate campaigns, 'Click for Vic' program, Lets Melbourne Again and the Melbourne City Council FOMO campaign.

These campaigns are all very welcome steps but need to be underpinned by a broader base of tactical activation. With the limits on spheres of travel, the period of the pandemic has shown us the value of 'local' and our neighbourhoods. Local neighbourhoods of Melbourne are a key element of the Melbourne visitor experience. It has been encouraging to see Visit Victoria embrace some neighbourhoods beyond the CBD in the most recent 'Visit Melbourne' campaigns. With an increased reliance on local domestic markets this concept of neighbourhood marketing can be expanded.<sup>54</sup>

The Committee considers that Visit Victoria should consult with RTBs and local government to tailor marketing campaigns towards each tourism region's recovery needs.

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51 Ibid., p. 4

52 Tourism Greater Geelong and The Bellarine, *Submission 84*, p. 8.

53 Ibid.

54 Western Melbourne Tourism, *Submission 104*, p. 6.

## 4.1.8 Working for Victoria Fund

The \$500 million Working for Victoria Fund helps businesses employ Victorian job seekers who lost their jobs due to COVID-19. The fund provides support for skills development and obtaining immediate accreditation to commence work, as well as connecting the public sector, local government, not-for-profit sector and private sector employers to facilitate job matching.

Broadly, stakeholders to the Inquiry praised the Working for Victoria scheme.<sup>55</sup> In the context of the arts and cultural tourism, the Arts Industry Council of Victoria told the Committee:

The Creative Workers in Schools and Museums and Galleries projects supported through [Working for Victoria] have been extremely positively received, as they engage artists as employees rather than contractors or casuals, and thus provide a more supported work environment. As pilots, these programs could offer new models employing artists across the sector and create more stable jobs.<sup>56</sup>

Similarly, the program was well received in regional areas. For example, Murrindindi Shire Council stated that it was able to fill 41 local positions due to the funding it received under the program, adding \$1.2 million to the local economy.<sup>57</sup> The Council plans to work more closely with the program, including 'exploring staff-sharing opportunities for businesses to retain employees following the completion of JobKeeper'.<sup>58</sup>

Going forward, the Working for Victoria program appears to present some promising opportunities for supporting Victoria's recovery. Strathbogie Shire Council noted:

Working for Victoria added employment and targeted grants and subsidies assisted tourism businesses to continue to trade. Now is the time to reflect on how the gains made can be consolidated and further supported by the Victorian Government in the future.<sup>59</sup>

Central Goldfields Shire Council similarly noted the positive effect that the program has had on the region. Drawing on the example of developments made in the Maryborough Railway Station, the Council stated that the Working for Victoria program:

assisted in value adding to both projects with (positive) unintended consequences. An example is the hiring of a highly skilled person to digitise the Art Gallery collection. This person's skills were also used to digitise a private collection of drawings of the Maryborough Railway Station that will ensure flexible use of these images in the relocated Visitor Information Centre.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>55</sup> South Gippsland Shire Council, *Submission 44*, p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> Arts Industry Council of Victoria, *Submission 49*, pp. 10–11.

<sup>57</sup> Murrindindi Shire Council, *Submission 140A*, p. 12.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>59</sup> Strathbogie Shire Council, *Submission 111*, p. 4.

<sup>60</sup> Central Goldfields Shire Council, *Submission 55*, p. 2.

### 4.1.9 Region-specific assistance

The Committee received many recommendations for further assistance for Victoria's tourism regions from stakeholders in those regions. Some examples of these recommendations are outlined below.

#### Murray region

- That the Victorian, Commonwealth and New South Wales Governments develop a coordinated approach and work collaboratively to support businesses and schools in border regions and communities
- That travel vouchers are developed for border towns that can be used across state borders

#### High Country

- That the Victorian Government develop a plan to provide affordable, short-term housing accommodation for staff
- That the Victorian Government make mental health services accessible within the Alpine Shire
- That Resort Management Boards be made eligible for state government subsidies and other opportunities
- That the Victorian Government make training and skill development programs available and accessible within the Alpine Shire

#### Gippsland

- That the Victorian Government increase investment in tourism sites, public assets and upgrades to infrastructure, such as the Walhalla Goldfields Railway
- That the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning assist groups looking after tourism assets by helping them to establish governance and operating procedures

#### Great Ocean Road

- That the Victorian Government provide additional funding for new tourism attractions which span across the entire Great Ocean Road
- That the Victorian Government fund marketing campaigns that focus on the Great Ocean Road
- That the Victorian Government streamline the planning scheme amendment process for residential development to increase the number of houses available for the hospitality workforce

### Greater Melbourne

- That the Victorian Government expand and promote the Greater Melbourne travel voucher scheme, supported with a significant marketing campaign to drive visitation from regional areas
- That the Victorian Government drive bookings and spending more broadly across greater Melbourne, including through the promotion of Melbourne's neighbourhood destinations

The Committee does not have the time nor the resources to address every recommendation made. This does not, however, deny their importance or underplay the many challenges faced by the Victorian tourism sector in its recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee believes that the best approach is for Visit Victoria to meet with RTBs and local governments, with the aim of assessing targeted recovery needs specific to each region.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** That the Victorian Government explore options for providing funding for tourism infrastructure projects in greater Melbourne.

**RATIONALE:** Continued improvements to Victoria's tourism infrastructure are needed to attract visitors back to the state.

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** That Visit Victoria undertake consultation with Regional Tourism Boards and local government, including greater Melbourne, to develop individual support packages, including funding and future marketing campaigns, specific to each tourism region's strengths and needs.

**RATIONALE:** There has not been uniform recovery in the tourism sector across Victoria. Each region has recovered at a different rate and requires tailored support to continue their recovery.

#### 4.1.10 Mental health support

Mental health support is provided to small businesses under the \$26 million Wellbeing and Mental Health Support for Victorian Small Businesses program. Current support under the program includes the Partners for Wellbeing helpline, which provides free mental health support to aid small businesses and their employees to deal with the impacts of COVID-19.

The majority of stakeholders to the Inquiry that commented on mental health challenges supported the Government's existing support measures. However, Indigo Shire Council argued that gaps in mental health services in their region, 'challenge our

short to medium term capacity for social and economic renewal ... Improvements to mental health services will be critical to sustained regional recovery and renewal'.<sup>61</sup> Knox City Council stated that mental health support is 'just as much value as direct grants'.<sup>62</sup>

Michael Leaney, owner of Walhalla's Star Hotel, explained the challenge tourism businesses face trying to stay positive for their customers while struggling themselves. He said:

from a mental health point of view, it has just done everyone, and a lot of people in the tourism and hospitality industry frankly are just done. They have had enough ... People are just really tired. We are tired and then when we get visitors coming, we have to be up and happy, happy, joy, joy and stuff. They do not want to see us being stressed. So you have got this real balancing act between being happy and encouraging people, because our customers are humans, they understand.<sup>63</sup>

Some stakeholders noted that it was unclear what mental health support is available to the sector. In this regard, there may have been poor communication about exactly what support was available. Yarra Ranges Tourism critiqued the pace with which mental health support has been provided within regional areas. They stated that regional tourism organisations have played a fundamental role in ensuring uptake of the Victorian Government's programs:

While the Government has responded to the mental health issue, through the Partners For Wellbeing initiative, this was very slow to be activated, taking several months. While Yarra Ranges Tourism is aware of this program being available and continue to promote its use, we have had little feedback as to whether there has been uptake of tourism businesses in our region. Yet [regional tourism organisations] have played a major role in promoting people to connect with such support. It is hoped that the Government will further refine the mental health supports for business, and will recognise the value of an outreach model through [regional tourism organisations].<sup>64</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION 7:** That the Victorian Government increase mental health support for the tourism sector, including by:

- targeting mental health initiatives in regions with limited existing access to mental health resources
- improving communication around available mental health support within the tourism sector.

<sup>61</sup> Indigo Shire Council, *Submission 5*, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> Knox City Council, *Submission 120*, p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> Michael Leaney, Proprietor, Walhalla's Star Hotel, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 16 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20.

<sup>64</sup> Yarra Ranges Tourism, *Submission 125*, p. 11.

**RATIONALE:** Financial losses in the tourism sector have caused many business owners and workers great personal stress. The mental health toll of the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing and the Victorian Government should continue to provide necessary support for those who need it.

## 4.2 Commonwealth

Commonwealth Government support to the Victorian tourism industry came mainly through the JobKeeper and aviation support programs.

### 4.2.1 JobKeeper Payment

The Commonwealth Government provided a wage subsidy for businesses significantly affected by COVID-19 in the form of the JobKeeper Payment scheme. A full explanation of the scope of the program is outlined in Chapter 2.

As noted in Chapter 3, stakeholders to the Inquiry overwhelmingly argued that tourism businesses would not have survived throughout 2020 without the support provided through federal and state government programs, particularly the JobKeeper scheme.<sup>65</sup> However, as the Accommodation Association noted, some staff, such as casual and international workers, did not qualify for support.<sup>66</sup>

The City of Greater Dandenong provided the specific example of the Melbourne Cable Park, explaining:

The Park found limited benefit from JobKeeper. Staff could not attend on-site and the nature of the Park's business was that they could not operate off-site. Moreover, many of the Park's 50 staff had not been with the tourist destination for more than one year and are casual. As a result, most were not covered by JobKeeper. While the business had about 12 staff who qualified, a number of these subsequently left the business. The Park ended up with 8 or 9 on JobKeeper, when they could operate.<sup>67</sup>

Further, following the end of JobKeeper in March 2021, some submitters called for its return or, alternatively, a replacement sector-specific wage subsidy to be introduced.<sup>68</sup> In the absence of such a program, Committee for Melbourne argued that the end of JobKeeper will have a strong effect on existing workforce and skills shortages in the tourism sector. The organisation argued:

Across the visitor economy sector, staff have been made redundant and have left the industry. Visiting working holiday and skilled visas weren't supported during COVID and this forced many to leave the country. This is creating a shortage across the industry due

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism, *Submission 87*, p. 2; Maribyrnong City Council, *Submission 108*, p. 8.

<sup>66</sup> Accommodation Association, *Submission 109*, p. 13.

<sup>67</sup> City of Greater Dandenong, *Submission 61*, p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> South Gippsland Shire Council, *Submission 44*, p. 7; Destination Phillip Island Regional Tourism Board, *Submission 77*, p. 9.

to Covid-19. After JobKeeper was terminated on 28 March, it is estimated this would cause over 100,000 job losses, many of which would be in the visitor economy sector.<sup>69</sup>

**FINDING 9:** The JobKeeper Payment scheme assisted in workforce retention, however, the ending of the scheme has caused concern about workforce retention in the tourism industry.

**RECOMMENDATION 8:** That the Victorian Government advocate to the Commonwealth Government for the resumption of the JobKeeper Payment scheme, or a similar form of wage subsidy, for industries that continue to face significant COVID-19 restrictions on their business and employment activity, such as the tourism sector.

**RATIONALE:** The Commonwealth Government's decision to end JobKeeper was based on macroeconomic conditions that do not reflect the ongoing economic challenges the tourism sector is enduring.

#### 4.2.2 Tourism Aviation Network Support Program

On 21 April 2021, the Commonwealth Government launched the Tourism Aviation Network Support Program. The program provided over 800,000 half-price airfares to select tourism regions most affected by the loss of international tourism, at a cost of \$1.2 billion. Discounted flights under the program were available from April to the end of July, for travel until 30 September 2021. Only one Victorian location was included in the program—Avalon Airport.

Brendan McClements, Visit Victoria's CEO, told the Committee that the tourism industry could not understand how algorithms driving the program determined Burnie in Tasmania to have lost more international visitors than somewhere like Melbourne. When asked if the program should have identified Melbourne as a destination that would benefit from half-price airfares, he replied:

I would have thought so, yes ... There was a degree of frustration expressed to me by the industry around the design of the program. There was certainly advocacy on our behalf federally around: how did they land on Burnie as one of the badly hit international destinations? It did not track with our numbers, but there is an algorithm apparently. And we have sought to see if it could, if it is extended in the future, include additional parts of Victoria. Yes, we would like to see Mildura included. We have an airport in Bendigo that could have been included, in addition to Avalon and, importantly, Melbourne.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Committee for Melbourne, *Submission 113*, p. 9.

<sup>70</sup> Brendan McClements, Chief Executive Officer, Visit Victoria, Public hearing, Melbourne, 19 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 8.

Stakeholders to the Inquiry argued that the program may harm regional Victoria's recovery by not encouraging interstate tourism to the regions. For example, VTIC asserted that:

While we welcomed the Federal Government's recent half-price airline fares initiative, Visit Victoria was disappointed that only one Victorian destination (Avalon) was included in the scheme. Visit Victoria strongly advocated to both Tourism Australia and Austrade, however, no subsequent Victorian destinations were added to the list. Pre COVID-19, international tourism made a significant contribution to Victorian visitor economy expenditure and our state is relying on strong domestic tourism to make up this short-fall. Any future initiatives should be more equitable and include more Victorian destinations which now heavily rely on domestic visitation in lieu of international tourism.<sup>71</sup>

Noting the limitations of the program, the Victorian Government stated that it has written to the Commonwealth Government to request changes to be made to the program. The Government attempted to highlight:

concerns with the program, noting that recovery of Victoria's tourism industry requires support for both Melbourne and regional Victoria. The Tourism Aviation Network Support Program, as currently designed, will not achieve this. It does not encourage regional dispersal in Victoria and incentivises group business away from Melbourne and Victoria...

The Victorian Government has requested that the Australian Government extend the program to address these issues by including support for regional airports that will encourage dispersal and visitation to the hardest hit areas of Victoria. Specifically, the Victorian Government has recommended support for flights into Tullamarine Airport, Albury Airport, Bendigo Airport and Mildura Airport.<sup>72</sup>

The Committee supports the Victorian Government's work in advising the Commonwealth Government of the obvious flaws in the Tourism Aviation Network Support Program.

**RECOMMENDATION 9:** That the Victorian Government advocate for the Commonwealth Government to implement a second Tourism Aviation Network Support Program that includes Melbourne and regional Victorian airports.

**RATIONALE:** The Commonwealth Government's process for choosing airports eligible for the Tourism Aviation Network Support Program was flawed. A second program should include Melbourne and also encourage travel to regional Victoria, as both were strongly damaged by the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>71</sup> Visit Victoria, *Submission 142*, p. 11.

<sup>72</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, p. 15.



# 5 The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Victoria's events sector

From early 2020, events across Australia were postponed or cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the introduction of various public health measures. The impacts of these restrictions, which have continued throughout 2021, have been more significant in Victoria than in any other Australian jurisdiction. This is primarily as a result of the lockdowns that have been introduced within the state, in particular in winter 2020, in conjunction with other measures such as curfews and density restrictions. For the individuals and businesses in Victoria that plan, manage and deliver events, the consequences have been devastating.

In response, the Save Victorian Events campaign was established in July 2020 to advocate for support for the events industry. The campaign claims membership of over two thousand. Members working across various parts of the sector have participated in the campaign, including through a survey of their experiences during the pandemic, an online campaign through the Do Gooder platform, and in providing submissions to this Inquiry. Outside of the Save Victorian Events campaign, a broad range of businesses working within the sector participated in the Inquiry and provided crucial evidence related to their experiences and need for support.

This Chapter provides an overview of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Victorian events industry. It provides a snapshot of the events sector, its composition, governance and industry representation, as well as the economic and social value the industry provides to the state. The Chapter discusses the varied impacts of the pandemic, including in terms of economic impacts, operator and public confidence, insurance coverage, loss of industry status, mental health and the differing impacts in regional areas.

## 5.1 The events sector in Victoria

As noted in Chapter 1, the Victorian Government uses the term 'visitor economy' to refer to the varied goods and services provided for visitor consumption.<sup>1</sup> This incorporates tourism and events into one industry focused on driving visitation both to and within the state. The Victorian Government's submission emphasises the ability of events to

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, *Victorian Visitor Economy Strategy*, Melbourne, July 2016, p. 6.

drive visitation, while also acknowledging other economic and social value that events provide:

Major, community, sporting, cultural and business events are a key driver of the Victorian visitor economy. Major and business events help drive Melbourne's national and international positioning and profile, tourism, branding and business linkages. Major events provide international and interstate broadcast exposure and high levels of spending from event organisers and participants. Community, sporting and cultural events are important for community connection and wellbeing and provide jobs for the event supply chain across metropolitan and regional Victoria. They showcase talent, strengthen social cohesion and contribute to liveability.<sup>2</sup>

The Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR) also provided further information in a response to a matter taken on notice at a public hearing, acknowledging that the two sectors are distinct, but that 'there are strong connections and shared opportunities between the industries with many events driving visitation to Victoria and tourists choosing to attend Victorian events during their visit'.<sup>3</sup>

However, throughout the Inquiry, the Committee heard that, apart from some crossover, the tourism and events sectors are separate from one another, including in terms of the core purpose of their work. Simon Thewlis from Save Victorian Events explained this distinction at a public hearing:

Some events are about marketing and tourism—the grand prix is an example of that—but in most cases tourism is a benefit from the event and not the event's primary purpose ... the event industry is not the tourism industry; we have a completely different purpose, operational model, economic model and supply chain.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, Susan Ryman-Kiernan, Managing Director of Wise Connections, acknowledged the limited crossover between the sectors but highlighted that attention must be paid to these different purposes:

I understand why they are coupled together, looking from the outside in. We deal with people travelling, we deal with accommodation, we deal with people eating. That is about where it finishes. I think that how you uncouple it is you just need some clarity on what the different sectors do and what their purpose is really.<sup>5</sup>

While tourism is focused on driving visitation within an area, stakeholders told the Committee that events are mostly intended to bring people together for a particular purpose—for example, to improve business connections, to raise money or provide educational activities for charity purposes, or to build community through a local festival.<sup>6</sup>

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2 Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, p. 3.

3 Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, Inquiry into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and events sectors hearing, response to questions on notice received 7 July 2021, p. 3.

4 Simon Thewlis, Save Victorian Events, Public hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

5 Susan Ryman-Kiernan, Managing Director, Wise Connections, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 2 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

6 Save Victorian Events, *Submission 7B*, p. 8.

In arguing that the events sector should be considered independently—and recognised as doing more than just helping to drive visitation as a part of the visitor economy—Save Victorian Events defined it as ‘the people and businesses involved in the professional creation and management of special events in Victoria’.<sup>7</sup> Steve Smith, General Manager of DG Global Events, agreed with and expanded on this definition at a public hearing:

From our perspective ... Victoria's events industry is the people and businesses involved in the professional creation and management of special events in and from Victoria. These include business events, public and community events, charity events, festivals, mass participation events and professional weddings—even Christmas parties. We have some overlap with the arts, music, tourism and sport, but they are very separate industries with different purposes, operational models and economic models, for example. So we all overlap. You have a corporate event—if there is entertainment there, you would think that we are tapping into the music industry. Well, we are. If there are circus performers, we are tapping into that. If there is a comedic MC that is on stage, well, we are tapping into that sector as well. We are also tapping into the production, the supplier level, of audio systems, lighting systems and vision systems. We tap into security guards. We tap into food and beverage. We tap into hotels.<sup>8</sup>

Mr Smith added: ‘An event is the reason why everything else comes along.’<sup>9</sup>

A further distinction between the tourism and events sectors relates to the inter-jurisdictional nature of events management and operation. The Victorian events sector is renowned both within Australia and internationally. As a result, Victorian businesses within the industry often work on events across other jurisdictions, meaning that external events bring economic and employment benefit back to Victoria. By comparison, tourism is primarily centred on encouraging visitors to travel to and within the state. Matt Jones, Managing Director of NW Group, which specialises in technical production, gave an example of support being provided by a Melbourne company to the Tokyo Olympic Games:

As we speak, we have got a technical crew, predominantly from Melbourne—so a Melbourne-based crew—quarantining in a Tokyo hotel. We have got a couple of containers en route to Tokyo to provide sound and broadcast services for the opening and closing ceremonies of the Tokyo Olympic Games. I make some of the points of these shows to sort of emphasise that Australia and Victoria in particular have an international reputation for their skill sets in the live events industry, and all of us should be immensely proud of that and very focused on preserving that position that we are so privileged to have and so much work has gone into establishing.<sup>10</sup>

However, stakeholders told the Committee that they felt their industry was often unseen or invisible, and only received attention when providing tourism or economic value.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Save Victorian Events, *Submission 7*, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Steve Smith, General Manager, DG Global Events, Public hearing, Via Zoom 2 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Matt Jones, Managing Director, NW Group, Public hearing, Melbourne, 19 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 18.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Save Victorian Events, *Submission 7*, p. 1.

## 5.1.1 Composition of the sector

One of the complex themes raised throughout the Inquiry was the difficulty in defining the events sector, with stakeholders raising differing views about who is and who isn't included. One source of this complexity is that, as stated, the sector has crossover with other industries, such as tourism and the arts.

However, the Committee received broad agreement that the events sector includes the businesses that plan, manage and deliver events. This includes organisers, professional services, venues and caterers, and the chain of suppliers and technical specialists that are often hidden behind the scenes. There are an extensive number and variety of suppliers, with Bea Tomlin, a Risk and Safety Consultant at Beaspoke Safety, noting that many events will utilise up to 80 different suppliers.<sup>12</sup>

DJPR told the Committee that it considers the events sector to include 'the people and businesses that contribute to the staging of events', including 'event organisers, suppliers, creatives and performers and venue providers'.<sup>13</sup>

Peter Marko, Head Electronic Repair Technician at Phaseshift Productions, provided an example of the diversity of the various individuals and businesses that contribute to the management and delivery of events:

There are highly specialised crew and staff who make up this industry that supplies production equipment—this includes lighting, audio, staging and all the things that go together to make concerts possible. There are production managers—they are the people who put together the jobs, get the quotes, draw up and plot out floor layouts using computer programs and software and oversee the set-up of the concerts and the crew on site and beforehand... Then there are the audio and lighting operators and directors who are involved. They program the shows, they operate the lighting and they control the sound desks and the lighting. They tune the audio systems, they mix on stage and front of house to make the sound sound wonderful... Then there are the repair technicians, who look after millions of dollars worth of state-of-the-art, very specialised equipment that cannot be used in really any other industry. They look after the equipment and make sure it is working and safe and that events take place.

There are mechanical engineers who are involved in our business as well. They build specific infrastructure needed for specific events, which you cannot go out and buy off the street. They build the road cases that all our equipment gets carried in and goes to and from the different venues in.

There are riggers, who hang all the equipment from the roof and make sure it is all safe. They hang all the trussing, the lighting and the PAs. There are stage riggers, who put the stages together that the artists perform on. It is a huge industry and they are all very specialised, professional people.

<sup>12</sup> Bea Tomlin, Safety and Risk Consultant, Beaspoke Safety, Public hearing, Melbourne, 19 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 34.

<sup>13</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, response to questions on notice, p. 3.

There are loaders, who unload the trucks and load the trucks and help put the gear on the stage. There are truck drivers—it goes on and on. And then there are all the infrastructure suppliers as well, who supply the seating, the marquees, the decor et cetera, who are a larger part of the whole thing that is happening. It is a massive industry.<sup>14</sup>

The Committee heard that many of these businesses and individuals are ‘in the background’, and intentionally so, due to the ‘behind the scenes’ nature of the work.<sup>15</sup> However, there is a fear that this has led to the industry being left behind. Audio Visual Dynamics told the Committee, ‘I am most concerned that as a supplier to an industry we will be forgotten’.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, stakeholders told the Committee that the sector is versatile in what it does. Jamie Lea, Director of JL Productions & Hire, noted that, ‘we are multitalented because we have to be but also because we can be. That is the beauty of this industry’.<sup>17</sup>

Importantly, there are a large number of freelancers working within the events sector, many of whom specialise in a particular part of the supply chain. Bea Tomlin described their importance within the industry:

the industry freelancers, our industry’s very highly skilled professional service providers, and there are so many of them: the production managers, the lighting designers, the producers, the creative directors, the audio engineers and the aerial riggers. Our industry relies heavily upon these people. Many freelancers go from gig to gig, state to state, even country to country, as they are experts in what they do.<sup>18</sup>

There are different types of events, with different organisers, hosts and purposes. Some businesses in the sector specialise in a particular type of event, such as business events or festivals, while others may provide goods or services across the various event types. According to Save Victorian Events, some of the main categories include:

- business events—such as conferences, exhibitions, seminars, awards and product launches
- public and community events—such as street fairs, parades and public performances
- charity events—such as galas, fetes and funding dinners
- festivals—such as multicultural, fashion or music festivals
- mass participation events—such as marathons or triathlons
- professional private events—such as weddings.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Peter Marko, Head Electronic Repair Technician, Phaseshift Productions, Public hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 41–42.

<sup>15</sup> Susan Ryman-Kiernan, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

<sup>16</sup> Audio Visual Dynamics, *Submission 46*, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Jamie Lea, Director, JL Productions & Hire, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 2 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> Bea Tomlin, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 34.

<sup>19</sup> Save Victorian Events, *Submission 7B*, pp. 10–11.

The difficulty in defining the events industry was acknowledged by Bea Tomlin, who in advocating for greater consultation between government and industry on the issue, noted the diversity of views:

I think that is where we need to be having more discussions with the different facets about what it is, because everybody has got a different opinion. You will have heard from all the different associations and the different bodies that are representing the industry, but as I say, there are so many facets and there is not one clear definition of what events are.<sup>20</sup>

The Committee considers that in order to move forward and to meaningfully support the sector, confusion and complexity around the scope of the sector itself needs to be worked out in detail by government and industry. This will require in-depth consultation with diverse stakeholders working on events, including the smaller businesses and freelancers outlined above.

The importance of future consultation on the nature of the events sector is discussed further in Chapter 7.

### 5.1.2 Governance

The Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events has primary responsibility for events in Victoria.<sup>21</sup> Individuals and organisations that plan, manage and carry out events in the state may fall under the portfolio responsibility of a number of other Ministers. This includes, for example, the Ministers for Creative Industries and Small Business.<sup>22</sup>

Departmental responsibility for events rests principally with DJPR. Within the department, the Tourism, Events and Visitor Economy branch has responsibilities in relation to strengthening the state's tourism and events profile and influencing strong economic outcomes for the sectors. The branch also provides governance support and advice to tourism and event entities, such as the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre.<sup>23</sup> At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, DJPR also established a Public Events Team to support the safe resumption of events in collaboration with the Department of Health.<sup>24</sup> One of DJPR's strategic priorities relates to strengthening the state's reputation as the leading Australian tourism and events destination, through 'a refreshed approach to major events, regional tourism and key tourism entities'.<sup>25</sup>

Visit Victoria is the state's tourism and events company, established in July 2016 as a company limited by guarantee. Its creation was an initial outcome of a 2015 review of tourism in Victoria, at which time it assumed the responsibilities held by Tourism

20 Bea Tomlin, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 36–37.

21 At the time of writing, this position was held by the Hon Martin Pakula MP, also the Minister for Industry Support and Recovery.

22 At the time of writing, these positions were held by the Hon Danny Pearson MP and the Hon Jaala Pulford MLC, respectively.

23 Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Tourism, sports and major events*, 2021, <<https://djpr.vic.gov.au/what-we-do/events-and-tourism>> accessed 10 June 2021.

24 Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, response to questions on notice, pp. 1–2.

25 Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *DJPR 2019–23 Strategic Plan*, Melbourne, August 2019, p. 23.

Victoria and the Victorian Major Events Company. The company falls under the portfolio responsibility of the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events and the sole shareholder is the Premier of Victoria. Visit Victoria's major events team acquires new major events for the state, provides event marketing and management, creates strategic partnerships and delivers the Regional Event Fund and Regional Events and Innovation Fund.<sup>26</sup> Visit Victoria is also a 51% owner of the Melbourne Convention Bureau, which has functions to acquire business events for Victoria.<sup>27</sup> DJPR told the Committee that the structure of Visit Victoria, in incorporating both tourism and events, 'recognises the linkages between the two industries'.<sup>28</sup>

Importantly, Visit Victoria's objective is to 'build Melbourne and Victoria into Australia's number one tourism destination by delivering strong and sustainable growth across priority markets'.<sup>29</sup> As such, its role in the events space is primarily to ensure they are a key driver of tourism outcomes.

The work of DJPR and Visit Victoria is informed by the *Victorian Visitor Economy Strategy*—another outcome of the 2015 review—which was released by the Victorian Government in July 2016. This strategy sets out the Victorian Government's 'commitment in ensuring the State's growth and prosperity across tourism and events until 2025'.<sup>30</sup> It was accompanied by a Visitor Economy Ministerial Advisory Committee, which seeks to ensure partnership across government and industry and oversee implementation.<sup>31</sup>

The policy and strategy pursued through the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, DJPR and Visit Victoria focuses on major events and business events. While these types of event are central to driving visitation and provide significant economic value to the state, there are a much broader variety of events that fall outside of these categories, as outlined in section 5.1.1. These events, and the businesses that plan, manage and deliver them, contribute broad economic, social and cultural benefits and have helped to build Victoria's status as Australia's events capital.

There are various bodies that represent the interests of particular areas within the events sector. Business Events Victoria—founded by the Regional Victoria Conference Group—provides representation for business events in regional Victoria under the framework of the Victoria Tourism Industry Council (VTIC). Membership includes conference venues, accommodation providers, tour operators, local councils, regional tourism organisations and service providers. The Business Events Council of Australia is the national peak body for business events and liaises primarily with the Commonwealth Government. There are also bodies that represent particular parts of

26 Visit Victoria, *Visit Victoria Annual Report 2019–20*, 2020, p. 11.

27 Brendan McClements, Chief Executive Officer, Visit Victoria, Public hearing, Melbourne, 19 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

28 Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, response to questions on notice, p. 3.

29 Visit Victoria, *About Visit Victoria*, <<https://corporate.visitvictoria.com/about>> accessed 11 June 2021.

30 Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Tourism, sports and major events*.

31 Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, *Victorian Visitor Economy Strategy*, p. 8.

the business events space, including Meetings and Events Australia, Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia, Professional Conference Organisers Association and the Professional Convention Management Association.

Outside of business events, representative bodies similarly exist for other particular parts of the events sector. This includes representative bodies that also overlap with other sectors. For example:

- Australian Festival Association
- Live Performance Australia
- Australian Mass Participation Sporting Events Alliance
- various arts industry bodies, such as Music Victoria, Regional Arts Victoria and Theatre Network Australia.

However, the Committee heard that there is no broad representative body for the whole events sector in Victoria. In its submission, Save Victorian Events attributes the lack of industry representation to this being the first major crisis that the industry has faced in decades:

The vast majority of the Event Industry doesn't in normal times receive any financial support from government and nor does it rely on government policy for approvals. So the majority of the Event Industry has had no reason to need to get together to deal with government. And in fact, the vast majority of our industry has been invisible to government.

This is the first time in many ... decades ... that the Event Industry has faced a major crisis that has involved needing to deal with government.<sup>32</sup>

In addition, the Committee heard that many feel unrepresented by the various industry bodies discussed above. For example, Bea Tomlin from Beaspoke Safety noted that smaller organisations and sole traders struggle to be involved:

a lot of associations are only for the larger events. I am a single, sole trader, even though I cannot use that because then I would not get any funds from the government. I do not have the money to pay to be a member. I do not have thousands of dollars to become a member. So that is why with Save Victorian Events we wanted to have the people who are family-orientated businesses, sole traders, to be able to speak as an industry.<sup>33</sup>

Other stakeholders felt that the 'visitor economy' strategy employed by the Victorian Government has impacted the way that industry bodies work with their members and the broader industry. For example, Madison Fitzgerald, Director, Communication and Branding for business event management company Destination, described a proposal submitted to various bodies related to the recovery of business events in the state. This proposal was not taken up despite support from other key bodies. She stated:

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<sup>32</sup> Save Victorian Events, *Submission 7*, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Bea Tomlin, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

I believe our new business event proposal wasn't rejected on its merits but because it doesn't fit within current frameworks for state business events within the governing authorities which focus on a tourism "visitor economy model" despite [business events] bringing tourism of up to \$12bn to the annual economy.<sup>34</sup>

For these reasons, many businesses working within the events sector feel their views are not being heard by either the various industry bodies or the Victorian Government, and that decisions that affect them are being made without their input.

Opportunities to rectify the gaps in governance and industry representation for the Victorian events industry are discussed further in Chapter 7.

**FINDING 10:** Many events businesses in Victoria do not feel represented by industry bodies because:

- the businesses have not felt that they needed representation prior to the COVID-19 pandemic
- some cannot afford to join industry bodies
- their business models do not align with the 'visitor economy' focus of some bodies, which stems from government policy.

### 5.1.3 Value of the events sector

Events in Victoria offer significant value in terms of economic, social and cultural benefit, although emphasis is most often placed on the former. As a result of government focus on major and business events, however, there is limited data on the economic impacts of the broader events industry.

Business events constitute the largest component of Victoria's events industry in terms of economic value. In its submission, the Victorian Government provided that business events generated approximately \$12.6 billion in annual expenditure prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, contributed approximately 84,000 jobs and attracted 14 million delegates.<sup>35</sup> The submission also provided that the state's major events calendar generated annual economic benefit of approximately \$2.5 billion, contributed approximately 3,350 jobs and attracted 6.9 million visitors. Unfortunately, no further data is provided in relation to events that do not constitute either major or business events.

According to modelling by Ernst and Young, commissioned by the Business Events Council of Australia, in 2015, Victoria had the largest business events sector in the country. This accounted for 65,479 jobs, or 37% of the nation's employment in the

<sup>34</sup> Madison Fitzgerald, Director, Communication and Branding, Destination, Inquiry into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and events sectors hearing, response to questions on notice received 16 June 2021, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, p. 3.

sector.<sup>36</sup> The Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre is the primary venue for large-scale business events and contributed \$1.1 billion in economic impact to the state in the financial year leading up to the pandemic.<sup>37</sup> In addition, Felicia Mariani, Chief Executive Officer of VTIC (which encompasses Business Events Victoria) noted the importance of business events to the broader events industry:

Business events ... sustain a critical supply chain by keeping them in business across the whole of the year, providing much-needed consistency to the state's reputation as an events capital.<sup>38</sup>

Live Performance Australia reports that in 2018, Victoria generated the second-highest share of both national live performance revenue and national live performance attendance. In addition, average spend per person on live events was \$107, compared to the national average spend of \$86 per person.<sup>39</sup>

Creative Victoria's *Victorian Creative Industries Festivals Review* reported that there are approximately 430 creative festivals each year across the state—57% in Melbourne, 43% in regional Victoria. These generate employment for around 12,000 people and provide opportunities for 80,000 creative practitioners.<sup>40</sup> The Australian Festival Association provided in its submission that in 2019, ticketed festivals contributed approximately \$390 million in economic benefit to Victoria.<sup>41</sup>

More broadly, the social and cultural value of events to Victoria is wide-ranging. Indigo Shire Council described their power as 'points of social connection'.<sup>42</sup> Save Victorian Events stated that events are 'integral to Victoria's identity' and 'integral to what makes living in Victoria great'.<sup>43</sup> Further, it added that events 'play an important role in bringing communities together, in overcoming isolation and loneliness, in building a sense of community, and getting people working together'.<sup>44</sup>

Jamie Lea of JL Productions & Hire, similarly described the importance of events in bringing together people and communities:

We have a huge, huge impact on the mental health and wellbeing of our communities. You know this—I am sure you know this and you are all very aware of this. We give humans something to look forward to, to aspire to. We ignite their wish and want to engage and contribute and communicate and connect. We give them a reason to get out of bed or leave the house. I know that as humans on this planet we were not born to work and die. Events gather people together and they create joy.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Ernst & Young, *The Value of Business Events to Australia*, report for Business Events Council of Australia, February 2015, p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Felicia Mariani, Chief Executive Officer, Victoria Tourism Industry Council, Public hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 28.

<sup>39</sup> Live Performance Australia, *Submission 127*, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> Creative Victoria, *Victoria's Creative Industry Festivals Review*, 2021, <<https://creative.vic.gov.au/research/reports/victorias-creative-industry-festivals-review>> accessed 15 March 2021.

<sup>41</sup> Australian Festival Association, *Submission 134*, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> Indigo Shire Council, *Submission 5*, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> Save Victorian Events, *Submission 7B*, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>45</sup> Jamie Lea, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

At a public hearing, Howard Freeman, the Founding Director of CrewCare, highlighted the power of live events in terms of the emotions they inspire in their audiences:

They make you at a live event feel that amazing empathy or that emotion. It can make you laugh, it can make you cry, it can make you sing, and we are missing that at the moment.<sup>46</sup>

**FINDING 11:** Events provide economic, social and cultural value to Victoria.

## 5.2 Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

As noted in Chapter 2, various public health measures have been introduced in Victoria since early 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These measures, and other flow-on effects of the pandemic, caused wide-ranging impacts on events across the state. It is important to note that neither Victoria, nor Australia more broadly, are alone in dealing with these issues. There has been significant discussion and advocacy in the events space around the world, with various international jurisdictions implementing measures to support the recovery of their respective events sectors.

Within Australia, the events industry in Victoria has been the hardest hit. This is largely a result of extended lockdowns and border restrictions throughout 2020 and 2021, as well as ongoing restrictions on events in terms of density restrictions and other safety requirements. This has also allowed the event industries in other states to recover faster than in Victoria,<sup>47</sup> which could have long-term ramifications for the sector's competitiveness.

Stakeholders to the Inquiry described the period between March and December 2020 as an 'industry shutdown'.<sup>48</sup> In comparison to some other sectors, events have suffered significantly due to the limited ability to transition their work or outputs into new or innovative means in the COVID-19 environment. They have also been 'one of the last to be reactivated'.<sup>49</sup>

In terms of the restrictions put in place, many stakeholders within the events sector told the Committee that they understood the need for public health measures that restricted business to bring COVID-19 under control within the state. For example, the Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia stated that it supported the position that 'the management of COVID-19 health risks comes first before business and economic considerations'.<sup>50</sup> However, the general view put forward was that the events sector had been impacted more than most other sectors yet received some of the least support.

<sup>46</sup> Howard Freeman, Founding Director, CrewCare, Public hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>47</sup> See, Matt Jones, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Gab Robinson, Chief Executive Officer, Harry the Hirer, Public hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 12.

<sup>49</sup> Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia, *Submission 64*, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

As argued by numerous submitters to the Inquiry, when the Victorian Government prevents businesses from operating in their usual way or capacity, it has a responsibility to provide financial support to mitigate the resulting costs. The submission from Myles Audio Visual Melbourne noted that, 'As long as government restrictions are in place that make our business unviable, a business that's been successful for the past 21 years, we need government assistance'.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, Damian De Jong, Vice-President of Action Events, stated that: 'We need to open up as quickly as we can, or if we cannot open up, we need to be subsidised directly—not the trickle-down effect...'<sup>52</sup> The adequacy and effectiveness of government support is discussed in further detail in Chapter 6.

Some businesses highlighted ways in which they were able to deliver their products and services through innovative approaches. For example, adventure sports event management company, Rapid Ascent, converted some of its trail runs to virtual events, where participants competed in their own locations but were connected through social platforms.<sup>53</sup> However, the income derived from virtual events is often a fraction of that from in-person events. In addition, these types of virtual events provide little work for the many businesses and freelancers working along the supply chain, such as hire companies.

Some stakeholders highlighted ways in which the pandemic had provided benefits to how events could be delivered. Joe Toohey, Co-Convenor of the Arts Industry Council of Victoria and Executive Director of Regional Arts Victoria, told the Committee that online events had expanded accessibility for some groups or communities, and that moving back to solely live performances could risk excluding those audiences once again:

the reopening phase that we are slowly going through now will present different challenges to different communities. As an example, the move to online events during the pandemic has actually greatly benefited a lot of deaf and disabled audiences.<sup>54</sup>

The Victorian Government's submission stated that major events started to recommence in a limited manner in November 2020, in line with the newly-introduced *COVID-19 Public Events Framework* (see section 6.1.1):

The first major events to resume in Victoria were the Spring Racing Carnival (without spectators), the Boxing Day Test (at 30 per cent capacity with 30,000 spectators per day) and the Australian Open Tennis (at up to 50 per cent capacity for all days, excluding the five-day circuit breaker lockdown).<sup>55</sup>

The submission also noted that the business events sector expected a slow recovery on the basis of confidence issues, long lead times for events and competition with other states.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Myles Audio Visual Melbourne, *Submission 10*, p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Damian De Jong, Vice President, Action Events, Public hearing, Melbourne, 19 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

<sup>53</sup> Sam Maffett, Owner, Rapid Ascent, Public hearing, Anglesea, 12 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 47.

<sup>54</sup> Joe Toohey, Co-convenor, Arts Industry Council of Victoria, Public hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 18.

<sup>55</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, p. 4.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

**FINDING 12:** The events sector generally accepts that the Victorian Government's public health measures have been justified by the COVID-19 health crisis. However, there is a view within the sector that the Victorian Government has a role to play in providing support to the events sector because its decisions have directly affected the sector's viability.

The following sections discuss some of the impacts in further detail, including in terms of economic impacts, operator and public confidence, accessibility of insurance coverage, loss of industry status, mental health and differing impacts in regional areas.

## 5.2.1 Economic impacts

The economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the events sector have been wide-ranging and caused significant, ongoing harm. Richard Swanson stated the industry had been 'decimated'.<sup>57</sup> Audio Visual Dynamics described its business as 'sitting dead in the water', until such a time as venues reopen and events recommence on a widespread basis.<sup>58</sup> Theatre Network Australia raised its concern that it 'won't take much to push a lot of organisations over the edge to insolvency'.<sup>59</sup>

As events were progressively cancelled from March 2020 onwards, businesses were forced to refund deposits, ticket fees and other critical revenue. Many businesses reported loss of revenue of over 85% in 2020. For example, NW Group reported decline in turnover of 95%;<sup>60</sup> Gig Power reported decline in turnover of 85%;<sup>61</sup> and Destination reported decline in turnover of 85%.<sup>62</sup> Rocky Bruzzano, Chief Financial Officer at ExpoNet, told the Committee: 'I know where the money is going, and there is no money coming in. All the money is going out, and it has been going out for the last 14 months.'<sup>63</sup>

In early 2021, Save Victorian Events released the results of a survey it conducted of Victorian events industry companies on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their businesses. Participants included event organisers and suppliers from 360 businesses and over 200 individuals. The results of the survey included:

- Total income for the period April to December 2020 had dropped by 85%.
- 94% of companies were receiving JobKeeper Payments, which enabled 38% of companies to retain all staff, and 47% to retain some staff.
- Following the scheduled end to JobKeeper in March, 43% of companies would need to lay off staff, and 40% may need to close their business.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Richard Swanson, *Submission 43*, p. 1.

<sup>58</sup> Audio Visual Dynamics, *Submission 46*, p. 46.

<sup>59</sup> Theatre Network Australia, *Submission 124*, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> NW Group Australasia, *Submission 93*, p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> Gig Power, *Submission 62*, p. 1.

<sup>62</sup> Destination, *Submission 139*, p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> Rocky Bruzzano, Chief Financial Officer, ExpoNet, Public hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 47.

<sup>64</sup> Save Victorian Events, *Final Survey Results: The Devastating Impact on Victoria's \$10+ billion Event Industry*, media release, February 2021.

In addition, the survey found that freelancers and contractors in the sector had experienced an 89% drop in income between April and December 2020. Approximately 77% have had to seek work outside of the industry. Of events industry workers, only 27% who were working full time in the sector prior to the pandemic continue to do so. An estimated 35% of industry workers no longer work in events at all.<sup>65</sup>

Some submitters told the Committee that significant sums had been lost from individual events, including those that had been cancelled as a result of 'snap' lockdowns or border closures. John Young, President of the Port Fairy Folk Festival, stated that the cancellation of the 2021 festival had cost them approximately \$3 million.<sup>66</sup>

Despite the existence of JobKeeper throughout 2020, many businesses were forced to let staff go. In its submission, Save Victorian Events highlighted that the core challenge was that a large portion of the sector did not have access to any income to pay overheads:

So, while JobKeeper does cover some of the direct cost of staff it does not cover all the costs of the staff or any of the on-costs. Or, any of all the normal day to day costs of keeping the business open - such as rent, utilities, equipment leases, insurance, etc. ...

Event industry businesses that are keeping staff on JobKeeper are still burning considerable amounts of money each month. Many businesses are now having to reassess if they can continue to keep staff on JobKeeper.<sup>67</sup>

Tiny Good, Director of Show Tech Australia, described the effect of these ongoing costs to his business:

We have been surviving, keeping our crew on JobKeeper as much as we can, but obviously we still have to pay all of the taxes and other charges and insurances and everything else that goes along with that. So JobKeeper is fantastic to actually put money in the pocket of the crew, but the on-cost to the business is actually horrific ...<sup>68</sup>

In addition, businesses still accrued costs with regard to employee entitlements, leaving many with substantial staffing liabilities.<sup>69</sup> The compounding financial impacts of business overheads, accrued employee entitlements and other costs have placed significant stress on many businesses within the sector. Rocky Bruzzano explained that ExpoNet's debts were likely to continue to accumulate:

One of the unfortunate consequences ExpoNet is facing is that we will be inheriting a COVID-19 debt. The challenge we have is we need to keep this COVID-19 debt as low as possible, because each month whilst our sales are non-existent the debt accumulates, and if it becomes too high, it will become unserviceable. Over the last 14 months we

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> John Young, President, Port Fairy Folk Festival, Public hearing, Camperdown, 13 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 16.

<sup>67</sup> Save Victorian Events, *Submission 7*, p. 33.

