

Inquiry into the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Tourism and Events Sectors

Organisation Name:
Your position or role:

YOUR SUBMISSION

Submission:

As a small, independent event organiser, desperately hurting through this pandemic, I wanted to share our story with you, to give you an idea of what it's really like for us in events.

Just 11 weeks out from our event (which takes a year to organise and has already been postponed twice), the Victorian government has cancelled our venue and left us out in the cold, with no apology or compensation. Where is the duty of care?

As a small, privately owned business, we produce 9 exhibitions each year, covering the wedding and pregnant/baby industries.

As with most event companies, Covid-19 has decimated our business. 95% of our Revenue was wiped out last year at no fault of our own. The events and exhibitions sector is not insignificant in size or contribution to the economy. In 2019 the industry had a direct contribution of \$35 billion, staging approximately 484,000 events nationally. It's not just the effect on event owners though, it's the businesses who participate at our events who need to sell product and all the contractors we use who are all hurting too because our events can't take place.

We were looking forward to 2021 bringing back stability to our Company but with every step forward we take we are being knocked back two steps by Government action.

Our first Covid-19 approved event of the year was to be a Baby expo held in Sydney next weekend on 19/20 March, however we had to cancel it due to lack of confidence from our interstate vendors, worried about snap border closures. No one can afford an unbudgeted 2 week quarantine for staff should that be the case.

We then began to plan for our next event which was to be held in Melbourne on 29/30 May. The event was going to be a double header as we were rolling events over from last year, cancelled due to the pandemic. We booked the Royal Exhibition Building and were going to hold a Baby expo at one end of the building and a Wedding expo at the other.

After a nightmare year we could see light at the end of the tunnel when out of the blue last Wednesday we had a phone call from Museum Victoria to say that the Department of Health Victoria were taking over the Royal Exhibition Building from 15th March to 30th June and they would not be honouring their contract with us in May. This was 12 weeks out from our event. Furthermore, they were unsure as to whether the Department of Health would continue to use the Building after June 30 and our next booking for an event to be held between 10 to 12 September might also not take place at their Venue. This is another devastating blow to our company and our exhibitors, who rely on these events to market their products and services. Both my team and our exhibitors have put a lot of work into the planning of this event. The Royal Exhibition Building has left us high and dry, with barely an apology or offer of any alternative or compensation. We understand the importance of the vaccine roll out. However, we feel it only fair that a comprehensive compensation package should be offered to us (and others affected).

We have also only received notification of this from the venue via phone call, still nothing in writing, so we

have been holding off communicating this to our vendors, visitors and suppliers until we get confirmation - so you can imagine our distress at seeing the venue promoting the vaccination hub on the news last night! We are currently preparing ourselves for the onslaught from our stakeholders. This now not only has a financial impact on our company, but also a reputational risk to our brand.

We are currently trying to secure an alternative venue with only 10 weeks to go until our event, which is not easy - particularly as it appears that all of Melbourne's large event spaces are also now being used as vaccination hubs or testing centres. Worryingly, the quote that we have received (from currently the only venue that may be able to take us), is TRIPLE what we were paying at the Royal Exhibition Building. Who is going to compensate us for that? Our event will now be running at a loss - again through no fault of our own. Haven't we been through enough?

We and all event and exhibition companies are completely at the mercy of the actions of Governments to combat Covid and we need help to get us through to the end of this year. At the moment there is none at hand.

We were excited to hear about the launch of the Business Events Program in September 2020, and eagerly awaited the program to be launched. However, we have been left devastated by the fact that the grant ignores consumer events and has very strict eligibility guidelines. We applied for all of our events to be part of the program, but were rejected in all cases because we ran business to consumer events. Our understanding is that over 50% of the 700 applicants for this grant were denied access to the grant. Another frustration is that the Grant seems to be prioritising the big event companies (like Reed Exhibitions, owned overseas), with the smaller family owned, Australian businesses being denied. There is no level playing field here. This week, the Government announced an extension of the Business Events Program to March 2020 and changes to the program guidelines. However consumer events are still excluded.

Why can't the government support the event industry by getting suppliers and contractors (equally affected by the pandemic) to build structures to house the vaccination hubs instead, to keep people in jobs, and allow the REB (and other venues) to continue to operate as an event venue.

FILE ATTACHMENTS

File1:

File2:

File3:

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