

**From:** [Michael Gazal](#)  
**To:** [tourisminquiry](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Legislative Council Standing Committee on Economy and Infrastructure's Inquiry into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and events sectors- Call for Submissions  
**Date:** Thursday, 15 April 2021 11:59:03 AM  
**Attachments:** [TravelManagers Australia.pdf](#)

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Dear Patrick,

Thank you for your letter dated the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 2021 and the opportunity to provide a submission into the impact of COVID-19 on the travel and tourism sector.

TravelManagers Australia Pty Ltd at the commencement of this pandemic in March 2020 had just on 600 self-employed, home-based personal travel managers across Australia. In effect 600 independent small travel business owners operating in all states and territories across Australia. To date due to catastrophic effects of the pandemic on our industry we have lost approximately 120 personal travel managers reducing our network to 480 home based businesses.

Since then, COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on the aviation and tourism industries and the travel agent segment in particular, all of which have been decimated by the ongoing international border closure and the uncertainty of domestic state borders. Fortunately, we together with our employees and associates have had the assistance of JobKeeper and whilst TravelManagers has not benefited from the \$128 million COVID-19 Consumer Travel Program we recognise and applaud the fact that other travel agents have.

With JobKeeper now ceased at the end of March and with January trading -130% of what it was compared to January 2020 the travel agency segment with an estimated 40,000 employees is in urgent need of government assistance if many businesses are to survive and for people to continue to have a job.

While new business is scarce many travel agent employees are still working relentlessly to assist Australians overseas in getting back home, rearranging the travel plans of existing customers and still actively overseeing travel credits and securing refunds from overseas and Australian-based suppliers. Because of the way the industry operates, the travel agent segment is not remunerated for these types of activities. I am sure you can appreciate how stressful this situation is for these small business owners, their employees and their families.

A large percentage of most travel agents' business is international travel with most domestic sales generally involving intra-state travel. 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 clients holiday has to be undone taking many hours with no remuneration.

It is not practical for government to have a policy that bans international travel for the entirety of 2021 and then offer no support from 28<sup>th</sup> March to an industry that cannot trade as a result of a ban on international travel and state governments' repeated closing of domestic borders based on one aspect of health advice and no consideration of the fiscal consequences. This is a national tragedy and the stress and mental impact on travel agents, who are dedicating many long hours without revenue in attempting to secure refunds for their clients from suppliers both within

Australia and overseas (that have been quoted industry wide to be at \$4 billion), is immense. Mental health is a significant issue among many owners, employees and sole traders.

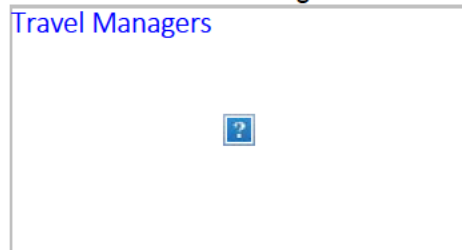
Regarding international travel, the Health Department Secretary Professor Brendon Murphy predicted on 18 January that international border closures will largely remain until 2022 which demonstrates that it will be far more than a year for anything resembling normality to return to the travel agent sector. Our Prime Minister has also confirmed further delays to the vaccine roll out which puts even more strain on consumer confidence to flying internationally, although the opening of a New Zealand bubble is a much-needed positive sign for the industry. There are thousands of jobs on the line because of domestic and international boarder 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.

TravelManagers has requested the government to consider introducing an economic stimulus package targeting the travel agency sector, including sole traders. We believe that a further commitment by the federal government would give travel agents, their employees the certainty they need at this time. This would assist the travel agency segment to remain intact and ready to respond when the borders open and the economy rebounds.

We do hope you can add weight to our request and ask that if you require additional information or wish to discuss the above, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Michael

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