<sup>68</sup> Tiny Good, Director, Showtech Australia, Public hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, Audio Visual Dynamics, *Submission 46*, p. 1.

have worked very hard to remain open. We have utilised all our cash reserves. We have negotiated rent relief from our landlords, negotiated settlements with our suppliers. All staff are currently working on heavily reduced pay.<sup>70</sup>

Some companies were forced to sell equipment or supplies, often at heavily reduced prices, in order to make ends meet or pay off rising debt. Damian De Jong from Action Events stated that businesses had 'multimillion dollars worth of equipment sitting there', which still needed to be maintained, and is 'worth nothing now'.<sup>71</sup> Peter Marko from Phaseshift Productions explained how selling this equipment would have long-term flow-on effects for both individual businesses and the sector as a whole:

Critical assets and specialised equipment, which companies like us have, which are necessary for concerts and other events to occur in the state, will be sold off to reduce debt. But it will not help because they will be sold at minimal prices, so the companies will still incur debts for decades to come. There is a lot of equipment that is very specialised, and if it is sold off because a company is going under, it is not going to make the sort of money that it is worth and people are going to be picking it up at rock-bottom prices. This is an important thing. If companies fold now, they are not just folding, they are going under with huge amounts of debt. The critical assets will be sold off, leaving massive shortcomings in Victoria's live music and arts events sectors. It will take years, if not decades, to rectify.<sup>72</sup>

Some businesses resorted to taking on any available work related to their products or services. For example, one staging company noted it was able to find work in construction which helped to pay the bills.<sup>73</sup> Damian De Jong from Action Events described the difficulty of having to pick up ad hoc work wherever it was available:

With my business I had to go into transport and do house removals, junk removal—all sorts of things. We were doing things that we did not want to do—we are passionate about our industry—but we had to. We had bills.<sup>74</sup>

However, many other businesses were unable to pivot their business model or services. This led to businesses being closed and workers leaving the industry to find work elsewhere. Tiny Good described the difficulties for specialised events professionals in this space:

We own ... about \$4.5 million worth of equipment that you cannot use anywhere else. Where else can we hire trusses, chain hoists, performer flying harnesses, winching systems, computer control systems, load monitoring equipment specifically designed for the entertainment industry? So hearing politicians say, 'Just pivot into another industry'—where?<sup>75</sup>

70 Rocky Bruzzano, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 46.

71 Damian De Jong, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

72 Peter Marko, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 42–43.

73 Revolution Staging, *Submission 11*, p. 1.

74 Damian De Jong, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 34.

75 Tiny Good, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

Event organisers also reported difficulty accessing suitable venues in which to hold events due to the repurposing of key venues for public health measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Audio Visual Dynamics stated that a number of hotels they worked with had become part of the hotel quarantine program, or otherwise were forced to close until travel could resume at a level that warranted reopening.<sup>76</sup> Another submission noted that the repurposing of the Royal Exhibition Building as a vaccination facility had left them without a venue 12 weeks prior to their event. It said that this was 'another devastating blow', without adequate apology, alternative option or compensation.<sup>77</sup>

The economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to continue over the winter months, particularly in the absence of the JobKeeper Payment, which ended on 28 March 2021. Howard Freeman described the impact of the loss of the wage subsidy at a public hearing:

I have got business owners who are friends of mine, mates for years, who are now paying their staff off their credit cards, who are selling their houses that they have worked all their lives for. That is the reality of losing JobKeeper. That is the reality of where we are.<sup>78</sup>

While public health restrictions are slowly relaxing, and events are beginning to resume across the state, financial uncertainty remains a critical concern for many business operators. Depending on their size, type and complexity, events can take many months—and sometimes years—to organise. This 'lead time' exacerbates existing financial insecurity for suppliers working on events, which will often not receive payment until an event has taken place. Gab Robinson, Chief Executive Officer of Harry the Hirer, described how this lead time was often underestimated:

there is a lag between that moment in time and the organisational process to stage a major job. It is not like you say, 'Well, you can gather again', and two days after that a grand prix can run or a flower show can run or a Melbourne Food and Wine Festival can run. It takes many weeks and months of preparation, and that is the gap that we are struggling with at the moment.<sup>79</sup>

Further, the Committee received evidence from stakeholders that the winter period is a much quieter time for events, which typically do not resume in great numbers until spring. In the absence of JobKeeper, these compounding factors of a quiet upcoming events season alongside a long lead time is continuing to place many businesses in the events sector in serious and ongoing financial uncertainty.<sup>80</sup>

No Fuss Events stated in its submission that it was arguably in a worse position than in March 2020, due to the loss of JobKeeper and the restrictions imposed on events. It stated that this loss would result in having to let go a majority of staff and potentially

<sup>76</sup> Audio Visual Dynamics, *Submission 46*, p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> Name withheld, *Submission 17*, p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> Howard Freeman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

<sup>79</sup> Gab Robinson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

<sup>80</sup> See, *ibid.*, p. 13.

lead to the business ceasing to trade at all.<sup>81</sup> The Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia noted that companies that had managed to survive the past year had access only to limited working capital for funding projects upfront, making it difficult to service their clients.<sup>82</sup>

In addition, community and public events are facing additional pressures where their economic models had limited profit margins to begin with. For volunteer groups or not-for-profits, the risk of cancellation can become too high to hold an event at all. Elaine Burridge, Manager, Economic and Community Development at Alpine Shire Council, described the fatigue experienced by the organisers of these types of events:

Even with COVID restrictions easing, many community events have not and will not proceed. This is largely due to events being run by volunteers and their personal exhaustion with everything that has occurred through 2020 and the challenge of trying to run an event in a COVID environment that we are still living in. Some events may not ever occur again due to that ongoing fatigue.<sup>83</sup>

The uncertainty created by potential lockdowns within Victoria is extremely difficult for businesses and individuals already in a dire financial situation. This uncertainty is discussed in further detail in relation to operator and public confidence in section 5.2.2 and the accessibility of insurance coverage in section 5.2.3.

While there continues to be a 'slow reopening', the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the events sector will be ongoing. NW Group noted that it did not expect revenues to recover completely until the reopening of international borders.<sup>84</sup>

**FINDING 13:** The effects of lockdowns, border closures and other public health measures threaten the long-term viability of the events sector in Victoria.

## 5.2.2 Operator and public confidence

One key theme that emerged throughout the Inquiry is that of low operator and public confidence for planning and attending events. This is due to a number of contributing factors, with the primary reason being the risk of the reintroduction of public health measures following an outbreak of COVID-19 within Australia.

In February 2021, the Business Events Council of Australia measured the level of confidence within the business events industry through an industry survey. The results, published in the *Government Support & Future Confidence Report: Business Events Industry Survey*, found that only 2% of participants were confident about business for the remainder of 2021, with 54% reporting they were cautious and 44% reporting

<sup>81</sup> No Fuss Events, *Submission 40*, p. 1.

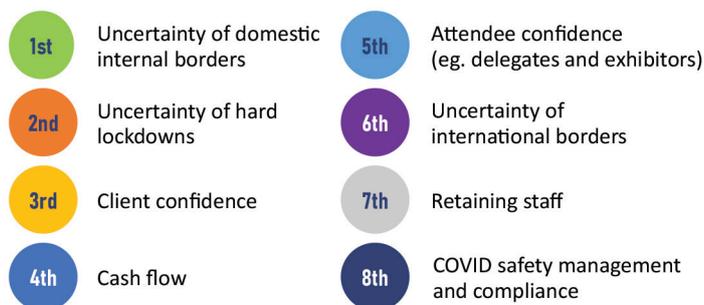
<sup>82</sup> Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia, *Submission 64*, p. 3.

<sup>83</sup> Elaine Burridge, Manager, Economic and Community Development, Alpine Shire Council, Public hearing, Bright, 28 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

<sup>84</sup> NW Group Australasia, *Submission 93*, p. 1.

they were either unsure or 'devastated'.<sup>85</sup> The report identified a number of key challenges regarding business confidence, which are ranked in order of the most critical in Figure 5.1 below. The primary challenge is uncertainty around domestic borders, followed by the uncertainty of hard lockdowns.

**Figure 5.1 Key challenges identified by the business events industry**



Source: Business Events Council of Australia, *Government Support & Future Confidence Report: Business Events Industry Survey*, March 2021, p. 6.

The risks related to Australian jurisdictions imposing border restrictions in response to an outbreak are particularly high for the events sector. Such restrictions may result not only in the cancellation or postponement of the event altogether, but also in the staff involved in delivering an event—and the participants—being stuck within a state or interstate. The costs for businesses of having staff caught interstate, or being forced to quarantine, can be extensive and debilitating. Tiny Good from Show Tech Australia gave an example of this financial cost:

the crew go to Victoria to do one day's event and go back to Queensland into 14 days of quarantine that they have to fund. So they earned \$600 and they got a \$3500 bill from the Queensland government purely because they came to Victoria to do one day's work.<sup>86</sup>

Similarly, Howard Freeman from CrewCare described the 'logistical nightmare' border closures create for larger events:

I am not prepared to work with a promoter and send 14 trucks to Western Australia with a crew when, if there is a lockdown, that is going to cost that promoter \$600 000 for those two weeks ... This industry, live music, works on travel and movement. I can leave Adelaide on a Friday night and be doing a show in Perth on Sunday, but I have got two drivers in every truck. I have got 14 trucks. I have got 28 drivers. I have got 90 crew. I have got 130 hotel rooms. I have got 100 seats on a plane. The spend is huge. So to be stuck somewhere and then reschedule your other shows on the off chance that you can find a venue that can take the rescheduling—the nightmare is continuous. The confidence in the industry—we are smashed at the moment.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Business Events Council of Australia, *Government Support & Future Confidence Report: Business Events Industry Survey*, March 2021, p. 6.

<sup>86</sup> Tiny Good, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

<sup>87</sup> Howard Freeman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

John Jacoby, owner of Rapid Ascent, explained that border restrictions had created low public confidence for interstate competitors participating in their adventure and mass participation events, which was 'very slow to rebuild'.<sup>88</sup>

As noted by Matt Jones from NW Group, 'the Victorian event industry is deriving its income not just from Victoria but interstate and internationally'.<sup>89</sup> The ongoing border restrictions therefore have a significant impact on the ability of events businesses to recover from the impacts of the pandemic.

In terms of low confidence related to the introduction of hard lockdowns, Susan Ryman-Kiernan told the Committee that Wise Connection's clients were more concerned with the impacts of the reintroduction of restrictions in response to an outbreak than they were with the prospect of COVID-19 itself emerging at an event. She noted that this is in light of the significant preparation required to safely deliver an event in the current environment:

They really want to do it; the appetite is there to do it. But we have got to get through the fear factor of: what if we are cancelled? I have not seen any fear. I have not spoken to anybody about, 'Oh, what if we go to events and there's COVID there?'. I think certainly the clients we are dealing with talking about the COVID-safe plans—which are pages and pages of what we do if, what we are doing to keep people safe—seem to be quite comfortable with that. It is just the prospect of cancelling.<sup>90</sup>

Stakeholders reported that this low risk appetite has flow on impacts down the supply chain, including the ability to retain staff and deploy suppliers.<sup>91</sup>

Operator confidence has been further damaged by recent Victorian public health restrictions introduced in both February and late May 2021, in response to COVID-19 outbreaks in the state. Audio Visual Dynamics stated that Victorian lockdowns had seen client confidence to book major conferences, with long lead times, 'evaporate'.<sup>92</sup> ICMS, a professional conference organiser, provided an example of a national conference that was cancelled due to low confidence stemming from the February lockdown in Victoria:

One example is a national association client who holds an annual conference attracting around 500 people from Australia and New Zealand. As a professional association they have to provide their members opportunities for professional development and they cancelled last years but were moving forward with the 2021 conference scheduled for September at the Melbourne Convention Centre, 4 day conference with 90% of anticipated audience coming from intrastate, interstate or New Zealand. The 5 day lockdown in February spooked them so they are moving to a completely virtual event. That is approx. 450 delegates x 4 nights x \$250 average accommodation spend = \$450,000 in potential accommodation spend, more on dinners in the CBD and the potential for delegates to extend their business trip into a leisure trip into the regions.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>88</sup> John Jacoby, Owner, Rapid Ascent, Public hearing, Anglesea, 12 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 48.

<sup>89</sup> Matt Jones, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20.

<sup>90</sup> Susan Ryman-Kiernan, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

<sup>91</sup> Sports Event Projects, *Submission 27*, p. 1.

<sup>92</sup> Audio Visual Dynamics, *Submission 46*, p. 1.

<sup>93</sup> ICMS Australasia, *Submission 88*, p. 1.

In addition, the Committee heard that there are also issues around public confidence in terms of how safe it is to book or attend an event. Evelyn Richardson, Chief Executive of Live Performance Australia, described the ticket sales drop following a snap lockdown or reintroduction of other restrictions, followed by a slow return of customers booking tickets.<sup>94</sup> Matt Jones from NW Group stated that confidence was higher immediately prior to an event taking place, when the particular risks were better known:

as we recover people are very, very uncertain about booking and are leaving it until the last minute, because everyone just feels uncomfortable about going ahead without knowing, and the closer they get to the date the more comfortable they feel. And I think that is because there is that lack of uncertainty about what is going to happen; the path to this being resolved is so uncertain. So a clearer path from Victoria around when we can get back to events and what the requirements are would give everyone more information on which to base their decisions and feel more confident about looking at things moving forward.<sup>95</sup>

Stakeholders noted that as the vaccination rollout progresses across the country, some confidence will return.<sup>96</sup> Susan Ryman-Kiernan of Wise Connections framed the issue in a different light, noting that the 'hesitancy we have seen in vaccination take-up is starting to play out in business willingness to stage events in Victoria'.<sup>97</sup>

The rollout of the vaccination scheme across the country will have a clear impact on operator and public confidence to both deliver and attend events. In arguing that greater certainty was needed in this space, Peter Jones Special Events advocated for confidence that lockdowns will no longer be required as the vaccine rollout continues.<sup>98</sup> The Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia recommended a 'consistent message that Victoria is open for business', including through 'clear guidelines around border management, vaccination roll-out, and a timeline and the precursors for the winding back of restrictions'.<sup>99</sup>

Government action to restore confidence is clearly needed. Music Victoria stated in its submission that while some degree of uncertainty is inevitable, the 'current operational climate is impossible for events'.<sup>100</sup>

One of the core issues raised in relation to the recovery of the sector relates to how to regain confidence. One mechanism of providing assurance is accessible event cancellation and business interruption insurance, discussed further below.

Mechanisms to improve operator and public confidence, including insurance, are also discussed further in Chapter 7.

<sup>94</sup> Evelyn Richardson, Chief Executive, Live Performance Australia, Public hearing, Melbourne, 19 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30.

<sup>95</sup> Matt Jones, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 22.

<sup>96</sup> See, for example, Susan Ryman-Kiernan, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>98</sup> Peter Jones Special Events, *Submission 38*, p. 2.

<sup>99</sup> Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia, *Submission 64*, p. 3.

<sup>100</sup> Music Victoria, *Submission 131*, p. 5.

**FINDING 14:** Events industry stakeholders identified border closures and uncertainty around hard lockdowns as key factors affecting operator and public confidence.

### 5.2.3 Insurance coverage

A further compounding factor in relation to the economic impacts discussed above is the ongoing inability to insure against the risks that the COVID-19 pandemic raises for the events sector. Two of the key insurance types relevant to these risks are event cancellation insurance and business interruption insurance.

Event cancellation insurance provides coverage where an event is affected by circumstances outside of the organiser's control, for example, extreme weather events, terrorism or non-appearance of a performer.

Business interruption insurance provides coverage for a shortfall in profits caused by an interruption to a business, as well as for ongoing costs until the business is able to resume operating. An interruption is a specific insurable event, such as fire or theft. This type of coverage acknowledges the significant financial implications of such an event on the operation of the business, in terms of paying business expenses, protecting invested capital, meeting guarantees given in relation to the business, and maintaining personal income.<sup>101</sup> While particular levels of coverage will be dependent on policy terms, there was uncertainty throughout 2020 as to whether existing policies would extend to interruptions resulting from COVID-19. In early 2021 two 'test cases' came before Australian courts that the Australian Securities and Investment Commission stated would 'provide greater clarity about whether insurance policies will cover business interruption losses from the COVID-19 pandemic'.<sup>102</sup>

In particular, the cases considered whether policies that had an exclusion referring to quarantinable diseases under a statute that has since been repealed could be considered to refer to the more recent version of the legislation. On 25 June 2021, the High Court of Australia denied an application by insurers for special leave to appeal the decision of the NSW Court of Appeal in its first test case.<sup>103</sup> As a result, the NSW Court's decision remains the authority in that the erroneously-worded exclusion in many business interruption policies (referring to outdated legislation) could not be used to prevent policyholders from making a claim on this basis.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>101</sup> QBE Insurance, *A guide to business interruption insurance*, 2017, <<https://www.qbe.com/au/news/a-guide-to-business-interruption#:~:text=%E2%80%9CBusiness%20interruption%20insurance%20deals%20with,their%20investment%20in%20the%20business.>> accessed 31 May 2021.

<sup>102</sup> Australian Securities and Investment Commission, *Business interruption insurance claims and COVID-19: what you need to do*, 2021, <<https://asic.gov.au/about-asic/news-centre/news-items/business-interruption-insurance-claims-and-covid-19-what-you-need-to-do>> accessed 1 June 2021.

<sup>103</sup> This first 'test case' was *HDI Global Specialty SE v Wonkana No. 3 Pty Ltd* [2020] NSWCA 296. See, High Court of Australia, *List of business for sittings at Canberra: Applications for special leave to appeal*, Friday, 25 June 2021.

<sup>104</sup> MinterEllison, *Business Interruption Insurance for COVID-19: First Australian Test Case*, 2021, <<https://www.minterellison.com/articles/business-interruption-insurance-for-covid-19>> accessed 5 July 2021.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, both event cancellation and business interruption insurance policies in Australia generally excluded communicable disease from coverage but offered a communicable disease extension option, with event organisers and promoters having the choice as to whether they took on that particular risk. However, this extension became unavailable toward the beginning of the global outbreak of COVID-19, as it became a 'known risk'.<sup>105</sup> Only active policies that had opted to include additional coverage for cancellation or postponement owing to communicable disease could access coverage, and only up to the end of the relevant policy period. As a result, event organisers are now unable to insure against postponement or cancellation resulting from the varied impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The communicable disease extension was previously considered as a low exposure for event organisers in Australia and New Zealand, particularly in comparison to some of the main exposures, such as bushfire, natural catastrophe, non-appearance of a principal performer or venue damage.<sup>106</sup>

The inability to access coverage for events where they are postponed or cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic has created significant risk for event organisers. As the submission from Save Victorian Events explained, a last-minute cancellation will incur all the projected costs of the event without receiving any of the event income.<sup>107</sup> Madison Fitzgerald from Destination provided an example in relation to its involvement in the 2020 Grand Prix:

We at Destination had a large financial loss last March when our event at the Melbourne Grand Prix, which had taken 6 months of planning and resources and set up costs, was cancelled within hours of set up on the first day. As a business we wore the financial loss and still had to honour and pay suppliers and staff for their contribution over many months and on the day.<sup>108</sup>

The financial costs of a last-minute cancellation of a single event has the potential to devastate a smaller organisation or not-for-profit. Simon Thewlis explained:

if you are a not-for-profit who does one conference a year and that raises money for your operations, you might make \$50 000 out of that conference. If that conference is cancelled at the last minute, your not-for-profit might lose \$100 000. Therefore there are a huge number of not-for-profits who just cannot risk losing 100 grand, because they do not have a lazy 100 grand lying around.<sup>109</sup>

Various Inquiry stakeholders told the Committee that the risks involved in putting on an event in the current environment are restricting the ability of the sector to recover. The Arts Industry Council of Victoria stated in its submission that, 'In the absence of

<sup>105</sup> Jason Holmes, Managing Director, Head of Region – Asia Pacific, H2 Insurance Solutions, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 2 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 39.

<sup>106</sup> Abigail Murison, 'Game, set and match for event cancellation cover?', *Journal of the Australian & New Zealand Institute of Insurance & Finance*, vol. 43, no. 2, August 2020, pp. 2–3.

<sup>107</sup> Save Victorian Events, *Submission 7B*, p. 24.

<sup>108</sup> Madison Fitzgerald, response to questions on notice, p. 1.

<sup>109</sup> Simon Thewlis, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 5.

adequate business interruption or event cancellation insurance, event producers and artists may deem the risk of running events too great.<sup>110</sup> Music Victoria noted that a number of its members considered it a risk 'they are simply not able to bear'.<sup>111</sup> Live Performance Australia similarly noted these concerns in its submission. The submission described the inability to access coverage as market failure, arguing that government has a right and a responsibility to act:

Now that COVID-19 is a known risk, it is no longer covered as an insurable event in insurance cover. Event organisers are unable to access business interruption insurance to cover losses arising from COVID-19 related cancellations, postponements, or re-imposed restrictions. This is a significant market failure, which the government has a role in addressing to support the safe reactivation of the live performance industry. Without access to affordable insurance to mitigate risks associated with COVID-19 and other communicable diseases, the risks with presenting events are significantly higher for event organisers.<sup>112</sup>

Jon Perring, co-owner of the Tote Hotel and Bar Open, also advocated for the Victorian Government to address the 'availability and price of insurance for live music venues and festivals, in particular public liability and business interruption insurance', including through underwriting policies.<sup>113</sup>

It remains unclear how the insurance industry will deal with these issues as vaccination rates increase and the risks of lockdowns and other public health measures decrease. However, insurance brokerage professionals have recently predicted that the events sector would face premium increases, higher deductibles and restrictive coverage when coverage does eventually return.<sup>114</sup>

Recommendations to address these risks include the introduction of a government-backed underwriting or reinsurance scheme in conjunction with private insurance providers, and establishment of an advance deposit scheme for events. These proposals are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

**FINDING 15:** The inability to insure against COVID-19 is a large barrier to the recovery of the events sector in Victoria.

#### 5.2.4 Loss of industry status and workforce challenges

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the events sector, and its expedited recovery in other states and some international jurisdictions, risks weakening Victoria's status as a leader in the field. At a public hearing, Peter Marko from Phaseshift Productions told the Committee:

<sup>110</sup> Arts Industry Council of Victoria, *Submission 49*, p. 3.

<sup>111</sup> Music Victoria, *Submission 131*, p. 3.

<sup>112</sup> Live Performance Australia, *Submission 127*, p. 4.

<sup>113</sup> Jon Perring, Co-Owner, Tote Hotel and Bar Open, Public hearing, Melbourne, 19 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

<sup>114</sup> Murison, 'Game, set and match for event cancellation cover?', p. 5.

These businesses and their workers are the backbone of the industry that gives Victoria its competitive advantage when it comes to our reputation for staging major events and presenting live music better than anyone else in Australia—amongst the best in the world ...

While it may be easy enough to open the door of a venue, unless Victoria retains the staff, the businesses and the equipment that these venues use to make safe and specialised events take place, the risk of Victoria losing its hard-won reputation for being national and international leaders in the way major events are delivered is a real risk. We could actually lose this status that we have, and we do not want to do that.<sup>115</sup>

Due to the economic situation outlined above, and ongoing uncertainty around when events will be able to resume in a meaningful way, many skilled professionals and workers have already left the industry in search of work and financial security elsewhere. This stands to continue to worsen in light of the compounding impacts of the end of JobKeeper, the statewide lockdown and associated public health restrictions that commenced in late May, and the risk of further public health measures being reintroduced in the case of new COVID-19 outbreaks. In its submission, NW Group acknowledged this loss:

We have observed that the technicians and crew that enable the production of events we support have left the industry in large numbers to find more stable and regular employment in other industries.<sup>116</sup>

The loss of skilled professionals will have sweeping impacts for the Victorian events industry, and crucially, in terms of its capacity and capability. As noted by Peter Marko, there is no certainty that these workers will return to the sector when work is available again:

If there is no support for us and live music event supply companies close down, the vast and critical knowledge from our specialist professional staff will leave the industry and they will find employment elsewhere, or they will leave the state of Victoria to continue their careers and opportunities where it is more viable, like overseas or interstate. In fact I know some people who have already gone interstate to work because there is no work available here. Whether they will come back or not we do not know, and they are very important people in the industry.<sup>117</sup>

Many workers were particularly vulnerable during the pandemic as a result of the casual, often ad hoc nature of their work. This includes, for example, artists and performers. Theatre Network Australia's submission provided findings from its report, *This is how we do it: Report on the Working Trends of Independent Artists and Creatives in the Performing Arts in Australia*, which was released during the pandemic in November 2020. The report found that nearly 70% of independent artists and creatives maintain employment outside their area of creative practice, and that of this group, 83% lost work due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over half of respondents had applied for

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115 Peter Marko, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 41–42.

116 NW Group Australasia, *Submission 93*, p. 2.

117 Peter Marko, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

survival or crisis support from one or more sources, such as Support Act or the Australia Council for the Arts.<sup>118</sup>

Joe Toohey from the Arts Industry Council of Victoria and Regional Arts Victoria described the ways in which the loss of key staff were already playing out:

I spoke to a couple of local government-run venues in the last week, and they are ... retraining entirely new teams. I went to one of their first events out of lockdown, and it was a bit of a teething exercise for them. You know, there are people who are entirely new to the organisation. There are people who perhaps are actually lost to the sector because they could not get work during the pandemic and went and found employment elsewhere, and there is going to be a challenge there of skills shortages.<sup>119</sup>

As discussed in section 5.2.2, business and public confidence in Victorian events is low, particularly following the statewide lockdown that commenced in late May 2021. As a result, other states and territories stand to benefit where public health measures in those jurisdictions have been less restrictive and confidence is somewhat higher. The Victorian Government's *Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan*, released in April 2021, acknowledges that one of the ongoing challenges in terms of recovery will be competition with other Australian jurisdictions:

Victoria will also face a highly competitive market for major events, regional events and business events. This is because other jurisdictions will also seek to propel their events industries out of the hibernation they also experienced during 2020.<sup>120</sup>

Peter Williams, Chair of the Winter Blues Festival, echoed this fear, noting that it would be difficult for Victorian events to compete with other states who are amenable to events restarting, making it more difficult for the sector to rebuild itself.<sup>121</sup> At a public hearing, Madison Fitzgerald from Destination, stated that work is already moving interstate:

But just looking from a business perspective, if your decision is, 'Do I hold it in Victoria or do I hold it'—and I am not going to name any other states—'in another state?', sometimes the decision is easier to do that. I think that that, combined with the loss of skills in this industry, particularly in the AV tech side of the world here—we have lost a lot of people who have worked for many, many years as freelancers who are fantastic at what they do. They travel around the country, they travel around the world. If they are not here to help us run all these events, we are going to struggle. So again it is very multilayered, but absolutely we are at risk. The events will go. They will go north, they will go east ... We have already lost them. We have already lost many.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>118</sup> Theatre Network Australia, *Submission 124*, p. 4.

<sup>119</sup> Joe Toohey, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

<sup>120</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan*, Victorian Government, April 2021, p. 7.

<sup>121</sup> Peter Williams, Chair, Winter Blues Festival, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 2 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 27.

<sup>122</sup> Susan Ryman-Kiernan, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 18.

In advocating for support for the industry, Damian De Jong from Action Events described the wide-reaching impacts of the dwindling workforce:

The community is missing out. Australian culture is missing out. We will not be the events capital of the world. We will be at the bottom end. The other states will totally overtake Victoria. I work in a corporate market, I work in a community market, and every section I look at has been decimated.<sup>123</sup>

Support measures to address these issues, including in terms of reattracting and retraining skilled professionals, are discussed further in Chapter 7.

**FINDING 16:** The loss of skilled workers is another threat to the recovery of the events sector in Victoria.

### 5.2.5 Mental health

The Committee received widespread evidence about the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of individuals and businesses working within the events sector. Stakeholders reported difficulty maintaining positivity or resilience due to the severity and length of time that restrictions were in place, as well as the uncertainty about what would happen to themselves and their work in the future. Other stakeholders acknowledged how common anxiety and depression was among their colleagues, often due to the financial pressures of keeping businesses afloat or finding work. Howard Freeman from CrewCare told the Committee, 'the only growth that we have seen in our industry in the last 12 months has been with the suicide helpline. That has gone up 135 per cent. This is about human beings'.<sup>124</sup>

Jamie Lea of JL Productions & Hire described the space many in the sector found themselves in throughout the pandemic:

It is an empty, hopeless, constant feeling of sadness. It is more than distressing to watch your life's work burn. My team, who I have trained up for years, move on and find other work. The attendees, who I have connected with, who have become family, become friends, become the community and the village I love, disconnect and invest their support, their time and money into something else. We spend years on marketing, engagement and brand awareness, getting our info out to punters so they believe in us and what we do and, poof, gone. I wish I could truly explain to you what that feels like. Sitting here, it is like giving my own eulogy, talking at my own funeral. But it is not just mine; it is my entire industry. Fifteen years, half of my life—for what?<sup>125</sup>

<sup>123</sup> Damian De Jong, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

<sup>124</sup> Howard Freeman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

<sup>125</sup> Jamie Lea, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 22.

In addition to the financial costs of postponing, rescheduling and cancelling events, having to undo the product of long periods of complex work and planning can place significant stress on those involved. Susan Ryman-Kiernan from Wise Connections described this impact:

As conference and event managers we generally spend 12 to 18 months working on planning events, organising marketing, ticketing, education programs, logistics and so on and so on, so when we must suddenly cancel an event that has been months in the planning it is not simple. We must unravel a web of contracts and plans and then, if we are lucky, try and put it back together again. Many businesses and many lives are impacted.

Since March 2020 we have spent thousands of unbillable hours cancelling, rebooking, planning, rebudgeting, changing plans, only to have them change again and again. The stress of this on the team coupled with the uncertainty of what the next days, weeks, months will hold is sometimes crippling, and we are getting through it by supporting each other.<sup>126</sup>

In noting the financial impacts on the sector, Bea Tomlin of Beaspoke Safety spoke of the personal impacts:

And that dollar figure does not even begin to quantify any of the mental anguish that many of my clients have experienced and are still navigating. I personally have had grown men cry on the phone to me, having lost their businesses, their homes, their futures and their motivation for life. I have also had colleagues and friends break down as they learn of yet another industry colleague who has taken their own life.<sup>127</sup>

The easing out of restrictions and beginning of recovery periods, followed by further lockdowns, has led to heightened uncertainty about how the sector will recover at all. Howard Freeman of CrewCare described the recent impact of a lockdown on his son, who also worked within the industry:

[He] just got the flick from the Byron blues festival when that was closed. He drove from Torquay to there to be a stage manager and production manager on that event, and he has come home with nothing in his pocket and no hope. The light that is looking at him down the tunnel is the train coming at him.<sup>128</sup>

More broadly, the Committee heard that mental health in Victoria continues to decline as a result of the pandemic, and that, as noted at section 5.1.3, events are a crucial way to bring people together again and begin healing.<sup>129</sup>

There are a number of community organisations that have provided critical health and financial support services to people in the events sector throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, including CrewCare, Support Act and the Arts Wellbeing Collective.

<sup>126</sup> Susan Ryman-Kiernan, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 16.

<sup>127</sup> Bea Tomlin, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 33–34.

<sup>128</sup> Howard Freeman, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

<sup>129</sup> Cr Ruth Gstrein, Mayor, Corangamite Shire Council, Public hearing, Camperdown, 13 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

According to data provided by Music Victoria, Support Act experienced a 52% increase in calls to its Wellbeing Helpline from Victorian music and arts workers during the crisis, with 44.5% of its national Crisis Relief grants going to Victorian workers.<sup>130</sup>

The Committee acknowledges that the desperation felt by many is ongoing and that there is a need for further support. In particular, further financial support and resourcing for organisations working with their respective industries is required, as well as awareness-raising regarding the availability of these services. The Committee notes the important commitments in relation to mental health that were made by the Victorian Government in the 2020–21 State Budget,<sup>131</sup> which are a welcome support for Victorians who have been deeply affected over the past 18 months. This includes the Wellbeing and Mental Health Support for Victorian Small Businesses program, which has a helpline providing mental health support to small business and employees affected by COVID-19. However, for those in the events sector, additional targeted support is needed.

**FINDING 17:** The events sector needs ongoing, targeted mental health support following the damage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**RECOMMENDATION 10:** That the Victorian Government increase mental health support for the events sector, in recognition of the significant and ongoing mental health impacts experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional resourcing should ensure equal access to, and effective communication of, these services across the sector.

**RATIONALE:** Financial losses in the events sector have caused many business owners and workers great personal stress. The mental health toll of the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing and the Victorian Government should continue to provide necessary support for those who need it.

## 5.2.6 Regional areas

The Committee received evidence around the differing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the events sector in regional areas. Many of the impacts discussed in the above sections are heightened in regional areas, due to more limited employment options and access to services, and the different makeup of the events sector itself. For example, at a public hearing, Terry Robinson, Chief Executive Officer of Destination Gippsland, noted that many community events in Gippsland are run by volunteer groups, who 'want to promote their town or their food and wine sector'.<sup>132</sup> For areas

<sup>130</sup> Music Victoria, *Submission 131*, p. 3.

<sup>131</sup> See, for example, Acting Premier and Minister for Mental Health, Hon James Merlino MP, *Building Our Mental Health System From The Ground Up*, media release, Victorian Government, 20 May 2021.

<sup>132</sup> Terry Robinson, Chief Executive Officer, Destination Gippsland, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 16 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

such as East Gippsland, which have been affected by both the 2019–20 bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic, the risks and resources involved for volunteers in organising events in the current climate are often too high.

Stakeholders noted the difficulties for regional areas when split from metropolitan Melbourne during lockdowns. Terry Robinson stated that 'Melbourne is our main market; there is no doubt about that', but also acknowledged that local events would often nevertheless go ahead at a smaller scale due to community interest and support.<sup>133</sup> For larger crowd-drawing events, this may not necessarily be the case. This was highlighted by Jamie Lea of JL Productions & Hire in relation to the Shepparton Festival, which commenced on 11 June 2021 in the midst of uncertainty about whether Melbourne would remain in lockdown. She provided an overview of how the festival would be impacted if visitors from Melbourne were restricted from attending:

a substantial part of this program is made up of people from interstate; we have artists travelling from all over the country to attend, engage and participate in the festival. We also have a large majority of people who travel regionally and from Melbourne. About a third of our guide is coming from interstate or Melbourne to participate in this festival and produce this festival ... We have a huge visitation ... 25 000-plus attendees over that 17-day period. Post most festivals we certainly get survey results and then we share those with our stakeholders and our funding bodies. But I would say at least a third of those 25 000 people would come from the big city, another third would come from all over the region...<sup>134</sup>

Felicia Mariani from VTIC told the Committee that the regional areas 'probably have been a little bit better off because the size of the events in regional Victoria are not what we are dealing with in Melbourne', and in particular, that business events in regional areas tend to be at smaller numbers than those in metropolitan areas.<sup>135</sup> The Committee was also made aware of how events in regional areas stimulate local economies, attract visitors and contribute to social cohesion. Kathryn Mackenzie, Chief Executive Officer of Echuca Moama Tourism, discussing the loss of the Riverboats Music Festival, 2020 Winter Blues Festival, June long weekend steam rally and numerous sporting events, told the Committee:

These events were sensitively positioned across Echuca-Moama to provide stimulus and attract major market segments during the quieter periods of the year, February and through our winter months, so the loss of events has had massive impact for us over the period of time.<sup>136</sup>

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>134</sup> Jamie Lea, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 24.

<sup>135</sup> Felicia Mariani, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31.

<sup>136</sup> Kathryn Mackenzie, Chief Executive Officer, Echuca Moama & District Tourism Development Association, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 2 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

Importantly, the loss of events since early 2020 has greatly impacted the communities that deliver them. Liz Price described this in terms of the Great Ocean Road region:

We had a loss of really significant events. This region is very blessed. We pretty much have a year-round calendar of events—everything from the May race carnival to Port Fairy Folk Festival, the Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road Race and the Rip Curl Pro ... The loss of those events really do hurt those communities. The Port Fairy Folk Festival invest so much of what they make back into that community. The volunteer program that works around that is a model to be put up on a pedestal.<sup>137</sup>

**FINDING 18:** Events in rural and regional Victoria are a significant economic driver and deliver important social outcomes for communities.

### 5.2.7 Events in Melbourne

Although Melbourne has a greater range and number of events than in the rest of the state, these events are equally as important for economic and social purposes in the city as they are in regional areas. Events in Melbourne include everything from festivals such as the St Kilda Festival and the Sydney Road Festival, through to business events and multicultural celebrations, down to local events such as school fetes. All drive local economic activity, give areas their unique identity and help people stay socially connected.

**FINDING 19:** As with rural and regional Victoria, events in Melbourne deliver important economic and social outcomes.

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<sup>137</sup> Liz Price, General Manager, Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism, Public hearing, Anglesea, 12 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

# 6 Victoria's events sector: ongoing restrictions and government support

This Chapter outlines ongoing restrictions for events in Victoria, including through the *COVID-19 Public Events Framework* (PEF). It also discusses support provided by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments for the events sector throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 6.1 Ongoing restrictions on events

As discussed in Chapter 2, at the time of writing this report, Victoria was operating under COVIDSafe Settings, which consist of a number of requirements for businesses and individuals to adhere to. These include the *Restricted Activity Directions*, *Stay Safe Directions* and *Workplace Directions*. In conjunction with the *Restricted Activity Directions*, businesses with on-site operations must have a COVIDSafe Plan in place, which may allow them to operate events at their place of business. For example, exhibitions in galleries or regular theatre performances.

In order to 'support the return of events across sectors such as creative, sporting and business events',<sup>1</sup> the Victorian Government released its PEF on 22 November 2020.<sup>2</sup> The PEF provides guidance for event organisers and venues that either do not have a COVIDSafe Plan in place, or who operate outside of the activities permitted under the *Restricted Activity Directions*. It operates alongside other event regulations and requirements, such as local government permits and occupational health and safety requirements.

The PEF has been updated in conjunction with changing public health advice and in response to industry feedback. Professor Brett Sutton, Victoria's Chief Health Officer, provided an overview of these changes, which were intended to refine the process and make it easier for safe events to happen:

Our public events framework has gone through iterative changes over time. It was introduced in November of 2020. It did include three phases ... There was an update to the PEF in March of 2021 as we were reviewing the continued epidemiology and had a low- and high-risk split—again, really taking a more nuanced account of the settings in which events took place, the number of people who were interacting, where they were coming from, how well they could be compartmentalised in time and space with zones and subzones and the kinds of check-in through ticketing, through QR systems and

1 Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, p. 16.

2 At the time of publication, the Framework had most recently been updated on 25 May 2021 as V3.0.

through other checks between zones. It has meant a reduced workload and the ability for some attestation being turned around in 24 hours. There have been further revisions to the public events framework in April of this year. That went live on 14 May—further refinement really of the approvals processes and less matters coming through formally for the public health assessment panel, really with a recognition that there are some lower risk tier events that can be self-monitored with a kind of self-attestation about the requirements that need to be put in place.<sup>3</sup>

## 6.1.1 COVID-19 Public Events Framework

The Victorian Government has defined public events for the purpose of determining whether they fall within the scope of the PEF:

A public event is an organised public gathering for a common purpose, which is conducted on a one-off or periodic basis, open to members of the public, publicly announced or advertised, and may be subject to specific licenses, approvals or permits.<sup>4</sup>

However, there are some types of events that do not reflect this definition but may nevertheless fall within the scope of the PEF. This could include, for example, a business conference not open to the public, or a charity gala which has not been publicly advertised.

The PEF establishes a process for working with the Victorian Government to confirm permitted capacity at a venue or event and consider other potential health control measures.<sup>5</sup> It outlines the different tiers of events, which events are required to be registered and/or approved, requirements of event organisers and information around current settings, such as attendee limits and density requirements.

Events are classified as either Tier 1, Tier 2 or Tier 3 depending on their size and complexity. Depending on the relevant tier of an event, event organisers may need to register the event and receive formal approval for it to proceed from the Victorian Government. However, in simple terms, public events with more than 1,000 attendees require a COVIDSafe Event Plan which provides how the event will be managed to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

The tiers and associated requirements, current at the time of publication, are outlined below.

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<sup>3</sup> Professor Brett Sutton, Chief Health Officer, Department of Health, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 28 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Victorian Government, *Public events*, 2021, <<https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/public-events>> accessed 16 June 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Victorian Government, *Rules for organising public events in Victoria*, 2021, <<https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/rules-for-organising-public-events-victoria>> accessed 16 June 2021.

**Table 6.1** Tiered approach for assessing public events

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Over 7,500 attendees</li> <li>High complexity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Between 1,001 and 7,500 attendees</li> <li>Moderate complexity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up to 1,000 attendees</li> <li>Low complexity</li> </ul>
Planning requirements	Event organisers must submit a COVIDSafe Event Plan <i>for approval</i> (8 to 10 weeks prior to 'key decision dates')	Event organisers must submit a COVIDSafe Event Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For organisers who can attest that their event can operate under the settings of the PEF, <i>no approval is required</i>. The Plan must be submitted 3 weeks prior to the event</li> <li>For organisers seeking an exemption from PEF settings, the COVIDSafe Event Plan must be received 4 to 6 weeks prior to 'key decision dates' and <i>receive formal approval</i></li> </ul>	Event organisers must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have a COVIDSafe Event Plan in place and operate under the <i>Restricted Activity Directions</i>; or</li> <li>Submit a COVIDSafe Event Checklist to the Victorian Government (1 week prior to the event). This Checklist is an online self-assessment guidance tool and no approval is required</li> </ul>
COVID Marshals	A minimum COVID Marshal ratio of 1:200 persons. Marshals should be visible, easily identifiable and appropriately trained		None required
Venue capacity (seated areas)	75% of the venue's fixed seated capacity (no capacity limit)		100% of the venue's fixed seated capacity
Density quotient (non-seated areas)	One person per two square metres (of the area publicly accessible to attendees)		

Source: Victorian Government, *COVID-19 Public Events Framework*, V3.0, 25 May 2021.

COVIDSafe Event Plans are comprehensive plans specific to the activity or venue. They outline risk mitigations, especially regarding 'COVID-Risky Behaviours' such as dancefloors, general admission areas and camping. Event organisers must also support contact tracing by maintaining electronic record keeping through QR codes.

During the implementation phase, the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR) may send Event Observers to approved events under the PEF to assist event organisers to 'self-regulate to comply with their approved COVIDSafe Event Plans'.<sup>6</sup> This program is intended to ensure that COVIDSafe protocols are adhered to during the event and feedback from Observers is provided to the Department of Health (DH) and DJPR to inform future engagement.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, Inquiry into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and events sectors hearing, response to questions on notice received 7 July 2021, p. 1.

As of April 2021, over 6,000 events had gone through the PEF process across all three tiers.<sup>8</sup> As at 21 June 2021, this had increased to over 8,600 events.<sup>9</sup>

In the event of an outbreak of COVID-19 within the state or cases of community transmission, guidance is 'reviewed and evaluated based on the epidemiology at the time'. Individual events may be reviewed and the Victorian Government may 'amend or withdraw any consultation, review, assessment or approval at any time without notice'. Changes may be made in relation to venue capacity and attendee limits; zoning; high risk activities such as singing, dancing and chanting; whether free-standing/roaming events, camping events or dancefloors are permitted or capped; and whether mask use is compulsory in certain circumstances.<sup>10</sup> The PEF acknowledges the uncertainty that possible imposition of these restrictions may provide, noting that: 'The Victorian Government is aware that certainty is important for the events industry but the nature of COVID outbreaks does not permit it.'<sup>11</sup>

Stakeholders were critical of the lack of public information regarding how decisions are made on changes to the framework in different situations, what those changes would be, and the uncertainty this created when planning events. For example, Richard Dexter, Festival Director at Festival Enterprises, advocated for 'clear and concise metrics on what will happen when something happens'. He stated, 'Give us some clear, detailed instructions on worst-case scenarios, best-case scenarios et cetera and then we can work towards it'.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, there is significant frustration within the sector regarding a perceived lack of consistency in application of the rules for public events. Under the PEF, major events that are 'are of significant value to Victoria from cultural, economic or government investment perspective, may be assessed for an exemption from the attendee limits and density requirements'.<sup>13</sup> For various individuals and businesses working on events, who have struggled financially during the COVID-19 pandemic, this exception has created or exacerbated feelings of disenfranchisement with the broader framework altogether. Liz Price, General Manager of Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism, provided an example of this:

We have seen a lot of inconsistency as well. I think we all saw Anzac Day, and I do not know how many calls I fielded on the Monday going, 'I cannot believe my event cannot have 7500 people and there were 75 000 in the G. I'm on 11 000 acres'. You know, there is not that consistency.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, response to questions on notice, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Victorian Government, *COVID-19 Public Events Framework: V3.0*, 25 May 2021, pp. 8–9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Dexter, Festival Director, Festival Enterprises, Public hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 39.

<sup>13</sup> Victorian Government, *COVID-19 Public Events Framework*, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Liz Price, General Manager, Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism, Public hearing, Anglesea, 12 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 16.

Similarly, Steve Smith, General Manager of DG Global Events, stated:

And then as someone that was just trying to get 650 people into Crown and hearing at the time I could not do that but 40 000 people could go to the football, I scratch my head and I get very confused, as does the entire industry wanting to do a corporate event. Even a breakfast could not happen, but we could go to a sporting event in this state.<sup>15</sup>

Professor Euan Wallace AM, Secretary of DH, stated that individual risk assessments apply to each event, and that differences do not necessarily reflect inconsistencies:

I think that there are certainly differences across different settings. I do not think the differences reflect inconsistencies. The differences are informed by the assessments of risk in different settings—different events, different venues and different behaviours at those events—and they are perhaps exemplified by the different cap and capacity numbers that are applied...<sup>16</sup>

Professor Sutton further explained that in Victoria 'aggregate risk' is a key consideration regarding event safety. This means that, as far as DH is concerned, even though small events present a lower risk, it is easier to manage one large event—such as the AFL—than many small events. Professor Sutton said:

So there will be on any one day at a major sporting event 50 000 people who require food and drinks or need to go to the bathroom, but across thousands of other smaller settings—business events or other smaller settings—there will be people with exactly the same needs, and they will contribute an aggregate risk in the same way.<sup>17</sup>

The Committee notes the complex risk assessment undertaken which will provide differing outcomes based on the nature of the event. However, in relation to where exemptions are granted in terms of attendee limits and density requirements, there is little public information on the circumstances where this occurs. While there may be particular economic or social interest in ensuring major events can go ahead in these situations—for example, to contribute to the Victorian economy, attract much-needed visitation back to Victoria and deliver a public message around the state reopening—there is clear dissatisfaction and frustration from a sector that has been significantly impacted and continues to work within the restrictions established under the framework.

Further, the fact that many stakeholders from the events sector seem to be unaware of the argument around aggregate risk suggests a breakdown in communication between DH and the sector.

<sup>15</sup> Steve Smith, General Manager, DG Global Events, Public hearing, Via Zoom 2 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 32.

<sup>16</sup> Professor Euan Wallace AM, Secretary, Department of Health, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 28 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 22.

<sup>17</sup> Professor Brett Sutton, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 22.

A further issue raised by stakeholders related to the difficulty in having to undertake different, complex processes in order to receive events approval across Australian jurisdictions. As many individuals within the sector work across a number of states and territories, this has created a significant cost in understanding and keeping up to date with restrictions in each jurisdiction. John Jacoby, owner of Rapid Ascent, explained how he operates in 'three or four different states and territories' and each 'has a different list of rules and different COVID plans and different QR code apps'.<sup>18</sup> In its submission, Music Victoria stated:

Another associated challenge regarding restrictions is the inconsistency across borders, industries and settings. The nature of our events is that they are part of tours which cross borders. These inconsistencies are a source of extreme frustration, and a nightmare to navigate for those trying to simply do the right thing.<sup>19</sup>

However, Susan Ryman-Kiernan, Managing Director of Wise Connections, also acknowledged the additional complexity in the Victorian framework was partly a result of the differing experiences of COVID-19 within the state:

The level of complexity, I guess, in Victoria for running events is more extensive than in other states, and that is partly because we have been locked down and we have had more cases here than many other places.<sup>20</sup>

**FINDING 20:** Some event organisers feel that major events, particularly professional sport, are treated more favourably regarding restrictions and density limits.

