

Impacts of COVID on members of the Professional Tour Guides of Australia (PTGAA)

Background

The Professional Tour Guide Association of Australia (PTGAA) is a membership organisation that has represented and supported Tour Guides, Tour Managers, Site Guides and related occupations since it was established in Victoria in 1991.

PTGAA offers guide accreditation, ongoing professional skills and career development opportunities that contribute to the success of the Victorian Tourism and events industry.

The PTGAA has been a Registered Association in Victoria since 1991 - Registration Number AOO26482X

There are currently have 250 members and Associate members.

Many of our members are individual contractors /sole traders who offer their services to a range of Inbound and local Tourism operators, others operate their own tour guiding business whilst some are Site Guides at Tourism venues.

The PTGAA is a not -for- profit volunteer organisation managed by a volunteer committee with very limited paid part time administrative support.

It relies entirely on membership payments/contributions for funding.

The PTGAA recognise a range of supports that are being offered by the Victorian Government and current tourism promotions by Visit Victoria.

Immediate impacts of COVID

Employment for members

Most members have had no work in the last 12 months. Many had relied on Jobkeeper until end of March 2021.

Although there is some recovery in local tourism most guides rely on International visitors for their work. Typically, Australians travelling internally do not use or recognise the value that a guide can add to their experience.

The availability of competent Tour Guides will be vital for the revival and reputation of the Victorian tourism Industry.

Current estimates are that up to 50% of accredited guides have already left or will leave the industry.

This will result in significant revenue loss for PTGAA and will severely impact on ability to provide current level of service members and tourism industry. (See Separate attachment)

There are real concerns of a significant skill shortage to service this important aspect of Tourism in the future.

Training and skilling of future guides.

There are currently only **3** Registered Training Organisations /TAFES in Victoria accredited to conduct Certificate 111 or Certificate 1V Courses in Tour Guiding.

[here](#)

There is currently **only 1** (Holmesglen TAFE) offering a Certificate guiding course.

The Victorian Government has already recognised a potential skill shortage in the industry generally by the inclusion of a certificate 111 course in tourism as part their “free” TAFE initiative.

PTGAA sees an opportunity to include an emphasis on guiding electives

Despite these concerns, PTGAA were advised by Skills Services Victoria (in the peak of the COVID crisis) that The State Education Department has identified Certificate 111 and 1V courses in tour guiding to be potentially removed from the list of Funded Courses. Apparently, due to low enrolment numbers.

PTGAA believes this approach is counter intuitive instead the guiding industry needs strong Government.

Ongoing Professional Development

The PTGAA conducts a range of Professional Development activities as part of their service on guides and to the tourism industry

PTGAA aims to schedule 1 training/professional development (PD) event per month and 2” Learning days” year.

PD events are typically Site visits where guides can learn more about tourism attractions venues and places of interest

Learning Days are conducted at conference venues and are an opportunity for guides to learn from guest speakers to enhance their skills/knowledge

There were only 6 PD events in 2020 (in-person, online and hybrid) most in-person professional activities) were cancelled, a few events (networking, educational webinars) moved online or to hybrid delivery – lockdown restrictions, social distancing and varying restrictions in different states contributed to these decisions

There were no Learning Days in 2020 -

Other concerns for PTGAA

The current situation created by COVID, adds to a number of concerns that the PTGAA already had regarding the viability of Guiding as a profession including:

- **No accreditation requirements in Victoria or Australia** - Unlike many jurisdictions in the world there is **no** requirement for guides to be accredited in Victoria or to adhere to any form of code of conduct.

(All PTGAA guides are assessed /accredited using voluntary National Accreditation Code that was introduced with Federal Government support and must adhere to a code of conduct, be covered by public liability insurance and have current First Aid certificates)

It is ironic that Australian Certificate in guiding and PTGAA National Guide Accreditation is now being recognised in jurisdictions where there are strict guiding requirements e.g. Ministry for Culture Heritage and Activities for Rome (see PTGAA member letter attached)

Working conditions for Guides.

Working conditions for guides is continually being eroded. Employment status is often uncertain. Rates of pay offered are generally decreasing. There are currently no award rates for guides.