## 6.1.2 Approvals process

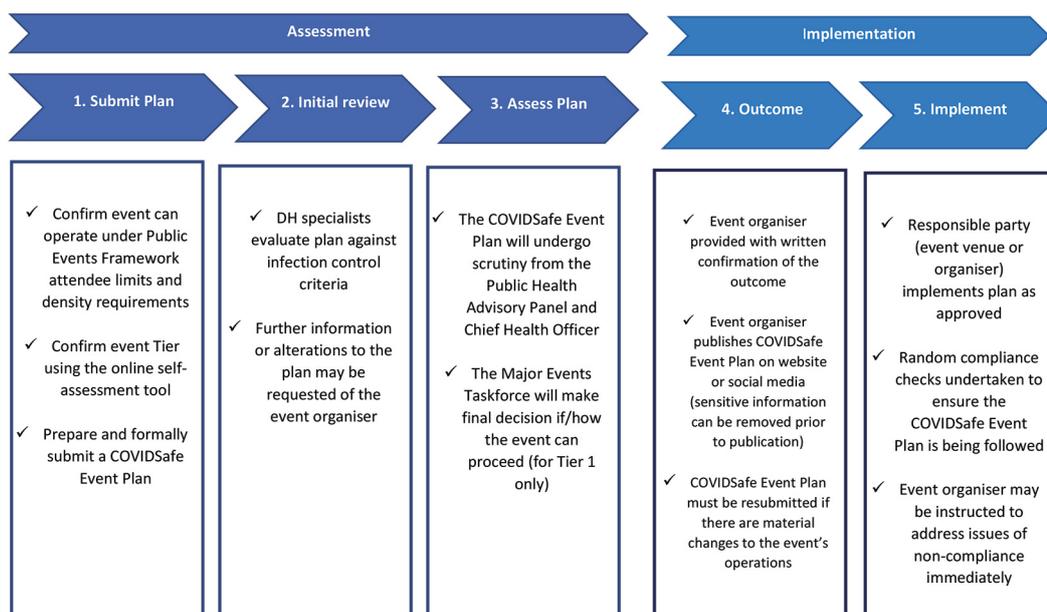
The evaluation and implementation process for COVIDSafe Event Plans that require approval is outlined in Figure 6.1 below.

<sup>18</sup> John Jacoby, Owner, Rapid Ascent, Public hearing, Anglesea, 12 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 50.

<sup>19</sup> Music Victoria, *Submission 131*, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Susan Ryman-Kiernan, Managing Director, Wise Connections, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 2 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

Figure 6.1 COVIDSafe Event Plan—Evaluation process



Source: Victorian Government, *COVID-19 Public Events Framework: V3.0*, 25 May 2021, p. 14.

In assessing an event, the Victorian Government will consider whether the COVIDSafe Event Plan sufficiently addresses five key areas that aim to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. These are:

- Oversight and administration, including that there is an appropriate governance structure, all workers and attendees receive clear communication on expectations prior to the event, and venues use electronic record keeping.
- Attendee management, including the inclusion of physical distancing strategies, COVID-19 screening for workers and attendees, management of suspected cases and minimisation of co-mingling and congregation areas.
- Cleaning and hygiene are accounted for, including that there is a regular and thorough cleaning schedule before, during and after the event, and that there are adequate hygiene resources and facilities.
- Workers, vendors and contractors are appropriately trained and have access to necessary resources, such as personal protective equipment.
- Operational spaces, such as ticket offices, toilets and training facilities, are accounted for in the plan.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, event organisers must identify whether certain risk factors apply to the event, including whether the event is held indoors, includes unallocated seating, features 'COVID-risky' behaviours such as singing, dancing and alcohol consumption, is held over multiple successive days with different attendees each day, features camping, or is likely to attract interstate attendees.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Victorian Government, *COVID-19 Public Events Framework*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

The current PEF provides timelines for assessment of COVIDSafe Event Plans, where they are required. These are:

- Tier 1 events—submitted at least 8–10 weeks prior to the ‘key decision date required by the event organiser’
- Tier 2 events seeking an exemption to PEF settings—submitted at least 4–6 weeks prior to the ‘key decision date required by the event organiser’.

These plans and other documents are submitted through an online form to DJPR. In outlining the timelines for assessment, the PEF notes that ‘Event organisers are expected to allow sufficient time for their event preparation and COVIDSafe Plan implementation’.<sup>23</sup>

However, the Committee heard from stakeholders that the approvals process was extremely slow with updates on progress not always provided. This led to uncertainty around whether or not the event would be able to go ahead, or whether modifications or restrictions would be needed.

In its submission to the Inquiry, Scarlett Mac Events provided an example of the impact the timeframes for approval had on the financial viability of an event:

In December, once the new events framework was released I applied to run a smaller version of our flagship event ‘Peninsula VineHop Festival’ after 7 weeks of hearing nothing regarding my submission I began to push eventually I had some feedback, but I had missed our deadline for marketing and tickets sales and had to reformat the event into a sit-down event. I decided to still run the event (Pop-up VineHop 13 March), and knew that with very little time to sell tickets I was unlikely to make much profit and that there was also a huge risk I could loose up to 30K if there was a snap lockdown. In the end I have made a tiny profit of less than 10K but Its better than nothing. Ultimately though, had I had enough time to sell tickets and had the option to increase capacity I could have made enough to pay my wages for a few more months. This situation says enough about our industry, that we are so short of work that risking 30k to make 10K is risk worth taking, as things are so dire anyway why not take the risk!<sup>24</sup>

One key change from earlier iterations of the PEF—which occurred after many of the public hearings for this Inquiry—is the use of timeframes in relation to the ‘key decision date required by the event organiser’. In previous versions, the listed timeframes were in relation to the event date—for example, for Tier 1 events, plans were required to be submitted 8 to 10 weeks prior to the event starting. This change is likely to reflect the need to ensure that event organisers are able to make informed decisions regarding an event well ahead of the event date. However, the timeframes themselves (8–10 weeks for Tier 1 events, or 4–6 weeks for Tier 2 events) remain unchanged from previous iterations.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> Scarlett Mac Events, *Submission 30*, p. 1.

The Committee acknowledges that some of the concerns raised by stakeholders regarding the approvals process for COVIDSafe Event Plans have been addressed in more recent iterations of the framework. However, one concern that remains relates to the estimated timeframes for evaluating event plans. The submission from Scarlett Mac Events stated that the estimated wait time of 4–6 weeks (for Tier 2 events) impacts the viability of an event to go ahead.<sup>25</sup> No Fuss Events stated that an improved approval process for all events was needed, with 'workable timelines in terms of approvals and communications'.<sup>26</sup> The Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia advocated for a more streamlined approval process with a guaranteed response time of two weeks, as well as 'clarity concerning the references to venue and event types that are more relevant to industry needs'.<sup>27</sup>

At a public hearing, Claire Febey, Associate Deputy Secretary, Tourism and Events at DJPR, explained the updated approvals process and noted that response times are continuing to improve as the approvals process becomes more streamlined. She said:

So really it is just the large, complex tier 1 events that now need to go through that full public health approval process. What we do now is ensure that every event that is going through that process has somebody within our department allocated specifically to their event so that they can work with them before they come to the approval process to make sure that their application is as strong as possible and incorporates as many of the learnings that we can share as to public health advice that is now known around the staging of COVID-safe events. And then it goes through an approval process that is becoming more swift every day ... we have weekly meetings of the public health advisory panel that makes determinations on individual events and then weekly meetings of the ministerial task force that is the decision-maker on those events ... certainly we have seen a very strong improvement in that processing time.<sup>28</sup>

The Committee notes that the PEF is evolving in response to the COVID-19 risk in the state, and in conjunction with health advice and feedback from the sector. However, it considers that expedited approvals timeframes are needed to provide greater certainty to event organisers in an already uncertain environment.

**RECOMMENDATION 11:** That the Victorian Government ensure approvals timeframes for COVIDSafe Event Plans that require approval are expedited in order to provide necessary assurance to event organisers, with a maximum response time of four weeks for Tier 1 events and a maximum response time of two weeks for Tier 2 events seeking approval under the *COVID-19 Public Events Framework*.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> No Fuss Events, *Submission 40*, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia, *Submission 64*, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Claire Febey, Associate Deputy Secretary, Tourism and Events, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 28 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 28.

**RATIONALE:** The Victorian Government has improved its approvals process for events. However, businesses need shorter timeframes to give them certainty that their events can occur.

### 6.1.3 Information and assistance

The Public Events Team within DJPR is the primary point of contact for the PEF. In its submission, the Victorian Government stated that the team had 'assisted thousands of event organisers to plan COVIDSafe Events and ... helped them prepare and refine COVIDSafe Event Plans'.<sup>29</sup> It gave an overview of the support that has been provided:

- Working closely with individual event organisers, venues and other bodies to provide information and advice on the requirements and process under the PEF, and how these apply to specific types of events and venues.
- Providing targeted engagement to event organisers in response to changes in epidemiological conditions and associated restrictions. This includes updating organisers on what they are permitted to do under an easing of restrictions under the Chief Health Officer's directions, as well as providing clarity on any new restrictions put in place in response to a COVID-19 outbreak.
- Organising meetings and forums for specific parts of the sector to answer questions and address policy and process updates.
- Providing information and answering questions from members of the public about the requirements for holding COVIDSafe Events and the Public Events Framework.
- Collating data insights and feedback from the events industry to share with the Department of Health and working with them to implement process and policy reform for the Public Events Framework based on these insights.<sup>30</sup>

However, the Committee heard criticism from stakeholders regarding the information and assistance available from the Victorian Government in relation to the PEF. Many stated that the rules are difficult to understand, and that in seeking clarification, there had been limited support or communication from DJPR. In addition, organisers often felt it was easier to find information through secondary sources within the industry. For example, Jamie Lea from JL Productions & Hire described communication and guidance from the Victorian Government to be 'like mud'.<sup>31</sup> Save Victorian Events provided an overview of the information and advice available:

At the moment, the only way for Event Industry people to get specific information or advice is by emailing a generic email address or by calling a generic Covid help line. The advice from the Covid help line to date has been very inconsistent as often the people taking the calls do not have an understanding of events or the information and how it would apply to events.

<sup>29</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, p. 16.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>31</sup> Jamie Lea, Director, JL Productions & Hire, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 2 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

When people are having to make large financial decisions about events, they need to be certain that the information they are getting is actually correct and accurate.

Similarly, they need to be able to call someone to chase up their Public Event Framework applications or to answer queries about their applications. Currently they only have the generic email address and just have to wait.<sup>32</sup>

In addition, stakeholders noted that there was limited communication from the Victorian Government regarding changes in the framework's settings. Music Victoria stated in its submission that it had received announcements or notifications with regard to restrictions that were 'unclear, lacking in detail and very last minute'.<sup>33</sup> It further noted that the PEF had been 'a very drawn out and arduous process' for some members and the eligibility criteria was still not completely understood.<sup>34</sup> John Jacoby from Rapid Ascent told the Committee:

We found that details online were very slow to be updated. The press conferences were made in the mornings but even by the afternoon the table of what we could do or could not do still had not been updated. The press conference is just the sort of headline bits, and there was not the nitty-gritty contained in there that was what we were trying to hear. I guess, further to that, to get a heads-up for what might happen often came down to which contacts you had inside government and where you could glean that information from, and that seemed hard to get.<sup>35</sup>

Ruth Gstrein, Mayor of Corangamite Shire Council, advocated for guidance to be simplified and streamlined for the volunteers that many events rely on:

And importantly, I think, going forward, with COVID restrictions and regulations, contact tracing, everything needs to be made as simple and easy as possible, because basically we are dealing with volunteers and if things become too complicated it is just so easy to throw your hands up in the air and walk away—just through regulations.<sup>36</sup>

In its *Visitor Economy Recovery Submission 2.0*, released in April 2021, the Victoria Tourism Industry Council (VTIC) asserted that the lack of available support and a backlog in processing applications indicated that there were resourcing issues regarding administration of the framework. It stated that 'streamlining of this system is urgently required to reduce unnecessary complexities and manage backlog'.<sup>37</sup>

The Committee notes the widespread concerns from members of the events sector regarding the standard of information and assistance provided by DJPR with regard to event planning and relevant public health restrictions. In particular, one concern was the lack of a direct contact phonenumber within the Public Events Team through which event organisers could seek relevant, timely and accurate advice.

<sup>32</sup> Save Victorian Events, *Submission 7B*, p. 33.

<sup>33</sup> Music Victoria, *Submission 131*, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> John Jacoby, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 47.

<sup>36</sup> Cr Ruth Gstrein, Mayor, Corangamite Shire Council, Public hearing, Camperdown, 13 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> Victoria Tourism Industry Council, *Submission 99A*, p. 15.

DJPR has advised that it has undertaken widespread engagement with event organisers 'in response to changes in epidemiological conditions and associated restrictions' and has organised information meetings and forums.<sup>38</sup> Stakeholders were clear, however, that relevant information has not been effectively communicated to the whole events sector.

DJPR also provided information on further engagement being organised with the events sector, including 'regular events newsletters, and increasing participation in community-based event information sessions in partnership with local government and Multicultural Affairs, to facilitate better grassroots outreach to large and small event organisers.'<sup>39</sup>

The Committee accepts that information is eventually updated on DJPR's website. However, it considers that renewed efforts to improve communication and engagement are needed, including across the varied areas that make up the industry. Such renewed engagement methods could include, for example, regular, publicly accessible, virtual information sessions and webinars that provide information on restrictions, common issues and queries, and best practice event management. In doing so, DJPR should ensure that it improves communication channels and alerts to reach a broader range of stakeholders. While the Committee notes that this process would be less complex if there were a single point of contact within the events industry (such as one peak body), it is nevertheless important to ensure effective communication channels have been established across the various parts of the sector. Industry representation is discussed further in Chapter 7.

**RECOMMENDATION 12:** That the Victorian Government ensure that the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions' Public Events Team:

- can provide timely support and advice in relation to the *COVID-19 Public Events Framework* and the safe coordination and management of events
- establish additional mechanisms for communicating changes in restrictions and responding to common questions or issues with the events industry. This could include, for example, virtual information sessions and webinars.

**RATIONALE:** The unpredictable nature of the COVID-19 pandemic means changes to the *COVID-19 Public Events Framework* sometimes happen quickly. Event organisers need these changes communicated to them as quickly as possible.

<sup>38</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, p. 16.

<sup>39</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, response to questions on notice, p. 1.

## 6.1.4 The need to revise events guidance

Stakeholders from the events sector told the Committee that the guidance material available in relation to events, such as the PEF and accompanying documents, were not developed in consultation with industry and, in many cases, were not fit for purpose. For example, John Jacoby of Rapid Ascent described how the mass participation events that his company organised fell under the same restrictions as other events with higher risk levels:

It felt as if we were always lumped into the same category as outdoor spectator events, which are two very different things. Our attendees are mobile around a large area, and since the event down here they have spread out over 50 or 100 kilometres. Once they are competing the chances of getting COVID from anyone else is pretty slim. There was a lack of ... clarity and lack of a direct contact with a person who could provide good, sound advice that was in accordance with the government guidelines.<sup>40</sup>

A further example of this is that the PEF, as noted above, does not specifically reflect all events in its definition of a 'public event'. However, this is the only available guidance for events. For event organisers whose events do not fall within the scope of this definition, it is unclear as to whether the PEF specifically applies in all circumstances. The Victorian Government has created a separate landing page for business events, which is intended to provide information for the organisers of business events around COVIDSafe planning.<sup>41</sup> However, the page primarily refers back to either the PEF or the mandatory COVIDSafe Plans that all businesses with on-site operations must have, and does not provide specific advice to particular types of business events. It also notes that if an event is 'a public event and cannot comply with restrictions', the event organiser may be able to seek an exemption under the PEF—but does not explain how this can be done for events that don't fall within the definition of a 'public event'.

In its submission, Save Victorian Events stated that guidance around business events should be clear and easy to understand:

Information about restrictions and what is allowed needs to be in a form that is easily understood. With many business events, for example, the decision about whether to hold an event is taken by the client often before they have even engaged an event company. So the decision is being made by people without detailed knowledge of events. If the information about what is being allowed is not logical and easy to understand, many people will decide not to proceed with their event.<sup>42</sup>

The Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia commented on several perceived failures in the development of the PEF which it considered have resulted in financial and reputational risk for businesses. These included the lack of clarity around conditions for event permits and the limited understanding of the unique characteristics of the

<sup>40</sup> John Jacoby, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 47.

<sup>41</sup> Victorian Government, *Business events – information for organisers*, 2021, <<https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/business-events-information-organisers#covid-safe-planning-for-business-events>> accessed 21 June 2021.

<sup>42</sup> Save Victorian Events, *Submission 7B*, p. 31.

industry and different types of events. It also highlighted the lack of a dedicated contact for business events, which resulted in difficulty obtaining 'definitive answers within a reasonable time frame'.<sup>43</sup>

Simon Thewlis from Save Victorian Events argued that the current guidance and approvals processes are 'largely unworkable' because of a lack of consultation with events professionals during their development.<sup>44</sup> This has a particular impact on smaller businesses and operators, who may have less resourcing to keep up to date with changing regulations and incorporate these into their operations. Stakeholders told the Committee that the events industry has significant experience managing risk and is well-placed to assist policy and guidance development in this area.<sup>45</sup>

Professor Catherine Bennett, Chair in Epidemiology, Faculty of Health at Deakin University, spoke with the Committee about how proper consultation processes help health authorities develop best practice protocols. She said:

one of the basic principles of public health communication is engagement with stakeholders, and that is because often that is where the rich information is that helps you understand the risks and the solutions. So I do think that those partnerships are really critical, and it also brings that expertise in to health departments or government departments that then have to operate in a very different way in a pandemic setting...<sup>46</sup>

Save Victorian Events stated that as of March 2021, there had not been any meetings between the event industry and DH to discuss guidelines for events.<sup>47</sup> Steve Smith of DG Global Events told the Committee that 'by the time we come to the table in Melbourne ... the decision has been made. There is no consulting which is done with the industry beforehand'.<sup>48</sup>

Julia Robinson, General Manager of the Australian Festival Association, noted that while some roundtables with government bodies had taken place, they were limited in the ways in which they fostered two-way dialogue and the ability to provide feedback on navigating the framework up to the stage of putting on an event.<sup>49</sup>

Other stakeholders acknowledged the consultation that had occurred with the Victorian Government. Gab Robinson, Chief Executive Officer of Harry the Hirer, told the Committee that consultation had taken place with the sector, and that 'government and the relevant departments have made an effort to speak with us, liaise with us and

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<sup>43</sup> Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia, *Submission 64*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>44</sup> Simon Thewlis, Save Victorian Events, Public hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Bea Tomlin, Safety and Risk Consultant, Beaspoke Safety, Public hearing, Melbourne, 19 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 33.

<sup>46</sup> Professor Catherine Bennett, Chair in Epidemiology, Faculty of Health, School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 28 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Save Victorian Events, *Submission 7*, p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> Steve Smith, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 33.

<sup>49</sup> Julia Robinson, General Manager, Australian Festival Association, Public hearing, Melbourne, 19 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 49-50.

get our ideas, and that has all fed back into a central point'.<sup>50</sup> However, evidence around meaningful or two-way consultation having taken place was limited.

Professor Bennett described some of the innovation that had been achieved in the events space in order to allow COVID-safe events to happen, including the AFL's use of zoning crowds. However, she suggested that the lack of similar innovations throughout the wider events sector suggests a problem with the consultation process. She told the Committee:

I wonder that we are not seeing some of the innovation because we tend to pull back to full shutdowns rather than each time we go into any sort of restriction—it would have been great to hear, 'And this time we can keep this going at this level because we've now got these things in place'. The one exception to that, I would say, is the football, because it is recognised they have done so much work in zoning crowds and doing other things so that the football might go ahead—and the Australian Open, for example—where others might not. It would be good to have that model, given we are a year and a half in, where we are constantly seeing that kind of innovation in partnership and in building COVID-safe operations that have been evaluated and are going to continue to be evaluated so we can learn what is best practice.<sup>51</sup>

At a public hearing, Simon Phemister, Secretary of DJPR, told the Committee that in terms of engagement with the sector:

we try to translate the directions out to industry through forums, through calls ... Our job first and foremost is to translate restrictions so they are easily understood by event proponents and tourism operators, so they can operate in the safest way possible.<sup>52</sup>

Further, Mr Phemister argued that a robust, two-way system of information-sharing was already in place to inform the sector of decisions made by DH:

After the hearing at a public health team, we translate that back. We communicate it back to event holders, and should events go ahead, we offer event observers. Those events observers operate in addition sometimes to the authorised officers from Health who are attending events, and the role of our observers from DJPR is to work with event proponents to, in real time, manage COVID risks and also to debrief after events so that we can continue to build a platform of excellence in hosting events. After that happens we then debrief not just with the individual event proponents but across the board for large events, for small events at tier 3 level to make sure that all event holders across industry have the best possible information.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Gab Robinson, Chief Executive Officer, Harry the Hirer, Public hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 15.

<sup>51</sup> Professor Catherine Bennett, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> Simon Phemister, Secretary, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 28 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 27.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

DH and DJPR told the Committee that various consultations and other engagement activities had been held with the events sector throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Professor Brett Sutton stated that: 'There have been a number of roundtable discussions with the sector, and there are continuous weekly, often daily, engagements with specific individuals who are stakeholders within those industry areas.'<sup>54</sup> Mr Phemister similarly stated that widespread engagement had been undertaken by his department.<sup>55</sup>

Additional information provided by DH corroborated the number and extent of these activities throughout 2020 and 2021.<sup>56</sup> Correspondence from Save Victorian Events similarly outlined a number of these activities but stated that the meetings had often involved a wide number of industries in addition to events, such as music, arts and sport. It further provided that the meetings were one-way discussions to communicate information or decisions rather than to facilitate feedback from the event industry.<sup>57</sup>

Professor Wallace noted the Victorian Government's approach to continuous improvement 'to ensure that our settings are always meeting the public health risks but at the same time are proportionate, so that events that can go on can go on safely'.<sup>58</sup>

In terms of monitoring and evaluation, Professor Bennett outlined how these processes could improve how events were understood in terms of risks levels, and inform policy in this space:

The best way to do that is to do some at least process evaluation if we do not have the virus circulating or, if the virus is circulating, use those opportunities to understand what is safe. That way, you come up with solutions in partnership that can potentially not only really fully understand the problem, given the nature of that event or workplace, but also actually set the benchmarks that inspire or reward people who are doing it well and in fact encourage others to lift their game, particularly if they can only open under certain circumstances.<sup>59</sup>

In addition, Professor Bennett noted that current approvals processes for events 'are often looked at at the individual level' and very little information is shared regarding lessons learned from these events. She stated:

We are not sort of learning from that process, and it should not just sit with decision-makers. It should be an iterative process so that events people can come back and say, 'Well, actually, we ran that event, but it was really difficult for these reasons. Can we review that part of it? And what does the epi tell us versus the logistics and feasibility?', and get that balancing as a continual process of improvement.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Professor Brett Sutton, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

<sup>55</sup> Simon Phemister, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31.

<sup>56</sup> Department of Health, Inquiry into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and events sectors hearing, response to questions on notice received 1 July 2021.

<sup>57</sup> Simon Thewlis, Save Victorian Events, correspondence, 29 June 2021.

<sup>58</sup> Professor Euan Wallace AM, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20.

<sup>59</sup> Professor Catherine Bennett, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 3–4.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

There was broad advocacy for events professionals to have a core role in redesigning the PEF and associated guidance to ensure it is fit for purpose. Beaspoke Safety contended that as the Australian events industry hosts some of the world's leading practitioners, 'their expertise should be utilised to assist the move into the new COVIDNormal for events'.<sup>61</sup> Further, as described by Susan Ryman-Kiernan of Wise Connections, the events sector has a long history of dealing with risk in terms of factors like occupational health and safety, and is well placed to continue to deal with it in the COVID-19 context.<sup>62</sup>

As noted above, a number of changes have been made to the PEF in the time since much of the evidence was received in this Inquiry. Some stakeholders acknowledged that the PEF and related guidance had improved from earlier versions. For example, Elaine Burridge, Manager Economic and Community Development at Alpine Shire Council noted that the framework 'was difficult to navigate around in the first instance' but that the changes had been positive and 'it is easier to manoeuvre around now'.<sup>63</sup>

The Victorian Government's submission states that DJPR's Public Events Team will continue to work directly with DH to 'streamline the process and policy underpinning the Public Events Framework to provide additional clarity and to reduce the administrative burden on event organisers'. It also notes that any updates made to the PEF will be in conjunction with feedback from the events sector and changing epidemiological conditions.<sup>64</sup>

The Committee acknowledges the mechanisms established by the Victorian Government to incorporate feedback from the events sector into future iterations of the PEF and related guidance materials. However, it notes the widespread dissatisfaction from the industry around how the materials were developed and the lack of input afforded to them. There is clear scope to improve these feedback mechanisms to enable the industry and the Victorian Government to work collaboratively to ensure that the PEF fosters, rather than inhibits, events safely in the COVID-19 environment and in accordance with public health advice.

In particular, the Committee considers that consultation is needed with events industry stakeholders on the requirements established under the PEF in order to ensure that they not only reflect public health advice but are also fit for purpose. This should include ensuring guidance is streamlined and easily accessible for stakeholders with limited knowledge or experience in events. Further, it should be an iterative process, so that event organisers and the Victorian Government can work to continuously improve guidance and share best practice.

Revision of the PEF is considered in the context of an advisory working group or taskforce, which is discussed further in Chapter 7.

<sup>61</sup> Beaspoke Safety, *Submission 97*, p. 1.

<sup>62</sup> Susan Ryman-Kiernan, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19.

<sup>63</sup> Elaine Burridge, Manager, Economic and Community Development, Alpine Shire Council, Public hearing, Bright, 28 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

<sup>64</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, p. 17.

**FINDING 21:** Stakeholders from the events sector did not believe they have been consulted in a way that allowed them to contribute to Victoria's *COVID-19 Public Events Framework*.

### 6.1.5 Density quotients and venue capacity

Under the PEF, the density quotient (at the time of publication) is one person per two square metres, of the area publicly accessible to attendees. This quotient applies for all non-seated areas. Where there is fixed seating, Tier 1 and 2 events can have up to 75% of the seated capacity and Tier 3 events are permitted to operate at 100% of the fixed seated capacity.<sup>65</sup> Additional restrictions may apply as per the *Restricted Activity Directions* in force at the time. For example, the *Restricted Activity Directions (Metropolitan Melbourne) (No 4)* limit creative arts facilities to a total number of 75 attendees at any time in indoor spaces, regardless of the venue size.<sup>66</sup>

A number of issues were canvassed by stakeholders regarding density quotients and venue capacity. One key concern is that the one person per two square metre rule significantly restricts the profit margin for an event, to the point where the event may not be viable at all. Jason Holmes, Managing Director, Head of Region – Asia Pacific at H2 Insurance Solutions, explained that event organisers often only break even in the final ticket numbers:

at half capacity you do not make money. These promoters cannot make money when you halve a capacity. They start making the money in the final percentages, not in halving the capacity, so it is unaffordable for a lot of them to continue on. Now, I know some have been able to do it and do two shows in one night and things like that, but there become increased costs of the event staff and a lot of things like that, so that is very tough.<sup>67</sup>

Stakeholders provided estimates of the percentage of profits lost in terms of this quotient. JL Productions & Hire stated in its submission that the one person per two square metre rule equated to trading at approximately 30% capacity, which is 'not a viable option'.<sup>68</sup> Simone Schinkel, Co-covenor of the Arts Industry Council of Victoria, provided the same figure, noting that it 'is not sustainable'.<sup>69</sup> Scarlett Mac Events explained that many events have fixed operating costs regardless of how many people attend the event:

For those of us who play in the large events space, having strict restrictions means that we can only do a tiny percentage of our normal work, which means our ability to make a profit is significantly diminished. VineHop is normally for 7000 patron, our mini version

<sup>65</sup> Victorian Government, *COVID-19 Public Events Framework*, p. 7.

<sup>66</sup> *Restricted Activity Directions (Metropolitan Melbourne) (No 4) (Vic) s 8.*

<sup>67</sup> Jason Holmes, Managing Director, Head of Region – Asia Pacific, H2 Insurance Solutions, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 2 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

<sup>68</sup> JL Productions & Hire, *Submission 102*, p. 1.

<sup>69</sup> Simone Schinkel, Co-convenor, Arts Industry Council of Victoria, Public hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20.

had the same number of staff for only 2000 patrons. The total cost to run the event was close to on par with the larger format event. When you do the maths it makes you wonder why we even bother trying to run anything at all. However the reason we do it is because we don't want our industry to die! We want to do something, as we already risk losing everything.<sup>70</sup>

John Young, President of the Port Fairy Folk Festival, similarly explained:

we build our infrastructure. It is temporary infrastructure. All our stages are out on cricket ovals. Our best ticket sales, we would sell to 10 000 people, so there are 10 000 people in venues on ovals. In the event of any social distancing and hence number restrictions, if we were to go from our successful economic model of about 10 000 ticket sales to half or 75 per cent, we would still need that infrastructure because of the spacings required ... It costs the same. The model economically does not work without that full capacity. So any changes that bring pressure down on ticket numbers, people in the venues, that causes us economic pain.<sup>71</sup>

In its submission, Music Victoria highlighted inconsistencies between these restrictions and the number of attendees permitted at private gatherings, which it stated particularly impacts live performance venues:

Live Performance Australia have noted that many live performance venues cannot reconcile current provisional capacity limits with density requirements restrictions. This means that, even with a nominal 100% capacity allowance for these spaces, density quotients of 2sqm per person will restrict them from reaching anywhere near this mark, and as such will prevent them from delivering profitable events. For some small venues, this creates a strange inconsistency whereby private events might host 100 people at their home but a small venue, with additional guidelines, risk mitigation strategies and expectations, cannot.

This is because the majority of live music is presented in non-seated venues which must adhere to the 1 person per 2 square metre density quotient rule. This restriction equates to operating at about 25% capacity, resulting in a 75% drop in revenue. Meanwhile, fixed costs like rent, insurance and staff remain static. These live music venues simply do not have the physical space to give each individual person this amount of room. As a point of comparison, Liquor licenses are issued based on 1 person per 0.75 square metres.<sup>72</sup>

This raises a further issue, which relates to the distinction between 'fixed seated' areas and non-seated areas. Venues with fixed seating are subject to far less stringent requirements than non-seated areas or, depending on how this is interpreted, venues with seating that is not 'fixed'. This reflects public health guidance that seated areas have lower risk of COVID-19 transmission than areas where attendees can move about freely. However, it disproportionately impacts venues and events that do not have seated areas, such as many live performances.

<sup>70</sup> Scarlett Mac Events, *Submission 30*, p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> John Young, President, Port Fairy Folk Festival, Public hearing, Camperdown, 13 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 17.

<sup>72</sup> Music Victoria, *Submission 131*, p. 4.

At a public hearing, Jon Perring, co-owner of the Tote Hotel and Bar Open, advocated for the recommencement of the Live Music Roundtable, which had previously acted as a consultative body between the music industry and the Victorian Government. He explained the importance of affected sectors being able to provide feedback on public health measures through mechanisms such as the roundtable:

In November 2020, when inside gigs were again allowed, there were ridiculous regulatory health constraints placed on live music performance that effectively prevented live music from being staged. The audience had to be spaced 5 metres in front of the performers, who were to be masked and spaced 2 metres apart. Lobbying ultimately removed these mandatory unworkable regulations after three weeks, and the situation could have been avoided through consultation. The delay meant that bands were not being programmed prior to the Christmas break, resulting in a delay of six to eight weeks in staging gigs, further financially injuring live music venues ... Thankfully government in each case listened to the industry, but in each case it has unnecessarily brought live music venues to the brink. This is hardly an orderly plan for the return of the music industry to COVID normal.<sup>73</sup>

The Committee highlights this as a good example of how consultation with a sector undertaken as a genuine two-way dialogue helps health authorities to develop appropriate guidelines.

Some stakeholders raised comparative density quotients in other states and territories as a guide for Victoria's response. However, the Committee is aware that caution should be exercised when comparing these measures due to the differences between the COVID-19 situation and related public health requirements in each jurisdiction at any point in time. Julia Robinson, General Manager of the Australian Festival Association, highlighted this issue at a public hearing:

We operate in every state and territory; we have got members across every state and territory. It is actually almost impossible to compare each state and territory because the baselines are just not the same, so it is not just apples and apples. My point in saying that is that it is a complete fruit salad out there...<sup>74</sup>

On 9 April 2021, the National Cabinet agreed to a number of decisions towards reopening the country on the basis of advice provided by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee.<sup>75</sup> Among these decisions were:

- Density restrictions: easing venue restrictions to be no stricter than the 2 square metre rule.
- Capacity restrictions: Large, ticketed and seated gatherings can have 100 percent capacity.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Jon Perring, Co-Owner, Tote Hotel and Bar Open, Public hearing, Melbourne, 19 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>74</sup> Julia Robinson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

<sup>75</sup> The Committee is comprised of all state and territory Chief Health Officers and chaired by the Australian Chief Medical Officer.

<sup>76</sup> Prime Minister of Australia, *National Cabinet Statement*, media release, 9 April 2021.

The Committee notes that the one person per two square metre density quotient currently applied in Victoria for non-seated areas is in line with the decision agreed by the National Cabinet in April 2021. While this quotient has a clear impact on the financial viability of events, the Committee considers that this statement, made on the basis of advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, takes precedence.

Events with over 1,000 attendees in Victoria are currently subject to a limit of 75% capacity. At a public hearing, Evelyn Richardson, Chief Executive of Live Performance Australia, advocated for 'a move to 100 per cent capacity for large ticketed and seated gatherings' in line with the National Cabinet statement.<sup>77</sup> The submission from Live Performance Australia noted that Victoria is 'the only jurisdiction that has not moved to 100 percent capacity or announced its time scale for alignment with [Australian Health Protection Principal Committee] advice'.<sup>78</sup> The Committee considers that this warrants further evaluation by the Victorian Government.

As discussed in Chapter 5, the lack of certainty around the potential reintroduction of public health measures following an outbreak of COVID-19 is a key issue for the events sector. In its submission, the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry advocated for a framework to be released that would outline 'what would result in limits being reapplied if there was a subsequent COVID-19 outbreak'.<sup>79</sup>

The Committee is aware that public health requirements often necessitate changes to the *Restricted Activity Directions* and accompanying guidance with little notice. This is particularly true with the new, more contagious variants now present in Australia.

However, the lack of certainty felt by the events sector, and small businesses more broadly, could be aided by public guidance on the types of triggers for the imposition or lifting of density quotients and venue capacity restrictions. The provision of clear communication around how and when these public health measures are likely to change would help to maintain and support business confidence, while retaining the ability for the Victorian Government to respond flexibly where needed.

**FINDING 22:** A comprehensive understanding of the events sector will better inform the guidance provided by the Department of Health and the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions.

**RECOMMENDATION 13:** That the Victorian Government publish clear guidance on the types of triggers for the imposition or lifting of density quotients and venue capacity restrictions in order to maintain and support business confidence.

<sup>77</sup> Evelyn Richardson, Chief Executive, Live Performance Australia, Public hearing, Melbourne, 19 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 27.

<sup>78</sup> Live Performance Australia, *Submission 127*, p. 8.

<sup>79</sup> Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, *Submission 137*, p. 2.

**RATIONALE:** Although the evolving nature of COVID-19 and the fact that each outbreak is unique makes predictions very difficult, wider sharing of the health advice regarding restrictions—including when lockdowns are likely to be imposed and lifted—would give the sector more certainty in planning events.

### 6.1.6 Additional financial costs

There are additional costs involved for event organisers to comply with the requirements under the *Restricted Activity Directions* and the PEF. This includes the time required to create, submit for assessment and implement a COVIDSafe Event Plan, as well as the costs of the event itself, including adequate hygiene facilities, increased cleaning, COVID Marshals and personal protective equipment. As discussed above, these additional costs are in light of potentially lower profits made on an event due to density quotients, venue capacities and other public health measures. Simone Schinkel of the Arts Industry Council of Victoria told the Committee that one artist manager had reported a 20% increase in costs in order to comply with the new public health regulations.<sup>80</sup>

JL Productions & Hire provided an example of this resource burden in its submission to the Inquiry:

In January we held one of our larger-scale events of the year in our event calendar. This event saw us reduce the number of attendees we could allow, however the expense to hold this event was much greater than in previous years. The rise in expenses mainly came down to our risk mitigation plans, including having the same amount of staff, hiring more security staff, more cleaners and we also engaged with a professional Covid safety consultant to ensure we were abiding by our obligations as organisers of a covid safe event. Although engaging with a professional was not a necessary requirement, we felt we had a responsibility to be leaders in our industry and ensure our staff and attendees were given a covid safe experience to the highest degree.<sup>81</sup>

## 6.2 Government support

As outlined in Chapter 2, the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments have introduced a range of programs and initiatives to support individuals and businesses throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. These include a number of general initiatives, as well as some that were targeted towards particular sectors or issues. The effectiveness of government support for the events sectors is discussed in the following sections.

<sup>80</sup> Simone Schinkel, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

<sup>81</sup> JL Productions & Hire, *Submission 102*, p. 1.

## 6.2.1 Victoria

The Victorian Government has progressively introduced a suite of support measures since March 2020. However, one key theme raised by events industry stakeholders was that while many had been able to access some of the general program funding, there had been extremely limited support for the events sector despite it being disproportionately affected. For this reason, the sector felt largely forgotten by the Victorian Government.

Save Victorian Events stated in its submission that government funding programs for events are often based on the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC) codes, with the relevant codes for the events sector also being the 'main ANZSIC codes for the arts, the music industry, and key parts of the sports sector'. As a result, it states that only a small portion of funding for these codes would flow to the events sector.<sup>82</sup> Simon Phemister from DJPR acknowledged that ANZSIC codes are sometimes used to 'underpin assistance rounds, noting that 'it is very difficult to put a boundary around events and tourism'.<sup>83</sup>

Revolution Staging stated that it was 'disappointing' to see higher levels of support provided to other industries that were recovering faster than the events industry.<sup>84</sup> Further, the submission from CrewCare highlighted how events have always been a vehicle for fundraising for those in need, for 'drought, fire, flood, famine'—yet there is no support for those working in events in their own time of need.<sup>85</sup>

Many stakeholders discussed 'falling through the cracks' of support, such as events suppliers and sole traders. For example, VTIC's submission stated that:

These are the businesses in the supply chain, sadly, that have fallen through the cracks in the construct of business support measures to assist in navigating through this crisis; and they will be a crucial component in the ultimate revival of the industry.<sup>86</sup>

Similarly, NW Group noted that while all support was welcome, the funding that had been made available was primarily to 'producers and promoters', which rarely made its way down the supply chain 'in the form of deposits for future events'.<sup>87</sup>

The Victorian Government introduced the Sole Trader Support Fund to provide grants of \$3,000 for eligible sole traders in sectors such as retail, accommodation and food services, media and events, who operate from a commercial premises or location as a tenant. However, stakeholders raised the narrow eligibility for this fund as an issue that left many unsupported—in particular, it was primarily targeted at providing rent relief.

<sup>82</sup> Save Victorian Events, *Submission 7*, p. 7.

<sup>83</sup> Simon Phemister, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 26.

<sup>84</sup> Revolution Staging, *Submission 11*, p. 1.

<sup>85</sup> CrewCare, *Submission 13*, p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> Victoria Tourism Industry Council, *Submission 99*, p. 5.

<sup>87</sup> NW Group Australasia, *Submission 93*, p. 2.

Further, the eligibility criteria for this program as well as other grants—such as the Business Victoria Costs Assistance Program 2, which provided support for small businesses affected by the May-June 2021 lockdown—include that the applicant is registered for Goods and Services Tax (GST). Businesses are required to register for GST if their annual turnover is over \$75,000 and can opt to register if it falls below this threshold.<sup>88</sup>

However, there are many events professionals that may operate as a sole trader and earn under this threshold, who are unable to access support on the basis of not having opted to register for GST. Damien Young stated in his submission that as a freelancer, with an ABN but not registered for GST, 'every single grant I have looked at seems to be written to exclude people like me'.<sup>89</sup>

In addition, the Committee heard that funding initiatives are often not accessible for community or not-for-profit organisations. Peter Williams, Chair of the Winter Blues Festival, told the Committee that as the festival was not a private business, it did not qualify for funding. He recommended that 'not-for-profit community organisations should be eligible for government support to the extent of any expenses that they have actually incurred'.<sup>90</sup>

The Victorian Government also introduced a number of payroll initiatives, including that employers with annual taxable wages up to \$3 million can have their payroll tax waived for the 2019–20 financial year. However, Rocky Bruzzano from Exponet noted that this did not take into account how much revenue a business had lost:

Employers with an annual Victorian taxable wage of up to \$3 million are eligible to have their payroll tax for the 2019–20 financial year waived. This is a great initiative, but because our Victorian taxable wages were greater than \$3 million, we were not eligible for this program, even though we have lost 100 per cent of our revenue.<sup>91</sup>

A further key theme among stakeholders within the events sector was that without additional targeted support, many businesses would have to close down and individuals would have to seek work elsewhere. Scarlett Mac Events stated that 'with no extra financial support most of us won't get through this year'.<sup>92</sup>

It should be noted that many of the concerns regarding the inadequacy of funding were raised prior to the announcement of the \$20 million Victorian Events Support Package on 15 June 2021. This package was aimed at supporting the events sector following the statewide lockdown and related restrictions introduced in May and June 2021. Simon Phemister stated that this program had been 'co-produced with industry' and that over

<sup>88</sup> Australian Taxation Office, *Registering for GST*, 2021, <<https://www.ato.gov.au/Business/GST/Registering-for-GST>> accessed 22 June 2021.

<sup>89</sup> Damien Young, *Submission 78*, p. 1.

<sup>90</sup> Peter Williams, Chair, Winter Blues Festival, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 2 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 27.

<sup>91</sup> Rocky Bruzzano, Chief Financial Officer, ExpoNet, Public hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 46.

<sup>92</sup> Scarlett Mac Events, *Submission 30*, p. 1.

30 roundtables had been held with industry stakeholders.<sup>93</sup> The package included the following initiatives:

- Sustainable Event Business Program—payments of up to \$250,000 for the organisers, hosts and suppliers of major events, who have had their financial viability significantly affected by the restrictions.
- Impacted Public Events Support Program—grants of \$25,000 to event organisers and \$10,000 to suppliers of Tier 1 and Tier 2 events that have incurred costs as a direct result of the recent public health restrictions.
- Independent Cinemas Support Program—payments of \$12,000 per independent cinema venue that was required to close due to the restrictions.
- Live Performance Support Program – Presenters—payments of up to \$7,000 for producers.
- Live Performance Support Program – Suppliers—payments of up to \$500 per event for suppliers of live performance events, up to a maximum of four events.<sup>94</sup>

This package provided much-needed support to the events sector. However, event organisers and suppliers of Tier 3 events were not eligible to apply for this program, which is likely to affect small businesses and sole traders.

The Victorian Government stated in its submission to the Inquiry that it had 'met extensively with representatives of the events industry, across business, sport and cultural events' in order to assess the impacts of the pandemic and support targeted recovery. It noted that this consultation included:

- Hosting more than 10 creative and cultural forums to engage with venue owners, and industry peak bodies including Live Performance Australia (LPA), Live Entertainment Industry Forum (LEIF).
- Frequent meetings with MCEC, Melbourne Convention Bureau (MCB) and Business Events Victoria on event impacts.
- Meetings with other stakeholders from the business events sector in a range of different forums focussed on impact of restrictions and opportunities for support.
- Hosting 20 sport forums with professional and community sport CEOs, associations and leagues.<sup>95</sup>

However, the Victorian Government does not identify any stakeholders within the broader events supply chain with which it consulted. This may relate in part to the lack of industry representation within the events sector—however, as discussed in section 6.1.3, there is nevertheless a clear need to improve consultation mechanisms with the diverse range of stakeholders that make up the sector.

<sup>93</sup> Simon Phemister, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 26.

<sup>94</sup> Martin Pakula, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, *Organisers, venues, cinemas, singers - backing our events sector*, media release, Victorian Government, 15 June 2021.

<sup>95</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, p. 16.

In relation to national support, the Victorian Government noted in its submission that it was actively involved in discussions with the Commonwealth Government on long-term sector recovery, including advocacy that programs 'meet the needs of the Victorian tourism industry'.<sup>96</sup> The submission does not mention advocacy or discussions in relation to events.

The Committee acknowledges that the infrastructure and resourcing required to establish the broad range of support initiatives provided by the Victorian Government across all areas was significant and extremely complex. As noted by Mr Phemister, DJPR has received more than 1.2 million applications for assistance since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. To put this in context, the department has processed more grants in the past 16 months than in the previous 50 years. As Mr Phemister pointed out, this figure reveals the amount of harm caused by the pandemic, saying: 'That does not mean we should not be treating every case and every call, every one of those 1.2 million applications, with the compassion they deserve, because these are people who are coming to us at often the most stressful if not the top couple of stressful moments of their lives.'<sup>97</sup>

The Committee also acknowledges the complexity of quickly rolling out support in response to the imposition of public health restrictions. Mr Phemister described this process and explained how DJPR is consistently seeking to improve its processes:

We work with industry on the design of support programs wherever possible. Now, when a snap lockdown is announced in a day, the best thing we can do is to move quickly to a business support round. With I think the most recent circuit-breaker lockdown, government asked if it could stand up an effectively ANZSIC-driven program and a licensed venue hospitality program that we had pre-prepared from previous rounds. So they were designed effectively taking previously prepared rounds, then taking our debriefing and debugging from those rounds—some of the points that were just raised with regard to enhancing communication—and we were ready to implement them within 72 hours.<sup>98</sup>

The Committee recognises that the Victorian Government has provided support to the events sector across several packages. This means that a business not receiving support from one package may well receive funds from a different package.

The Committee recognises the continuous improvement model that DJPR and DH have undertaken and hopes that the feedback provided by the events sector throughout this Inquiry will inform future support measures for the sector.

### **Efficacy of available support measures**

In terms of particular support measures, stakeholders complimented the effectiveness of a number of support packages.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., pp. 14–15.

<sup>97</sup> Simon Phemister, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 26.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

One key initiative was the Business Support Fund, which provided grants to small and medium businesses that were impacted by COVID-19 restrictions. Payment amounts were dependent on annual payroll and ranged between \$10,000-\$20,000. Simon Phemister told the Committee that a 'broad-based approach to business support' had been adopted, partly due to the complexity of drawing lines between sectors, and that 'hopefully the business assistance structure has accommodated to the greatest extent possible those businesses that rely on those events and tourism offers'.<sup>99</sup> Stakeholders praised the impacts of support from the Business Support Fund. Sports Event Projects stated in its submission the payment had covered a portion of the rent on its commercial premises, which had remained unused for over a year.<sup>100</sup>

Another initiative is the National Business Events Program, which opened in May 2021 and is being administered by the Melbourne Convention Bureau. The program provides grants of up to \$25,000 for business events that take place in Melbourne over at least two days, attract at least 150 in-person delegates, and have at least 30% of attendees travelling from interstate. Grants can be used to pay for costs such as venue hire, accommodation, transport and other expenses in order to 'spread the benefits across Victoria's business events supply chain'.<sup>101</sup> The program will provide 50% of the payment prior to the event to 'support upfront expenses'.<sup>102</sup> Brendan McClements, Chief Executive Officer of Visit Victoria, provided an overview of the uptake of the program in the week since its announcement:

with the recent innovation of announcing a National Business Events Program to support event stages, to bring their events to Melbourne, we have seen 50 applicants already for up to \$25 000 in grants. That started to take place, and we were really pleased actually that we could stage what was then the largest business conference that had been held since the pandemic hit in April at the Melbourne exhibition centre, where 900 people in our industry came together to start the process of getting back.<sup>103</sup>

At a public hearing, Simon Thewlis from Save Victorian Events described the program as a 'good help', but noted that funding would not make it down the supply chain for several months due to the long lead times for events, reinforcing the need for immediate support:

that money is not actually going to get down to the people who are doing it the toughest—the suppliers and the workers—for three, four, five, maybe six months, because multiday conferences do not get organised in a week. So it is looking at the direct measures until events happen, because no matter what we do today, it is still months down the track that those dollars actually get into people's pockets and help them pay their rent and put food on the table.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>100</sup> Sports Event Projects, *Submission 27*, p. 1.

<sup>101</sup> Martin Pakula, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, *Applications Open For Business Events Funding*, media release, Victorian Government, 12 May 2021.

<sup>102</sup> Melbourne Convention Bureau, *National Business Events Program, 2021*, <<https://www.melbournecb.com.au/plan-event/national-business-events-program>> accessed 22 June 2021.

<sup>103</sup> Brendan McClements, Chief Executive Officer, Visit Victoria, Public hearing, Melbourne, 19 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 3.

<sup>104</sup> Simon Thewlis, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 9.

The Melbourne Convention Bureau's program webpage states that the funding will be available for events in Melbourne.<sup>105</sup> However, the Victorian Government submission describes the program as 'securing events for Melbourne and the regions, benefiting key Melbourne and regional business event venues'.<sup>106</sup> As such, it is unclear whether the program will apply to the regions. Yarra Ranges Tourism advocated for it to be extended to regional areas, particularly those that rely on business events.<sup>107</sup>

A further initiative raised by submitters was the Victorian Live Music Venues Program. This Program aims to support the live music events sector by providing financial assistance to licensed venues. Funding amounts are determined by venue capacity but can be up to \$130,000 for larger venues (up to 1,200-person capacity).<sup>108</sup> Stakeholders predominantly welcomed this fund. Jon Perring of the Tote Hotel and Bar Open told the Committee that this fund 'saved our bacon'. However, he noted that they were nevertheless still in a very precarious situation:

But just to put that in perspective, between my two venues we have probably somewhere around, I do not know, maybe a \$4 million annual turnover. So the \$100 000 in that context to offset costs did not go all the way, and hence my point that I was saying about how beaten up we are at the moment. We are still in a very precarious position and we have been the beneficiary of some of that funding.<sup>109</sup>

Similarly, the Live Music Office noted that the fund provided critical relief for live music venues, and had been used to inform announcements in other jurisdictions:

This program provided desperately needed support to underwrite venues navigating long lockdown periods and where other funding programs were unable to support operational costs. The program also directly informed the announcement of the associated \$24M NSW program in March 2021. There is a compelling case for this funding program to be supported through a second round in 2021 as many venues are still experiencing unsustainable economic impacts on their operations at this critical time.<sup>110</sup>

Many businesses were also able to have liquor licensing fees waived through the Victorian Government's economic survival packages. Barry Wurlod, owner of Keayang Maar Vineyard, expressed being 'very happy' with this waiver.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Melbourne Convention Bureau, *National Business Events Program*.

<sup>106</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, p. 17.

<sup>107</sup> Yarra Ranges Tourism, *Submission 125*, p. 17.

<sup>108</sup> Creative Victoria, *Victorian Live Music Venues Program*, 2021, <<https://creative.vic.gov.au/grants-and-support/programs/victorian-live-music-venues-program>> accessed 15 March 2021.

<sup>109</sup> Jon Perring, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 22–23.

<sup>110</sup> Live Music Office, *Submission 128*, p. 1.

<sup>111</sup> Barry Wurlod, Owner, Keayang Maar Vineyard, Public hearing, Melbourne, 13 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25.

**FINDING 23:** Many stakeholders in the events sector welcomed the financial support that has been provided by the Victorian Government. However, the sector broadly believes that more needs to be done to:

- provide targeted support to ensure its ongoing viability
- ensure businesses affected by future restrictions are supported
- identify and support those who did not receive support, such as some sole traders.

### Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan

The *Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan* (VERRP), released in April 2021, provides a framework for the Victorian Government's approach to reinvigorating tourism and events. Of the six key themes included in the VERRP, one is related to events in terms of reviving 'Victoria's calendar of world-class events, to drive demand by strengthening our position as a global events destination'.<sup>112</sup> Three outcomes are identified:

- Visit Victoria and the Melbourne Convention Bureau have the flexibility to target events that will best support recovery of the visitor economy.
- Focus on national events supports intrastate and interstate visitation while international borders are closed.
- Strong forward pipeline strengthens Victoria's brand as an events destination and rebuilds longer-term demand.<sup>113</sup>

These outcomes reflect Victorian Government policy of events as a key driver of visitation, and do not pursue broader outcomes outside of the visitation focus.

The Victorian Government's submission identifies the tourism-based organisations with which it consulted in development of the VERRP but does not identify any stakeholders from the events sector.<sup>114</sup> Madison Fitzgerald, Director, Communication and Branding at Destination, highlighted concerns around how funding towards events had been allocated primarily to government stakeholders under the plan:

Now, I have had a good look at the Victoria Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan for the next four years, and ... what is very evident to me is government stakeholders. Under the government stakeholders we have a big list here of the Melbourne Convention Bureau, Visit Victoria, Regional Tourism Boards and Business Events Victoria. Under the plan there is \$633 million allocated to government stakeholder agencies. Again I would like to say: of the \$12 billion that comes in from events, 80 per cent of that is

<sup>112</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan*, Victorian Government, April 2021, p. 13.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>114</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, pp. 12-13.

from business events. So if you have a look at the business events side that brings in that income—the other 20 per cent is made of public and community and charity and festivals—zero dollars have been allocated. That is very disheartening.<sup>115</sup>

In its submission, the Victorian Government also provided examples of initiatives it has undertaken in partnership with VTIC to facilitate industry recovery, including:

- establishment of an online Industry Support Hub with access to 'resources for tourism and events businesses'
- distribution of industry resources on financial management, human resources, restart and recovery, operations, risk management and marketing
- distribution of information on restrictions and support measures 'within 24 hours of release'
- daily contact with businesses across the tourism and events sectors to 'provide clarification on specific issues and tailored support'
- delivery of a series of webinars on themes related to business survival and reopening.<sup>116</sup>

The submission does not identify how distribution of resources or information was undertaken, or which stakeholders in the events sector were directly engaged with as part of these initiatives.

Madison Fitzgerald told the Committee that government funding in relation to the VERRP had been allocated to tourism, with 'zero to events'.<sup>117</sup> This type of funding includes, for example, major events that are largely aimed at driving visitation. Through the VERRP, the Victorian Government allocated an additional \$152 million over four years to the Major Events Fund to secure up to ten additional major events per year. It noted in its submission the recommencement of major events is 'supporting the economic recovery of the broader events industry by creating jobs and opportunities for events supply chain businesses'.<sup>118</sup>

The VERRP and the need for further long-term planning for the recovery of the events sector is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

### 6.2.2 Commonwealth

The key support measure referred to by stakeholders to the Inquiry was the Commonwealth Government's JobKeeper Payment scheme, which allowed many businesses to retain staff and remain in business. However, as noted in Chapter 5, the conclusion of JobKeeper on 28 March 2021 has placed additional financial stress on an already weak sector.

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<sup>115</sup> Madison Fitzgerald, Director, Communication and Branding, Destination, Public hearing, Melbourne, 19 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

<sup>116</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, pp. 12–13.

<sup>117</sup> Madison Fitzgerald, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 15.

<sup>118</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, p. 17.

The Committee heard that there is ongoing need for a wage subsidy for the events sector. The Business Events Council of Australia's *Government Support & Future Confidence Report: Business Events Industry Survey*, released in February 2021, reports that 85% of respondents in the business events sector accessed JobKeeper Payments for the period between January and March 2021, a decrease of only 2% from the period between March and September 2020. A total of 47% of respondents indicated they would stand down staff or make them redundant if JobKeeper was not extended past March 2021, and a further 40% indicated they were unsure given the slow recovery of the sector.<sup>119</sup>

These findings were broadly echoed by stakeholders. In its submission, Scarlett Mac Events stated that 'with the end to this scheme now I'm unsure how we will survive, short of me folding the company and looking for a new career'.<sup>120</sup> Music Victoria outlined how since the end of JobKeeper, individuals have instead sought critical assistance from other bodies:

Since the end of JobKeeper, Support Act have received close to 500 applications which is a 500% increase on the numbers that they were receiving pre the end of JobKeeper. They are currently distributing more than \$200k a week in grant payments, and this is set to rise.<sup>121</sup>

Stakeholders to the Inquiry advocated for the reintroduction of a wage subsidy in a similar form to JobKeeper, that would support the industry to 'get back on its feet'.<sup>122</sup> Gab Robinson from Harry the Hirer justified the return of the payment on the basis of the continuing, significant reduction in revenue that the events industry is experiencing:

If you think about the advent of JobKeeper, the criterion for JobKeeper was a 30 per cent reduction in revenue ... We have been surviving off a 90 per cent reduction of revenue. We are now at a 70 per cent reduction of revenue. We have used all the resources that we have managed to put aside over the last 45 years of trade. That has enabled us to fund and scrap our way through to this point, with big overheads for a 1200-person strong business. So we would say, 'Well, our revenues have still reduced 70 per cent, and we can provide the evidence to support that'. JobKeeper was introduced for a 30 per cent reduction in revenue, so we are so far behind that criteria, and that is after 12 months and will probably be the case for another six months. So if I paint that picture, you can see how vital support is.<sup>123</sup>

The Committee acknowledges that the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the events sector are ongoing and significant. The Commonwealth Government justified the ending of JobKeeper by referring to overall growth in the economy. This ignores the fact that not every sector in the economy has recovered.

<sup>119</sup> Business Events Council of Australia, *Government Support & Future Confidence Report: Business Events Industry Survey*, March 2021, p. 2.

<sup>120</sup> Scarlett Mac Events, *Submission 30*, p. 1.

<sup>121</sup> Music Victoria, *Submission 131*, p. 3.

<sup>122</sup> Stage Four Productions, *Submission 42*, p. 1.

<sup>123</sup> Gab Robinson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 13.

There is clear need for reintroduction of the JobKeeper Payment scheme, or a similar form of wage subsidy, for sectors that continue to experience substantial declines in revenue as a result of the pandemic. The Committee believes that the Victorian Government could play a crucial advocacy role in this space.

**RECOMMENDATION 14:** That the Victorian Government advocate to the Commonwealth Government for the resumption of the JobKeeper Payment scheme, or a similar form of wage subsidy, for industries that continue to face significant COVID-19 restrictions on their business and employment activity, such as the events sector.

**RATIONALE:** The Commonwealth Government's decision to end JobKeeper was based on macroeconomic conditions that do not reflect the ongoing economic challenges the events sector is enduring.

# 7 Future support measures for the tourism and events sectors

As discussed in detail in Chapters 3 and 5, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and events sectors have been significant and wide-ranging. While a diverse range of support mechanisms have been established by both the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments—and indicators point to sectors that are now in the early days of recovery—these impacts are likely to continue into the future. In addition, some negative flow-on effects have the potential to continue to emerge over time—for example, the loss of skilled professionals from these sectors.

This Chapter discusses future support measures aimed at ensuring the recovery of the tourism and events sectors in Victoria. It considers a number of ongoing challenges for these industries, including uncertainty around domestic and international border restrictions, vaccination rollout and reintroduction of public health restrictions; flow-on effects, such as around labour availability and housing; and significant financial implications for the Victorian Government. The Chapter will consider mechanisms for restoring public and operator confidence, as well as support measures for the tourism and events sectors.

## 7.1 Ongoing challenges for the tourism and events sectors

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and events sectors are ongoing and will have many flow-on effects over the long term. This presents a number of challenges for the sectors and the Victorian Government.

In terms of the tourism sector, there is significant concern that current peaks in demand—in the wake of lockdowns and other public health measures—will not last. With no firm date in sight as to when international borders will reopen, there remains the risk that domestic tourism will be insufficient to make up the shortfall in tourism spend. Stakeholders argue that investment in tourism infrastructure is crucial to ensure that the industry is able to cater to the domestic travel market and so that Victoria will also be an attractive destination when international tourism resumes.

Across both the tourism and events sectors, many businesses have been forced to close, with skilled professionals forced to seek work in other areas. For the tourism industry, the labour shortage that is due, in part, to the lack of overseas workers has implications for the capacity of many businesses to reopen and recover. Housing shortages within many of the tourism regions impact the ability to attract new workers to fill skills gaps. Within the events sector, the Committee heard that many of those that have left may not return.

A further challenge relates to low operator and public confidence. For the events sector, a particular issue in this space is insurance. The lack of event cancellation insurance, in conjunction with high uncertainty around when and how public health measures are likely to be reinstated or borders closed, is limiting the events sector's recovery. For many, the risks are simply too high. The impacts of this ongoing uncertainty, combined with significant financial stress as a result of lockdowns and other measures, has led to serious mental health consequences for the industry.

For the Victorian Government, the financial cost of supporting the many industries and communities impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic is high. However, well-targeted investment in the tourism and events sectors will ensure significant economic returns that aid the state's long-term recovery.

The Committee notes that the immediate period in the months following the tabling of this report will be critical for the events sector in particular. It encourages the Victorian Government to implement action as quickly as possible, to ensure the recovery and revival of events within the state, and to ensure that the sector's status as a world leader is maintained.

## 7.2 Restoring confidence

The following sections discuss two areas for restoring confidence in the tourism and events sectors: the national suppression strategy and the vaccine rollout.

### 7.2.1 Suppression strategy

Australia has a national goal of zero community transmissions of COVID-19. This was agreed at National Cabinet on 24 July 2020:

National Cabinet recommitted to the suppression strategy to address COVID-19. The goal remains suppression of COVID-19 until a point in time a vaccine or effective treatments are available, with the goal of no local community transmission.<sup>1</sup>

This means that health authorities in every jurisdiction must respond to outbreaks by reducing community transmission to zero cases. With Australia's lagging vaccination rollout, the most effective way of doing this is via lockdowns.

Estimates vary as to what the ideal proportion of vaccinated persons should be. For example, Peter Collignon, an infectious diseases physician and microbiologist at the Australian National University, estimated a total of at least 70% of adults being fully vaccinated in order to have a high level of protection. Regarding the opening of Australia's borders, he said:

In any nonimmune population, Covid will spread rapidly if there are not restrictions in place to decrease the risk of spread (e.g. indoor crowd numbers) and on returning travellers. It is therefore essential we have high levels of immunity in Australia before

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<sup>1</sup> Prime Minister Hon. Scott Morrison MP, *National Cabinet Statement*, media release, Sydney, 24 July 2020.

we can open our borders. Vaccination will give people immunity, but to have a high level of protection for our entire population, we will likely need 70% or more of adults fully vaccinated.<sup>2</sup>

More conservative estimates put the figure at up to 85%, in conjunction with the emergence of new variants.<sup>3</sup> The ongoing speed and coordination of the vaccine rollout will determine how quickly this rate can be achieved.

Vaccinations achieve two things: they make it less likely that people pass on a virus; and they reduce the impact of the virus once a person is infected. At a public hearing, Professor Catherine Bennett, Chair in Epidemiology, Faculty of Health at Deakin University, described the benefits of vaccination at the population level:

What it is doing at the population level is that now we are not seeing the deaths at the same levels. We have fewer cases in those who are vaccinated. Of the cases reported up to a couple of weeks ago, over 83 per cent were people who were not vaccinated, and of those fully vaccinated there were only 3.7 per cent of cases meeting that definition. So clearly vaccination really shifts your risk of hospitalisation and severe disease and fatalities, and that was what our main focus was.<sup>4</sup>

Only with high vaccination rates do societies learn to ‘live with COVID-19’ similar to other viruses, like influenza.

For example, in late January 2021, the United Kingdom recorded a daily high death rate of 1,800 deaths and around 33,000 new cases.<sup>5</sup> However, at the end of June and with over 60% of the adult population fully vaccinated, the number of deaths had fallen to 23 and around 20,000 new cases.<sup>6</sup> This has given the country confidence to ‘open up’ and allow events to occur—including Wimbledon, the European football championships and music festivals—and tourist sites to reopen.

Similarly, tourism and events in the USA are recovering strongly with nearly 50% of the country’s whole population fully vaccinated.<sup>7</sup>

At the time of writing this report, only around 9% of adults in Australia were fully vaccinated.

2 Peter Collignon, ‘Australia must eventually face reality: live with Covid or become a hermit nation’, *The Guardian*, 15 June 2021, <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jun/15/australia-must-eventually-face-reality-live-with-covid-or-become-a-hermit-nation>> accessed 30 June 2021.

3 Professor Catherine Bennett, Chair in Epidemiology, Faculty of Health, School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 28 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 5.

4 Ibid., pp. 6–7.

5 ‘UK hits record number of daily COVID-19 deaths as Boris Johnson warns numbers will rise’, *ABC News*, 21 January 2021, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-01-21/uk-record-number-daily-covid-19-deaths-boris-johnson/13077346>> accessed 30 June 2021.

6 Public Health England, *Coronavirus (COVID-19) in the UK: UK summary*, 2021, <<https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk>> accessed 30 June 2021.

7 Katie Adams, ‘States ranked by percentage of population fully vaccinated’, *Becker’s Hospital Review*, 29 June 2021, <<https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/public-health/states-ranked-by-percentage-of-population-vaccinated-march-15.html>> accessed 30 June 2021.

On 2 July 2021, National Cabinet announced a *National Plan to transition Australia's National COVID Response* (National Plan). This transition will be from current settings that focus on continuing to suppress community transition, to settings following a high percentage of vaccination that focus on preventing serious illness, hospitalisation and fatality, similarly to how other infectious diseases are managed.<sup>8</sup> The National Plan consists of four stages. A summary of these stages is set out in Table 7.1 below.

**Table 7.1** *National Plan to transition Australia's National COVID Response*

<b>A. Current Phase—Vaccinate, prepare and pilot</b>	<p>Continue to suppress the virus for the purpose of minimising community transmission. Measures include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement the national vaccination plan to offer every Australian an opportunity to be vaccinated with the necessary doses of the relevant vaccine as soon as possible</li> <li>• Lockdowns to be used only as a last resort</li> <li>• Trial and pilot the introduction of alternative quarantine options, including home quarantine for returning vaccinated travellers</li> <li>• Expand commercial trials for limited entry of student and economic visa holders</li> <li>• Undertake a further review of the national hotel quarantine network.</li> </ul>
<b>B. Post Vaccination Phase</b>	<p>Seek to minimise serious illness, hospitalisation and fatality. Measures may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ease restrictions on vaccinated residents - such as lockdowns and border controls</li> <li>• Lockdowns only in extreme circumstances to prevent escalating hospitalisation and fatality</li> <li>• Allow capped entry of student and economic visa holders subject to quarantine arrangements and availability</li> <li>• Introduce new reduced quarantine arrangements for vaccinated residents.</li> </ul>
<b>C. Consolidation Phase</b>	<p>Manage COVID-19 consistent with public health management of other infectious diseases. Measures may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No lockdowns</li> <li>• Exempt vaccinated residents from all domestic restrictions</li> <li>• Abolish caps on returning vaccinated travellers</li> <li>• Allow increased capped entry of student, economic, and humanitarian visa holders</li> <li>• Lift all restrictions on outbound travel for vaccinated persons</li> <li>• Extend travel bubble for unrestricted travel to new candidate countries (Singapore, Pacific).</li> </ul>
<b>D. Final Phase</b>	<p>Manage COVID-19 consistent with public health management of other infectious diseases. Measures may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow uncapped inbound arrivals for all vaccinated persons, without quarantine</li> <li>• Allow uncapped arrivals of non-vaccinated travellers subject to pre-flight and on arrival testing.</li> </ul>

Source: Prime Minister of Australia, *National Cabinet Statement*, media release, 2 July 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Prime Minister of Australia, *National Cabinet Statement*, media release, 2 July 2021.

The statement notes that these stages will be ‘triggered by the achievement of vaccination thresholds expressed as a percentage of the eligible population (16+)’. These thresholds will be based on scientific modelling being undertaken by the COVID-19 Risk Analysis and Response Task Force, which is not yet available.<sup>9</sup>

The Committee welcomes this National Cabinet announcement. This transition from a suppression strategy to a management strategy will allow the Department of Health (DH) more freedom to relax restrictions around events in Victoria and give event organisers confidence that a small number of cases may not see events cancelled. It will also allow the tourism sector assurance around the resumption of both domestic and international travel.

**FINDING 24:** The National Cabinet announcement of a transition from a suppression strategy to a management strategy for COVID-19 in line with increases in the proportion of vaccinated persons will provide much-needed assurance to the tourism and events sectors.

However, the Committee notes that the National Plan does not include dates or vaccination rates that will trigger change.

**RECOMMENDATION 15:** That the Victorian Government work with National Cabinet to revise the *National Plan to transition Australia’s National COVID Response* to include dates and vaccination rates that will trigger changes to Australia’s national COVID-19 response to provide certainty for the tourism and events sectors.

**RATIONALE:** The national requirement for jurisdictions to maintain zero community transmission has been a major reason for lockdowns. Removing this requirement will give the tourism and events sectors the confidence that small numbers of COVID-19 in the community will no longer lead to lockdowns or harsh restrictions.

## 7.2.2 Vaccination thresholds and public guidance

A critical means of restoring public and operator confidence is ensuring successful rollout of COVID-19 vaccines across the country. A high vaccination rate will allow business to resume, borders to reopen and reduce the need for public health restrictions in response to outbreaks.

In light of the National Plan, there is now further clarity around how public health responses will broadly change in conjunction with an increasing vaccination rate. However, the Committee remains concerned regarding the speed of the vaccine rollout in comparison with other comparable international jurisdictions.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Further, the Committee considers that there is scope for the Victorian Government to issue public guidance on how particular state-based public health mechanisms and policies will change in line with the vaccination thresholds established under the National Plan. For example, the Victorian Government should be prepared to make amendments to the requirements for holding events under the *COVID-19 Public Events Framework* (PEF). The provision of clear estimates of these types of changes, in line with the National Plan, will bring confidence back to the tourism and events sectors. While the Committee notes that there are various contextual factors that could change how these situations may play out in practice—in particular, the emergence of new variants of COVID-19 and some people’s refusal to be vaccinated—publishing guidance on future activity would provide some much-needed clarity and assurance for businesses.

**RECOMMENDATION 16:** That the Victorian Government provide public guidance on how public health mechanisms and policies will change in conjunction with the vaccination thresholds established under the *National Plan to transition Australia’s National COVID Response*.

**RATIONALE:** Understanding how the Victorian Government will adapt its COVID-19 health response in line with increased vaccination rates will allow businesses in the tourism and events sectors to develop plans for their immediate future.

## 7.3 Tourism

The tourism sector is seeing a slow recovery from 2020 visitation levels, but will need long-term, region-specific planning to ensure it recovers and is able to remain competitive in a changed market.

Chapter 3 made a number of recommendations for amending or expanding existing support measures. The following sections outline further potential support for the tourism sector in relation to governance and skills shortages.

### 7.3.1 Governance

As outlined in Chapter 3, the *Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan* (VERRP)—released in April 2021—sets out the Victorian Government’s strategy for the tourism sector’s recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The VERRP provides that the state will undertake ‘strategic statewide planning’ in order to deliver a state-level ‘destination master plan’. It also notes that the Victorian Government will ‘partner with regions to deliver regional and local destination planning’.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan*, Victorian Government, April 2021, p. 15.

The Committee welcomes this commitment to developing a state-wide destination master plan that will guide recovery efforts in the long term. This had been identified as a key area for improvement by Inquiry stakeholders. In its submission, Yarra Ranges Tourism noted that there has previously been a ‘limited strategic framework’ at the state level for addressing issues and exploring opportunities for the tourism industry, compared with other states who have developed comprehensive statewide destination management and related plans.<sup>11</sup>

Most of Victoria’s tourism regions have Destination Management Plans in place to provide long-term management and strategic vision for their respective areas. However, not all regions have been supported to develop plans. In its submission, Yarra Ranges Tourism noted that its region didn’t have a Destination Management Plan but welcomed budget commitments in the 2020–21 Victorian Budget that may facilitate future development in this space.

The 2020–21 Victorian Budget allocates \$107 million for ‘strategic destination planning, targeted marketing campaigns, capacity and skills development for tourism businesses, and Regional Tourism Boards’.<sup>12</sup> The Department of Treasury and Finance’s *Budget Paper No. 3: Service Delivery* gave an overview of industry support for the visitor economy:

Funding is provided to support the recovery of Victoria’s visitor economy, especially in regional areas, from the impact of the 2019–2020 Victorian bushfires and coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The funding will support strategic destination planning to identify priority regional tourism initiatives; business case development for new tourism products, events and experiences; targeted intrastate, interstate and overseas marketing campaigns to attract visitors to our regions; capacity and skills development for tourism businesses; and continued support to Regional Tourism Boards.<sup>13</sup>

The Committee welcomes these important budget commitments to ensuring that Victoria’s tourism regions continue to adapt to changing visitor supply and demand, and can plan for long-term recovery and growth. Noting that some Regional Tourism Boards are yet to develop a Destination Management Plan, the Committee considers it important that the Victorian Government ensure adequate support is provided—through both funding and strategic support—to assist this process.

**RECOMMENDATION 17:** That the Victorian Government provide adequate financial and strategic support to Regional Tourism Boards to ensure that Destination Management Plans are in place in each region and that they reflect regional needs in terms of recovery and rebuilding in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>11</sup> Yarra Ranges Tourism, *Submission 125*, p. 20.

<sup>12</sup> Department of Treasury and Finance, *Victoria Budget 2020/21 Paper No. 2*, Melbourne, 2020, p. 56.

<sup>13</sup> Department of Treasury and Finance, *Victorian Budget 2020/21 Paper No. 3*, Melbourne, 2020, p. 100.

**RATIONALE:** Destination Management Plans provide long-term management and strategies for Victoria’s tourism regions. Plans should be developed or revised to focus on the specific recovery needs of each region.

### 7.3.2 Skills shortages

As outlined in Chapter 3, the tourism sector faces large challenges around workforce retention and skills shortages. While some of these issues existed previously—for example, labour shortages across the hospitality industry—the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated them.

The VERRP identifies some key issues for small businesses, including: ‘labour and skills challenges, including attraction and retention, industry seasonality, housing affordability, and the perception of tourism as a career’.<sup>14</sup> In responding to these issues, the VERRP provides that:

We will collaborate with industry in a strategic and coordinated way to undertake a Workforce Planning and Skills Audit, to identify critical gaps and potential opportunities in the workforce as we recover from the pandemic.

Based on the recommendations of the Workforce and Skills Audit, funding will be available for Visitor Economy Partnerships to develop and implement tailored local workforce plans.<sup>15</sup>

In some areas, it may be necessary to rebuild skills within the sector and encourage new trainees and apprenticeships. In addition, some tourism stakeholders noted how the insecure and seasonal nature of many jobs in the sector, in particular in hospitality, can make it hard to attract and retain workers. The Committee heard that businesses that have relied on tourists on short-term visas to fill these roles will need to adjust to make the sector more attractive to local workers, at least for the foreseeable future.<sup>16</sup>

Some free or subsidised courses linked to the tourism industry are currently available through the Commonwealth Government’s JobMaker scheme and the Victorian Government’s ‘Free TAFE for priority courses’ program. These include the Certificate III in Tourism and Certificate III in Hospitality, as well as an Online Engagement for Small Business course aimed at supporting small businesses in the tourism, travel and hospitality industry to develop skills in social media management and website development and maintenance.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan*, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> Damien Cerantonio, Managing Director, Great Ocean Road Resort, Public hearing, Anglesea, 12 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 3–6; Rupert Shaw, Operations Manager, Bright Brewery, Public hearing, Bright, 28 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 25–27.

<sup>17</sup> Victorian Government, *Free TAFE for lots of jobs*, 2021, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/free-tafe>> accessed 29 June 2021; Victorian Skills Gateway, *Online Engagement for Small Business*, <<https://www.skills.vic.gov.au/s/coursedetails?jt=1&id=SITSS00062>> accessed 30 June 2021.

However, the Committee heard that the absence of skilled international workers is particularly impacting tourism-related areas. For example, Committee for Melbourne stated: ‘Visiting working holiday and skilled visas weren’t supported during COVID and this forced many to leave the country’.<sup>18</sup> Western Melbourne Tourism noted that as ‘travel restrictions are eased within Australia, labour shortages have reappeared in the absence of temporary visa holders’.<sup>19</sup>

The Committee welcomes the inclusion of a Workforce and Skills Audit to assess where workforce gaps and opportunities lie across Victoria’s tourism regions. However, it is unclear how long such an audit and the establishment of Visitor Economy Partnerships will take. In light of the evidence received around the need for skilled international workers to fill workforce gaps, the Committee considers that the Victorian Government could play an advocacy role with the Commonwealth Government around the need to prioritise workers from sectors experiencing significant skills shortages when international borders reopen. This could also be achieved as part of commercial trials for limited entry of economic visa holders under the National Plan.

**RECOMMENDATION 18:** That the Victorian Government advocate to the Commonwealth Government to prioritise for entry into Australia, when international borders fully reopen, those workers who can fill skills shortages in the tourism sector, including hospitality. Alternatively, this could form part of commercial trials for limited entry of economic visa holders under the *National Plan to transition Australia’s National COVID Response*.

**RATIONALE:** Australia’s partially closed borders have exacerbated skills shortages in the tourism sector in Victoria. Filling these shortages will help facilitate the rapid recovery of the sector.

## 7.4 Events

Addressing the significant challenges facing the events sector in terms of its ongoing recovery also presents opportunities for Victoria. In particular, events have the potential to play a key role in inspiring connection, building social cohesion and rebuilding a sense of community in the post-pandemic environment.

Chapter 4 made a number of recommendations for amending or expanding existing policy and support measures. The following sections discuss further potential support measures for the events sector, including in relation to governance, insurance, event vouchers and the workforce.

<sup>18</sup> Committee for Melbourne, *Submission 113*, p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> Western Melbourne Tourism, *Submission 104*, p. 8.

## 7.4.1 Governance

As discussed in Chapter 4, there are a number of gaps in governance and industry representation for the Victorian events industry. The following sections will discuss some of these governance issues, in terms of recognition of the sector, oversight of Victorian events and industry representation.

### Recognition of the events industry

One of the key concerns raised by stakeholders within the events industry is the lack of recognition by the Victorian Government of its status as a distinct sector, separate from tourism, arts and other industries. Save Victorian Events described this as the ‘single most important thing’ being sought by the event industry from this Inquiry.<sup>20</sup>

The Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR) and DH told the Committee that they understand and recognise the events industry. Andrew Abbott, Deputy Secretary, Creative, Sport and Visitor Economy at DJPR, argued that the department had a good relationship with the sector:

I would not accept the premise of the question, which is that there is a breakdown between the department and the events industry, because I do not believe there is. I think there is a very good and healthy relationship between the department and the events industry, and we meet very regularly and constructively.<sup>21</sup>

However, this does not reflect the views of many of the Inquiry’s stakeholders, who consider that there is still limited recognition and understanding despite consultation and advocacy over the past 18 months. This advocacy has focused on the importance of meaningful recognition of the industry’s status as an important contributor to the state’s economy and social vibrancy—and as an industry that has been devastated by the impacts of COVID-19 while receiving little support.

One contributor to this perceived lack of recognition relates to Victorian Government policy that classifies events as predominantly falling within the ‘visitor economy’, helping to drive visitation and bring associated economic benefits to the state. This has flow-on effects for the ways in which funding is allocated and how the Victorian Government, and industry representative bodies themselves, engage with the full events sector. A further contributing factor is the absence of a single peak or representative body through which advocacy and consultation is facilitated.

As outlined in Chapter 6, during the COVID-19 pandemic, DJPR and DH held a number of roundtables with events industry stakeholders regarding the impacts of public health measures and potential support.

<sup>20</sup> Simon Thewlis, Save Victorian Events,, correspondence, 24 June 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Abbott, Deputy Secretary, Creative, Sport and Visitor Economy, and Chief Executive, Creative Victoria, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 28 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

However, the Committee heard that these were ultimately unsuccessful in resolving the concerns raised by stakeholders in this Inquiry.

Bea Tomlin, Risk and Safety Consultant at Beaspoke Safety, noted that there had been promising aspects of early roundtable discussions, but that communication had broken down in this space:

We need to continue what we had with the roundtable discussions, to have these conversations. It was going well with the roundtable discussions, and so many parts of the industry were working together through these discussions, but we kept getting railroaded by the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions that we could not move forward, to the point that the communication just seems to have broken down. Take, for example, the event framework: it actually got changed last week. No-one told us. It is like we have to sit there every day just pressing refresh to see if any changes have been made. The communication is not coming out through the departments.<sup>22</sup>

The Committee notes that there are diverse views around the nature and composition of the events sector and its crossover with other industries. This includes within government, particularly in light of the predominant policy consideration of events as falling within the visitor economy. However, recognition of the broader, diverse values of events to the state is needed in order to restore the industry to its status as a global leader.

The Committee also acknowledges that DJPR has put a great deal of effort into meeting with what it believes to be the events sector. There are clear complexities around how to undertake meaningful consultation with the sector outside of the peak bodies, including in relation to effectively engaging a cross-section of smaller businesses and sole traders.

Yet, the need to improve consultation cannot be ignored. This would help to provide much-needed clarity around the scope of the sector, inform strategy on further recovery needs and establish critical consultation channels for the future. Further, it would provide assurance to the sector that their voices are being heard by the Victorian Government.

### **Oversight of Victorian events**

In conjunction with the clear recognition of the events sector as a distinct industry is the need for effective oversight within the Victorian Government. Simon Thewlis from Save Victorian Events argued that existing public sector knowledge of the industry—including ‘how it works and what it is about’—is lacking. He advocated for an area within government ‘where it is their job to know about our industry’.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Bea Tomlin, Risk and Safety Consultant, Beaspoke Safety, Public hearing, Melbourne, 19 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 39.

<sup>23</sup> Simon Thewlis, Save Victorian Events, Public hearing, Melbourne, 14 April 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 8.

Simon Phemister, Secretary of DJPR, described the internal governance arrangements as they relate to tourism and events:

My department has, like all large bureaucracies, a group ... that covers tourism events in [its] title, and within that there is an Associate Deputy Secretary who looks after both, but we actually do stream into an events team and a tourism team, and within the tourism team there are specialists on regional tourism and there is a specialist team on metro. The same goes for events. We have specialists on large-scale public events—so sporting events, the grand prix and the like—and we have a team that specialises in business events ... So I would argue that our structure actually does provide for specialists in tourism and events, and that is also how we structure our engagements.<sup>24</sup>

In addition, Nicole Brady, Deputy Secretary, COVID-19 Strategy and Policy at DH, told the Committee that in the public events space, the department had a dedicated team that included ‘quite a number of people who used to work in the events sector’ and who have ‘strong industry knowledge’.<sup>25</sup>

The Committee acknowledges the work undertaken by DJPR and DH in seeking to meaningfully engage with the events sector in the midst of complex policy and governance challenges stemming from the COVID-19 crisis. However, noting concerns about recognition of the industry, the nature of consultation in relation to the PEF, and limited targeted support for the industry, there is a clear need for government oversight of the sector to be improved.

A number of suggestions were made by Inquiry stakeholders for resolving these oversight issues. Save Victorian Events recommended the establishment of a standalone body under the name of Events Victoria. At a public hearing, Steve Smith, General Manager of DG Global Events, explained that this would ensure there are ‘people in government who understand events and our industry and who also want to work with us so we can get restrictions, guidelines and approval processes that are workable’.<sup>26</sup>

Save Victorian Event’s submission states that this new body could have functions including:

- industry development—further developing Victoria’s events industry and the people and businesses within it, including through growing existing events and encouraging new events to be created and to happen in Victoria
- advocacy—representing the events industry within government
- marketing and communication—promoting the state’s events and its events industry both nationally and internationally

<sup>24</sup> Simon Phemister, Secretary, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 28 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 28.

<sup>25</sup> Nicole Brady, Deputy Secretary, COVID-19 Strategy and Policy, Department of Health, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 28 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> Steve Smith, General Manager, DG Global Events, Public hearing, Via Zoom 2 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 31.

- industry research—undertaking data collection and research into the work of the industry, including in terms of economic value.<sup>27</sup>

The submission notes that the operating model for Events Victoria could take different forms, including as a government body (such as Sport and Recreation Victoria), a government-owned entity (such as Visit Victoria), or an industry body with government support (such as Music Victoria).<sup>28</sup> Creation of such a body would require revising the functions of Visit Victoria to reallocate oversight for major and business events to Events Victoria. However, there would be scope for the two to work together on developing events aimed at attracting visitation both to and within the state.

Another suggestion put forward by stakeholders for improving government oversight was to amend the Minister's name to ensure the scope of the relevant responsibilities reflected the broader events industry. For example, renaming the 'Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events' to the 'Minister for Tourism, Sport and Events'. Madison Fitzgerald, Director, Communication and Branding at events management company Destination, stated:

So we put our heads together and what we thought would be good would be to have an events division within Victoria that would come under the honourable minister. I know his title at the moment is 'sports, tourism and major events', so I would like to just have that as 'events'.<sup>29</sup>

Save Victorian Events argued that this new ministry could be paired with the Minister for Small Business and Minister for Innovation.<sup>30</sup>

Importantly, this establishment of a new standalone body would help to drive more broadly framed departmental priorities and ensure that all events are taken into consideration in policy and funding decisions—rather than just events that drive visitation. This would also recalibrate how events are dealt with more broadly by the various industry bodies, in terms of their priorities and advocacy.

A further suggestion is the establishment of an events taskforce or advisory group that could work directly with the Minister and relevant government bodies. This advisory body would feature diverse representation from different parts of the events sector and provide strategic advice on the long-term recovery of the industry. It could also assist the ongoing development of workable events guidance and provide feedback on policy matters in the events space.

While the previous Visitor Economy Ministerial Advisory Committee advised the Minister on implementation of the *Victorian Visitor Economy Strategy*, the representatives on this Committee were primarily tourism-based. The VERRP provides for the establishment of a Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Ministerial

<sup>27</sup> Save Victorian Events, *Submission 7B*, pp. 21–24.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>29</sup> Madison Fitzgerald, Director, Communication and Branding, Destination, Public hearing, Melbourne, 19 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

<sup>30</sup> Save Victorian Events, *Submission 7B*, p. 17.

Advisory Council to provide 'guidance on whole-of-government management and implementation' of the VERRP's initiatives.<sup>31</sup> However, as noted in Chapter 6, the VERRP pursues outcomes for events that focus on driving visitation, rather than broader recovery of the sector.

In light of there being limited long-term planning and strategy for the recovery of the events sector, this is a space in which an advisory taskforce could play a key role.

In its submission, Save Victorian Events described how a taskforce could operate:

It is recommended that an Event Recovery Taskforce be set up immediately with key people from DJPR, DH and the Event Industry to quickly work together to get the urgently needed financial and practical support in place.

This taskforce should report to a minister. Logically this could be the Minister for Small Business - as the vast majority of Event Industry businesses are small businesses and this Minister's responsibilities do already go across existing departments.

The taskforce would be supported by a dedicated Events Unit within DJPR to work with Event Industry.<sup>32</sup>

Madison Fitzgerald from Destination provided an example of how representation on an advisory body could be allocated to different elements of the events sector:

And within 'events' we actually have some industry practitioners that work within that industry, that understand that industry, that can advise the minister and at least have a say so that it is not filled again with already government-backed and funded agencies like the convention bureaus and tourism boards. So it needs to be ones with events. So I have thought about it being fair and having a really broad scope of advisers so that everyone is represented, because at the moment there is zero representation for events.

So just a little example is that, because there is a crossover, having maybe one allocation of tourism, because there is a lot of crossover and a lot of beneficial relationships between the two. So one from an experiential and staging agency, two from business events—because business events do bring 80 per cent of the money into the state. And one of those positions could be brought in with BECA. They actually are underneath the tourism board as a semi-government authority already. Not-for-profit and public could have a representation, and charities.<sup>33</sup>

Susan Ryman-Kiernan, Managing Director of Wise Connections, noted that a taskforce was needed to 'develop clear event guidelines and clarity of what the rules for business events are' as there is 'a muddle around what can be done and what cannot be done'. She further stated that a taskforce could 'develop a comprehensive communications strategy focused on delivering the message across the state and nationwide that Victoria is open for events'.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan*, p. 22.

<sup>32</sup> Save Victorian Events, *Submission 7B*, p. 25.

<sup>33</sup> Madison Fitzgerald, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> Susan Ryman-Kiernan, Managing Director, Wise Connections, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 2 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 16.

Both DJPR and DH told the Committee that they recognise and understand the events industry. At a public hearing, Simon Phemister said: ‘We very sincerely understand what event operators [and] supply chain operators ... are going through’.<sup>35</sup>

The Committee does not doubt the sincerity of either department. However, it is clear that stakeholders from the sector disagree. It believes that in order to resolve the disparity in views between Victorian Government bodies and sector stakeholders, there is need for changes to be made to the governance structure as it relates to events.

In particular, the Committee considers that the establishment of an events taskforce or other form of advisory body to the Minister, DJPR and DH would be beneficial in informing policy and guidance that relates to events. This role could include assisting the development of a plan for the long-term recovery of the events sector in Victoria and the reestablishment of its status as a global leader.

**FINDING 25:** Events sector stakeholders identified a need for changes to be made to the governance structure as it relates to events.

**RECOMMENDATION 19:** That the Victorian Government establish an events industry taskforce to review and revise its consultation processes with the events sector in Victoria, in order to:

- identify departmental structural changes to facilitate ongoing consultation and inform the long-term recovery of the sector, including revision of the *COVID-19 Public Events Framework*
- recognise its value independently of tourism and other sectors
- provide clarity around the scope of the sector and its crossover with other sectors
- ensure small- and medium-sized businesses have a greater voice.

**RATIONALE:** The Victorian Government has had many meetings with stakeholders in the events sector. However, many stakeholders in this Inquiry, in particular small- and medium-sized businesses, felt they have not had the opportunity to consult with the Victorian Government to the extent that they would like.

## Industry representation

As discussed in Chapter 5, the Committee received evidence on the complexities around government communication and consultation with businesses and individuals working in the events sector. There are currently a diverse range of representative bodies from different areas within the sector, such as business events, festivals and live performance.

<sup>35</sup> Simon Phemister, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 26.

However, some stakeholders stated that they did not feel represented by these bodies and that their voices were not being heard.<sup>36</sup> Other stakeholders argued that the industry has never had a single peak body that represents its many parts.<sup>37</sup>

This lack of a single peak body for the events sector is a key point. The Committee came to conclude that there are two main reasons that such a body has yet to form. Firstly, the sector hasn't had the need to establish one in the past as it has been a highly successful and profitable sector. Secondly, the type of people involved in the sector—described many times to the Committee as 'behind the scenes' people—are generally more independent and less likely to turn to collective action. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed that.

At a public hearing, Brendan McClements, Chief Executive Officer of Visit Victoria, highlighted the 'broad church' that makes up the events sector and how its complexity and overlap with other sectors makes consultation difficult:

One of the things that we are doing is my chair and I will convene—we are just trying to find the right date—a representative group from many of the organisations that we have talked about, so we will see VECCI, we will see VTIC, we will see individual event operators, Peter Jones Special Events and others. We want to understand if there is more we can do from the demand side ... It is a very broad church. We have live music, we have weddings, we have bar mitzvahs, we have parties and we have all sorts of things that in some way define themselves as events but are often members of other groups ... So one of the challenges is often to get a clear line of sight on exactly the representatives and what they are saying, so that is why we are trying to bring a number of different people to the party—to [Visit Victoria]—so we can hear directly from them.<sup>38</sup>

The Committee has been advised that at the time of writing, this meeting has not yet been held.

The Committee considers that the implementation of the recommendations in this Chapter regarding governance—on establishing effective consultation mechanisms and making changes to the government oversight structure—will greatly improve how the Victorian Government interacts with the events industry. It hopes that issues around different representative bodies will be worked through during consultation processes and in conjunction with the advisory taskforce, including the potential establishment of a peak industry body to represent the events sector in the future.

**FINDING 26:** A single peak industry body for Victoria's whole events sector would simplify consultation with the Victorian Government.

<sup>36</sup> Bea Tomlin, Safety and Risk Consultant, Beaspoke Safety, Public hearing, Melbourne, 19 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

<sup>37</sup> Simon Thewlis, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> Brendan McClements, Chief Executive Officer, Visit Victoria, Public hearing, Melbourne, 19 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 7.

## 7.4.2 Insurance

As discussed in Chapter 5, a major ongoing issue for the events sector is the inability to obtain insurance to cover the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This could include circumstances where, for example, an event is cancelled or postponed due to a government-imposed lockdown. As a result, the risk for event organisers is high due to the financial costs of a late cancellation or postponing of an event. For many smaller organisations, or for organisations under significant financial pressures, the cancellation of a single event could be devastating.

The Committee received evidence from stakeholders around the best ways of reducing this risk to event organisers. The main options proposed were:

- Establishment of an advance deposit scheme
- Provision of event cancellation insurance, with coverage for communicable disease, as a government-backed insurance product through the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority (VMIA)
- Introduction of a government-backed underwriting or reinsurance scheme in conjunction with private insurance providers.

These options are discussed in the following sections.

### Advance deposit scheme

An advance deposit scheme would involve the Victorian Government providing funds to event organisers in advance, to pay for deposits and other expenses prior to an event taking place. These funds would be repaid following the event, or in the case of a cancellation for reasons related to COVID-19, retained to cover costs. Importantly, the scheme would assist cash flow, provide support for the businesses along the event supply chain, and provide assurance around the costs of a potential cancellation or postponement.