The Victorian Government recognised similar issues with the establishment and findings of the recent “On Demand Workforce Enquiry”

There is no reliable information as to the number of “guides” working in the industry in Victoria but anecdotally there are many working in the sector with no skills/knowledge/experience/training/accreditation. Many of these ‘guides’ work for well below minimum rates and are entrusted with the safety and ‘guiding’ of overseas guests in Victoria.

There are concerns that with recovery, because of a shortage of guides and as cost cutting measures, some operators will rely on “driver guide”. There are serious safety concerns with driver guides on large coaches?

Licensing on Public Lands.

Tour operator /tour guide licensing on public land requirements by Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DWELP) remains a concern for many tour guides and small operators particularly differing interpretation by land managers.

Current requirements/multiple licences and fees are a disincentive for many guides who have traditionally led visitors to a range of locations around Victoria.

The PTGAA has had discussions with bodies such as Parks Victoria and the Shrine of Remembrance who, under the current DWELP legislation, require tour operators to be licenced to conduct tours on lands that they manage.

We applaud the recognition that there should be a user pay system and that sites such as the Shrine are able to ensure that there is control and proper interpretation of the site.

The following example explains concerns:

A tour operator has devised and sold tickets to a shore excursion for 40 cruise passengers to visit the Shrine of Remembrance and Sherbrooke Forest.

The tour operator engages a coach company and a freelance tour guide as a sub-contractor.

Licensing requirements, although covered by the same Act and regulations, have been interpreted differently by Parks Victoria and the Shrine of Remembrance.

Parks Victoria define the Tour Operator as “wholesalers” and have advised that both the coach company and the tour guide require a Parks Victoria Tour Operator licence, they both need to lodge reports and pay a per capita fee for the same 40 people. The tour company devising and profiting from the tour are absolved. The tour guide and coach company are also required to pay the per capita fee per park- so there would be 2 per capita fees (currently \$2.40 per adult) in the above tour.

The Shrine has determined that in the above example the Tour Company should have a tour operator licence and they need to pay the per capita fees and lodge the returns. The tour guide and the coach company are not required to be licenced.

There are potentially many other land managers responsible for managing tourism destinations who should implement similar licensing and could have additional /different requirements.

The impact on tour guides, many of whom are small business operators is significant.

Many guides take visitors to a wide range of iconic visitor locations. As it stands now this requires multiple licences, additional compliance requirements and significant expense. All disincentives.

The PTGAA identified these issues in a response to a DWELP/ Engage.Vic. Gov. Au survey in 2019.

In the survey PTGAA requested a separate briefing /meeting about this policy review. We have not had any response to date and have no information about the progress of this important review.

Access to Government advice /Service

The issues /concerns of the PTGAA have been raised in a number of forums and with a range of Government Departments/Agencies.

Many of these processes are challenging especially for a small Association with volunteer resources.

Advice/assistance/response is mostly non- existent.

We appreciate this opportunity to provide information to this Parliamentary review and would hope a single- entry point to Government could be identified to address our future concerns

PTGAA welcomes this review and is available to provide more information if required at any time

Kind Regards

Jim McInerney on behalf of PTGAA committee and members .

The PTGAA currently has a high standard for membership.

All members are assessed using a National Guiding Accreditation standard that was developed by Guiding organisations of Australia (GOA) with funding and support from State and Federal Governments. All members must abide by a code of conduct, undergo ongoing professional development, be eligible to work in Australia, be covered by public liability insurance and have current first aid certification.

We believe these should be minimum standards for guides

PTGAA believes that a shortage of accredited guides will be significant risk to the recovery of Victorian and Australian Tourism.

The PTGAA is a “not for profit” organisation that is managed by a volunteer committee with the support of a part time administrator for 10 hours per week. It is entirely funded by

membership subscriptions. We are very concerned that, in the current climate, our financial viability as an organisation supporting the Victorian tourism industry is at risk.

The PTGAA would appreciate the opportunity to discuss these concerns and our commitment to support Tour Guides and the Victorian Tourism industry into the future.

We can be contacted at any time to discuss and provide any additional