The Exhibition & Event Association of Australasia provided an example of how this type of scheme could operate:

Both the organiser of an event and the suppliers to an event need to register with the Scheme, and answer questions surrounding financial viability and sustainability. Each event must take place in Victoria, and then assessed on their economic impact to the state overall, and benefits to CBD and/or regional areas.

Dependant on the scale of the event as determined by economic impact (such as hotel nights, economic benefit, regional support, priority industry sector etc.), gross revenue, number of delegates or number of visitors etc., tiered support could be available, for example:

- Small economic benefit up to \$150,000
- Medium economic benefit up to \$250,000
- Large economic benefit up to \$350,000

These monies would be paid out to the registered supplier, including venues, 60 days prior to the event as the deposit, and not to exceed 30% of the total estimated invoice. Previous event costings may be needed to verify the estimates. Minimum spend with any supplier to be at least \$10,000, to make it less onerous on government. The organiser is not having to fund these costs upfront, thereby reducing their financial risk, and providing certainty.<sup>39</sup>

This proposal was supported by a number of Inquiry stakeholders, including the Victoria Tourism Industry Council (VTIC), Tourism Greater Geelong and The Bellarine, Meetings & Events Australia and Professional Conference Organisers Association (PCOA).<sup>40</sup> VTIC argued that as vaccination rates increase and levels of risk decrease, an advance deposit scheme would be a ‘cost-effective complement to other measures (such as incentive grants) designed to rebuild and recover Victoria’s once-thriving events industry’.<sup>41</sup>

Consumer confidence is emerging as a key barrier to recovery in the events industry. With so much uncertainty, customers are reluctant to take the critical step of putting down a deposit for their event. A government guarantee to cover deposits in case of cancellations caused by COVID-19 would provide the reassurance needed to start cash flowing through the events sector again. As vaccination rates rise and risk diminishes, this approach is a cost-effective complement to other measures (such as incentive grants) designed to rebuild and recover Victoria’s once-thriving events industry.<sup>42</sup>

This approach would require the Victorian Government to provide substantial funding upfront, with the likelihood that this would be recovered as events take place and risks related to lockdowns decrease.

### Public insurance scheme

A number of submitters suggested that a public insurance scheme should be provided for businesses in the events sector through the VMIA to redress the lack of access to, and affordability of, insurance coverage.<sup>43</sup>

Public insurance schemes that operate similarly to this option exist in other sectors. While the primary role of the VMIA is to provide risk management and insurance to government departments and authorities, it can also provide insurance and indemnities to other persons or bodies when directed to do so by the Minister.<sup>44</sup> Since 2010, under the direction of the Victorian Government, the VMIA has assumed responsibility for domestic building insurance—compulsory coverage for builders undertaking building

<sup>39</sup> Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia, *Submission 64*, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> Victoria Tourism Industry Council, *Submission 99*, p. 8; Tourism Greater Geelong and The Bellarine, *Submission 84*, p. 7; Meeting Events Australia, *Submission 54*, p. 4; Professional Conference Organisers Association, *Submission 58*, p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> Victoria Tourism Industry Council, *Submission 99A*, p. 15.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, South Gippsland Shire Council, *Submission 44*, p. 3; Tourism Greater Geelong and The Bellarine, *Submission 84*, p. 7; Destination Gippsland, *Submission 91*, p. 3; Bass Coast Shire Council, *Submission 132*, p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> *Victorian Managed Insurance Authority Act 1996* (Vic) s 25A.

work in excess of \$16,000.<sup>45</sup> This took place in the context of an insurance market where private insurers considered domestic building insurance unprofitable, and ultimately left the market altogether.<sup>46</sup>

### Government-backed underwriting or reinsurance scheme

Another option proposed was the creation of a government-backed underwriting or reinsurance scheme, through which the Victorian Government guarantees the COVID-19 risk component of existing insurance policies provided through private insurance schemes. This was the most popular of the options proposed.

Underwriting is the process by which insurance companies assess risk in relation to applications for insurance. It reflects the nature of insurance as a ‘risk transfer, loss-spreading arrangement’ through which an individual or organisation transfers to the insurer the burden of a particular financial loss that may occur in the future.<sup>47</sup> Insurers may also transfer a part of their risk portfolio to another party (such as another insurer, or in this discussion, to the government) in order to reduce their overall liability. As noted in Chapter 5, insurance providers stopped providing communicable disease coverage towards the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recommendations relating to government underwriting or reinsurance therefore seek to share aspects of this risk between the insurance industry and government in order to ensure insurance coverage is available for events in the current global context.

There are various ways in which such schemes could operate. One model proposed by stakeholders would involve the Victorian Government underwriting COVID-related risks for events, with event organisers paying a premium to receive coverage. A recent example of this type of scheme is the Temporary Interruption Fund (TIF), which was introduced by the Commonwealth Government to assist Australian screen productions impacted by COVID-19 restrictions. The TIF, which is administered by Screen Australia, allows Australian productions<sup>48</sup> with Film Producers Indemnity insurance from an approved insurer to obtain additional coverage for COVID-19 related losses. Total liability for each production is capped at either 60% of the total budget, or \$4 million, whichever is less. Production companies are required to pay a premium equal to 2% of the coverage provided for the production (or 1% prior to July 2021). The program has limited funding of \$50 million.<sup>49</sup>

A second proposed model would allow insurers to reinsure claims for certain COVID-19 losses with the government. Stakeholders provided examples of previous circumstances where government-backed reinsurance schemes have been established as a result of insurance coverage becoming scarce in the aftermath of a major event.

<sup>45</sup> Victorian Managed Insurance Authority, *Annual Report 2019–20*, Melbourne, 2020, p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> Choice, *Domestic building insurance*, 2016, <<https://www.choice.com.au/money/insurance/home-and-contents/articles/domestic-building-insurance>> accessed 30 June 2021.

<sup>47</sup> Greg Pynt, *Australian Insurance Law: A First Reference*, 4, LexisNexis Butterworths, 2018, pp. 4–5.

<sup>48</sup> This includes feature films, drama series, documentary series, single episode programs, entertainment or reality series.

<sup>49</sup> Screen Australia, *Temporary Interruption Fund (TIF)*, 2021, <<https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/funding-and-support/covid-19-support/temporary-interruption-fund>> accessed 3 June 2021.

The primary example is the terrorism reinsurance scheme, administered by the Australian Reinsurance Pool Corporation (ARPC).<sup>50</sup> This scheme was established by the Commonwealth Government following the 11 September 2001 terrorist events in the USA and the subsequent global withdrawal of insurance coverage for commercial property for terrorist events.<sup>51</sup> The ARPC’s website explains:

The Government was concerned that the lack of comprehensive insurance cover for commercial property or infrastructure would lead to a reduction in financing and investment in the Australian property sector.<sup>52</sup>

The terrorism reinsurance scheme operates by allowing insurers to enter into a treaty agreement with the ARPC and pay premiums in order to reinsure the risk of claims for eligible terrorism losses in the event of a declared terrorist incident.<sup>53</sup> The Commonwealth Government has provided a \$10 billion solvency guarantee for the ARPC.<sup>54</sup>

These types of schemes can be temporary measures until such a time as market conditions have changed to allow insurers to again assume responsibility for underwriting. Recent media reports on the UK’s Trade Credit Reinsurance (TCR) scheme—which provided coverage for business transactions within the UK and internationally during the COVID-19 pandemic—note that it will close on 30 June as planned, as participating insurers have indicated that it is no longer needed and they are able to resume underwriting in this area.<sup>55</sup>

### Other jurisdictions

The Committee is aware of programs in other jurisdictions that provide government-backed guarantees for disruption of events due to COVID-19. This includes funds in Tasmania and Western Australia as well as across Europe. Examples of these programs are outlined in Table 2 below, including their eligibility, scope and administration. However, in undertaking any comparison of support offered, the contextual differences of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in other jurisdictions should be taken into consideration. For example, Australia has been relatively open for events compared to many European nations,<sup>56</sup> while within Australia, the pandemic’s impact on events in Victoria has been more significant than in other states and territories.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Jason Holmes, Managing Director, Head of Region – Asia Pacific, H2 Insurance Solutions, Public hearing, Via Zoom, 2 June 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 37–38.

<sup>51</sup> The Australian Reinsurance Pool Corporation is established under the *Terrorism Insurance Act 2003* (Cth).

<sup>52</sup> Australian Reinsurance Pool Corporation., *About ARPC*, 2021, <<https://arpc.gov.au/about-arpc>> accessed 3 June 2021.

<sup>53</sup> Australian Reinsurance Pool Corporation, *The Scheme*, 2021, <<https://arpc.gov.au/what-we-do/the-scheme>> accessed 3 June 2021.

<sup>54</sup> Australian Reinsurance Pool Corporation, *ARPC Annual Report 2019 – 2020*, Commonwealth of Australia 2020, p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> Clare Ruel, ‘Temporary trade credit reinsurance scheme to close’, *Insurance Times*, 27 May 2021, <<https://www.insurancetimes.co.uk/news/temporary-trade-credit-reinsurance-scheme-to-close/1437635.article>> accessed 3 June 2021.

<sup>56</sup> Jason Holmes, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 40.

Table 7.2 Government-backed guarantee programs in other jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	Scheme	Eligibility	Scope	Administration
Tasmania	Live Performance Support Program	Arts organisations and businesses (including sole traders and partnerships), festival organisers, cultural producers and performing arts venues based in Tasmania, presenting performances or events that feature Tasmanian artists	Eligible individuals or bodies can apply for a guarantee ranging from \$10,000 to \$100,000 if performances are subject to cancellation or significant change due to public health restrictions related to COVID-19	<p>The program has limited funding of \$2 million. Applications are assessed and accepted until the full funding pool has been pre-approved. If events proceed as planned, allocated funds that are not required will be returned to the funding pool to support future applications.</p> <p>As this is a competitive program, applications are assessed by a 'multi-artform peer panel' against criteria related to benefit, financial responsibility and planning.</p>
Western Australia	Getting the Show back on the Road program	Western Australian performing arts organisations, live music event producers and presenters, festivals organisers (for a program of activities or a component of the program) and commercial event companies	A 'shared risk' underwriting program that funds a percentage (between 50–75%, up to an agreed maximum amount of \$150,000) of the box office income loss where there has been a negative impact due to COVID-19 for the presentation of performing arts and live music events	<p>The program has limited funding of up to \$9 million. As this is a competitive program, applications are assessed by a panel against criteria of financial responsibility, good planning, quality and reach.</p> <p>Applications must be submitted at least 25 business days prior to the event for assessment and approval. If an approved event experiences a loss, applicants can submit a claim for payment which will be provided within 20 to 25 business days.</p>
Germany	Coronavirus Cultural Fund (Kulturfonds)	Cultural events	<p>A €2.5 billion (approx. AU\$3.9 billion) fund with two components:</p> <p><b>Profitability aid</b></p> <p>This fund will supplement ticket sales for smaller cultural events where restrictions are reintroduced to cap audience numbers. Where restrictions limit the number of participants by at least 20%, organisers can receive a subsidy of the ticket cost for every ticket sold (up to a maximum of €100,000)</p> <p><b>Failure protection fund</b></p> <p>The fund will underwrite the cost of events (up to 80% of costs, or up to a maximum of €8 million per event) for cancellation, partial cancellation, postponement or reduction in participant numbers</p>	<p>The profitability aid fund will open in July for smaller events (up to 500 attendees) and August for medium-sized events (up to 2,000 attendees). Events can be registered before they take place and applications submitted following the event.</p> <p>The failure protection fund will open on 1 September 2021 for larger events (over 2,000 attendees), with a fund for smaller events also available (up to 50% of proven costs).</p>

Jurisdiction	Scheme	Eligibility	Scope	Administration
Austria	Aid scheme for event organisers	Event organisers	A €300 million (approx. AU\$470 million) fund to cover costs if an event is cancelled due to new rules or a reduction in capacity limits. The maximum amount available per event is €800,000.	The scheme applies to events taking place between 1 February 2021 and 31 December 2022. Applications must be made prior to the event taking place, with a business and financial plan. In the event of restrictions being imposed, costs will be paid following the event date.
Switzerland	Event cancellation fund	Event organisers	The scheme provides a guarantee for events costs where an event is cancelled, postponed or significantly affected as a result of public health orders. Financial liability is shared between the federal government and the relevant canton.	The fund will be administered by the Swiss cantons, and each canton can choose whether to participate in the fund as well as relevant timeframes. Federal guidance provides a general timeframe of between 1 June 2021 and 30 April 2022.
The Netherlands	Subsidy scheme for events	Event organisers (including events such as festivals, concerts, sporting events and business events)	Eligible events organisers can apply for a reimbursement of up to 100% of total costs (80% as a gift, and an optional additional 20% as a loan) if the event is subject to cancellation or significant change due to public health restrictions related to COVID-19.	The fund has a value of approximately €385 million (approximately AU\$608 million). Events organisers must register with the Netherlands Enterprise Agency. If approved, organisers are eligible for reimbursement of event costs for any events that cannot take place due to public health restrictions. However, events must have taken place previously, and been covered by event cancellation insurance.
Denmark	Aid scheme for events	Private and some public legal entities that organise events in Denmark	A DKK 400 million (approx. AU\$85 million) scheme for provision of compensation for organisers of events scheduled to take place in Denmark with 350 or more attendees that are cancelled, postponed or substantially modified as a consequence of public health restrictions.	Authorities conduct a risk-based assessment of applications. Beneficiaries must provide a 'solemn declaration', event information and financial accounts, legally binding contracts, proof of reimbursement of tickets, and declaration by an independent, authorised auditor for applications of compensation over DKK 0.5 million.

Source: Arts Tasmania, *Live Performance Support Program*, 2021, <[https://www.arts.tas.gov.au/grants\\_and\\_loans/live\\_performance\\_support\\_program](https://www.arts.tas.gov.au/grants_and_loans/live_performance_support_program)> accessed 1 June 2021; WA Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, *Getting the Show Back on the Road - Stream A: Program Guidelines*, 2021, <<https://www.dlgsc.wa.gov.au/funding/arts-funding/getting-the-show-back-on-the-road/getting-the-show-back-on-the-road-program-guidelines>> accessed 4 June 2021; Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung (Press and Information Office of the Federal Government (BPA)), *Bund unterstützt Kulturveranstaltungen mit Sonderfonds (The federal government supports cultural events with special funds)*, 26 May 2021, <<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/bundesregierung/staatsministerin-fuer-kultur-und-medien/aktuelles/bund-unterstuetzt-kulturveranstaltungen-mit-sonderfonds-1917918>> accessed 4 June 2021; European Commission, *State aid: Commission approves €300 million Austrian scheme to support organisers of events affected by coronavirus outbreak*, 2021, <[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_21\\_151](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_151)> accessed 4 June 2021; Swiss Eidgenossenschaft (The Federal Council), *Coronavirus: Fourth round of lifting restrictions from Monday goes further than originally planned*, 2021, <<https://www.admin.ch/gov/en/start/documentation/media-releases-media-releases-federal-council.msg-id-83697.html>> accessed 4 June 2021; Netherlands Enterprise Agency, RVO, *Subsidy scheme for events cancelled due to corona measures*, <<https://business.gov.nl/subsidy/events-cancelled-corona-measures>> accessed 4 June 2021; European Commission, *State Aid SA.59667 (2020/N) - Denmark: Amendment to the aid scheme SA.57209 (2020/N) - Compensation scheme for cancellation of events related to COVID-19*, Brussels, 30 November 2020.

Both Tasmania and Western Australia announced their shared risk programs in late 2020,<sup>57</sup> with the Western Australia program opening in November 2020. The Tasmanian scheme focuses on live entertainment and the arts, whereas the Western Australian program is more targeted towards the event industry in that it explicitly includes commercial event companies in its eligibility criteria. The Western Australian Government has also recently announced the expansion of its fund to include regional tourism events and agricultural shows.<sup>58</sup> In terms of the competitive nature of the funding for each scheme, the Tasmanian and Western Australian programs both have assessment criteria that include an emphasis on safe planning with approved COVID-19 event plans, as well as sound financial planning and management.

The Western Australian Minister for Tourism, Culture and the Arts stated in June 2021 that the scheme had been ‘very successful’ and had supported nearly 50 events to take place through provision of approximately \$4 million in risk-share support.<sup>59</sup>

The German Coronavirus Cultural Fund (Kulturfonds), announced in May 2021, represents the largest government commitment to a shared risk program with the events sector in relation to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The German Minister for Finance, Olaf Scholz, has described the initiative as ‘the biggest cultural subsidy programme’ since the second world war.<sup>60</sup> Media reports note that the country is experiencing a declining rate of infection alongside improving vaccination rates, with public health restrictions gradually being lifted.<sup>61</sup>

The Dutch Government has recently announced the introduction of a slightly different form of shared risk scheme. This initiative, which is expected to begin in July 2021, will guarantee event organisers up to the total of incurred costs—80% as a gift and 20% as an optional loan. The scheme has been reported to apply to events taking place between July and December 2021, and only eligible to events that have previously been covered by event cancellation insurance.<sup>62</sup>

In the UK, a House of Commons committee report in May 2021 called on the UK Government to introduce a ‘time-limited insurance scheme for costs incurred by live events scheduled to take place after 21 June’ which have to cancel due to COVID-19.<sup>63</sup>

57 Hon David Templeman, Minister for Tourism, Culture and the Arts, Heritage and Hon Ben Wyatt, Minister for Finance, Aboriginal Affairs, Lands, *Massive \$76 million recovery package to support culture and arts in WA*, media release, Government of Western Australia, 6 August 2020.

58 Parliament of Western Australia, *Question Without Notice No. 263 asked in the Legislative Assembly on 22 June 2021 by Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski*, 22 June 2021, <<https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/pquest.nsf/viewLAPQuestByDate/D690BA911BB1B871482586FF001BCFOC>> accessed 1 July 2021.

59 Ibid.

60 Kate Connolly, ‘Germany insures culture sector against Covid cancellations with €2.5bn fund’, *The Guardian*, 28 May 2021, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/28/germany-agrees-25bn-package-to-help-revive-covid-hit-culture-sector>> accessed 4 June 2021.

61 ‘Coronavirus: Germany launches €2.5 billion fund to boost cultural sector’, *Deutsche Welle (DW)*, 26 May 2021, <<https://p.dw.com/p/3u09p>> accessed 4 June 2021.

62 RVO Netherlands Enterprise Agency, *Subsidy scheme for events cancelled due to corona measures*, <<https://business.gov.nl/subsidy/events-cancelled-corona-measures>> accessed 4 June 2021.

63 Culture House of Commons Digital, Media and Sport Committee, *The future of UK music festivals: First Report of Session 2021–22*, House of Commons, 2021, p. 32.

The UK Government had announced earlier in 2021 that it would not consider implementing such a scheme until all restrictions on its recovery roadmap were lifted.<sup>64</sup> In the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee's report, it stated:

Government-backed insurance is crucial to mitigating the Covid-19 related risks to festival organisers and enabling them to start planning, as the vast majority do not have the financial resilience to cover the costs of another year of late-notice cancellations. Despite the events and insurance industries proposing a range of solutions for how such a scheme might work, the Government have refused to take multiple opportunities to address the market failure in the provision of insurance for live events this summer and set the conditions to unlock the significant economic and cultural contribution made by festivals and their supply chains. Although there remains considerable uncertainty around the risks of new Covid-19 variants, the Government's plan to wait until all restrictions are lifted will simply be too late...<sup>65</sup>

Media articles from late June 2021 reported that the UK Government was poised to announce the establishment of an insurance scheme for live events.<sup>66</sup>

### Options for Victoria

There was widespread support from submitters for some form of government-backed insurance scheme for event cancellation insurance and/or business interruption insurance. Julia Robinson, General Manager of the Australian Festival Association, described the current inability to access event cancellation insurance as 'the largest barrier to business-as-usual operation' and, while acknowledging its complexity, argued that it is 'the single issue that, if solved, would have the greatest impact'.<sup>67</sup>

A total of 26 submissions supported introduction of an underwriting scheme with an additional 109 individuals and organisations expressing support via email for the recommendations made by Save Victorian Events in its submission. Many stakeholders acknowledged the need for the sector to contribute to the initiative, with Susan Ryman-Kiernan from Wise Connections advocating for cancellation insurance which is 'self-funded and sustainable'.<sup>68</sup>

John Jacoby, owner of adventure event management company, Rapid Ascent, explained that introducing this type of scheme would provide much-needed assurance to the events sector as well as to the public:

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<sup>64</sup> UK Parliament, 'Report blames government inaction over insurance as festivals face another lost summer', <<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/378/digital-culture-media-and-sport-committee/news/155563/report-blames-government-inaction-over-insurance-as-festivals-face-another-lost-summer>> accessed 1 July 2021.

<sup>65</sup> House of Commons Digital, *The future of UK music festivals*, p. 10.

<sup>66</sup> Carolyn Cohn and Barbara Lewis, 'UK government set for leading role in insuring live entertainment', *Reuters*, 30 June 2021, <<https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-government-set-leading-role-insuring-live-entertainment-2021-06-29>> accessed 1 July 2021.

<sup>67</sup> Julia Robinson, General Manager, Australian Festival Association, Public hearing, Melbourne, 19 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 46.

<sup>68</sup> Susan Ryman-Kiernan, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 16.

not only would it give the events sector confidence, I think it would give the consumer a lot of confidence and maybe even further grow that pent-up demand. People would say, 'Well, if I know these events are underwritten by such a policy, if there is a lockdown, I know I can get my money back'.<sup>69</sup>

Jason Holmes, Managing Director, Head of Region – Asia Pacific at H2 Insurance Solutions, told the Committee that in terms of his clients, both small and large, 'already if they could buy this coverage, they would be willing to buy it to know with certainty that they can push on and get events done'.<sup>70</sup>

Live Performance Australia (LPA) provided a potential model for a Live Entertainment Business Interruption Fund to respond to the difficulties related to accessing business interruption insurance, as discussed in Chapter 5. The scheme would indemnify the costs incurred by businesses if a live event were cancelled, postponed or negatively impacted by COVID-19 restrictions imposed by government. Participants would pay a premium to receive coverage to ensure the costs are shared.<sup>71</sup> LPA advised that this type of scheme could be operated and funded in conjunction with the Commonwealth Government and industry, or as a standalone national or state program.

At a public hearing, Evelyn Richardson, Chief Executive of LPA told the Committee that the organisation had discussed this proposal with the Commonwealth Government, including the potential for it to be implemented as a federal-state partnership.<sup>72</sup>

This proposal has been endorsed by a number of other submitters.<sup>73</sup> The key elements of the proposed fund are set out in the table below.

<sup>69</sup> John Jacoby, Owner, Rapid Ascent, Public hearing, Anglesea, 12 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

<sup>70</sup> Jason Holmes, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 41.

<sup>71</sup> Live Performance Australia, *Submission 127*, pp. 6–8.

<sup>72</sup> Evelyn Richardson, Chief Executive, Live Performance Australia, Public hearing, Melbourne, 19 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 28.

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, Live Music Office, *Submission 128*, p. 2; Australian Festival Association, *Submission 134*, p. 1; Theatre Network Australia, *Submission 124*, p. 1.

**Table 7.3 Proposed Live Entertainment Business Interruption Fund**

Eligibility	Scope	Function	Administration	Duration	Cost
Presenters or producers of professional productions; commercial producers; promoters; venues	Coverage for live events presented in Australia and cancelled, postponed or forced to operate under stricter restrictions due to COVID-19 (for example, imposition of public health measures). Coverage solely for costs/losses arising from COVID-19, including sunk costs and additional costs incurred directly from COVID-related circumstances. Cap placed on the level of cover, with ideal coverage ranging between \$25,000 and \$10 million	Payment of 1% of total event costs to the fund to receive coverage	Administered by a private third-party insurer, drawing on industry contributions	Established for an initial period of three years and extended if necessary following review	Estimated cost of between \$100 and \$500 million to government, depending on future events

Source: Live Performance Australia, *Submission 127A*, pp. 6–8.

One challenge presented was that such a scheme is more appropriately operated at a national level. This is because many businesses operate across states and territories, and a state-based scheme in one jurisdiction may attract businesses to shift their operations from another jurisdiction. However, as provided in the Tasmanian initiative, a scheme could be limited to events that take place within the state and have a competitive funding process. At a public hearing, Jason Holmes from H2 Insurance Solutions noted that while a national scheme would have the advantage of covering events and businesses that work across state and territory borders, a state-based scheme would still be possible and desirable compared to not having a scheme at all.<sup>74</sup>

A further issue raised related to what would be covered within a government-backed scheme. Mr Holmes highlighted how a scheme would need to consider whether profits as well as costs would be covered, or, whether it would only apply to costs actually incurred:

Now, there could be a question about whether people are allowed to insure their profits as well as their costs. For example, in a million-dollar event—just making it up, let us say it is \$750 000 in costs and \$250 000 in profits—maybe they are only allowed to insure their costs.<sup>75</sup>

Another challenge presented is that the current environment may be too high of a risk for the government to intervene in. That is, instead of the departure of insurance providers in this area being a market failure, it is instead a ‘market signal’. However,

<sup>74</sup> Jason Holmes, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 38.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

noting the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines in Australia and the positive effects that high vaccination rates are having internationally on the ability of countries to reopen, the risks for events in Australia are slowly decreasing.

A further issue is that the introduction of a reinsurance scheme or an uncapped underwriting scheme has the potential to have extremely high costs to government. According to modelling by LPA, approximate costs for its Live Entertainment Business Interruption Fund could range between \$100 and \$500 million, depending on the future return of live activity.<sup>76</sup>

Due to the uncertainty around future outbreaks of COVID-19, and the slow vaccine rollout to date, it is extremely difficult to estimate at which end of the spectrum the cost to government would fall. In the context of the need for the Victorian Government to support a broad range of initiatives aimed at stimulating the state's economy, and a large number of impacted persons and sectors, these potential costs are unlikely to be feasible. The Committee notes that the real costs could exceed those modelled in this scenario.

The Committee acknowledges the high risk that exists for the events sector in being unable to access insurance coverage for events. This has clear implications for whether and how events are organised and delivered in Victoria, particularly in conjunction with the uncertainty related to potential further lockdowns or the reintroduction of public health measures discussed above. For many, without this kind of assurance, the risks are too high. The Committee therefore considers that in order to ensure the future viability of the events sector in Victoria, action is needed to provide a level of certainty to event organisers.

The Committee heard that a capped 'shared risk' funding initiative would provide certainty to the Victorian Government regarding potential costs, in the context of the many competing budget demands in responding to COVID-19. This would necessitate a competitive assessment process for event organisers and venues to apply for a guarantee of coverage, with assessment criteria including, for example: sound financial planning and management; existence of an approved COVIDSafe event plan; and public benefit. Successful applicants could pay a small fee to contribute towards the administrative costs of the program.

As vaccination rates increase and the risk of lockdowns, border closures and other restrictions decreases in conjunction with the National Plan, the need for this type of fund will decrease. The availability of insurance options may also improve as this risk decreases.

Further, the Committee notes the approach in the Netherlands scheme that limits access to coverage to organisers, venues and events that have previously taken out event cancellation insurance. This ensures coverage for those that would generally have otherwise purchased event cancellation insurance in the pre-pandemic environment.

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<sup>76</sup> Live Performance Australia, *Submission 127A*, p. 8.

The Committee particularly noted the approach taken in Western Australia, including:

- the competitive nature criteria of the scheme requiring safe planning with approved COVID-19 event plans and strong financial planning and management
- setting a maximum amount payable for individual events
- that the scheme covers events of all sizes.

The total value of Western Australia's shared risk underwriting scheme was \$9 million. Considering the relative size of Victoria's events sector compared to Western Australia, the Committee has estimated that providing similar assistance in Victoria would require a capped aggregate value of approximately \$65 million.

**RECOMMENDATION 20:** That the Victorian Government, as a matter of urgency, consider the issue of the events sector's inability to insure against the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This should be done in consultation with the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority working in cooperation with the Insurance Council of Australia and representatives from the events sector. This should also consider the merits of establishing a shared risk underwriting scheme.

**RATIONALE:** The inability to insure against the impacts of COVID-19, particularly the risks associated with government-imposed health measures, is a major impediment to the recovery of Victoria's events sector. The Victorian Government can provide support to the sector by resolving this issue. The Committee adds that the Victorian Government should address this issue before the six-month deadline it has to respond to this report.

### 7.4.3 Events vouchers

A further proposal to improve public and consumer confidence and support the reopening of events in Victoria is the introduction of an events voucher scheme. This could also serve as an incentive to attract events back to the state and ensure that attendance is viable.

Theatre Network Australia and LPA recommended the introduction of 'See it Live' e-vouchers to encourage Victorians to attend live events.<sup>77</sup> LPA described the benefits of consumer stimulus in this space:

Voucher schemes are proving to be a successful means to build consumer confidence and stimulate spending ... The reactivation of live events and positive consumer sentiment are crucial to Australia's economic recovery from COVID-19. Victorians could register for a voucher that would enable them to claim back money spent on live events and live entertainment experiences. A 'See it Live' voucher, like the Dine & Discover NSW vouchers, would increase consumer confidence to attend live events.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Theatre Network Australia, *Submission 124*, p. 2; Live Performance Australia, *Submission 127*, p. 3.

<sup>78</sup> Live Performance Australia, *Submission 127*, p. 13.

At a public hearing, Evelyn Richardson from LPA noted that there were different ways this type of scheme could be set up for events. For example, through a registration process for event organisers or production companies, with consumers accessing a voucher or similar discount mechanism, that ‘encourages them to see theatre shows and to engage with live entertainment events that might be being put on here but also across the state’.<sup>79</sup> She observed that such a scheme would be particularly important over the next 12 months, in light of the continued closure of international borders.<sup>80</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 4, the Regional and Melbourne Travel Voucher Schemes were well-received by the tourism sector and have encouraged visitor spending of over \$113 million.<sup>81</sup> In describing the success of the voucher schemes, John Jacoby from Rapid Ascent stated that: ‘the incentives provided to the consumer, I think, seem to work better for us. The 50 per cent off flights thing, the travel vouchers—I think that really helps build confidence in the community’.<sup>82</sup> Voucher schemes aimed at driving intrastate visitation have also been introduced in other Australian jurisdictions, including Tasmania, NSW and the ACT.

Similar initiatives have also been used in the business events space, with funding instead being provided to the event organiser for a certain amount per delegate. For example, Tourism Greater Geelong and the Bellarine have implemented a ‘You Belong in Geelong’ Initiative, which provides support to the value of \$50 per delegate for smaller business events of up to 100 people that take place in Geelong and the Bellarine. Events can use the funding for venue hire, accommodation, engagement of professional organisers, welcome receptions and dinners, and other activities that stimulate local businesses.<sup>83</sup> At a public hearing, Brendan Sanders, Business Manager of Tourism Greater Geelong and The Bellarine, described the success of the scheme:

Speaking of business events for Geelong and the Bellarine as well, to reflect on our You Belong in Geelong campaign, that is the voucher system for attracting business event activity to our region where we give \$50 per delegate. Secured business to date—we have had to up the quota for that. We have surpassed the budget allowed for that. We have secured \$600 000 in events activity and got \$400 000 in pending business at the moment. Basically the program runs out at the end of June, so we have got a while yet to go for that one as well. That is off a base of \$50 000 worth of investment to attract business. The only way that money can be accessed is for in-person events that are using venues within the region and experiencing the dining and restaurants as well. That in itself—those figures—represent that, particularly for the business events sector, there is strong demand particularly now for regional in-person activity.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Evelyn Richardson, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>81</sup> Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, *Submission 144*, p. 14.

<sup>82</sup> John Jacoby, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 48.

<sup>83</sup> Business Events Geelong, *You Belong in Geelong*, 2021, <<https://www.businesseventsgeelong.com.au/resources/you-belong-in-geelong>> accessed 23 June 2021.

<sup>84</sup> Brendan Sanders, Business Manager, Tourism Greater Geelong and the Bellarine, Public hearing, Anglesea, 12 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

In their submissions to the Inquiry, Action Events and the Australian Amusement Association similarly proposed a form of events voucher. The Australian Amusement Association stated that event organisers ‘could use these vouchers as deposits to assist the struggling operators’.<sup>85</sup>

The Committee notes that voucher schemes in other areas and jurisdictions have been successful in restoring public confidence, stimulating spending and helping businesses to recover. It considers that there is scope to extend state-based voucher schemes beyond tourism-centred activities to events to provide further support for this sector.

**RECOMMENDATION 21:** That the Victorian Government consider implementing a voucher scheme for events that are organised and take place within the state as a consumer incentive measure. This should be aimed at improving public confidence and promoting support for the events sector’s recovery.

**RATIONALE:** Events vouchers can be as effective as tourism vouchers in rebuilding public confidence in, and providing stimulus to, the sector.

#### 7.4.4 Workforce challenges

As discussed in Chapter 5, the events sector is facing significant workforce challenges, particularly in relation to skilled professionals who have been forced to leave the industry to seek employment or business elsewhere. NW Group stated in its submission that: ‘we are already seeing skills shortages emerge due to technicians and crew moving away from the industry’.<sup>86</sup> This will affect the sector’s future recovery as well as its status as a leader in the field.

For these reasons, it is important to ensure that mechanisms are in place to rebuild the industry and address emerging skills shortages. While creating an environment in which events can restart will encourage some workers to return, the Committee heard that this will not go far enough.

The Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia stated in its submission that strategies were needed for dealing with skilled and casual labour shortages, such as: ‘Free-of-charge short training skills to enable people to cross skill and up skill’.<sup>87</sup> Some stakeholders advocated for the introduction of initiatives aimed at encouraging new growth, such as through targeted apprenticeship programs. Matt Jones, Managing Director of NW Group, advocated for this type of initiative to be introduced for a fixed period to assist recovery:

<sup>85</sup> Australian Amusement Association, *Submission 121*, p. 3.

<sup>86</sup> NW Group Australasia, *Submission 93*, p. 2.

<sup>87</sup> Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia, *Submission 64*, p. 4.

Targeted industry apprenticeship schemes whereby the cost of new employees is subsidised for the first 12 months to assist with the rebuild of the industry. As I mentioned, we have lost a lot of the talent that existed. Some may come back. Fortunately the vast majority, as we know through our employment statistics, have been able to find re-employment elsewhere, but that is not going to help us when we try to get our events sector back up and running at full pace.<sup>88</sup>

Action Events provided that incentives and grants would allow businesses ‘to train up more staff’.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, the Australian Festival Association recommended funding be provided to attract new skillsets for festivals:

Funding to upskill and train workers to retain, and attract new, festival workers to ensure that once the industry reopens in a full way, there are skilled workers to take positions.<sup>90</sup>

The Victorian Government’s Free TAFE for priority courses program, which began in January 2019, offers free courses that ‘lead to jobs in demand from Victorian employers’.<sup>91</sup> There are also free apprenticeship pathway courses available, which provide opportunities for students to experience training as they would during an apprenticeship. These can provide a pathway into an apprenticeship.

In order to be eligible for free TAFE courses, students must meet one of the following criteria:

- aged under 20 (regardless of any other qualifications they might hold)
- aged 20 or above and enrolling in a course that is a higher qualification than the highest qualification previously attained
- a Victorian who needs additional support.<sup>92</sup>

Courses offered span a number of areas, including hospitality and tourism—but none within the events sector.

The Commonwealth Government’s JobTrainer Fund offers another mechanism for the provision of free or low-cost training courses. Funding is allocated for accredited diplomas, certificates or short courses, based on a list determined by the National Skills Commission and state and territory governments. Each jurisdiction then chooses which qualifications and short courses to prioritise from this list.<sup>93</sup> Similarly to the Free TAFE for priority courses initiative, courses relevant to the events sector do not feature on the list.

<sup>88</sup> Matt Jones, Managing Director, NW Group, Public hearing, Melbourne, 19 May 2021, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20.

<sup>89</sup> Action Events Group, *Submission 114*, p. 4.

<sup>90</sup> Australian Festival Association, *Submission 134*, p. 4.

<sup>91</sup> Victorian Government, *Free TAFE for lots of jobs*.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment, *JobTrainer Fund*, 2021, <<https://www.dese.gov.au/skills-reform/jobtrainer-fund>> accessed 29 June 2021.

In light of the evidence received around the significant workforce shortages in the events sector, and the long-term impacts this will have on the sector's recovery and industry status, the Committee considers there is a need to support the attraction of new workers and upskilling of existing staff. This support could take the form of inclusion of courses and apprenticeship pathway options for key events sector skills within the Victorian Government's Free TAFE for priority courses initiative. Consultation should be undertaken with stakeholders across the events industry to identify areas of priority need and potential pathway options.

**RECOMMENDATION 22:** That the Victorian Government investigate options for supporting skills growth in the events sector through targeted apprenticeship programs or subsidised courses. This could be through inclusion of apprenticeship pathway and other courses for the events sector in the Victorian Government's Free TAFE for priority courses initiative, and in consultation with the events sector to identify priority needs.

**RATIONALE:** The events sector requires staff trained in very particular skills. Shortages caused by the COVID-19 pandemic must be filled for the sector to recover strongly.

**Adopted by the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee  
Parliament of Victoria, East Melbourne  
16 July 2021**

# Appendix A

## About the Inquiry

### A.1 Submissions

1	Krystal Ciaglia	31	Name Withheld
2	Harry the Hirer	32	ExpoNet
3	Wellington Shire Council	33	Name Withheld
4	Name Withheld	34	Leading Voice
5	Indigo Shire Council	35	Festival Enterprises
6	Name Withheld	36	SKP Events
7	Save Victorian Events	37	Chelsea Skals
8	Confidential	38	Peter Jones Special Events
9	Showtime Attractions	39	Name Withheld
10	Myles Audio Visual	40	No Fuss Events
11	Revolution Staging	41	Bright Brewery
12	Name Withheld	42	Stage Four Productions
13	CrewCare	43	Richard Swanston
14	Steven Ward	44	South Gippsland Shire Council
15	Name Withheld	45	Wise Connections
16	Name Withheld	46	Audio Visual Dynamics
17	Name Withheld	47	Name Withheld
18	Tiny Good	48	Name Withheld
19	Peter Marko	49	Arts Industry Council of Victoria
20	AFI Branding	50	Great Southern Touring Route
21	Name Withheld	51	Gunnawarra Shire Council
22	Confidential	52	Ballarat City Council
23	Kerrie O'Dea	53	Aussie Premium Products
24	Limax Events	54	Meeting Events Australia
25	Phaseshift Productions	55	Central Goldfields Shire Council
26	Blu Event Productions	56	Victoria Walks
27	Sports Event Projects	57	Professional Tour Guide Association of Australia
28	Tina Ribbons	58	Professional Conference Organisers Association
29	Name Withheld	59	Casey City Council
30	Scarlett Mac Events		

60	Lake Anderson Caravan Park	96	NORTH Link
61	Greater Dandenong City Council	97	Beaspoke Safety
62	Gig Power	98	Karl Flowers
63	Confidential	99	Victoria Tourism Industry Council
64	Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia	100	Greater Shepparton City Council
65	Loddon Shire Council	101	Daylesford Macedon Tourism
66	Herbie Rosenberg	102	JL Productions & Hire
67	Confidential	103	Mornington Peninsula Shire Council
68	Stonnington City Council	104	Western Melbourne Tourism
69	Port Fairy Folk Festival Committee	105	Paynesville Business and Tourism Association
70	Walhalla's Star Hotel	106	Walhalla and Mountain Rivers Tourism
71	TravelManagers	107	Port Phillip City Council
72	Sarah Oesterle	108	Maribyrnong City Council
73	Whitehorse City Council	109	Accommodation Association
74	Duane Swan	110	Thomas Brownrigg
75	Victorian Alpine Resorts	111	Strathbogie Shire Council
76	Hit the Road Tours	112	Glenelg Shire Council
77	Destination Phillip Island Regional Tourism Board	113	Committee for Melbourne
78	Damien Young	114	Action Events Victoria
79	Tahbilk Estate	115	Public Galleries Association of Victoria and National Exhibitions Touring Support Victoria
80	John O'Brien	116	Victorian Pride Lobby
81	Confidential	117	Grampians Tourism Board
82	Easy Weddings	118	Greater Bendigo City Council
83	Name Withheld	119	Museums Victoria
84	Tourism Greater Geelong and The Bellarine	120	Knox City Council
85	Engage Disegno	121	Australian Amusement Association
86	Dr Mike Trubetskov	122	Murray Regional Tourism
87	Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism	123	National Gallery of Victoria
88	ICMS	124	Theatre Network Australia
89	Jon Perring	125	Yarra Ranges Tourism
90	W Burston Consulting	126	Wangaratta Rural City Council
91	Destination Gippsland	127	Live Performance Australia
92	McKell Institute Victoria	128	Live Music Office
93	NW Group Australasia	129	Bruce Rouse
94	National Trust of Australia Victoria	130	Captain's Cove Waterfront Apartments Paynesville
95	Whittlesea City Council		

131	Music Victoria	Margaret Michael
132	Bass Coast Shire Council	Kerrie O'Dea
133	Hepburn Shire Council	Heath Mackay
134	Australian Festival Association	Ray German
135	Adventure Tourism Victoria	Kate Stevens
136	Echuca Moama Tourism	Leanne Lamb
137	Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry	Matthew Barton
138	Tourism North East	Richard Dexter
139	Destination	Lisa Moloney
140	Murrindindi Shire Council	Emma Hall
141	Frankston City Council	John O'Brien
142	Visit Victoria	Arthur Ipsaros
143	Harm Reduction Victoria DanceWise	Liz Wright
144	Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions	Jessica Schuyler
145	YHA Australia	Nicole White
146	Backpacker and Youth Tourism Advisory Panel	Mary Rohan
147	Latrobe City Council	Rebecca Williamson
148	DG Global Events	Jodi Howell
149	Historical Society of Mooroopna.	Vernon Ip
150	Timboon Fine Ice Cream	Peter Verhagen
151	Proforma A	Robyn Jelleff
	<i>Proforma signatories</i>	Mishka Greene
	Simon Thewlis	TJ Carroll
	Mario Fera	Judy Hart
	Geoff Knight	Vicki Williames
	Nicole Koroneos	Ian Wood
	Matthieu Delepau	Jade Bophela
	Jacqui Bates	Jill Dalton
	Rebecca Adams	Holly Barker
	Simon Kemp	David Green
	Taryn Gater	Nick Cunneen
	Belinda Gaffney	Robert Lofven
	Jason Lehman	Tek Marko
	Stephen Smith	Jason Cahill
	Tiana Newman	William Hutton
	Jay Davis	Tony Colquhoun
		Richard Brain

Felicity Ashman	Peter Marko
Robert Cobban	Pete Rickman
Carson White	Steve Angel
Melanie Day	Jenny Hector
Nicole Carter	Lisa Price
Rhianna Stewart	Adam Barnes
Mary Tan	Zoey McPherson
Michael Richardson	Lisa MacGregor
Kait Hall	Russell Watkins
Claire Talbot	Matt Bisset
Denise Broeren	Allan Van't Padje
Claire Nichols	Tobias Jacobsen
Kristen Scott	Duncan Kaye
Kim Laowes	Charles Zard
Kath Millar	Rhiannon Wallace

## A.2 Public hearings and site visits

### Wednesday, 14 April 2021

Meeting Rooms G.1 and G.2, 55 St Andrews Place, East Melbourne and via Zoom

Name	Title	Organisation
Simon Thewlis	-	Save Victorian Events
Tiny Good	Director	Show Tech Australia
Howard Freeman	Founding Director	CrewCare
Gab Robinson	Chief Executive Officer	Harry the Hirer
Joe Toohey	Co-Convenor	Arts Industry Council of Victoria
Simon Schinkel	Co-Convenor	Arts Industry Council of Victoria
Felicia Mariani	Chief Executive Officer	Victoria Tourism Industry Council
Janusz Zak	Director	Festival Enterprises
Richard Dexter	Festival Director	Festival Enterprises
Lawrie Videky	Owner	Phaseshift Productions
Peter Marko	Head Electronics Repair Technician	Phaseshift Productions
Rocky Bruzzano	Chief Financial Officer	ExpoNet

## Wednesday, 28 April 2021

Bright Community Centre, 1 Railway Avenue, Bright

Name	Title	Organisation
Amber Gardner	Chief Executive Officer	Mount Hotham Alpine Resort
Stuart Smythe	Chief Executive Officer	Falls Creek Alpine Resort
Elaine Burridge	Manager, Economic and Community Development	Alpine Shire Council
Bess Nolan-Cook	Chief Executive Officer	Tourism North East
Rupert Shaw	Operations Manager	Bright Brewery
Michael Dal Zotto	-	Dal Zotto Wines
Guy Wilkinson	Economic Development and Investment Coordinator	Indigo Shire Council

## Wednesday, 12 May 2021

Great Ocean Road Resort, 105 Great Ocean Road, Anglesea

Name	Title	Organisation
Damien Cerantonio	Founder	Great Ocean Road Resort
Liz Price	General Manager	Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism
Mick Sheehan	Owner	Southern Exposure
Bindy Sheehan	Owner	Southern Exposure
Raylene Fordham	-	Anglesea Backpackers
Brendan Sanders	Business Manager	Tourism Greater Geelong and The Bellarine
Brett Ince	Executive Director	Tourism Greater Geelong and The Bellarine
Geoff Caldwell	Director of Camping	Baptist Camping Victoria
John Jacoby	Owner	Rapid Ascent
Sam Maffett	Owner	Rapid Ascent

## Thursday, 13 May 2021

Five Star Function Centre, Camperdown Football Netball Club, Adeney Street, Camperdown

Name	Title	Organisation
Cr Ruth Gstrein	Mayor	Corangamite Shire Council
Andrew Mason	Chief Executive Officer	Corangamite Shire Council
Matt Bowker	Manager	Cape Otway Lightstation
John Young	President	Port Fairy Folk Festival
Barry Wurlod	Owner	Keayang Maar Vineyard
Carolyn Woods	Owner	By Moonlight

## Wednesday, 19 May 2021

Meeting Rooms G.1 and G.2, 55 St Andrews Place, East Melbourne and via Zoom

Name	Title	Organisation
Brendan McClements	Chief Executive Officer	Visit Victoria
Madison Fitzgerald	Director, Communication and Branding	Destination
Jon Perring	Co-Owner	Tote Hotel and Bar Open
Matt Jones	Managing Director	NW Group Australasia
Evelyn Richardson	Chief Executive	Live Performance Australia
Bea Tomlin	Safety and Risk Consultant	Beaspoke Safety
Damian De Jong	Vice President	Action Events
Julia Robinson	General Manager	Australian Festival Association

## Wednesday, 2 June 2021

Via Zoom

Name	Title	Organisation
Kathryn Mackenzie	Chief Executive Officer	Echuca Moama Tourism
Dean Oberin	Owner	American Hotel Echuca
Paul Lavars	Marketing and Sales Manager	Rich River Golf Club and Resort Moama
Susan Ryman-Kiernan	Managing Director	Wise Connections
Jamie Lea	Director	JL Productions & Hire
Peter Williams	Chair	Winter Blues Festival
Steve Smith	General Manager	DG Global Events
Jason Holmes	Managing Director, Head of Region - Asia Pacific	H2 Insurance Solutions

## Wednesday, 16 June 2021

Via Zoom

Name	Title	Organisation
Terry Robinson	Chief Executive Officer	Destination Gippsland
Tamara Cook	Manager	Captain's Cove Waterfront Apartments Paynesville
Michael Leaney	Proprietor	Walhalla's Star Hotel
Martin Richardson	President	Paynesville Business and Tourism Association
Cr Darren Howe	Deputy Mayor	Latrobe City Council
Kerryn Ellis	Chief Executive Officer	South Gippsland Shire Council
Renae Littlejohn	Director Economy and Community	South Gippsland Shire Council

## Monday, 28 June 2021

Via Zoom

Name	Title	Organisation
Professor Catherine Bennett	Chair in Epidemiology	Faculty of Health, School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University
Professor Euan Wallace AM	Secretary	Department of Health
Nicole Brady	Deputy Secretary, COVID-19 Strategy and Policy	Department of Health
Professor Brett Sutton	Chief Health Officer	Department of Health
Simon Phemister	Secretary	Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions
Andrew Abbott	Deputy Secretary, Creative, Sport and Visitor Economy and Chief Executive, Creative Victoria	Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions
Claire Febey	Associate Deputy Secretary, Tourism and Events	Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions



# Appendix B

## Government support measures

The below tables highlight support measures provided by the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments to the tourism and events sectors in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes general measures available across sectors as well as those targeted towards a particular area or industry. This list may not be comprehensive.

## B.1 Victorian Government support measures

Package	Program	Industry	Total cost	Eligibility	Details of funding
<b>Business Support Fund</b>	Grants	Small business (including hospitality, tourism, accommodation, arts and entertainment, retail)	\$2.6 billion (\$776 million was paid out as at 4 December 2020)	Small businesses that employ staff and are subject to closure or highly impacted by the lockdown restrictions due to the pandemic	The Fund is a grant scheme administered by the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, and its Executive Directors have the decision-making power to provide a grant to eligible business owners  Grants have been delivered over three rounds to date
<b>Economic Survival and Jobs Package</b>	-	-	<b>\$1.7 billion</b>	Businesses and workers, including those in tourism and events	An economic survival and jobs package announced on 21 March 2020 provided support to Victorian businesses and workers, including those in the tourism and events sector <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$369 million for accommodation and food services businesses</li> <li>• \$50 million for arts and recreation services businesses</li> <li>• \$27 million for travel agency and tour arrangement services businesses</li> </ul>
Business Support Fund (first round)	Hospitality, tourism, accommodation, arts and entertainment, retail	\$500 million	75,000 eligible businesses	Business owners	A free online learning platform to help businesses upskill and adjust to new market conditions including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• free courses</li> <li>• aive and on-demand events</li> <li>• a range of business resources</li> </ul>
Upskill My Business website	Business	N/A	N/A	Business owners	Closing date for 2020 land tax relief applications was 31 March 2021
Payroll tax, liquor licence and land tax deferrals and waivers	Business	N/A	N/A	Payroll tax refunds for small and medium-sized businesses with payroll of less than \$3 million Payroll tax deferrals for small businesses	

Package	Program	Industry	Total cost	Eligibility	Details of funding
<b>Economic Survival and Jobs Package (Continued)</b>	Commercial Tenancy Relief Scheme	Business	N/A	Commercial tenants in government buildings	Scheme was introduced to implement the commercial leasing principles announced by National Cabinet on 29 March providing relief to commercial tenants affected by the COVID-19 crisis  Provision of the <i>COVID-19 Omnibus (Emergency Measures) (Commercial Leases and Licences) Regulations 2020</i> .  The regulation-making power permitted (until September 2020) the Minister to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>prohibit termination of leases and recovery of possession of leased premises</li> <li>modify certain rights and liabilities arising under leases</li> <li>extend lease periods and to require landlords and tenants to participate in mediation facilitated by the Small Business Commission in certain circumstances</li> </ul>
	Grants	Landlords	\$60 million	Small, private landlords	To provide assistance to some small private landlords who may not have the financial capacity to provide the rent reduction to their Commercial Tenancy Relief Scheme-eligible tenants  Grants of up to \$3,000 per tenancy
<b>Business Support Package</b>	Regional Tourism Accommodation Support Program	Tourism, hospitality	<b>\$40 million</b>	Regional accommodation providers in regional Victoria, the Yarra Valley, the Dandenong Ranges and the Mornington Peninsula impacted by Stay at Home and state border restrictions.	Introduced to provide targeted support for regional accommodation providers, over the period July to September 2020. More than 3,900 providers were supported through direct grants totalling more than \$18 million.
	CBD Business Support Fund	Business	\$20 million	Business owners and workers	Including 10 million CBD Small Hospitality Grant Program
	Hospitality Business Grant Program	Business	\$30 million	Business owners with annual payroll greater than \$3 million and lower than \$10 million in 2019–2020	To support food service businesses affected by Stay at Home restrictions.  \$5,000 to \$25,000 grants
	Night-time Economy Business Support Initiative	Business	\$40 million	Licensed pubs, clubs or restaurants and with an annual turnover of less than \$50 million	To provide commercial rental relief for licensed businesses impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.  Reimbursement of up to \$20,000



Package	Program	Industry	Total cost	Eligibility	Details of funding
<b>Business Support Package (Continued)</b>	Wellbeing and Mental Health Support for Victorian Businesses	Business	\$26 million	Small business owners	Providing one-to-one wellbeing support to help Victorians dealing with the challenges of running a small business navigate the impacts of COVID-19.
	Business Recovery and Resilience Mentoring	Business	\$10 million	Small business owners	Deliver free customised mentoring helping small businesses mitigate risks and financial exposure, build customised strategies for recovery, market transformation, digital literacy, supply chain diversification and upskill existing employees.
<b>Experience Economy Survival Package</b>	-	Tourism, racing	<b>\$150 million</b>	Tourism, racing	Targeted support to tourist attractions as well as supporting racing bodies
	-	Tourism	\$11 million	Specific tourism attractions	Funding for the Emerald Tourist Railway Board (Puffing Billy) and other not-for-profit and privately-owned visitor attractions, plus regional tourism boards (including Yarra Ranges Tourism) and the Victoria Tourism Industry Council.
	-	Tourism, arts	\$32 million	Creative agencies and initiatives	\$32 million to support creative agencies and initiatives, including funding for the Geelong Arts Centre, Museums Victoria, National Gallery of Victoria, Arts Centre Melbourne and Melbourne Recital Centre.
<b>Business Resilience Package</b>	-	Arts	\$6 million	Artists, workers, businesses and organisations in the music industry	Grants of \$4,000 to \$50,000 plus access costs
	-	-	<b>\$3 billion</b>	Businesses, including eligible tourism and events businesses	Cash grants, tax relief and cashflow support
	Business Support Fund (third round)	Small and medium sized business	\$822 million	75,000 eligible businesses with a payroll of up to \$10 million	Grants of \$20,000, \$15,000 or \$10,000 depending on size
	Licensed Hospitality Venue Fund	Hospitality, accommodation and eligible tourism	\$251 million	Licensed pubs, clubs, hotels, bars, restaurants and reception centres	Grants up to \$30,000
	Sole Trader Support Fund	Events, accommodation, hospitality	\$100 million	Eligible sole traders including retail, accommodation and food services and events	Grants of \$3,000
Alpine Resorts Support Program	Tourism	\$10.3 million	Eligible alpine resorts businesses	Grants up to \$25,000	

Package	Program	Industry	Total cost	Eligibility	Details of funding
<b>Business Resilience Package (Continued)</b>	Grants for local business groups and chambers of commerce	Businesses	\$5 million	Non-profit, business membership-based organisations	Grants of \$10,000, \$20,000 or \$50,000
	Melbourne City Recovery Fund	Events, business, arts	\$100 million	Small and medium businesses, events, cultural activities	A partnership between the Victorian Government and the City of Melbourne to support Melbourne's CBD on the roadmap for reopening to COVID Normal.
		Small and medium business	\$30 million	Small and medium businesses	to pay for equipment, convert spaces like rooftops and courtyards into hospitality zones and remodel internal layouts to allow for the better flow of patrons.
		Events	\$30 million	Events and cultural activities	Support COVIDSafe events and cultural activities.
		Arts	\$40 million	-	To provide physical improvements to the CBD streetscape
	Outdoor Eating and Entertainment Package	Hospitality	\$87.5 million	Hospitality	Funding of up to \$5,000 to help hospitality businesses located outside the City of Melbourne adapt to outdoor dining and entertainment
	Small Business Digital Adaptation Program	Businesses	\$20 million	Eligible businesses	To allow eligible businesses to trial and then receive access to digital products, tools and training they can use to build digital capability in their day-to-day operations.
	Click for Vic marketing campaign	Local business, tourism	\$8.5 million	Business owners	A dedicated advertising and marketing campaign through to January 2021 which generated more than 600,000 leads to businesses. More than 1,300 businesses are profiled on Click for Vic including Billson's Brewery in Beechworth and Sailors Grave Brewing in Orbost.
	Tax cashflow support	Businesses	\$1.8 billion	Eligible businesses	Payroll tax waivers and deferrals, stamp duty discounts, deferred increase in the landfill levy, waivers of Congestion Levy, liquor license fees and Vacant Residential Land Tax.

Package	Program	Industry	Total cost	Eligibility	Details of funding
<b>Circuit Breaker Action Business Support Package</b>	-	Hospitality, tourism and events	<b>\$143 million</b>	-	For businesses impacted by the circuit breaker action to limit the spread of COVID-19
	Business Costs Assistance Program	Hospitality, food, wholesaling, tourism, events and selected retail industries	\$92 million	List of eligible ANZSIC Classes <sup>a</sup>	Grants of \$2,000 for eligible employing and non-employing businesses in the hospitality, food wholesaling, tourism, events and selected retail industries
	Victorian Accommodation Support Program	Tourism	\$16.2 million	Tourism accommodation providers	Providing \$2,250 per business for accommodation providers who had 10 or fewer cancellations and \$4,500 per business for providers with more than 10 booking cancellations.
<b>Strategic Investment Fund</b>	Regional Travel Voucher Scheme	Tourism	\$10 million	Victorian residents may use vouchers to travel within regional Victoria	Funding provided through the 2020–21 Victorian Budget to include a new Melbourne Travel Voucher Scheme, offering 40,000 vouchers for \$200 for travel in greater Melbourne, and an additional 10,000 vouchers to support travel in regional Victoria.
	Funding	Creative and cultural	\$13 million	Non-government arts and cultural organisations	Provide urgent and immediate support to the non-government small to medium creative organisations that receive multi-year-support through Creative Victoria.
<b>Creative Victoria grant programs</b>	Funding and support programs	Cultural and creative	\$1.6 million	Arts and cultural organisations, performers and creative and music industry workers	Creative Victoria's funding and support programs are designed to stimulate high quality, diverse creative activity across the state
	Grants and partnerships	Sport, tourism, creative industries	\$2.35 million	Creative, sport and tourism organisations	To help digitise their content and generate new experiences online. Includes delivery of a new online portal showcasing the best the state has to offer from live music and comedy, to animals at Melbourne Zoo. Launched in May 2020 as part of a dedicated campaign to help keep Victorians connected.
<b>Victorian Live Music Venues Program</b>	Funding	Events and music industry	\$15 million	Licensed venue operators in Victoria, with a primary business model of presenting original live music performances	Grants for live music venues as well as to support music jobs on stage and behind the scenes.
<b>Victorian Music Scene and Workers Support Package</b>	Grants	Music industry	\$9 million	Artists, managers, promoters, bookers, road crew and other workers	Grants between \$4,000 and \$50,000

Package	Program	Industry	Total cost	Eligibility	Details of funding
<b>Creative Season 2020–21 Package</b>	Programs and outdoor activities	Art, music, creative and events	\$17.2 million	Art, music and entertainment industries	<p>To support Victoria's art, music and entertainment sectors including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$7.9 million to enable cultural institutions to bring their experiences outdoors on a large-scale.</li> <li>• \$4.3 million to enable 16 leading Victorian arts companies and festivals to present summer and autumn programs outdoors, including Melbourne International Comedy Festival, Midsomma, Shepparton Arts Festival and Creative Clunes.</li> <li>• \$5 million to deliver a new series of live music events across regional and peri-urban communities.</li> </ul>
<b>Victorian Economy Recovery and Reform Plan (VERRP)</b>	-	Tourism, events	<b>\$633 million</b>	-	<p>VERRP provides a mix of short-term COVID-19 recovery initiatives, including travel vouchers and infrastructure stimulus, as well as medium to long term initiatives.</p>
	Flagship regional tourism infrastructure projects	Tourism	\$149 million	Specified projects	<p>To deliver flagship tourism infrastructure projects across Victoria that can create a halo effect and spur private investment and new products in surrounding areas.</p> <p>Ten projects in regional Victoria will receive dedicated funding to improve experiences at these locations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wilsons Promontory</li> <li>• Great Ocean Road Revitalisation</li> <li>• Mallee Silo Art Trail</li> <li>• Maximising investment in the Grampians Peaks Trail</li> <li>• Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing: Stage 1</li> <li>• Murray River Adventure Trail</li> <li>• Gippsland Tourism Recovery Package</li> <li>• Brambuk Cultural Centre Revitalisation</li> <li>• Ballarat Centre for Photography</li> <li>• Prosecco Road—Early Works</li> </ul>



Package	Program	Industry	Total cost	Eligibility	Details of funding
<b>Victorian Economy Recovery and Reform Plan (VERRP)</b> <i>(Continued)</i>	Regional Tourism Investment Fund	Tourism	\$146 million	Eligible stimulus projects and flagship projects. <a href="#">A complete list of projects supported by the Fund's stimulus round is detailed here<sup>b</sup></a>	Support available for enabling infrastructure, priority private-led projects and nature-based products on public land.  As part of the Regional Tourism Investment Fund's stimulus round, the fund will deliver 30 smaller-scale shovel ready tourism products <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$12.5 million to explore new and innovative investment, support the private sector to undertake planning processes and provide investment facilitation to unlock private investment.</li> <li>• \$3 million to improve visitor engagement services.</li> <li>• \$58 million for destination marketing to rebuild visitor demand.</li> <li>• \$4.8 million to deliver a statewide destination master plan underpinned by priority sector plans.</li> <li>• \$8 million to support vital industry development activities, including crisis management support, digital capability, and workforce skills planning</li> <li>• \$15.4 to support the network of Regional Tourism Boards including their transition into a new network of Visitor Economy Partnerships.</li> </ul>
	Marketing, industry skills and development	Tourism	\$106.5 million	Businesses	-
<b>Major Events Fund</b>	Funding	Events	\$152 million	Major events	To secure more events to ensure that the sector can rebound strongly
<b>Regional and Melbourne Travel Voucher Schemes</b>	Voucher scheme	Tourism	\$44 million	Eligible Victorians	\$200 vouchers available to spend on accommodation, attractions or tours in regional Victoria (later expanded under the Melbourne Scheme) to encourage travel across the state.
<b>National Business Events Program</b>	Grants	Events	\$10.2 million	Event businesses	Funds provided by the 2020–21 Victorian Budget to help secure new business events for the State. Grants provided up to \$25,000 to support costs for hosting events, including accommodation, venue hire and transport.

Package	Program	Industry	Total cost	Eligibility	Details of funding
<b>Regional Events Fund</b>	Funding	Events	\$20 million	Businesses conducting an event or festival within regional Victoria that will attract visitation to the area	Renewed in the 2020–21 Victorian Budget to continue to support events in regional Victoria. The REF will support the development of a calendar of regional events for Victoria and drive economic impact through the attraction of intrastate, interstate and international visitation.
<b>Industry support hub (in partnership with Victoria Tourism Industry Council (VTIC))</b>	Initiative	Tourism, events and hospitality	N/A	Tourism and events businesses	VTIC has partnered with the Victorian Government to establish an online Industry Support Hub to collate and provide access to resources for tourism and events businesses. The Hub includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information on grants available at federal, state and local levels;</li> <li>• Business and marketing resources consolidated and developed by VTIC in collaboration with industry experts</li> <li>• Resources on mental health and wellbeing for employers and employees</li> <li>• Latest data and insights from business planning</li> <li>• Industry contacts</li> </ul>
<b>Tourism Recovery Consultations Program (in partnership with VTIC)</b>	Program	Tourism and events	N/A	Tourism and events businesses	Delivery of the Tourism Recovery Consultations Program offering businesses 90-minute one-on-one sessions with an experienced tourism industry consultant to help businesses identify a goal to focus on, evaluate options that can help them achieve this goal and set some practical actions to get started on their recovery journey.
<b>Regional Travel Voucher Scheme expansion</b>	Voucher scheme	Tourism	\$6 million	Eligible Victorians	Eligible to receive a reimbursement of \$200 on presentation of receipts
<b>Regional Tourism Support Package</b>	-	-	<b>\$32.2 million</b>	-	-
	Regional Travel Voucher Scheme	Tourism	\$16 million	Eligible Victorians	Eligible to receive a reimbursement of \$200 on presentation of receipts
	Business Costs Assistance Program Tourism Supplement	Tourism	\$11.8 million	Eligible tourism businesses (accommodation, attractions, and tourism operators)	An additional \$4,500 payment for businesses impacted by the May to June 2021 restrictions



Package	Program	Industry	Total cost	Eligibility	Details of funding
<b>Circuit Breaker Business Support Package</b>	-	-	<b>\$500 million</b>	Small to medium business and sole traders	Package to assist small to medium businesses and sole traders affected by the circuit breaker restrictions announced on 27 May 2021
	Business Costs Assistance Program Round Two	Businesses	\$371 million	<a href="#">List of eligible ANZSIC classes<sup>c</sup></a>	-
	Business Costs Assistance Program Round Two Top-up Payments	Businesses	\$8.4 million	Businesses in metropolitan Melbourne that are closed due to extended restrictions	For businesses in metropolitan Melbourne that remained under restrictions from 11.59pm on Thursday 10 June 2021 A \$2,000 top-up payment.
<b>Multicultural Festivals and Events Program</b>	New round of the Licensed Hospitality Venue Fund 2021	Hospitality	\$70 million	Hospitality venues impacted by the May-June restrictions who hold an eligible liquor licence	Eligible businesses in regional Victoria receive \$3,500 per premises Eligible businesses in metropolitan Melbourne receive \$7,000 per premises
	Victorian Events Support Package	Events	\$20 million	Event organisers, hosts and suppliers	The package supports event organisers, hosts and suppliers as they manage the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Includes the Sustainable Event Business Program, Impacted Public Events Support Program, Independent Cinemas Support Program, Live Performance Support Program - Presenters and Live Performance Support Program - Suppliers.
<b>COVIDSafe Deep Cleaning Rebate</b>	Grants	Events	\$1.45 million	Multicultural community groups and organisations	Supporting 252 festivals and events of cultural significance between July and December 2021 Grants from \$2,000-\$50,000
	Rebate	Businesses	N/A	Eligible small and medium-sized businesses	A rebate amount of up to 80% of the cleaning costs to a maximum of \$10,000 where a worksite has closed due to a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 case
<b>Sustaining Creative Workers</b>	Grants	Creative industry workers	\$4.2 million	Creatives	Support for creative industries workers, organisations and micro-businesses to undertake activities that will help protect creative careers, explore new business opportunities and enable the sector to rebuild and bounce back.

Package	Program	Industry	Total cost	Eligibility	Details of funding
<b>Victorian Independent Producers Initiative</b>	Grants	Creative and events	-	Established producers	A total of nine grants will be available throughout 2020–2023 Up to \$35,000 per annum for up to three years, per producer

- a. [https://business.vic.gov.au/\\_\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/1973927/List-of-Eligible-ANZSIC-Classes-Business-Costs-Assistance-Program.pdf](https://business.vic.gov.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1973927/List-of-Eligible-ANZSIC-Classes-Business-Costs-Assistance-Program.pdf)
- b. [https://dipr.vic.gov.au/\\_\\_\\_data/assets/excel\\_doc/0008/1979783/Regional-Tourism-Investment-Fund-Stimulus-Round.xlsx](https://dipr.vic.gov.au/___data/assets/excel_doc/0008/1979783/Regional-Tourism-Investment-Fund-Stimulus-Round.xlsx)
- c. [https://business.vic.gov.au/\\_\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/1997955/List-of-Eligible-ANZSIC-classes-Business-Costs-Assistance-Program-R2.pdf](https://business.vic.gov.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1997955/List-of-Eligible-ANZSIC-classes-Business-Costs-Assistance-Program-R2.pdf)

## B.2 Commonwealth Government support measures

Package	Program	Industry	Total cost	Eligibility	Details of funding
<b>Coronavirus Economic Response Package</b>	JobKeeper Payment scheme	Businesses	\$70 billion	Businesses significantly affected by COVID-19	Provided a wage subsidy to around 6 million workers who received a flat payment of \$1,500 per fortnight through their employer, before tax. The payment was open to eligible businesses that experienced a significant decline in turnover as a result of COVID-19 Finished 28 March 2021
<b>COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund</b>	-	Aviation, agriculture, fisheries, tourism and the arts	<b>\$1 billion</b>	-	To support regions, communities and industry sectors that have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19
	Recovery for Regional Tourism	Tourism	\$50 million	<a href="#">The eligible regions and the Australia Government funding allocated can be seen here.<sup>a</sup></a>	To assist nine tourism regions which are heavily reliant on international tourism.
	Business events – Grants program	Business events sector	\$50 million	<a href="#">A schedule of approved business events can be found here.<sup>b</sup></a> Tourism is one of the 'priority sectors' for these business events grants	To assist Australia's business events sector by supporting businesses to participate at pre-approved events, exhibitions and trade shows. The funding will help cover the costs associated with participating such as space hire, design and manufacture, plus travel and accommodation. Grants between \$10,000 and \$250,000
	Sustaining Tourism at Australia's Iconic World and National Heritage Sites	Tourism	\$33.5 million	<a href="#">A list of projects and upgrades can be found here.<sup>c</sup></a>	Conservation work and infrastructure upgrades across 23 national and world heritage sites.
	Supporting Agricultural Shows and Field Days Package	Events and Agriculture	\$39 million	<a href="#">Agricultural shows and show societies. A list of grant recipients can be seen here.<sup>d</sup></a>	The program is helping to relieve flow pressures in regional Australia. It provides a one-off payment to eligible agricultural show societies and agricultural field day organisers to reimburse eligible expenses for cancelled shows and field day events.

Package	Program	Industry	Total cost	Eligibility	Details of funding
<b>COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund (Continued)</b>	Support Act: Crisis Relief for Artists, Crew and Music Workers	Cultural and Creative	\$20 million	Artists, crew and music workers affected by COVID-19	To provide immediate crisis relief to artists, crew and music and live performance workers who have lost employment or are experiencing hardship following the cancellation of gigs, music festivals and other performances across the country.
	Playing Australia: Regional Performing Arts Touring Fund	Cultural and Creative	\$5 million	Individuals and organisations wanting to tour performing arts	A one-off injection of funds for Playing Australia to support the viability of regional and remote touring projects and regional performing art centres across the country. Funding varies on a case-by-case basis.
	Zoos and Aquarium program	Tourism	\$96.4 million	Eligible applicants are exhibiting zoos, aquariums and wildlife parks that are either Zoo and Aquarium Association members or attractions that have been identified by state and territory tourism organisations.	This program provides assistance to eligible exhibiting zoos, aquariums and wildlife parks to help sustain these important tourism attractions at a time when their tourism turnover has been affected by the travel restrictions and social distancing measures designed to limit the spread of COVID-19.
<b>Jobmaker Plan</b>	-	Entertainment, Arts and Screen sectors	<b>\$250 million</b>	Entertainment, Arts and Screen sectors	New grant and loan programs will roll out over the next 12 months to different parts of the arts sector to support the creative economy
	Seed investment to Reactivate Production and Tours	Production and events businesses	\$75 million	Production and event businesses	Competitive grant funding in 2020–21 through the Restart Investment to Sustain and Expand (RISE) Fund. This program will provide capital to help production and event businesses to put on new festivals, concerts, tours and events as social distancing restrictions ease. Grants of varying sizes will be available, from \$75,000 through to \$2 million.
	Show Starter Loans	Creative economy businesses	\$90 million	Established arts and entertainment businesses	Loans of between \$100,000 to \$5 million to fund up to 50% of a new arts and entertainment production or event
	Kick-starting Local Screen Production	Film and television	\$50 million	Local film and television producers	For Screen Australia for a Temporary Interruption Fund to support local film and television producers to secure finance and start filming again. Filming of new productions has largely been halted as insurers are not providing coverage for COVID-19.



Package	Program	Industry	Total cost	Eligibility	Details of funding
<b>JobMaker Plan (Continued)</b>	Supporting Sustainability of Sector-Significant Organisations	Arts and culture organisations	\$35 million	Commonwealth-funded arts and culture organisations	To provide direct financial assistance to support arts and culture organisations facing threats to their viability due to COVID-19, which may include organisations in fields including theatre, dance, circus, music and other fields. The Government will partner with the Australia Council to deliver this funding.
<b>Tourism Aviation Network Support Program</b>	-	Tourism and aviation	<b>1.2 billion</b>	-	The package is a mix of half-price airline tickets, cheap loans for businesses, and direct support to keep planes in the air, and airline workers in their jobs
	Half price airline tickets	-	-	Eligible Australians	800,000 half-price airfares to 13 specified destinations across Australia The discounted flights are for interstate holidays to destinations usually reliant on international tourism. In Victoria, this includes Avalon Airport.
<b>Coronavirus supplement</b>	Payments	N/A	N/A	Eligible income support recipients	From 25 September until 31 December 2020, the Coronavirus Supplement was available at \$250 per fortnight. From 1 January until 31 March 2021, the Coronavirus Supplement was \$150 per fortnight
<b>COVID-19 disaster payments</b>	Payments	N/A	\$34.3 million	People living in areas which have been subject to snap COVID-19 lockdowns	Under specific criteria, people who would ordinarily work more than 20 hours in a week will be paid \$500, with \$325 paid to those who would have worked less than 20 hours a week.
<b>COVID-19 Consumer Travel Support Program</b>	Direct support	Tourism	\$258 million	Travel agents, inbound tour operators and tour wholesalers	Direct support for travel agents to support their business operations, providing a one-off payment of up to \$100,000
<b>Restart Investment to Sustain and Expand (RISE) Fund</b>	Grants	Creative, entertainment and arts sectors	\$200 million	Creative organisations	Grants of between \$50,000 and almost \$2 million will be allocated to projects across Australia, supporting arts and entertainment sector organisations that are seeking to restart, re-imagine or create new cultural and creative activities.

Package	Program	Industry	Total cost	Eligibility	Details of funding
<b>'Holiday Here This Year' campaigns</b>	Advertising campaigns	Tourism	\$9 million	N/A	Marketing campaign to encourage Australians to book a longer holiday in Australia to provide support to the tourism sector. The campaigns will run across TV, print, online, social media, content partnerships, and radio.
<b>Business Events Bid Fund Program</b>	Funding	Events	\$3 million	Business events	To attract international events to Australia.
<b>Business Events Boost Program</b>	Funding	Events	\$1 million	Business events	Provides support to industry-led business events marketing and distribution projects.

- a. <https://www.austrade.gov.au/australian/tourism-and-business/recovery-for-regional-tourism>
- b. <https://www.austrade.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/10605/Schedule-of-Approved-Business-Events.pdf.aspx>
- c. <https://minister.infrastructure.gov.au/mccormack/media-release/617-million-boost-environment-jobs-and-tourism>
- d. <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/ag-farm-food/infrastructure/supporting-ag-shows#victoria>



# Extracts of proceedings

Legislative Council Standing Order 23.27(5) requires the Committee to include in its report all divisions on a question relating to the adoption of the draft report. All Members have a deliberative vote. In the event of an equality of votes, the Chair also has a casting vote. The Committee divided on the following questions during consideration of this report. Questions agreed to without division are not recorded in these extracts.

## Chapter 2

In section 2.2.2, Mr Davis moved that the following sentence be added: ‘The Committee notes that the Hotel Quarantine program was suggested by the Premier of Victoria.’

### Question—put.

#### The Committee divided.

Ayes	Noes
Mr Davis	Mr Erdogan
Ms Lovell	Mr Gepp
	Mr Tarlamis
	Mr Barton
	Mr Quilty

### Question negatived.

In section 2.2.3, Mr Quilty moved that the words ‘a critically important tool’ be replaced with ‘undoubtedly effective’.

### Question—put.

#### The Committee divided.

Ayes	Noes
Mr Quilty	Mr Erdogan
Ms Lovell	Mr Gepp
Mr Davis	Mr Tarlamis
	Mr Barton

### Question negatived.

In section 2.2.4, Mr Davis moved that the following Recommendation be added: ‘That the Victorian Government publish briefings supporting the Public Health Orders made under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*.’

**Question—put.**

**The Committee divided.**

Ayes	Noes
Mr Davis	Mr Erdogan
Ms Lovell	Mr Gepp
Mr Quilty	Mr Tarlamis
	Mr Meddick (substitute Member for Mr Barton)

**Question negatived.**

In section 2.2.4, Mr Davis moved that the following Recommendation be added: ‘That the Victorian Government publish the Chief Health Officers orders related to the Public Events Framework.’

**Question—put.**

**The Committee divided.**

Ayes	Noes
Mr Davis	Mr Erdogan
Ms Lovell	Mr Gepp
Mr Quilty	Mr Tarlamis
	Mr Meddick (substitute Member for Mr Barton)

**Question negatived.**

Mr Gepp moved, That Table 2.1 be removed.

**Question—put.**

**The Committee divided.**

Ayes	Noes
Mr Erdogan	Mr Davis
Mr Gepp	Ms Lovell
Mr Tarlamis	Mr Quilty
Mr Barton	

**Question agreed.**

## Chapter 5

In Finding 12, Mr Quilty moved that the words ‘The events sector generally accepts’ be replaced with ‘Many in the events sector accept’.

### Question—put.

#### The Committee divided.

Ayes	Noes
Mr Quilty	Mr Erdogan
Ms Lovell	Mr Gepp
Mr Davis	Mr Tarlamis
	Mr Meddick (substitute Member for Mr Barton)

### Question negated.

## Chapter 6

In section 6.1.1, Mr Davis moved, that the following Finding be added: ‘The Committee notes that the density and other restrictions have been harsher in Victoria than in any other state for equivalent levels of circulating COVID-19 and that this has had a significant negative impact on the events sector.’

### Question—put.

#### The Committee divided.

Ayes	Noes
Mr Davis	Mr Erdogan
Ms Lovell	Mr Gepp
Mr Quilty	Mr Tarlamis
	Mr Meddick (substitute Member for Mr Barton)

### Question negated.

## Chapter 7

In Recommendation 20, Mr Davis moved, That the word ‘consider’ be replaced with the word ‘resolve’.

### Question—put.

#### The Committee divided.

Ayes	Noes
Mr Davis	Mr Erdogan
Ms Lovell	Mr Gepp
	Mr Tarlamis
	Mr Barton
	Mr Quilty

#### Question negatived.

# Minority report



# Minority Report – Liberal and National Members of Parliament

## Inquiry into the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Tourism and Events Sectors

### 1. Background

In February this year the Opposition moved to support the tourism and events sectors through the Legislative Council specifically through the establishment of this Inquiry. We did this because of a clear recognition the events and tourism sectors had been hit very hard by the COVID19 pandemic and the mismanagement of the Victorian pandemic and support efforts by the Andrews Labor Government.

In Victoria the pandemic has been more impactful across the whole economy than in other states because the state has been locked down much more severely, harshly and longer than in other states. The tourism and events sector which have bore the brunt of the tough lockdowns in Victoria and have in particular suffered as a direct result of Labor’s mismanagement of the hotel quarantine and the chaotic approach to advice, support and communication by Daniel Andrews and his Government.

<b>Days of Lockdown</b>	<b>As of 21/07/2021</b>	
VIC	179 days	
WA	44 days	
NT	41 days	
NSW	71 days	<i>omitting 22 days for Northern Beaches</i>
ACT	35 days	
SA	13 days	
QLD	42 days	
TAS	41 days	
<i>Source: Parliamentary Library - obtained - 21 / 07 / 2021</i>		

Below are many additional points the Liberal Nationals believe should have been highlighted and several extracts of Committee proceedings where we disagreed with Labor members and some minor party members of the Committee.

## **2. Impact on the economy**

### **2.1 The Events Sector**

The events sector is a diverse sector with many distinct parts; business events, festivals, community and myriad other events. It should also not be seen through the lens of 'Major Events' which are only one, although an important aspect of the sector.

The events sector is a distinct sector of the Victorian economy and should be recognised as such. The sector should not be confused with the tourism sector and should not be managed as an adjunct to the 'visitor economy' and be treated as support for the 'visitor economy'.

The state government has not collected proper or detailed information on activity in the events sector. This became clear as the inquiry proceeded.

**Recommendation 1: In addition to the recommendations in the main report, which have been supported by the Coalition, the Victorian State Government undertake better collection of data specific to the events sector to better inform policy and support for the events sector.**

Business events, community events and the full spread of events are far beyond the visitor economy.

**Recommendation 2: The events sector should be treated as a distinct sector. That is, the sector should be seen as an important part of the Victorian economy and society its own right. The sector should not be shackled to the visitor economy or the visitor economy plans or support packages.**

The Liberal National support the Committee recommendation (number 19) for a taskforce to be appointed to represent the events sector. This must be independent and represent all facets of the events sector. We however believe its is important to ensure the departmental structures are also reformed.

**Recommendation 3: a section of the relevant department should be reformed as 'Events Victoria' which would support events other than major events. This distinct section on the department should be created so that participants in the events sector have a specific go to person and section which can provide support in the longer term and facilitate access to other parts of government. This would require no additional resources.**

### **2.2 The Tourism Sector**

The Liberal Nationals agree with the recommendations in the main report but note the issues of public health orders where the basis of orders as outlined in formal briefings has been hidden and yet the tourism sector is one of the hardest hit sectors.

The tourism sector was hit hard in key areas of country Victoria during the bushfires, particularly Gippsland and the North East. This has been compounded by the impact of COVID19 coming as it did so shortly afterwards.

Central Melbourne has been particularly hard hit by the COVID19 pandemic and we note the loss of international tourism caused by the COVID19 pandemic.

## 2.3 JobKeeper

The Committee heard evidence about the important role of JobKeeper in many sectors of the economy. Of course, no program is perfect, but the extraordinary support provided by the Commonwealth stands in stark contrast to the inadequate support provided for the tourism and events sectors by the Victorian Government.

The JobKeeper Payment finished on 28 March 2021. The Reserve Bank of Australia highlighted that while active, JobKeeper saved at least 700,000 jobs. (Hon. Josh Frydenberg MP, *JobKeeper*, media release, Treasury 2021.)

**Table 1. JobKeeper Payment by state and territory**

State / Territory	Amount (\$ billion)	Share (%)
New South Wales	30.0	33.8
Victoria	28.1	31.7
Queensland	15.7	17.7
Western Australia	7.2	8.1
South Australia	4.8	5.5
Tasmania	1.4	1.5
ACT	1.1	1.3
Northern Territory	0.4	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>88.7</b>	<b>100</b>

Labor sought to block the printing of this table with the Liberal Nationals seeking to ensure the table was published as can be seen in the extract of proceeding below:

Mr Gepp moved, That Table 1 be removed.

The Committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Erdogan, Mr Gepp, Mr Tarlamis, Mr Barton.

Noes: Mr Davis, Ms Lovell, Mr Quilty.

Question agreed.

**Finding 1: JobKeeper, the Commonwealth Government program saved the Victorian economy during the COVID19 pandemic, it provided massive and necessary support for the tourism and events sectors.**

## 3. Hotel Quarantine

A key reason the COVID19 pandemic impact has been so much more severe in Victoria and has hit the tourism and events sectors so hard is the state Labor Government under Daniel Andrews botched the management of hotel quarantine.

This mismanagement by Labor led directly to the breaches of hotel quarantine with the subsequent wild spread of COVID19 throughout the Victorian community. The second lockdown for 112 days in

the second half of last year has done tremendous damage to our community, economy and social structure. Many small businesses have never recovered.

The events and tourism and events sectors have been casualties of Andrews's mismanagement. But far from accepting responsibility and being honest about this Labor and Andrews in particular has tried to cover up, fudge and obfuscate.

The unseemly behaviour at the Coate inquiry into the hotel quarantine failures which saw the Premier and senior public service officers and Minister suffer collective amnesia and the inquiry despite the expenditure of almost \$20 million fail to find an answer to the simple question: who ordered hotel quarantine? Who was responsible?

The Andrews Labor Government's failures in hotel quarantine led to the deaths of 801 Victorians. This was arguably the biggest loss of life due to a public policy failure in Australia's history.

Hotel Quarantine was the idea of the Premier Daniel Andrews and his Chief Health Officer Brett Sutton. **Attachment 1 – a documents obtained under Freedom of Information** - shows the genesis of the idea with Brett Sutton's tracked changes to the National documents – clearly himself at Andrews's direction introducing the idea of hotel quarantine. In such circumstances its is a bit rich to seek to step away from the context and the damage that resulted.

Putting aside the tragic death toll; the tourism and events sectors have been amongst the biggest losers of any sectors in the Victorian economy. The damage to these two sectors has been deeper and longer lasting than in any other state.

The vote below an extract from proceedings saw Labor vote to protect the Premier, to cover up his culpability.

In section 2.2.2, Mr Davis moved that the following sentence be added:

***The Committee notes that the Hotel Quarantine program was suggested by the Premier of Victoria.***

The Committee divided:

Ayes: Mr Davis, Ms Lovell.

Noes: Mr Erdogan, Mr Gepp, Mr Tarlamis, Mr Barton, Mr Quilty.

Question negatived.

Victorians, especially those in the hard-hit events and tourism sectors deserve to hear the truth, not a coverup.

**Finding 2: the almost \$20 million of taxpayers' money squandered on the futile Coate Inquiry would have been better directed to assisting the suffering tourism and events sectors.**

**Finding 3: The small businesses, employees and self-employed in the hard-hit events and tourism sectors are owed a proper explanation for the hotel quarantine decisions made by Daniel Andrews and his government. They deserve to know who was responsible. Memory losses across so many participants and 'creeping assumptions' are not sufficient explanations and treat those who suffered losses, of family members or their businesses and jobs with disrespect. The Premier Daniel Andrews should release the texts between him and his Chief of Staff Lissie Ratcliffe tendered to the Coate inquiry but hidden from Victorians.**

**4. Transparency, Public Health Orders and the supporting documents, including briefings – the need for the release of the background documents and briefings behind PHOs, including with respect to orders impacting on the events and tourism sectors.**

The Inquiry heard repeated evidence regarding the incomprehensibility of the rules – the Public Health Orders (PHOs) - in relation to the events and tourism sectors.

We heard from Professor Catherine Bennett regarding the importance of the Public Health Orders and transparency and the reasons behind them being public, **a significant extract of her evidence is attached at Attachment 2**

Professor Bennett said to the Committee with respect to the briefings behind each public health order the following:

***Mr DAVIS:** In the context of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act, which has a requirement for transparency, accountability and proportionality at its core, as well as a requirement for consultation and so forth, is it your view that some of these briefings and background documents should be public? I think you have kind of said that in terms of the assessment of some of the outbreaks. I should say it is my view that the briefings that are concurrent with the orders should be in the public domain because people can make better assessments and those with knowledge elsewhere— including epidemiologists, I might say—are able to make contributions.*

***Prof. BENNETT:** Yes, no—yes-no. I absolutely agree. Taking the time to explain the evidence as it comes together—they have got great people in the department pulling together everything that is known around the world. That is driving some of the decision-making—a lot of the decision-making initially—but we do not hear a lot of that just as we do not hear about evaluations after an outbreak to say, ‘This is what we did really, really well. This is what we’ve learned. This is what we’ll do next time, should there be a next time’. And I do think sharing both the analysis that leads to public health orders and the evaluation of those in real time—you know, after the event—to understand those processes is a great way to engage the public but also the sectors that have been impacted through those interventions. If people understood what some of the assumptions about human behaviour were, that might be a really good way to change behaviour and actually get people on board rather than adding layers or increasing fines associated with certain activities and so on. That might give you a better way to focus on holding events, because people are more trusted and they are more trustworthy at the same time because they understand the dynamics here, and if they are likely to comply, then it means they do not have to have more serious restrictions. That can reinforce the kind of behaviour that actually minimises risk in a pandemic. Then you could look at events, including ones I have been involved in like the choral group, where this is an incredibly important connection for older Australians that goes way beyond our normal understanding of basic health issues to social inclusion, social connectedness and all those things that actually tie to health as well. They are easy to put aside because they are smaller community events, when in fact they can be the very thing that is so critical to people particularly—*

**A witness who would not answer key questions: a mute Professor Brett Sutton**

The Chief Health Officer Brett Sutton was questioned on accountability and transparency in the hearings on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> June 2021 when he appeared at the Committee. He was specifically asked regarding the release of background documents on the Curfew, which is clearly a PHO that had a huge impact on the tourism and events sectors. In fact, he raised the curfew in his initial evidence but refused to answer legitimate questions regarding the curfew for his and the government’s

secrecy and lack of accountability on the briefs and background documents behind each health order.

The critical transcript is attached from the 28<sup>th</sup> June hearing of the Committee at **Attachment 3**

The Legislative Council has ordered the release of these briefs in three separate orders including a prospective order. For example, the curfew documents have been blocked and these are highly relevant to the serious impacts on the tourism and events sectors. The Legislative Council has received a list of the background documents relied upon by the Labor Government with respect to the curfew. This correspondence is attached at **Attachment 4**

**Finding 4: The Chief Health Officer refused to answer legitimate questions concerning his secrecy and his refusal to release briefings and background documents behind public health orders that effect the tourism and events sectors. This refusal included a failure to answer questions or release documents on the curfew. This secrecy and lack of transparency is an open contempt of the Committee and in effect of the Victorian community, including the tourism and events sectors.**

**Recommendation 4: The Chief Health Officer should be resummoned to attend the Committee and answer further questions. He should be required to bring with him the briefing/s behind every public health order, including the curfew documents.**

**Finding 5: The Chairman of the Inquiry, Mr Erdogan, sought to protect the Chief Health Officer and shield him from legitimate questions concerning the lack of transparency in the supporting documents and background material for key public health orders. This behaviour by Mr Erdogan was inappropriate and part of a cover up.**

The Liberal Nationals sought to insert recommendations that would see greater transparency and the release of the hitherto secret briefing and background documents particularly as they relate to the events and tourism sectors. After all these sectors have been impacted massively and they have a right to see how these orders were formed and the basis, or otherwise, upon which the orders were promulgated. Labor opposed these recommendations bitterly.

A further extract of proceedings related to section 2.2.4,

Mr Davis moved that the following Recommendation be added:

***“That the Victorian Government publish briefings supporting the Public Health Orders made under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008.”***

The Committee divided:

Ayes: Mr Davis, Ms Lovell, Mr Quilty.

Noes: Mr Erdogan, Mr Gepp, Mr Tarlamis, Mr Meddick (Substitute Member for Mr Barton).

Question negated.

In section 2.2.4, Mr Davis moved that the following Recommendation be added:

***“That the Victorian Government publish the Chief Health Officers orders related to the Public Events Framework.”***

The Committee divided:

Ayes: Mr Davis, Ms Lovell, Mr Quilty.

Noes: Mr Erdogan, Mr Gepp, Mr Tarlamis, Mr Meddick (Substitute Member for Mr Barton).

Question negatived.

The Government was

Mr Gepp moved, That Table 1 be removed.

The Committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Erdogan, Mr Gepp, Mr Tarlamis, Mr Barton.

Noes: Mr Davis, Ms Lovell, Mr Quilty.

Question agreed.

This second motion to insert a further recommendation which in essence related to the background documents behind orders relating the public events framework was also rejected by Labor who are clearly covering up the weakness behind many of the public health orders as they relate to and impacted upon tourism and events.

**5. Controls and restrictions including density restrictions imposed by Victorian orders principally through the Public Events Framework.**

The Liberals and Nationals are aware of the impact of the harsh rules restricting public events in Victoria throughout the last 16 months under COVID19. These rules have been tougher – more onerous overwhelmingly - than in equivalent states. In part this is due to the greater length and severity of lockdowns in Victoria but even when out of lockdown Victoria's rules have been more restrictive and frankly much more damaging for businesses in the events sector across the spectrum. This has hammered the viability of businesses and cost jobs. The sector has not recovered.

**See Attachment 5 - tables of comparison prepared in conjunction with the Parliamentary Library**

The Labor members of the Committee fought the recognition of the harshness of the public events rules in the report and voted against the following motion despite it simply stating the facts of the situation.

In section 6.1.1, Mr Davis moved, that the following Finding be added:

**The Committee notes that the density and other restrictions have been harsher in Victoria than in any other state for equivalent levels of circulating COVID-19 and that this has had a significant negative impact on the events sector.**

The Committee divided:

Ayes: Mr Davis, Ms Lovell, Mr Quilty.

Noes: Mr Erdogan, Mr Gepp, Mr Tarlamis, Mr Meddick (Substitute Member for Mr Barton).

Question negatived.

Labor sought to cover up the severe impact on the events sector of these harsh rules and was not of a mind to see the publication of these detailed but damaging comparisons.

Where such onerous, but certainly in some cases necessary restrictions, are placed on whole sectors they must be justified by the release of all background documents and supporting or decision-making documents. Labor has covered up the detailed reasons for their decisions through public health orders and the implementation the rigid Public events framework.

The Committee heard from witnesses that the framework was not clear and that contact with the department failed often to clarify aspects. The Department of Health refused to meet many in the events sector until very recent weeks. We believe best practice regulation would see proper engagement with the relevant sectors.

The Arts and music sector have suffered many of the same issues with the public events framework

**Finding 6: The Andrews Labor Government and its agencies have not been open and transparent or, by and large approachable, by those seeking to undertake the many types of events, large and small. The implementation of public events rules has been opaque and capricious.**

**Recommendation 6: the Victorian Government should be transparent releasing all relevant orders and the background supporting documents in full relevant to the event framework rules in place at any given point to assist the events and arts sectors.**

**Recommendation 7: The Departments and agencies should meet with and listen to the firms and individuals in the events and arts sector to help them work through the particular rules in place at any point to ensure that the maximum number of 'COVID19 safe events' are able to proceed. This should involve positive engagement and support not as is the case so often now a wall where communication goes in but never comes out.**

#### **6. Need for an urgent package to support the events industry in Victoria.**

The events industry has not been adequately supported in Victoria. Failure to provide rapid support to all industries including tourism and events has been disastrous. As has the failure to support so many sole traders who under Daniel Andrews were completely cut out of any support. This has been outrageous and cruel. Victoria's contrasting support compared to other states has been paltry.

The events sector package provided by Daniel Andrews of just over \$20 million is far short of what is required. Criticisms of the Victorian package argue that in fact only \$10 million was actually earmarked for the events sector.

A comparison with New South Wales is instructive where prior to the current lockdown the Government has announced a \$200 million package.

**Recommendation 8: The Andrews Labor Government quickly review and upgrade its inadequate Victorian events sector support package noting it is a tenth of the size on of the equivalent package in New South Wales seeking at least a prorated equivalent level of support.**

**Recommendation 9: Proper support be provided for sole traders within the tourism and events industry. This should include support to home-based businesses and those who have not registered for GST. NSW has been able to support these hard hit sole traders, it is wrong Victoria has not.**

## **7. Urgent Insurance support needed for the events sector**

The events sector in Victoria is now largely unable to get insurance for COVID19 impacts. This is having a significant impact on future business and employment. The risk is that many events will simply not proceed being effectively stymied for lack of insurance. The Committee heard important evidence on this matter and the main report reflects much of this evidence. Other jurisdictions both within Australia and overseas have acted to deal with what is in effect a serious market failure. Most importantly Western Australia provides a model to move forward.

The Victorian Government must act quickly to ensure insurance is available. For this reason, although Liberal Nationals supported the intent and basis of Recommendation 20, we were concerned that action is needed now the word '**consider**' fails to convey the urgent need for immediate action, not contemplation or drift. We sought to demand the Victorian Government '**resolve**' this insurance problem. The time for contemplation is over.

The extract of Extract of proceedings is below.

Recommendation 20, Mr Davis moved, That the word 'consider' be replaced with the word 'resolve'.

The Committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Davis, Ms Lovell.

Noes: Mr Erdogan, Mr Gepp, Mr Tarlamis, Mr Barton, Mr Quilty.

Question negatived.

## **8. Rapid Testing**

The Committee chose not to investigate the possibilities of rapid testing in supporting the wider opening of the tourism and events sectors. We think this was unfortunate.

In several overseas countries rapid testing is playing an increasing role in opening up their economies. These is an obvious opportunity for staff in the events and tourism sectors to be tested and perhaps patrons, including where known events are able to manage entry through tickets of other means.

**Recommendation 10: Victorian Government should examine the use of rapid testing in other jurisdictions and support selective introduction of rapid COVID19 testing in Victoria recognising there is an obvious role in supporting the wider and more reliable opening of the tourism and events sectors.**

The members below regret the need for this minority report but believe that its tabling may support the tourism and events sectors, the businesses within them and save the jobs on many within these critical sectors.



Hon. David Davis MP

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wendy Lovel".

Hon. Wendy Lovel MLC

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Beverley McArthur".

Beverley McArthur MLC

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Melina Bath".

Melina Bath MLC

## Attachment 1 – FOI DOCS

### Fwd: Brendan's paper with my edits

DPC.0025.0001.0001

Department of Premier and Cabinet  
RELEASED UNDER THE FOI ACT  
AND PARTS OF THIS PAGE ARE  
EXEMPT UNDER THE FOI ACT

33(1)  
From: Chris Eccles (DPC) <[REDACTED]@dpc.vic.gov.au>  
To: Lissie Ratcliff (VICMIN) <[REDACTED]>  
Date: Thu, 26 Mar 2020 22:58:58 +1100  
Attachments: Nat Cab Advice CHOs.docx (36.29 kB)

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33(1)  
From: Kym Peake (DHHS) <[REDACTED]@dhhs.vic.gov.au>  
Sent: Thursday, March 26, 2020 10:49:52 PM  
To: Chris Eccles (DPC) <[REDACTED]@dpc.vic.gov.au>  
Subject: Fwd: Brendan's paper with my edits

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33(1)  
From: Brett Sutton (DHHS) <[REDACTED]@dhhs.vic.gov.au>  
Sent: Thursday, March 26 2020 10:49:52 PM  
To: Kym Peake (DHHS) <[REDACTED]@dhhs.vic.gov.au>  
Subject: Brendan's paper with my edits 33(1)

Hi Kym,

Not sure if Brendan will accept this, but have agreed to edit his version and see where we land - are you OK with this?

Brett

**Adj Clin Prof Brett Sutton MBBS MPHTM FAFPHM FRSPH FACTM MFTM**  
**Victorian Chief Health Officer**  
**Victorian Chief Human Biosecurity Officer**  
Regulation, Health Protection & Emergency Management  
Department of Health & Human Services | 14 / 50 Lonsdale St  
ph. [03 9594 1000](tel:0395941000)  
[www.dhhs.vic.gov.au](http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au) | [www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/health-officer](http://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/health-officer)  
[twitter.com/NictorianCHO](https://twitter.com/NictorianCHO) 33(1)

Please note that I work from home on Thursdays and am contactable on the numbers above.

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Department of Premier and Cabinet  
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**Advice to National Cabinet from NSW, Vic, Qld & Commonwealth CHOs on Next Step Measures**

There has been significant further growth in cases, still with substantial numbers of returned travellers and small community outbreaks associated with travellers. Overall case numbers in Australia are very concerning, although comparison with many other countries, when they were at this level, suggests much better case ascertainment in Australia. Small clusters are evident in Sydney and there is growth in cases with no epidemiology link. Victoria has small numbers of cases with no epidemiology link, including some health care workers. Data from Victoria also show a delay between symptoms to diagnosis that is currently too long. Queensland has a significant caseload but no clear evidence of community transmission. Given the case load in major Eastern Seaboard cities is the most material, all three States are keen to take consistent measures and have consistent messages

All three states continue to be significantly impacted by returned travellers and all are supportive of very stringent new boarder measures.

Whilst there is some evidence of flattening of the epidemi f €Hegy curve and evidence of impact of recent social distancing measures (foot traffic, public transport utilisation), it is too early for a clear assessment of the long-term measures recently introduced. If only 70-80% of the population is included in, and compliant with, social distancing criteria, it is unlikely to succeed to control the outbreak, with compliance above 90% required to significantly flatten the epidemiological curve.

It is also likely that more stringent border measures will also take several days to take effect.

There is concern that any further action that may be required (particularly in Sydney) should be implemented early for best effect. There is a 10-12 day lag between introducing an intervention and seeing its effect on case numbers but in this time, if there is material community transmission, cases could continue to grow exponentially with potential impact on the health system.

A suppression strategy should continue to be supported to ensure the best health outcomes.

Accordingly some additional short-term measures are worthy of consideration in the three major affected Cities to buy some additional time to observe the trend of the epidemiology over the next week.

There does not seem to be a clear indication for additional measures in the remainder of the f Gount ry at this stage, provided new highly effective border measures are urgently implemented.

A suppression strategy should continue to be supported to ensure the best health outcomes ∴.

#### Additional Measures supported/recommended:

1. In addition to the existing Any traveller coming through the International border will have an enforced quarantine arrangements for international travellers arriving in Australia, it is recommended that either in the option home or, in high risk cases, monitored placement in an alternative facility such as a hotel is enforced for those who would normally reside with others at home.
2. Given the epidemiology in Greater Sydney, Greater Melbourne and South East Queensland, it is proposed that these jurisdictions consider immediately instituting additional physical distancing measures through closure of some or all non-essential services for a short-term period a two week close down on all non essential services be instituted in these three areas.
3. Vulnerable people will be strongly directed and supported to undertake home isolation. These include
  - a. People age 60 or older with one or more chronic diseases including hypertension, diabetes, heart disease and lung disease
  - b. All people age 70 or older
  - c. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders age 50 or older with one or more chronic disease

#### Additional Consideration of Triggers

The officials were unable to agree on any set numerical triggers for further action given the need for a contextualised assessment of the outbreak in a given area. The previously proposed parameters include an assessment of the following:

- The overall epidemic curve, which demonstrates 'rate of growth' nationally or potentially regionally if a regional lock down is proposed. This needs to be interpreted in the local context.
- Clusters without clear epidemiology links are the strongest indication of outbreaks, which are unlikely to be contained by public health intervention.
- The degree of expected impact of current social distancing on transmission rates.
- Health system impact. An assessment that demand for general or specific health services (particularly critical care services) will likely exceed capacity within 2 to 3 weeks.
- Case positivity rate as an indicator of testing.
- Time to diagnosis and time to complete contact tracing as well as the number of contacts per case as an indicator of public health response capacity.

## ATTACHMENT 2

**Professor Catherine Bennett, Chair in Epidemiology, Faculty of Health, School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University.**

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Davis to ask a question.

**Mr DAVIS:** Can I just first say, Professor Bennett, that your contribution to the general debate has been remarkable, calm, thoughtful, rational, well informed, and I think that has added a great deal to the debate. But my questions today relate very specifically to the events industry, and you have advocated for a more sophisticated approach, a more nuanced approach. It seems to me that the events industry—and I am not so much talking about these very large events; I think they are better understood. One of the things we have learned in this inquiry is that the smaller events—so it might be a business event or a corporate event of some type or something of that nature—are very controlled. We know exactly who is coming to it. They are prepaid. Monday, 28 June 2021 Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee 12 There are tickets. There is a series of tight functions. It seems to me it should be possible for the department to work with the event organisers and to carefully put in place protections and nuanced controls that make these sorts of events safe. Is that a fair summation?

**Prof. BENNETT:** Yes. Look, I do think we should be getting smarter as we go with this. I would have loved to have seen Australia as a world leader, using our low-COVID and often zero-COVID background to put our efforts into these, as I say, dial-up, dial-down, adaptable COVID-safe plans. We do have COVID-safe plans in place, but they are often looked at at the individual level. So you follow a framework, you put together a proposal and it may or may not get passed. We are not hearing a lot about that. We are not sort of learning from that process, and it should not just sit with decision-makers. It should be an iterative process so that events people can come back and say, 'Well, actually, we ran that event, but it was really difficult for these reasons. Can we review that part of it? And what does the epi tell us versus the logistics and feasibility?', and get that balancing as a continual process of improvement.

**Mr DAVIS:** So in that context it would be very difficult for event people, if the department had not met with them for more than a year, to have that kind of dialogue and exchange.

**Prof. BENNETT:** Absolutely. It is about that communication, as I said. Then other events providers are learning from that particular iterative process, which has to include follow-up afterwards. I do think there has been, in my understanding from outside, a process where people are given almost impossible decisions sometimes, which are kind of like, 'Will this work? I don't know'. We use the best evidence, but the evidence tends to be very high level, so, you know, movement equals virus; lots of people together equals virus; indoors versus outdoors, a lot worse. Then it is sort of a very simplified approach as opposed to looking at nuanced approaches.

**Mr DAVIS:** In the context of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act, which has a requirement for transparency, accountability and proportionality at its core, as well as a requirement for consultation and so forth, is it your view that some of these briefings and background documents should be public? I think you have kind of said that in terms of the assessment of some of the outbreaks. I should say it is my view that the briefings that are concurrent with the orders should be in the public domain because people can make better assessments and those with knowledge elsewhere—including epidemiologists, I might say—are able to make contributions.

**Prof. BENNETT:** Yes, no—yes-no. I absolutely agree. Taking the time to explain the evidence as it comes together—they have got great people in the department pulling together everything that is

known around the world. That is driving some of the decision-making—a lot of the decision-making initially—but we do not hear a lot of that just as we do not hear about evaluations after an outbreak to say, ‘This is what we did really, really well. This is what we’ve learned. This is what we’ll do next time, should there be a next time’. And I do think sharing both the analysis that leads to public health orders and the evaluation of those in real time—you know, after the event—to understand those processes is a great way to engage the public but also the sectors that have been impacted through those interventions. If people understood what some of the assumptions about human behaviour were, that might be a really good way to change behaviour and actually get people on board rather than adding layers or increasing fines associated with certain activities and so on. That might give you a better way to focus on holding events, because people are more trusted and they are more trustworthy at the same time because they understand the dynamics here, and if they are likely to comply, then it means they do not have to have more serious restrictions. That can reinforce the kind of behaviour that actually minimises risk in a pandemic.

Then you could look at events, including ones I have been involved in like the choral group, where this is an incredibly important connection for older Australians that goes way beyond our normal understanding of basic health issues to social inclusion, social connectedness and all those things that actually tie to health as well. They are easy to put aside because they are smaller community events, when in fact they can be the very thing that is so critical to people particularly—

**Mr DAVIS:** The glue that holds the community together.

**Prof. BENNETT:** Absolutely, and the individual together if these are people that otherwise live in isolation. A lot of these people were people who live alone. They went from having a community connection to being very alone. Now, there is risk with choirs, but there are ways you can do it safely, and we are learning—we are seeing some work done overseas. This group has really taken the initiative, particularly in loco with COVID times, to try and come up with new models of both, from their perspective, operating but hopefully feeding that back to the governments at state level to help them understand what might be safe ways to go ahead. So you do not have to shut things down completely every time but you dial them down, so that you say you can only sing outdoors or you need to take these various tech solutions they have put in place that remove that risk, individual to individual in the choir or to an audience. So I do think there are things we should be doing. In our downtime we are not hearing about the evaluation or the innovation that I think should be then taking us to a better place. Even if we unfortunately have the virus seeded again, we know that we are just a step ahead next time.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Davis. Thank you, Professor Bennett. On behalf of the committee, Professor Bennett, we would like to thank you for your contribution and presentation today. It has been very informative, it has been very helpful. I know there are a number of questions on notice, and we will get them to you as soon as possible.

**Witness withdrew.**

### ATTACHMENT 3

**Prof. SUTTON:** "... When the second wave peaked in August of 2020 the number of new daily cases in Victoria was over 700 or around 700. Mobility was limited through a curfew and a movement radius limit of 5 kilometres put in place for metropolitan Melbourne to reduce the risk of the virus seeding from metro Melbourne to regional Victoria, which was a really important measure, and it is also reflected in the border restrictions that are happening around Australia now. There was movement restriction into those areas. This boundary between metro Melbourne and regional Victoria remained in place until 8 November last year and was essential in protecting regional Victoria during the second wave. The Victorian road map for reopening was published on 6 September 2020 to try and give as much forward notice and a detailed and enduring high-level phase plan for Victoria to emerge from its second wave. The road map was the product of extensive intergovernmental, industry and community engagement and analysis of local and global evidence and really significant and high-quality predictive modelling, which does not predict the future but gives our best estimates of the trajectory of that second wave based on the epidemiology that we were seeing."

**Mr DAVIS:** I will be very quick with Professor Sutton. Professor Sutton, I have called repeatedly for the release of information behind many of the health orders. That information exists, and the government has refused—now, it may not be your decision—to release that information. You mentioned the curfew before, for example. We know that there were a bundle of documents behind the curfew decision. The government has actually told the Parliament about the documents. Now, within the frame of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act transparency and accountability and proportionality are central. Why have you not insisted on these documents being made public?

**Prof. SUTTON:** Could I check with the Chair if this is in scope with this inquiry?

**Mr DAVIS:** It is in scope, given the curfew.

**The CHAIR:** No. I think it is out of order, Mr Davis. In the end the inquiry is about the tourism and events sectors and the effects of the pandemic on the tourism and events sectors. You are asking a question about—

**Mr DAVIS:** And he has mentioned the curfew, and I am very specifically seeking information on account of his discussion.

**The CHAIR:** which information can be released. You have already asked this question in the chamber a number of times. I do not think it is in the terms of reference.

**Mr DAVIS:** Well, no, it is, with respect, Chair. It is, with respect, in the terms of reference. You might want to run a protection racket, but you cannot do that.

**The CHAIR:** No, not at all. I mean, the terms of reference are—

**Mr DAVIS:** The truth is the curfew has had an impact on the events sector and obviously on the tourism sector too. It is entirely in order for me to seek, for example, a document—attachment D, policy paper, new restrictions, 2 August 2020—which lays out a whole set of policy information about the decision on the curfew. That has been suppressed by government, and I am asking Professor Sutton why that would not be released.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Davis, it seems that question is a question for the government, not for the witnesses here. So that is why is out of order.

**Mr DAVIS:** Well, he is actually responsible.

**The CHAIR:** That is why I am ruling it out of order, Mr Davis.

**Mr DAVIS:** No, no. Actually it is quite clear. He is responsible for the Public Health and Wellbeing Act, Chair, and he can insist on the release of these sorts of documents.

**The CHAIR:** I think if you ask a question—you have already asked a couple of questions about the tourism sector and the consultation, and I think the Deputy Secretary, Ms Brady, has answered that. And I think that—

**Mr DAVIS:** Well, Chair, I will record that you are determined to close down the question and Professor Sutton seems determined to sit there and not answer it.

**Mr TARLAMIS:** On a point of order, Chair, you have made a ruling, and Mr Davis is continuing to defy that ruling. I mean, it is very clear that he should be respecting your ruling, otherwise he is reflecting on you as the Chair.

**Mr DAVIS:** I think the Chair is running a protection racket, Mr Tarlamis. He does not like tough questions.

**Mr TARLAMIS:** That is inappropriate, Mr Davis. I mean, you know it is out of order.

**Mr DAVIS:** No, it is not. It is clearly squarely in the witness's—

**Mr TARLAMIS:** It actually is, and I think you have been a member of Parliament long enough to know that it is. You have got form in this regard to just making outrageous statements to try and get a 5-minute grab from media.

**Mr DAVIS:** Well, Mr Tarlamis, you might want to not have those questions answered, but I certainly do.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Davis, I might move on the next question because, like I said, I think you have already had a couple—

**Mr DAVIS:** Well, I am recording my disappointment.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Brady has provided a response.

**Mr DAVIS:** And the muteness of the witness.

## Attachment 4 - Symes letter to the Leg Co and associated tables refusing access.



Jaclyn Symes MP

Attorney-General  
Minister for Resources

121 Exhibition Street  
Melbourne, Victoria 3000 Australia  
Telephone: +61 3 8684 1111  
DX 210077

Our ref: D21/45565

Mr Andrew Young  
Clerk of the Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Mr Young

### **Production of documents - decision to impose a curfew**

I refer to the Legislative Council's resolution of 16 September 2020 seeking the production of copies of the briefs and other materials upon which the decision on 2 August 2020 to impose a curfew was based.

I also refer to the letters to you from former Attorneys-General, the Hon. Martin Pakula MP and the Hon. Jill Hennessy MP of 14 April 2015 and 20 February 2019 respectively, noting the limits on the Legislative Council's power to call for documents. Those limits centre on the protection of the public interest. These letters set out the factors the government would consider in assessing whether the release of documents would be prejudicial to the public interest.

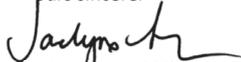
The government has conducted a thorough and diligent search to identify the documents that may be relevant to the Council's resolution. It identified 11 documents that fall within the scope of the Council's order.

The government, on behalf of the Crown, makes a claim of executive privilege in relation to six of the documents in full, on the basis that their disclosure would be contrary to the public interest.

In compliance with Standing Orders 11.02(3) and 11.03(1)(a), the attached schedule refers to the documents in respect of which a claim of executive privilege is made.

I note that five documents are produced to the Legislative Council. One of the documents produced by the Government contains the personal information of individuals. In the interests of personal privacy, those details have been excluded.

Yours sincerely

  
Jaclyn Symes MP  
Attorney-General  
Minister for Resources

03 / 05 / 2021

Encl.



OFFICIAL: Sensitive

**SCHEDULE OF DOCUMENTS TO BE RELEASED**

**Department of Health (formerly known as the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS))**

NO	DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION	DATE OF DOCUMENT	DOCUMENT AUTHOR
1.	Attachment A - Instrument of Authorisation	11/05/2020	DHHS
2.	Attachment B1 - Restricted Activity Directions (No. 16)	2/08/2020	DHHS
3.	Attachment B2 - Restricted Activities Directions (Restricted Areas) (No. 4)	2/08/2020	DHHS
4.	Attachment B3 - Stay Safe Directions (No. 9)	2/08/2020	DHHS
5.	Attachment B4 - Stay at Home Directions (Restricted Areas) (No. 6)	2/08/2020	DHHS

**SCHEDULE OF DOCUMENTS WITHHELD IN FULL ON THE BASIS OF EXECUTIVE PRIVILEGE**

**Department of Health (formerly known as the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS))**

NO	DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION	DATE OF DOCUMENT	DOCUMENT AUTHOR	EXECUTIVE PRIVILEGE REASONS
6.	Cover Brief – Re-issue of public health directions to limit the spread of Novel Coronavirus 2019 (2019-nCoV)	2/08/2020	DHHS	Executive privilege is claimed over the document on the basis that disclosure would reveal the high-level confidential deliberative processes of the Executive government, or otherwise genuinely jeopardise the necessary relationship of trust and confidence between public officials and a minister.  Executive privilege is also claimed over part of the document on the basis that disclosure of parts C and D of the document would reveal confidential legal advice of the Government's advisers.
7.	Attachment C1 - Charter assessment - Restricted Activity Directions (No. 16)	2/08/2020	DHHS	Executive privilege is claimed over the document on the basis that disclosure would reveal the high-level confidential deliberative processes of the Executive government, or otherwise genuinely jeopardise the necessary relationship of trust and confidence between public officials and a minister, and would reveal confidential legal advice of the Government's advisers.
8.	Attachment C2 - Charter Assessment Restricted Activities (Restricted Areas) (No. 4)	2/08/2020	DHHS	Executive privilege is claimed over the document on the basis that disclosure would reveal the high-level confidential deliberative processes of the Executive government, or otherwise genuinely jeopardise the necessary relationship of trust and confidence between public officials and a minister, and would reveal confidential legal advice of the Government's advisers.
9.	Attachment C3 - Charter assessment - Stay Safe Directions (No. 9)	2/08/2020	DHHS	Executive privilege is claimed over the document on the basis that disclosure would reveal the high-level confidential deliberative processes of the Executive government, or otherwise genuinely jeopardise the necessary relationship of

				trust and confidence between public officials and a minister, and would reveal confidential legal advice of the Government's advisers.
10.	Attachment C4 - 10. C4 - Charter Assessment Stay at Home (Restricted Areas) (No. 6)	2/08/2020	DHHS	Executive privilege is claimed over the document on the basis that disclosure would reveal the high-level confidential deliberative processes of the Executive government, or otherwise genuinely jeopardise the necessary relationship of trust and confidence between public officials and a minister, and would reveal confidential legal advice of the Government's advisers.
11.	Attachment D - Policy Paper - New Restrictions	02/08/2020	DHHS	Executive privilege is claimed over the document on the basis that disclosure would reveal the high-level confidential deliberative processes of the Executive government, or otherwise genuinely jeopardise the necessary relationship of trust and confidence between public officials and a minister, and disclosure of some information would reveal the content of information submitted to a committee of Cabinet for the purposes of its deliberations or the deliberations and decisions of Cabinet.

# Attachment 5

**TABLE 1 – TABLE OF RESTRICTIONS OF PUBLIC EVENTS COMPARING AUSTRALIAN STATES – 24 MARCH 2021 (Source: publicly available documents prepared with the assistance of the Parliamentary Library)  
RECEIVED – 24 MARCH 2021**

At-a-glance summary of numbers and/or densities of people currently permitted by venue in each state:

STATE:	NSW As of 25 Feb 2021 ( <a href="#">amended 10, 23 and 29 Mar 2021</a> )		QLD As of <a href="#">13 March 2021</a>		VIC From <a href="#">6pm, 26 March 2021</a>	
Venues	Indoors	Outdoors	Indoors	Outdoors	Indoors	Outdoors
Galleries (Large and small)	<p>One person per 2m<sup>2</sup> or 25 persons</p> <p>No density limit if 25 visitors or fewer</p> <p>COVID-19 Safety Plans are mandatory</p>	<p>One person per 2m<sup>2</sup> or 25 persons</p> <p>No density limit if 25 visitors or fewer</p>	<p>One person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>&lt;500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;</p> <p>500-10,000 people - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units</p>	<p>&lt;1,500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;</p> <p>1,500-10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units</p>	<p>Up to 75% of total capacity, max 1,000 patrons per space and one person per 2m<sup>2</sup>.</p> <p>All venues must use electronic record keeping through the Services Vic app or a government API-linked digital system.</p> <p>2m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated and seated areas.</p> <p>If &gt;500 people, then venue must publish their COVIDSafe Plan online.</p>	<p>Up to 75% of total capacity, max 1,000 patrons per space and one person per 2m<sup>2</sup>.</p> <p>All venues must use electronic record keeping through the Services Vic app or a government API-linked digital system.</p> <p>2m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated and seated areas.</p> <p>If &gt;500 people, then venue must publish their COVIDSafe Plan online.</p>

<p>Concerts (Large and small)</p>	<p>Capacity at an entertainment facility must not be the greater of 100% of fixed seating capacity of the facility or 1 person per 2 square metres.</p> <p>Support 1.5m physical distancing where possible.</p>	<p>Capacity at an entertainment facility must not be the greater of 100% of fixed seating capacity of the facility or 1 person per 2 square metres.</p> <p>Support 1.5m physical distancing where possible.</p>	<p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>Ticketed venues can be 100% of seated capacity.</p> <p>&lt;500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;</p> <p>500-10,000 people - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units</p>	<p>Open air stadiums can operate at 100% of seated capacity with a COVID Safe Plan.</p> <p>Since 13 March 2021, outdoor events with &lt;500 people per day can operate without a COVID Safe Event Checklist (and no person per m<sup>2</sup> limit or requirement to collect contact details).</p> <p>&lt;1,500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;</p> <p>1,500-10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan</p>	<p>Up to 75% of total capacity, max 1,000 patrons per space, one person per 2m<sup>2</sup>.</p> <p>2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>Venues with capacity over 1,000 are determined on an individual basis under the <a href="#">Public Events Framework</a> (last updated 16 March 2021).</p>	<p>Up to 75% of total capacity, max 1,000 patrons per space, one person per 2m<sup>2</sup>.</p> <p>2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>Venues with capacity over 1,000 are determined on an individual basis under the <a href="#">Public Events Framework</a> (last updated 16 March 2021).</p>
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				approved by local public health units;  >10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by the Chief Health Officer.		
Live venues (Large and small)	Capacity at an entertainment facility must not be the greater of 100% of fixed seating capacity of the facility or 1 person per 2 square metres.  Support 1.5m physical distancing where possible.	Capacity at an entertainment facility must not be the greater of 100% of fixed seating capacity of the facility or 1 person per 2 square metres.  Support 1.5m physical distancing where possible.	2m <sup>2</sup>  <500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;  500-10,000 people - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units	<1,500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;  1,500-10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units;  >10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by the Chief Health Officer.	Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons in each space.  One person per 2m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.  All venues must use electronic record keeping through the Services Vic app or a government API-linked digital system (venues will have a 28-day compliance amnesty)	Non-seated outdoor venues (eg. zoo) do not have patron caps but density limit on 1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> apply.  All venues must use electronic record keeping through the Services Vic app or a government API-linked digital system (venues will have a 28-day compliance amnesty)
Theatres	Capacity at an entertainment	Capacity at an entertainment	2m <sup>2</sup>	<1,500 – COVID	Large indoor venues, such	Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons

(Large and small)	<p>facility must not the greater of 100% of fixed seating capacity of the facility or 1 person per 2 square metres.</p> <p>Support 1.5m physical distancing where possible.</p> <p><a href="#">Exemptions were granted</a> in March 2021 by NSW Health to the STC and the Sydney Lyric Theatre to have 100% capacity performances</p>	<p>facility must not the greater of 100% of fixed seating capacity of the facility or 1 person per 2 square metres.</p> <p>Support 1.5m physical distancing where possible.</p>	<p>&lt;500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;</p> <p>500-10,000 people - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units</p>	<p>Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;</p> <p>1,500-10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units;</p>	<p>as the NGV and Princess Theatre, can open for up to 75% of the total venue capacity (to a max of 1,000 patrons).</p> <p>One person per 2m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>One per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p>	<p>One person per 2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>One per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p>
Pubs (Large and small)	<p>Not exceed the greater of one person per 2 square metres of space in the premises, or 25 persons.</p> <p>Children count</p>	<p>Not exceed the greater of one person per 2 square metres of space in the premises, or 25 persons.</p> <p>Children count</p>	<p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>Dine-in patrons must check in with the Check In Qld app or similar method</p>	<p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>Dancing permitted in all indoor and outdoor venues (music events, pubs, clubs and nightclubs) subject to the one</p>	<p>Density quotient of 1 per 2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No requirement for seated service.</p> <p>All venues are required to use the Services Vic app or a government API-linked digital</p>	<p>Density quotient of 1 per 2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No requirement for seated service.</p> <p>All venues are required to use the Services Vic app or a government API-linked digital system for electronic record keeping (venues will have a 28-day compliance amnesty).</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people</p>

				<p>person per 2m<sup>2</sup> rule.</p> <p>system for electronic record keeping (venues will have a 28-day compliance amnesty).</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p> <p>Nightclubs will have a one person per 2m<sup>2</sup> density quotient with no maximum patron limit.</p> <p>Dance floors, karaoke bars, and food courts are now open with no limits, except for the one person per two square metres of publicly accessible floorspace rule.</p>	<p>at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p> <p>Nightclubs will have a one person per 2m<sup>2</sup> density quotient with no maximum patron limit.</p> <p>Dance floors, karaoke bars, and food courts are now open with no limits, except for the one person per two square metres of publicly accessible floorspace rule.</p>
Businesses	<p>See <a href="#">COVID Safe Mandatory Registration</a></p> <p>Including gyms, hospitality venues, funeral homes, crematoria, and places of public worship.</p>	<p>See <a href="#">COVID Safe Business Framework</a></p> <p>2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>See <a href="#">COVIDSafe Plan</a></p> <p>COVIDSafe principles for business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1.5m physical distancing</li> <li>• practise good hygiene</li> </ul>		

	<p>Other businesses and organisations are encouraged to register.</p>	<p>1.5m physical distancing</p> <p>Businesses are required to keep contact details for a minimum of 30 days and a maximum of 56 days.</p> <p>Businesses (such as restaurants, food outlets, food courts, pubs, club and nightclubs) that do not use electronic sign-in, must collect that information manually and operate with an occupant density of one person per 4m<sup>2</sup>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• keep good records and act quickly if staff become unwell</li> <li>• avoid interactions in close spaces</li> <li>• create workforce bubbles</li> </ul>
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**TABLE 2 - At-a-glance summary of numbers and/or densities of people currently permitted by venue in each state: 26 February 2021**

(Source: publicly available documents prepared with the assistance of the Parliamentary Library)

**RECEIVED 26 FEBRUARY 2021**

STATE:	NSW As of 26 Feb 2021:		QLD As of 19 February 2021:		VIC From 11:59pm, 26 Feb 2021	
Venues,	Indoors	Outdoors	Indoors	Outdoors	Indoors	Outdoors
Galleries (Large and small)	<p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 visitors or fewer</p>	<p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 visitors or fewer</p>	<p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>&lt;500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;</p> <p>500-10,000 people - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units;</p>	<p>&lt;1,500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;</p> <p>1,500-10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units;</p>	<p>Up to 50% of seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-</p>	<p>Up to 75% seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons.</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-</p>

					based records.  If more than 500 people then venue must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.	based records.  If more than 500 people then venue must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.
Concerts (Large and small)	2m <sup>2</sup>  75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m <sup>2</sup> , whichever is greater.  Children count towards the capacity limit.	2m <sup>2</sup>  100% of seated capacity.  Children count towards the capacity limit.	2m <sup>2</sup>  <500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;  500-10,000 people - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units	<1,500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;  1,500-10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units;  >10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by the Chief Health Officer.	Up to 50% of seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons.  2m <sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.  4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.	Up to 75% seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons.  2m <sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.  4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.
Live venues (Large and small)	2m <sup>2</sup>  1.5m physical distancing when mixing, queuing, or between seated groups	2m <sup>2</sup>  1.5m physical distancing when mixing, queuing, or between seated groups	2m <sup>2</sup>  <500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;  500-10,000 people - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units	<1,500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;  1,500-10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units;	Up to 50% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons  1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.  1 per 4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with	Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons  1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.  1 per 4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with

				>10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by the Chief Health Officer.	paper-based records.	paper-based records.
Theatres (Large and small)	2m <sup>2</sup> 75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m <sup>2</sup> , whichever is the greater.  Children count	2m <sup>2</sup> 100% of seated capacity.  Children count	2m <sup>2</sup> <500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;  500-10,000 people - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units	<1,500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;  1,500-10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units;	Large indoor venues, such as the NGV and Princess Theatre, can open for up to 75% of the total venue capacity (to a max of 1,000 patrons).  1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.  1 person per 4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.  Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.	Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons  1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.  1 per 4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.  Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.
Pubs (Large and small)	2m <sup>2</sup>  No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.	2m <sup>2</sup>  No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.	2m <sup>2</sup>		Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons seated.	Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons seated.

	<p>Children count</p> <p>Nightclubs must close.</p>	<p>Children count</p> <p>Nightclubs must close.</p>			<p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup> per person on dance floors to max 50 people per dance area (such as a nightclub with multiple dance floors).</p>	<p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup> per person on dance floors to max 50 people per dance area (such as a nightclub with multiple dance floors).</p>
Businesses	<p><b>See COVID Safe Mandatory Registration</b></p> <p>Including gyms, hospitality venues, funeral homes, crematoria, and places of public worship.</p> <p>Other businesses and organisations are encouraged to register.</p>		<p><b>See COVID Safe Business Framework</b></p> <p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>1.5m physical distancing</p> <p>Businesses are required to keep contact details for a minimum of 30 days and a maximum of 56 days.</p>		<p>See <a href="#">COVIDSafe Plan</a></p> <p>COVIDSafe principles for business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1.5m physical distancing</li> <li>• practise good hygiene</li> <li>• keep good records and act quickly if staff become unwell</li> <li>• avoid interactions in close spaces</li> <li>• create workforce bubbles</li> </ul>	

**TABLE 3 RECEIVED 12 February 2021 – SOURCE: PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARY**

**At-a-glance summary of numbers and/or densities of people currently permitted by venue in each state:**

STATE:	NSW From 7 Dec 2020:		QLD From 12Pm, 14 Dec 2020:		VIC From 11:59pm, 6 Dec 2020	
Venues,	Indoors	Outdoors	Indoors	Outdoors	Indoors	Outdoors
Galleries (Large and small)	1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup>  No density limit if 25 visitors or fewer	1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup>  No density limit if 25 visitors or fewer	1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup>  <500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;  500-10,000 people - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units;	<1,500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;  1,500-10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units;	Up to 50% of seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons  1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.  4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.  If more than 500 people then venue must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.	Up to 75% seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons.  1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.  4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.  If more than 500 people then venue must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.
Concerts (Large and small)	2m <sup>2</sup>  75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m <sup>2</sup> , whichever is greater.  Children count towards the capacity limit.	2m <sup>2</sup>  100% of seated capacity.  Children count towards the capacity limit.	2m <sup>2</sup>  <500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;  500-10,000 people - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by	<1,500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;  1,500-10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units;	Up to 50% of seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons.  2m <sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.  4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas	Up to 75% seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons.  2m <sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.  4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas

			local public health units	>10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by the Chief Health Officer.	with paper-based records.	with paper-based records.
Live venues (Large and small)	2m <sup>2</sup> Maximum of 3000 people. Children count 1.5m physical distancing when mixing, queuing, or between seated groups	2m <sup>2</sup> Maximum of 3000 people. Children count 1.5m physical distancing when mixing, queuing, or between seated groups	2m <sup>2</sup> <500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed; 500-10,000 people - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units	<1,500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed; 1,500-10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units; >10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by the Chief Health Officer.	Up to 50% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons 1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping. 1 per 4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.	Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons 1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping. 1 per 4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.
Theatres (Large and small)	2m <sup>2</sup> 75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m <sup>2</sup> , whichever is the greater. Children count	2m <sup>2</sup> 100% of seated capacity. Children count	2m <sup>2</sup> <500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed; 500-10,000 people - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units	<1,500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed; 1,500-10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units;	Large indoor venues, such as the NGV and Princess Theatre, can open for up to 50% of the total venue capacity (to a max of 1,000 patrons). 1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with	Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons 1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping. 1 per 4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.

					<p>electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p>	<p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p>
Pubs (Large and small)	<p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.</p> <p>Children count</p> <p>On dancefloors one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> to a max of 50.</p> <p>At nightclubs one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> to a max of 50.</p>	<p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.</p> <p>Children count</p> <p>On dancefloors one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> to a max of 50.</p> <p>At nightclubs one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> to a max of 50.</p>	2m <sup>2</sup>		<p>Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons seated.</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup> per person on</p>	<p>Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons seated.</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup> per person on</p>

					dance floors to max 50 people per dance area (such as a nightclub with multiple dance floors).	dance floors to max 50 people per dance area (such as a nightclub with multiple dance floors).
Businesses	<p>See <b>COVID Safe Mandatory Registration</b></p> <p>Including gyms, hospitality venues, funeral homes, crematoria, and places of public worship.</p> <p>Other businesses and organisations are encouraged to register.</p>	<p>See <b>COVID Safe Business Framework</b></p> <p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>1.5m physical distancing</p> <p>Businesses are required to keep contact details for a minimum of 30 days and a maximum of 56 days.</p>			<p>See <a href="#">COVIDSafe Plan</a></p> <p>COVIDSafe principles for business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1.5m physical distancing</li> <li>• wear a face mask</li> <li>• practise good hygiene</li> <li>• keep good records and act quickly if staff become unwell</li> <li>• avoid interactions in close spaces</li> <li>• create workforce bubbles</li> </ul>	

At-a-glance summary of numbers and/or densities of people currently permitted by venue in each state:

(No change to QLD restrictions from 14 Dec 2020)

STATE:	NSW (Greater Sydney, Central Coast, Wollongong) <b>From 29 Jan 2021:</b>		NSW (regional & rural) <b>From 29 Jan 2021:</b>		VIC <b>From 11:59pm, 6 Dec 2020</b>	
Venues,	Indoors	Outdoors	Indoors	Outdoors	Indoors	Outdoors
Galleries (Large and small)	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 visitors or fewer</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>1 person per 4m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 visitors or fewer</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Up to 50% of seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>If more than 500 people then venue must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p>	<p>Up to 75% seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons.</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>If more than 500 people then venue must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p>
Concerts (Large and small)	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup> outdoors <b>or</b> one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> indoors</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup> outdoors <b>or</b> one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> indoors</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Up to 50% of seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons.</p> <p>2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p>	<p>Up to 75% seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons.</p> <p>2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p>

					4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.	4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.
Live venues (Large and small)	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup> outdoors or one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> indoors</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup> outdoors or one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> indoors</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Up to 50% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p>	<p>Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p>
Theatres (Large and small)	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup> outdoors or one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> indoors</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup> outdoors or one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> indoors</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Large indoor venues, such as the NGV and Princess Theatre, can open for up to 50% of the total venue capacity (to a max of 1,000 patrons).</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p>	<p>Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their</p>

					Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.	COVIDSafe Plans online.
Pubs (Large and small)	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.</p> <p>Children count towards the capacity limit.</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.</p> <p>Children count towards the capacity limit.</p>	<p>Businesses that prepare and serve food and drink to customers on the premises or for takeaway need to have a <a href="#">COVID-19 Safety Plan</a> for their venue type.</p> <p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.</p>	<p>Businesses that prepare and serve food and drink to customers on the premises or for takeaway need to have a <a href="#">COVID-19 Safety Plan</a> for their venue type.</p> <p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.</p>	<p>Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons seated.</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup> per person on dance floors to max 50 people per dance area (such as a nightclub with multiple</p>	<p>Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons seated.</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup> per person on dance floors to max 50 people per dance area (such as a nightclub with multiple</p>

					dance floors).	dance floors).
Businesses	<p>Check the <a href="#">COVID-19 Safety Plan</a> that applies to your business for guidance on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• whether your staff are required to face masks</li> <li>• whether a COVID-19 Safety Plan is required or recommended for your venue or event</li> <li>• who is responsible for the COVID-19 Safety Plan</li> <li>• whether you need to <a href="#">register as a COVID safe venue</a></li> <li>• when to apply the <a href="#">one person per 2 square metres rule</a> and <a href="#">one person per 4 square metres rule</a></li> <li>• the maximum number of people permitted at specific venues and events.</li> </ul> <p>If changes have been introduced for your industry since you last prepared a COVID-19 Safety Plan, see the latest version for new requirements.</p> <p>Learn more about <a href="#">electronic recordkeeping</a> if your business or organisation needs to collect customer details.</p>	<p>Check the <a href="#">COVID-19 Safety Plan</a> that applies to your business for guidance on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• whether a COVID-19 Safety Plan is required or recommended for your venue or event</li> <li>• who is responsible for the COVID-19 Safety Plan</li> <li>• whether you need to <a href="#">register as a COVID safe venue</a></li> <li>• when to apply the <a href="#">one person per 2 square metres rule</a> and <a href="#">one person per 4 square metres rule</a></li> <li>• the maximum number of people permitted at specific venues and events.</li> </ul> <p>If changes have been introduced for your industry since you last prepared a COVID-19 Safety Plan, see the latest version for new requirements.</p> <p>Learn more about <a href="#">electronic recordkeeping</a> if your business or organisation needs to collect customer details.</p>	<p>See <a href="#">COVIDSafe Plan</a></p> <p>COVIDSafe principles for business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1.5m physical distancing</li> <li>• wear a face mask</li> <li>• practise good hygiene</li> <li>• keep good records and act quickly if staff become unwell</li> <li>• avoid interactions in close spaces</li> <li>• create workforce bubbles</li> </ul>			

**As at 12 Feb 2021:**

At-a-glance summary of numbers and/or densities of people currently permitted by venue in each state:

**NSW:** capacity limits generally now one person per 2 square metres across the board (except for gyms, which are still at one person per 4 square metres).

STATE:	NSW (Greater Sydney, Central Coast, Wollongong <b>As at 12 Feb 2021:</b>		NSW (regional & rural) <b>As at 12 Feb 2021:</b>		QLD <b>As at 12 Feb 2021:</b>	
Venues	Indoors	Outdoors	Indoors	Outdoors	Indoors	Outdoors
Galleries (Large and small)	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 visitors or fewer</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 visitors or fewer</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>&lt; 500 people – COVID Safe Event Checklist required</p> <p>&gt; 500 people – COVID Safe Event Plan required</p>	<p>&lt; 1500 people – COVID Safe Event Checklist required</p> <p>&gt; 1500 people – COVID Safe Event Plan required</p>
Concerts (Large and small)	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>&lt; 500 people – COVID Safe Event Checklist required</p> <p>&gt; 500 people – COVID Safe Event Plan required</p> <p>100% capacity at seated, ticketed venues with patrons encouraged to wear masks on entry and exit</p>	<p>&lt; 1500 people – COVID Safe Event Checklist required</p> <p>&gt; 1500 people – COVID Safe Event Plan required</p> <p>Open air stadiums: 100% seated capacity (with a COVID Safe Plan). All patrons encouraged</p>

						to wear masks on entry and exit.
Live venues (Large and small)	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>&lt; 500 people – COVID Safe Event Checklist required</p> <p>&gt; 500 people – COVID Safe Event Plan required</p> <p>100% capacity at seated, ticketed venues with patrons encouraged to wear masks on entry and exit</p>	<p>&lt; 1500 people – COVID Safe Event Checklist required</p> <p>&gt; 1500 people – COVID Safe Event Plan required</p> <p>Open air stadiums: 100% seated capacity (with a COVID Safe Plan). All patrons encouraged to wear masks on entry and exit.</p>
Theatres (Large and small)	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>&lt; 500 people – COVID Safe Event Checklist required</p> <p>&gt; 500 people – COVID Safe Event Plan required</p> <p>100% capacity at seated, ticketed venues with patrons encouraged to wear</p>	<p>&lt; 1500 people – COVID Safe Event Checklist required</p> <p>&gt; 1500 people – COVID Safe Event Plan required</p> <p>Open air stadiums: 100% seated capacity (with a COVID Safe</p>

					masks on entry and exit	Plan). All patrons encouraged to wear masks on entry and exit.
Pubs (Large and small)	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.</p>	<p>One person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>(e.g. restaurants, cafés, pubs, clubs, museums, art galleries, places of worship, convention centres and Parliament House), including standing eating and drinking.</p>	
Businesses	<p>Check the <a href="#">COVID-19 Safety Plan</a> that applies to your business for guidance on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• whether your staff are required to face masks</li> <li>• whether a COVID-19 Safety Plan is required or recommended for your venue or event</li> <li>• who is responsible for the COVID-19 Safety Plan</li> <li>• whether you need to <a href="#">register as a COVID safe venue</a></li> <li>• when to apply the <a href="#">one person per 2 square metres rule</a> and, for gyms, the</li> </ul>	<p>Check the <a href="#">COVID-19 Safety Plan</a> that applies to your business for guidance on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• whether your staff are required to face masks</li> <li>• whether a COVID-19 Safety Plan is required or recommended for your venue or event</li> <li>• who is responsible for the COVID-19 Safety Plan</li> <li>• whether you need to <a href="#">register as a COVID safe venue</a></li> <li>• when to apply the <a href="#">one person per 2 square metres rule</a> and, for gyms, <a href="#">one</a></li> </ul>	<p>Check the <a href="#">COVID-19 Safety Plan</a> that applies to your business for guidance on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• whether your staff are required to face masks</li> <li>• whether a COVID-19 Safety Plan is required or recommended for your venue or event</li> <li>• who is responsible for the COVID-19 Safety Plan</li> <li>• whether you need to <a href="#">register as a COVID safe venue</a></li> <li>• when to apply the <a href="#">one person per 2 square metres rule</a> and, for gyms, <a href="#">one</a></li> </ul>	<p>All hospitality industry businesses (i.e. pubs, clubs, restaurants and cafés) in Queensland must comply with <a href="#">electronic contact information collection requirements</a>.</p> <p>COVID Safe businesses :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow the <a href="#">public health directions</a> and keep up-to-date with requirements to make your business and customers COVID Safe.</li> <li>• Ensure staff and customers observe physical distancing.</li> </ul>		

	<p><a href="#">one person per 4 square metres rule</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the maximum number of people permitted at specific venues and events.</li> </ul> <p>If changes have been introduced for your industry since you last prepared a COVID-19 Safety Plan, see the latest version for new requirements.</p> <p>Learn more about <a href="#">electronic recordkeeping</a> if your business or organisation needs to collect customer details.</p> <p><b>Sources:</b>  <a href="https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/what-you-can-and-cant-do-under-rules/greater-sydney">https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/what-you-can-and-cant-do-under-rules/greater-sydney</a>   <a href="https://www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/covid-19-restrictions-update-for-greater-sydney-region">https://www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/covid-19-restrictions-update-for-greater-sydney-region</a></p>	<p><a href="#">person per 4 square metres rule</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the maximum number of people permitted at specific venues and events.</li> </ul> <p>If changes have been introduced for your industry since you last prepared a COVID-19 Safety Plan, see the latest version for new requirements.</p> <p>Learn more about <a href="#">electronic recordkeeping</a> if your business or organisation needs to collect customer details.</p> <p><b>Source:</b>  <a href="https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/what-you-can-and-cant-do-under-rules/regional-and-rural-nsw">https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/what-you-can-and-cant-do-under-rules/regional-and-rural-nsw</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collect and keep customer details (if required).</li> <li>Don't allow staff or customers showing any COVID-19 symptoms to enter your premises.</li> <li>Ensure <a href="#">COVID Safe management plans</a> (Work Health and Safety) are in place which detail how you, your workers and your patrons will stay COVID safe.</li> <li>Operate under a <a href="#">COVID Safe Industry Plan</a> or a <a href="#">COVID Safe Checklist</a>, which detail how COVID safety is managed in specific industries.</li> <li>Develop <a href="#">COVID Safe site specific plans</a> if your business has an individual, unique and complex site (like large outdoor amusement parks, zoos etc.).</li> </ul> <p><b>Sources:</b>  <a href="https://www.covid19.qld.gov.au/government-actions/roadmap-to-easing-queenslands-restrictions#_current">https://www.covid19.qld.gov.au/government-actions/roadmap-to-easing-queenslands-restrictions#_current</a>   <a href="https://www.covid19.qld.gov.au/government-actions/covid-safe-businesses">https://www.covid19.qld.gov.au/government-actions/covid-safe-businesses</a></p>
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**TABLE 4 - PROVIDED ON 2 FEBRUARY 2021 BY THE PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARY**

**There have been no changes to restrictions in QLD and Vic since the last information was supplied on 17/12/20.**

**At-a-glance summary of numbers and/or densities of people currently permitted by venue in NSW:**

STATE:	NSW (Greater Sydney, Central Coast, Wollongong From 29 Jan 2021:		NSW (regional & rural) From 29 Jan 2021:	
Venues,	Indoors	Outdoors	Indoors	Outdoors
Galleries (Large and small)	Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan  1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup>  No density limit if 25 visitors or fewer	Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan  1 person per 4m <sup>2</sup>  No density limit if 25 visitors or fewer	Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan  1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup>	Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan  1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup>
Concerts (Large and small)	Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan  75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m <sup>2</sup> outdoors or one person per 4m <sup>2</sup> indoors	Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan  100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m <sup>2</sup> outdoors or one person per 4m <sup>2</sup> indoors	Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan  75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m <sup>2</sup>	Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan  100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m <sup>2</sup>
Live venues (Large and small)	Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan  75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m <sup>2</sup> outdoors or one person per 4m <sup>2</sup> indoors	Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan  100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m <sup>2</sup> outdoors or one person	Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan  75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m <sup>2</sup>	Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan  100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m <sup>2</sup>

		per 4m <sup>2</sup> indoors		
Theatres (Large and small)	Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan  75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m <sup>2</sup> outdoors or one person per 4m <sup>2</sup> indoors	Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan  100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m <sup>2</sup> outdoors or one person per 4m <sup>2</sup> indoors	Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan  75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m <sup>2</sup>	Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan  100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m <sup>2</sup>
Pubs (Large and small)	Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan  4m <sup>2</sup>  No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.  Children count towards the capacity limit.	Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan  4m <sup>2</sup>  No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.  Children count towards the capacity limit.	Businesses that prepare and serve food and drink to customers on the premises or for takeaway need to have a <a href="#">COVID-19 Safety Plan</a> for their venue type.  2m <sup>2</sup>  No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.	Businesses that prepare and serve food and drink to customers on the premises or for takeaway need to have a <a href="#">COVID-19 Safety Plan</a> for their venue type.  2m <sup>2</sup>  No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.
Businesses	Check the <a href="#">COVID-19 Safety Plan</a> that applies to your business for guidance on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• whether your staff are required to face masks</li> <li>• whether a COVID-19 Safety Plan is</li> </ul>		Check the <a href="#">COVID-19 Safety Plan</a> that applies to your business for guidance on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• whether a COVID-19 Safety Plan is required or recommended for your venue or event</li> </ul>	

	<p>required or recommended for your venue or event</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• who is responsible for the COVID-19 Safety Plan</li> <li>• whether you need to <a href="#">register as a COVID safe venue</a></li> <li>• when to apply the <a href="#">one person per 2 square metres rule</a> and <a href="#">one person per 4 square metres rule</a></li> <li>• the maximum number of people permitted at specific venues and events.</li> </ul> <p>If changes have been introduced for your industry since you last prepared a COVID-19 Safety Plan, see the latest version for new requirements.</p> <p>Learn more about <a href="#">electronic recordkeeping</a> if your business or organisation needs to collect customer details.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• who is responsible for the COVID-19 Safety Plan</li> <li>• whether you need to <a href="#">register as a COVID safe venue</a></li> <li>• when to apply the <a href="#">one person per 2 square metres rule</a> and <a href="#">one person per 4 square metres rule</a></li> <li>• the maximum number of people permitted at specific venues and events.</li> </ul> <p>If changes have been introduced for your industry since you last prepared a COVID-19 Safety Plan, see the latest version for new requirements.</p> <p>Learn more about <a href="#">electronic recordkeeping</a> if your business or organisation needs to collect customer details.</p>
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At-a-glance summary of numbers and/or densities of people currently permitted by venue in each state:

STATE:	NSW From 7 Dec 2020:		QLD From 12Pm, 14 Dec 2020:		VIC From 11:59pm, 6 Dec 2020	
Venues,	Indoors	Outdoors	Indoors	Outdoors	Indoors	Outdoors
Galleries (Large and small)	1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup>  No density limit if 25 visitors or fewer	1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup>  No density limit if 25 visitors or fewer	1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup>  <500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;  500-10,000 people - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units;	<1,500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;  1,500-10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units;	Up to 50% of seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons  1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.  4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.  If more than 500 people then venue must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.	Up to 75% seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons.  1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.  4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.  If more than 500 people then venue must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.
Concerts (Large and small)	2m <sup>2</sup>  75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m <sup>2</sup> , whichever is greater.  Children count towards the capacity limit.	2m <sup>2</sup>  100% of seated capacity.  Children count towards the capacity limit.	2m <sup>2</sup>  <500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;  500-10,000 people - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units	<1,500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;  1,500-10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units;	Up to 50% of seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons.  2m <sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.  4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-	Up to 75% seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons.  2m <sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.  4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-

				>10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by the Chief Health Officer.	based records.	based records.
Live venues (Large and small)	2m <sup>2</sup> Maximum of 3000 people. Children count 1.5m physical distancing when mixing, queuing, or between seated groups	2m <sup>2</sup> Maximum of 3000 people. Children count 1.5m physical distancing when mixing, queuing, or between seated groups	2m <sup>2</sup> <500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed; 500-10,000 people - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units	<1,500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed; 1,500-10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units; >10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by the Chief Health Officer.	Up to 50% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons 1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping. 1 per 4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.	Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons 1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping. 1 per 4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.
Theatres (Large and small)	2m <sup>2</sup> 75% of seated capacity, or one person per 2m <sup>2</sup> , whichever is the greater. Children count	2m <sup>2</sup> 100% of seated capacity. Children count	2m <sup>2</sup> <500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed; 500-10,000 people - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units	<1,500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed; 1,500-10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units;	Large indoor venues, such as the NGV and Princess Theatre, can open for up to 50% of the total venue capacity (to a max of 1,000 patrons). 1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic	Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons 1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping. 1 per 4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.

					<p>record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p>	<p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p>
Pubs (Large and small)	<p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.</p> <p>Children count</p> <p>On dancefloors one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> to a max of 50.</p> <p>At nightclubs one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> to a max of 50.</p>	<p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.</p> <p>Children count</p> <p>On dancefloors one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> to a max of 50.</p> <p>At nightclubs one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> to a max of 50.</p>	2m <sup>2</sup>		<p>Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons seated.</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup> per person on dance floors</p>	<p>Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons seated.</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup> per person on dance floors</p>

					to max 50 people per dance area (such as a nightclub with multiple dance floors).	to max 50 people per dance area (such as a nightclub with multiple dance floors).
Businesses	<p>See <b>COVID Safe Mandatory Registration</b></p> <p>Including gyms, hospitality venues, funeral homes, crematoria, and places of public worship.</p> <p>Other businesses and organisations are encouraged to register.</p>	<p>See <b>COVID Safe Business Framework</b></p> <p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>1.5m physical distancing</p> <p>Businesses are required to keep contact details for a minimum of 30 days and a maximum of 56 days.</p>			See <a href="#">COVIDSafe Plan</a>	<p>COVIDSafe principles for business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1.5m physical distancing</li> <li>• wear a face mask</li> <li>• practise good hygiene</li> <li>• keep good records and act quickly if staff become unwell</li> <li>• avoid interactions in close spaces</li> <li>• create workforce bubbles</li> </ul>

**TABLE 5 - PROVIDED – 17 DECEMBER 2020 BY THE PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARY**

**At-a-glance summary of numbers and/or densities of people currently permitted by venue in each state:**

**(No change to QLD restrictions from 14 Dec 2020)**

STATE:	NSW (Greater Sydney, Central Coast, Wollongong From 29 Jan 2021:		NSW (regional & rural) From 29 Jan 2021:		VIC From 11:59pm, 6 Dec 2020	
Venues,	Indoors	Outdoors	Indoors	Outdoors	Indoors	Outdoors
Galleries (Large and small)	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 visitors or fewer</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>1 person per 4m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 visitors or fewer</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Up to 50% of seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>If more than 500 people then venue must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p>	<p>Up to 75% seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons.</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>If more than 500 people then venue must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p>
Concerts (Large and small)	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup> outdoors <b>or</b> one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> indoors</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup> outdoors <b>or</b> one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> indoors</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Up to 50% of seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons.</p> <p>2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p>	<p>Up to 75% seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons.</p> <p>2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p>

					4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.	4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.
Live venues (Large and small)	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup> outdoors or one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> indoors</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup> outdoors or one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> indoors</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Up to 50% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p>	<p>Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p>
Theatres (Large and small)	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup> outdoors or one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> indoors</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup> outdoors or one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> indoors</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>100% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Large indoor venues, such as the NGV and Princess Theatre, can open for up to 50% of the total venue capacity (to a max of 1,000 patrons).</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p>	<p>Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their</p>

					Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.	COVIDSafe Plans online.
Pubs (Large and small)	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.</p> <p>Children count towards the capacity limit.</p>	<p>Must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.</p> <p>Children count towards the capacity limit.</p>	<p>Businesses that prepare and serve food and drink to customers on the premises or for takeaway need to have a <a href="#">COVID-19 Safety Plan</a> for their venue type.</p> <p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.</p>	<p>Businesses that prepare and serve food and drink to customers on the premises or for takeaway need to have a <a href="#">COVID-19 Safety Plan</a> for their venue type.</p> <p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.</p>	<p>Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons seated.</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup> per person on dance floors to max 50 people per dance area (such as a nightclub with multiple</p>	<p>Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons seated.</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup> per person on dance floors to max 50 people per dance area (such as a nightclub with multiple</p>

					dance floors).	dance floors).
Businesses	<p>Check the <a href="#">COVID-19 Safety Plan</a> that applies to your business for guidance on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• whether your staff are required to face masks</li> <li>• whether a COVID-19 Safety Plan is required or recommended for your venue or event</li> <li>• who is responsible for the COVID-19 Safety Plan</li> <li>• whether you need to <a href="#">register as a COVID safe venue</a></li> <li>• when to apply the <a href="#">one person per 2 square metres rule</a> and <a href="#">one person per 4 square metres rule</a></li> <li>• the maximum number of people permitted at specific venues and events.</li> </ul> <p>If changes have been introduced for your industry since you last prepared a COVID-19 Safety Plan, see the latest version for new requirements.</p> <p>Learn more about <a href="#">electronic recordkeeping</a> if your business or organisation needs to collect customer details.</p>	<p>Check the <a href="#">COVID-19 Safety Plan</a> that applies to your business for guidance on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• whether a COVID-19 Safety Plan is required or recommended for your venue or event</li> <li>• who is responsible for the COVID-19 Safety Plan</li> <li>• whether you need to <a href="#">register as a COVID safe venue</a></li> <li>• when to apply the <a href="#">one person per 2 square metres rule</a> and <a href="#">one person per 4 square metres rule</a></li> <li>• the maximum number of people permitted at specific venues and events.</li> </ul> <p>If changes have been introduced for your industry since you last prepared a COVID-19 Safety Plan, see the latest version for new requirements.</p> <p>Learn more about <a href="#">electronic recordkeeping</a> if your business or organisation needs to collect customer details.</p>	<p>See <a href="#">COVIDSafe Plan</a></p> <p>COVIDSafe principles for business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1.5m physical distancing</li> <li>• wear a face mask</li> <li>• practise good hygiene</li> <li>• keep good records and act quickly if staff become unwell</li> <li>• avoid interactions in close spaces</li> <li>• create workforce bubbles</li> </ul>			

**TABLE 6 - PROVIDED ON 17 December 2020 BY THE PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARY**

**At-a-glance summary of numbers and/or densities of people currently permitted by venue in each state\*:**

STATE:	NSW From 7 Dec 2020:		QLD From 12Pm, 14 Dec 2020:		VIC From 11:59pm, 6 Dec 2020	
Venues,	Indoors	Outdoors	Indoors	Outdoors	Indoors	Outdoors
Galleries (Large and small)	1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup>  No density limit if 25 visitors or fewer	1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup>  No density limit if 25 visitors or fewer	1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup>  <500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;  500-10,000 people - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units;	<1,500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;  1,500-10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units;	Up to 50% of seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons  1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.  4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.  If more than 500 people then venue must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.	Up to 75% seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons.  1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.  4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.  If more than 500 people then venue must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.
Concerts (Large and small)	2m <sup>2</sup>  75% of seated capacity, or one person per 2m <sup>2</sup> , whichever is greater.  Children count towards the capacity limit.	2m <sup>2</sup>  100% of seated capacity.  Children count towards the capacity limit.	2m <sup>2</sup>  <500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;  500-10,000 people - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by	<1,500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;  1,500-10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units;	Up to 50% of seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons.  2m <sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.  4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas	Up to 75% seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons.  2m <sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.  4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas

			local public health units	>10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by the Chief Health Officer.	with paper-based records.	with paper-based records.
Live venues (Large and small)	<p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>Maximum of 3000 people.</p> <p>Children count</p> <p>1.5m physical distancing when mixing, queuing, or between seated groups</p>	<p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>Maximum of 3000 people.</p> <p>Children count</p> <p>1.5m physical distancing when mixing, queuing, or between seated groups</p>	<p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>&lt;500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;</p> <p>500-10,000 people - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units</p>	<p>&lt;1,500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;</p> <p>1,500-10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units;</p> <p>&gt;10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by the Chief Health Officer.</p>	<p>Up to 50% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p>	<p>Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p>
Theatres (Large and small)	<p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m<sup>2</sup>, whichever is the greater.</p> <p>Children count</p>	<p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>100% of seated capacity.</p> <p>Children count</p>	<p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>&lt;500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;</p> <p>500-10,000 people - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units</p>	<p>&lt;1,500 – COVID Safe Event Checklist, no further approval needed;</p> <p>1,500-10,000 - COVID Safe Event Plan approved by local public health units;</p>	<p>Large indoor venues, such as the NGV and Princess Theatre, can open for up to 50% of the total venue capacity (to a max of 1,000 patrons).</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with</p>	<p>Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p>

					<p>electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p>	<p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p>
Pubs (Large and small)	<p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.</p> <p>Children count</p> <p>On dancefloors one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> to a max of 50.</p> <p>At nightclubs one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> to a max of 50.</p>	<p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.</p> <p>Children count</p> <p>On dancefloors one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> to a max of 50.</p> <p>At nightclubs one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> to a max of 50.</p>	2m <sup>2</sup>		<p>Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons seated.</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup> per person on</p>	<p>Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons seated.</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup> per person on</p>

					dance floors to max 50 people per dance area (such as a nightclub with multiple dance floors).	dance floors to max 50 people per dance area (such as a nightclub with multiple dance floors).
Businesses	<p>See <b>COVID Safe Mandatory Registration</b></p> <p>Including gyms, hospitality venues, funeral homes, crematoria, and places of public worship.</p> <p>Other businesses and organisations are encouraged to register.</p>	<p>See <b>COVID Safe Business Framework</b></p> <p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>1.5m physical distancing</p> <p>Businesses are required to keep contact details for a minimum of 30 days and a maximum of 56 days.</p>			See <a href="#">COVIDSafe Plan</a>	<p>COVIDSafe principles for business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1.5m physical distancing</li> <li>• wear a face mask</li> <li>• practise good hygiene</li> <li>• keep good records and act quickly if staff become unwell</li> <li>• avoid interactions in close spaces</li> <li>• create workforce bubbles</li> </ul>

\*See detailed information for each state below.

## **New South Wales**

[NSW Government: What you can and can't do under the rules: Hospitality venues, events and musical activities](#) (Sourced 08/12/2020.)

### **Hospitality venues, events and musical activities**

#### **Two square metres rule**

Venue operators must generally ensure there are at least [2 square metres of space](#) for each person on the premises or in the area, as applicable.

#### **Hospitality venues**

- Businesses that prepare and serve food and drink to customers on the premises or for takeaway need to have a [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#) for their venue type.
- Penalties apply to venues found to [breach the public health order](#) rules.
- The maximum number of people permitted at hospitality venues is [one person per 2 square metres](#). Up to 25 patrons are permitted before this rule applies.
- For hospitality venues with more than one separate area, this applies per separate area.

#### **Nightclubs**

- Nightclubs are subject to the one person per [4 square metres rule](#) and must follow the requirements in an up-to-date [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#).
- Dance floors are limited to 50 people.
- A nightclub is defined as any premises that is the subject of an on-premises licence in force under the [Liquor Act 2007](#) that relates to a public entertainment venue (other than a cinema or theatre).

#### **Function centres, trade shows and exhibitions**

- A function centre is a building or place used for holding events, functions, conferences, and includes convention centres, exhibition centres and reception centres. Function centre operators must complete and register a [COVID Safety Plan](#).
- If a trade show or exhibition is held in a function centre and open to the public, the maximum capacity is [one person per 2 square metres](#).
- See also the COVID-19 Safety Plan for [functions and conferences](#).

#### **Entertainment facilities including cinemas and theatres**

- Under the public health order, an entertainment facility means a theatre, cinema, music hall, concert hall, dance hall and the like, but does not include a pub or registered club.
- Entertainment facilities must have a [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#) and can
  - sell tickets for seated events at 75% of capacity, to a maximum of 1000 tickets, or
  - use the [2 square metres rule](#) to calculate capacity with no maximum number of people.
- Events must be ticketed with ticketholders assigned to a seating area for the 75% capacity calculation to be used.
- Alternatively, entertainment facilities may allow [one person per 2 square metres](#) on the premises, with no maximum capacity.
- Outdoor cinemas and theatres are permitted 100% seated capacity.

#### **Group singing and musical ensemble advice**

- Group singing and chanting remains a high-risk activity for transmission should someone involved be infected.
- *Indoors settings*
- Up to 50 people may

- sing together in one area if all singers face forwards and not towards each other
- have physical distancing of 1.5 metres between each other and any other performers, and
- 5 metres distancing from all other people in front including the audience and conductor.
- The audience or congregation should not participate in singing in this setting due to the increased risk of transmission and NSW Health strongly recommends anyone 12 years or older wear a [face mask](#).
- Ensembles and other musical groups should rehearse and perform outdoors or in large, well-ventilated indoor spaces.

#### *Outdoors settings*

- There is no limit on the number of people singing together in an outdoors setting.
- To minimise infection risk:
  - all singers should face forwards and not towards each other
  - maintain physical distancing of 1.5 metres between each other and any other performers, and
  - keep 5 metres distancing from all other people including the audience and conductor.
- If the event is one where the audience or congregation are likely to participate in the singing, such as carols by candlelight or religious services, audience members and congregants 12 years or older should wear a [face mask](#).

#### **Outdoor music performances and rehearsals**

- Music performances and rehearsals can be held outdoors with a maximum of 3,000 people if
  - the person principally responsible for organising the rehearsal or performance develops and complies with a [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#)
  - all participants provide their contact details (name and phone number or email) where practicable.
- Outdoor music performances and rehearsals held at certain larger venues, including entertainment facilities, major recreation facilities and zoos, may have more than 3,000 people subject to the restrictions at those venues.
- Outdoor music performances and rehearsals may be held at places of public worship, subject to the [one person per 2 square metres](#) rule.

#### **Current restrictions on businesses**

See the [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#) that applies to your business for guidance on

- whether a COVID-19 Safety Plan is required or recommended for your venue or event
- who is responsible for the COVID-19 Safety Plan
- whether you need to register as a COVID safe venue
- when to apply the [one person per 2 square metres](#) rule and one person per 4 square metres rule
- the maximum number of people permitted at specific venues and events.

Learn more about [electronic record keeping](#) if your business or organisation needs to collect customer details.

#### **COVID Safe businesses and organisations**

COVID Safe businesses and organisations have:

- a comprehensive COVID-19 Safety Plan in place
- registered as COVID Safe.

COVID Safe businesses and organisations are easily recognised by the blue tick badge displayed on their premises or online.



Registration is quick and easy and it shows customers that you're committed to their safety.

Registered businesses and organisations get:

- a digital COVID Safe badge for use on Google and social channels
- a print ready COVID Safe badge file for use as a poster or sticker on your shop front/high traffic areas
- posters on safety and hygiene
- reports on how your customers and visitors rate your business.

### **Mandatory registration**

For some types of businesses and organisations, it is mandatory to register as COVID Safe under the Public Health Orders.

These businesses are:

- gyms
- hospitality venues (restaurants, cafes, pubs, clubs, small bars, cellar doors, breweries, distilleries, karaoke bars and casinos)
- funeral homes and crematoria
- places of public worship.

Other businesses and organisations are encouraged to register as COVID Safe to show their customers and visitors that they are keeping up the highest standards to prevent COVID-19 transmission.

### **COVID-19 Safety Plans**

- COVID-19 Safety Plans are comprehensive checklists designed by NSW Health and approved by the Chief Health Officer.
- The plans provide clear directions on how businesses and organisations should fulfil their obligations under Public Health Orders to minimise risk of transmission of COVID-19 on their premises.
- Businesses and organisations should review the COVID-19 Safety Plan for their industry to see if completing a plan and registering is compulsory under Public Health Orders.
- All other businesses and organisations are encouraged to complete a COVID-19 Safety Plan voluntarily.

See also: [COVID-19 Restriction Checker: Entertainment and community – New South Wales](#) (Current as of 7 December 2020.)

## **Queensland:**

[Queensland Government: Roadmap to easing restrictions](#). Sourced 16/12/2020.

### **Stage 6: From 1am Tuesday 1 December 2020**

What's changed from 1am AEST 12 December 2020

- There are no [COVID-19 hotspots](#) in Australia.
- You are free to enter Queensland from any Australian state or territory.
- The Queensland Border Declaration Pass system is not active. You do not need a border pass to enter Queensland.
- New Zealand is a safe travel zone country – anyone from New Zealand who travels on a [quarantine-free flight\\*](#) can come to Queensland without needing to quarantine. [Find out more about quarantine for international arrivals](#).
  - Other countries, including New Zealand, still have travel restrictions in place. Queenslanders should visit [Smart Traveller](#) before making overseas travel arrangements.

Indoor dancing is allowed from noon on Monday 14 December, subject to the one person per 2m<sup>2</sup> rule.

From 1am Tuesday 1 December 2020:

- **Border Passes:** Visitors can enter Queensland without having to complete a Queensland Border Declaration Pass or mandatory quarantine, unless they are travelling from a declared hotspot. As at 12 December 2020 there are no declared hotspots in Australia.
- **Hotspots:** Visitors and returned travellers who have been in a [Local Government Area identified as a hotspot](#) in the last 14 days can enter Queensland with a valid [Queensland Border Declaration Pass](#) and are required to complete the mandatory 14-day quarantine.
- **Gatherings:** 50 people allowed to gather in homes and 100 in public spaces across Queensland.
- **Indoor premises:** One per person per 2m<sup>2</sup> (e.g. restaurants, cafes, pubs, clubs, museums, art galleries, places of worship, convention centres and Parliament House). Indoor play areas and unattended retail (such as children's rides and freestanding unattended amusement and wellbeing machines) within a premises can open with a COVID Safe Checklist.
- **Wedding ceremonies:** Up to 200 people can attend a wedding and all guests can dance (both indoors and outdoors).
- **Funerals:** Up to 200 people can attend a funeral.
- **Indoor events:** 100% capacity at seated, ticketed venues with patrons to wear masks on entry and exit (e.g. theatre, live music, cinemas and indoor sports). Performers can distance from audience at 2m, except choirs which remain at 4m from the audience.
- **Outdoor events:** 1500 permitted at outdoor events with a COVID Safe Event Checklist. Larger events require a COVID Safe Plan.
- **Open air stadiums:** 100% seated capacity (with a COVID Safe Plan).
- **Outdoor dancing:** Outdoor dancing allowed (e.g. outdoor music festivals, beer gardens).

### **Businesses, activities and undertakings**

[Restrictions on Businesses, Activities and Undertakings Direction \(No.11\)](#)

What's changed from 12pm (midday) AEST 14 December 2020

- Indoor and outdoor dancing is allowed, subject to the one person per 2 square metre rule. Businesses should ensure patrons practice physical distancing in dance areas.
- Community facilities (such as PCYC's) are no longer restricted by the 50 person limit where there is no COVID-safe Plan or Checklist in place.
- Businesses are required to keep contact details for a minimum of 30 days and a maximum of 56 days.
- Unattended children's rides and games in retail premises can operate.
- There is a new definition of 'ticketed and allocated seating'.

Schedule 1: [Direction from Chief Health Officer in accordance with emergency powers arising from the declared public health emergency](#) Effective from: 12pm AEST 14 December 2020)

<b>Entertainment venues</b>	
Pubs, licensed clubs, RSL clubs, function centres, bars, wineries, distilleries and microbreweries, and licensed premises in hotels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May also operate for takeaway service and home delivery.</li> </ul>
<p>Concert venues, theatres, auditoriums and cinemas</p> <p><i>Note – if a venue does not have an <b>Approved Plan</b> they may operate under another element of the COVID Safe Framework (see paragraph 9)</i></p>	<p>May operate in compliance with an <b>Approved Plan</b> and <b>occupant density</b>.</p> <p>For drive in cinemas people should remain in their vehicles to the extent possible.</p> <p><i>Example – a school auditorium hired by a dance studio for an end of year concert may use up to 100% of seated venue capacity when spectators are in <b>ticketed and allocated seating</b>.</i></p>
Convention centres and show grounds	
<p>Indoor and outdoor events</p> <p><i>(Example – marathons, cultural festivals, fetes, expos)</i></p>	<p>May operate in compliance with an <b>Approved Plan</b> (if applicable), other than a <b>COVID Safe Event Plan</b>. If more than 500 people (indoor events) or more than 1,500 people (outdoor events) will be in attendance, the event organiser must notify the local public health unit a minimum of 10 business days prior to the event taking place.</p> <p>Otherwise, must operate in accordance with the following conditions, depending on the number of people per event (or number of people per day for multi-day events) and whether the event is held indoors or outdoors:</p> <p>Must operate in accordance with <b>occupant density</b> and the following conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Indoor events</b></li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Fewer than 500 people</b> – must comply with a <b>COVID Safe Event Checklist</b>, no further approval needed;</li> <li>○ <b>Between 500 and 10,000 people</b> - must comply with a <b>COVID Safe Event Plan</b> approved by local public health units;</li> <li>○ <b>Over 10,000 people</b> - must comply with a <b>COVID Safe Event Plan</b> approved by the Chief Health Officer.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Outdoor events</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Fewer than 1,500 people</b> – must comply with a <b>COVID Safe Event Checklist</b>, no further approval needed;</li> <li>○ <b>Between 1,500 and 10,000 people</b> - must comply with a <b>COVID Safe Event Plan</b> approved by local public health units;</li> <li>○ <b>Over 10,000 people</b> - must comply with a <b>COVID Safe Event Plan</b> approved by the Chief Health Officer.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><i>Note – Multi-day events may operate in accordance with the above conditions, depending on the number of people in attendance per day. For example, a 3-day outdoor event with 1,500 attendees per day may comply with a COVID Safe Event Checklist.</i></p>
Theme parks, outdoor amusement parks, tourism experiences and arcades	
Indoor play centres and unattended children’s rides and games in retail premises	
<b>Non-residential institutions</b>	
Galleries, museums, national and state institutions and historic sites	<p>Limited to one person per 2 square metres regardless of the size of the venue.</p> <p><i>Example – a gallery with 150 square metres must comply with the one person per 2 square metre rule.</i></p> <p>An event held at these venues will need to comply with the relevant indoor or outdoor event requirements.</p>
Community facilities (such as community centres and	Limited to one person per 2 square metres regardless of the size of the venue.

halls, recreation centres, youth centres, community clubs, RSLs, PCYCs)	<p>The condition in paragraph 9(d)(i) does not apply.</p> <p>Community facilities should allow for <b><i>physical distancing</i></b> to the extent possible.</p> <p>An event held at these venues will need to comply with the relevant indoor or outdoor event requirements.</p>
<b><i>High risk businesses, activities and undertakings</i></b>	
Nightclubs	

See also: [COVID-19 Restriction Checker: Entertainment and community – Queensland](#)

## **Victoria**

[Victorian Government: Entertainment and culture - Victoria - Last Step](#) (Sourced 8/12/2020)

Restrictions are changing in Victoria from 11:59pm on Sunday 6 December 2020.

- Dance floors can open in pubs and bars. Venues must apply a [four square metre rule](#) to the dance floor, with a maximum of 50 people dancing at one time per dance area (such as in a nightclub with multiple dance floors).
- Indoor and outdoor seated entertainment venues can open for up to 75 per cent of seating capacity up to 1,000 patrons. For non-seated areas, venues can use the [two square metre rule](#) if using electronic record keeping. If using paper-based records, the [four square metre rule](#) applies.
- Large indoor venues, such as the NGV and Princess Theatre, can open for up to 50 percent of the total venue capacity (up to a maximum of 1,000 patrons). For non-seated areas, venues can use the [two square metre rule](#) if using electronic record keeping. If using paper-based records, the [four square metre rule](#).
- Outdoor non-seated entertainment venues can open. They can apply the [two square metre rule](#) if using electronic record keeping.
- Indoor non-seated entertainment venues can open for up to 50 per cent of capacity (up to a maximum of 1,000 patrons).
- Casinos can open. The 4m<sup>2</sup> rule must be applied and electronic record keeping must be used.
- Arcades, bingo centres and escape rooms can open. They can apply the two square metre rule if using electronic record keeping to ensure people can keep 1.5 metres away from others.
- Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.
- There are no limits on how far you can travel to visit an entertainment, arts or cultural venue.
- To keep their staff and customers safe businesses need to follow cleaning, signage and record keeping requirements.

## **Business and work**

[COVIDSafe Plan](#): Information and resources to help your business prepare a COVIDSafe Plan.

## **COVIDSafe Summer**

- Restaurants, cafes, bars and pubs can open for seated and unseated service. They must use electronic record keeping and apply the [two square metre rule](#) to ensure that customers have enough room to keep 1.5 metres between themselves and others. There are no other limits on the number of customers. Venues can have up to 25 people before the two square metre rule needs to be applied.

[Record keeping for contact tracing - information for business](#): Key points

- From 11:59pm 6 December 2020 businesses may apply the two square metre rule if they use electronic record keeping to record the details of anyone who spends more than 15 minutes at their business. Otherwise, the four square metre rule applies for manual means of record keeping. Retailers should keep electronic records where practical to do so.
- Businesses are strongly encouraged to use QR codes to support contact tracing. For more information on this free service see [Victorian Government QR Code Service](#).
- A [Visitor and patron contacts log - Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) contact tracing register](#) is available for businesses using manual processes such as pen and paper.
- Businesses across the state can now access information on dealing with coronavirus (COVID-19) by calling the Business Victoria hotline on 13 22 15.

See also: [COVID-19 Restriction Checker: Can I go to entertainment or cultural venues in Victoria?](#)  
(Current as of 7 December 2020)

**TABLE 7 - PROVIDED ON 8 DECEMBER 2020 BY THE PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARY**

**At-a-glance summary of numbers and/or densities of people currently permitted by venue in each state\*:**

STATE:	NSW From 7 Dec 2020:		QLD From 1am, 1 Dec 2020:		VIC From 11:59pm, 6 Dec 2020	
Venues,	Indoors	Outdoors	Indoors	Outdoors	Indoors	Outdoors
Galleries (Large and small)	1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup>  No density limit if 25 visitors or fewer	1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup>  No density limit if 25 visitors or fewer	1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup>	1500 with a COVID Safe Event Checklist.  Larger events require a COVID Safe Plan.	Up to 50% of seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons  1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.  4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.  If more than 500 people then venue must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.	Up to 75% seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons.  1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.  4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.  If more than 500 people then venue must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.
Concerts (Large and small)	2m <sup>2</sup>  75% of seated capacity, <b>or</b> one person per 2m <sup>2</sup> , whichever is greater.  Children count towards the capacity limit.	2m <sup>2</sup>  100% of seated capacity.  Children count towards the capacity limit.	2m <sup>2</sup>	1500 with a COVID Safe Event Checklist. Larger events require a COVID Safe Plan.  Open air stadiums: 100% seated capacity	Up to 50% of seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons.  2m <sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.	Up to 75% seating capacity, max 1,000 patrons.  2m <sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.

				(with a COVID Safe Plan).	4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.	4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.
Live venues (Large and small)	2m <sup>2</sup> Maximum of 3000 people. Children count 1.5m physical distancing when mixing, queuing, or between seated groups	2m <sup>2</sup> Maximum of 3000 people. Children count 1.5m physical distancing when mixing, queuing, or between seated groups	2m <sup>2</sup>	1500 with a COVID Safe Event Checklist. Larger events require a COVID Safe Plan.  Open air stadiums: 100% seated capacity (with a COVID Safe Plan).	Up to 50% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons  1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.  1 per 4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.	Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons  1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.  1 per 4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.
Theatres (Large and small)	2m <sup>2</sup> 75% of seated capacity, or one person per 2m <sup>2</sup> , whichever is the greater. Children count	2m <sup>2</sup> 100% of seated capacity. Children count	2m <sup>2</sup>	1500 with a COVID Safe Event Checklist. Larger events require a COVID Safe Plan.	Large indoor venues, such as the NGV and Princess Theatre, can open for up to 50% of the total venue capacity (to a max of 1,000 patrons).  1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with electronic record keeping.  1 per 4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.	Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons  1 person per 2m <sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.  1 per 4m <sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.  Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their

					Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.	COVIDSafe Plans online.
Pubs (Large and small)	<p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.</p> <p>Children count</p> <p>On dancefloors one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> to a max of 50.</p> <p>At nightclubs one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> to a max of 50.</p>	<p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>No density limit if 25 or fewer customers.</p> <p>Children count</p> <p>On dancefloors one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> to a max of 50.</p> <p>At nightclubs one person per 4m<sup>2</sup> to a max of 50.</p>	2m <sup>2</sup>	1500 with a COVID Safe Event Checklist. Larger events require a COVID Safe Plan.	<p>Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons seated.</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup> per person on dance floors to max 50 people per dance area (such as a nightclub with multiple</p>	<p>Up to 75% of capacity, max 1,000 patrons seated.</p> <p>1 person per 2m<sup>2</sup> Non-seated areas, with electronic record keeping.</p> <p>1 per 4m<sup>2</sup> in non-seated areas with paper-based records.</p> <p>Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.</p> <p>4m<sup>2</sup> per person on dance floors to max 50 people per dance area (such as a nightclub with multiple</p>

					dance floors).	dance floors).
Businesses	<p>See <b>COVID Safe Mandatory Registration</b></p> <p>Including gyms, hospitality venues, funeral homes, crematoria, and places of public worship.</p> <p>Other businesses and organisations are encouraged to register.</p>	<p>See <b>COVID Safe Business Framework</b></p> <p>2m<sup>2</sup></p> <p>1.5m physical distancing</p>			<p>See <a href="#">COVIDSafe Plan</a></p> <p>COVIDSafe principles for business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1.5m physical distancing</li> <li>• wear a face mask</li> <li>• practise good hygiene</li> <li>• keep good records and act quickly if staff become unwell</li> <li>• avoid interactions in close spaces</li> <li>• create workforce bubbles</li> </ul>	

\*See detailed information for each state below.

## **New South Wales**

[NSW Government: What you can and can't do under the rules: Hospitality venues, events and musical activities](#) (Sourced 08/12/2020.)

### **Hospitality venues, events and musical activities**

#### **Two square metres rule**

Venue operators must generally ensure there are at least [2 square metres of space](#) for each person on the premises or in the area, as applicable.

#### **Hospitality venues**

- Businesses that prepare and serve food and drink to customers on the premises or for takeaway need to have a [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#) for their venue type.
- Penalties apply to venues found to [breach the public health order](#) rules.
- The maximum number of people permitted at hospitality venues is [one person per 2 square metres](#). Up to 25 patrons are permitted before this rule applies.
- For hospitality venues with more than one separate area, this applies per separate area.

#### **Nightclubs**

- Nightclubs are subject to the one person per [4 square metres rule](#) and must follow the requirements in an up-to-date [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#).
- Dance floors are limited to 50 people.
- A nightclub is defined as any premises that is the subject of an on-premises licence in force under the [Liquor Act 2007](#) that relates to a public entertainment venue (other than a cinema or theatre).

#### **Function centres, trade shows and exhibitions**

- A function centre is a building or place used for holding events, functions, conferences, and includes convention centres, exhibition centres and reception centres. Function centre operators must complete and register a [COVID Safety Plan](#).
- If a trade show or exhibition is held in a function centre and open to the public, the maximum capacity is [one person per 2 square metres](#).
- See also the COVID-19 Safety Plan for [functions and conferences](#).

#### **Entertainment facilities including cinemas and theatres**

- Under the public health order, an entertainment facility means a theatre, cinema, music hall, concert hall, dance hall and the like, but does not include a pub or registered club.
- Entertainment facilities must have a [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#) and can
  - sell tickets for seated events at 75% of capacity, to a maximum of 1000 tickets, or
  - use the [2 square metres rule](#) to calculate capacity with no maximum number of people.
- Events must be ticketed with ticketholders assigned to a seating area for the 75% capacity calculation to be used.
- Alternatively, entertainment facilities may allow [one person per 2 square metres](#) on the premises, with no maximum capacity.
- Outdoor cinemas and theatres are permitted 100% seated capacity.

#### **Group singing and musical ensemble advice**

- Group singing and chanting remains a high-risk activity for transmission should someone involved be infected.
- *Indoors settings*
- Up to 50 people may

- sing together in one area if all singers face forwards and not towards each other
- have physical distancing of 1.5 metres between each other and any other performers, and
- 5 metres distancing from all other people in front including the audience and conductor.
- The audience or congregation should not participate in singing in this setting due to the increased risk of transmission and NSW Health strongly recommends anyone 12 years or older wear a [face mask](#).
- Ensembles and other musical groups should rehearse and perform outdoors or in large, well-ventilated indoor spaces.

#### *Outdoors settings*

- There is no limit on the number of people singing together in an outdoors setting.
- To minimise infection risk:
  - all singers should face forwards and not towards each other
  - maintain physical distancing of 1.5 metres between each other and any other performers, and
  - keep 5 metres distancing from all other people including the audience and conductor.
- If the event is one where the audience or congregation are likely to participate in the singing, such as carols by candlelight or religious services, audience members and congregants 12 years or older should wear a [face mask](#).

#### **Outdoor music performances and rehearsals**

- Music performances and rehearsals can be held outdoors with a maximum of 3,000 people if
  - the person principally responsible for organising the rehearsal or performance develops and complies with a [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#)
  - all participants provide their contact details (name and phone number or email) where practicable.
- Outdoor music performances and rehearsals held at certain larger venues, including entertainment facilities, major recreation facilities and zoos, may have more than 3,000 people subject to the restrictions at those venues.
- Outdoor music performances and rehearsals may be held at places of public worship, subject to the [one person per 2 square metres](#) rule.

#### **Current restrictions on businesses**

See the [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#) that applies to your business for guidance on

- whether a COVID-19 Safety Plan is required or recommended for your venue or event
- who is responsible for the COVID-19 Safety Plan
- whether you need to register as a COVID safe venue
- when to apply the [one person per 2 square metres](#) rule and one person per 4 square metres rule
- the maximum number of people permitted at specific venues and events.

Learn more about [electronic record keeping](#) if your business or organisation needs to collect customer details.

#### **COVID Safe businesses and organisations**

COVID Safe businesses and organisations have:

- a comprehensive COVID-19 Safety Plan in place
- registered as COVID Safe.

COVID Safe businesses and organisations are easily recognised by the blue tick badge displayed on their premises or online.



Registration is quick and easy and it shows customers that you're committed to their safety.

Registered businesses and organisations get:

- a digital COVID Safe badge for use on Google and social channels
- a print ready COVID Safe badge file for use as a poster or sticker on your shop front/high traffic areas
- posters on safety and hygiene
- reports on how your customers and visitors rate your business.

### **Mandatory registration**

For some types of businesses and organisations, it is mandatory to register as COVID Safe under the Public Health Orders.

These businesses are:

- gyms
- hospitality venues (restaurants, cafes, pubs, clubs, small bars, cellar doors, breweries, distilleries, karaoke bars and casinos)
- funeral homes and crematoria
- places of public worship.

Other businesses and organisations are encouraged to register as COVID Safe to show their customers and visitors that they are keeping up the highest standards to prevent COVID-19 transmission.

### **COVID-19 Safety Plans**

- COVID-19 Safety Plans are comprehensive checklists designed by NSW Health and approved by the Chief Health Officer.
- The plans provide clear directions on how businesses and organisations should fulfil their obligations under Public Health Orders to minimise risk of transmission of COVID-19 on their premises.
- Businesses and organisations should review the COVID-19 Safety Plan for their industry to see if completing a plan and registering is compulsory under Public Health Orders.
- All other businesses and organisations are encouraged to complete a COVID-19 Safety Plan voluntarily.

See also: [COVID-19 Restriction Checker: Entertainment and community – New South Wales](#) (Current as of 7 December 2020.)

## **Queensland:**

[Queensland Government: Roadmap to easing restrictions](#). Sourced 08/12/2020.

### **Stage 6: From 1am Tuesday 1 December 2020**

- Gatherings: 50 people allowed to gather in homes and 100 in public spaces across Queensland.
- Indoor premises: One per person per 2m<sup>2</sup> (e.g. restaurants, cafes, pubs, clubs, museums, art galleries, places of worship, convention centres and Parliament House). Indoor play areas within a premises can open.
- Wedding ceremonies: Up to 200 people can attend a wedding and all guests can dance (both indoors and outdoors).
- Funerals: Up to 200 people can attend a funeral.
- Indoor events: 100% capacity at seated, ticketed venues with patrons to wear masks on entry and exit (e.g. theatre, live music, cinemas and indoor sports). Performers can distance from audience at 2m, except choirs which remain at 4m from the audience.
- Outdoor events: 1500 permitted at outdoor events with a COVID Safe Event Checklist. Larger events require a COVID Safe Plan.
- Open air stadiums: 100% seated capacity (with a COVID Safe Plan).
- Outdoor dancing: Outdoor dancing allowed (e.g. outdoor music festivals, beer gardens).

### **Businesses, activities and undertakings**

#### **Overview**

- All restricted businesses can open, in line with the [COVID Safe Framework](#).
- All restricted businesses may now have one person per 2 square metres on their premises.
- Businesses that have never been required to close (e.g. grocery stores) can continue to operate as they have been.
- Note, physical distancing rules still apply. So wherever possible, people should remain 1.5 metres away from others.
- For full details, read the [official public health direction](#).

See also: [COVID-19 Restriction Checker: Entertainment and community – Queensland](#)

## **Victoria**

[Victorian Government: Entertainment and culture - Victoria - Last Step](#) (Sourced 8/12/2020)

Restrictions are changing in Victoria from 11:59pm on Sunday 6 December 2020.

- Dance floors can open in pubs and bars. Venues must apply a [four square metre rule](#) to the dance floor, with a maximum of 50 people dancing at one time per dance area (such as in a nightclub with multiple dance floors).
- Indoor and outdoor seated entertainment venues can open for up to 75 per cent of seating capacity up to 1,000 patrons. For non-seated areas, venues can use the [two square metre rule](#) if using electronic record keeping. If using paper-based records, the [four square metre rule](#) applies.
- Large indoor venues, such as the NGV and Princess Theatre, can open for up to 50 percent of the total venue capacity (up to a maximum of 1,000 patrons). For non-seated areas, venues can use the [two square metre rule](#) if using electronic record keeping. If using paper-based records, the [four square metre rule](#).
- Outdoor non-seated entertainment venues can open. They can apply the [two square metre rule](#) if using electronic record keeping.
- Indoor non-seated entertainment venues can open for up to 50 per cent of capacity (up to a maximum of 1,000 patrons).
- Casinos can open. The 4m<sup>2</sup> rule must be applied and electronic record keeping must be used.
- Arcades, bingo centres and escape rooms can open. They can apply the two square metre rule if using electronic record keeping to ensure people can keep 1.5 metres away from others.
- Large venues that host more than 500 people at one time must publish their COVIDSafe Plans online.
- There are no limits on how far you can travel to visit an entertainment, arts or cultural venue.
- To keep their staff and customers safe businesses need to follow cleaning, signage and record keeping requirements.

## **Business and work**

[COVIDSafe Plan](#): Information and resources to help your business prepare a COVIDSafe Plan.

## **COVIDSafe Summer**

- Restaurants, cafes, bars and pubs can open for seated and unseated service. They must use electronic record keeping and apply the [two square metre rule](#) to ensure that customers have enough room to keep 1.5 metres between themselves and others. There are no other limits on the number of customers. Venues can have up to 25 people before the two square metre rule needs to be applied.

[Record keeping for contact tracing - information for business](#): Key points

- From 11:59pm 6 December 2020 businesses may apply the two square metre rule if they use electronic record keeping to record the details of anyone who spends more than 15 minutes at their business. Otherwise, the four square metre rule applies for manual means of record keeping. Retailers should keep electronic records where practical to do so.
- Businesses are strongly encouraged to use QR codes to support contact tracing. For more information on this free service see [Victorian Government QR Code Service](#).
- A [Visitor and patron contacts log - Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) contact tracing register](#) is available for businesses using manual processes such as pen and paper.
- Businesses across the state can now access information on dealing with coronavirus (COVID-19) by calling the Business Victoria hotline on 13 22 15.

See also: [COVID-19 Restriction Checker: Can I go to entertainment or cultural venues in Victoria?](#)  
(Current as of 7 December 2020)



