

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

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Lake Anderson Caravan Park, Chiltern

SUBMISSION

Background

The Lake Anderson Caravan Park is on about 2ha of recreation reserve situated in the middle of Chiltern, directly behind the town's main street, with six cabins, 40 camping sites, camp kitchen as well as a laundry and amenities block.

We have run the park as a partnership for the past seven years, having purchased the lease that was already seven years into its 20-year term. We have six years remaining. Like many small family businesses, we have mortgages and finance repayments, all with a goal of one day making a profit on the sale of the lease and in the interim provide us with a small income. Our plan is one of constant improvements based on an established and growing patronage.

When the first COVID lockdowns struck we had several travellers who were stuck here and about 8 permanents in the Park. Without that small income we would not have survived. When the lockdown was lifted, they moved on and so when the July lockdown was enforced, we were empty. In good faith we refunded \$8500 in bookings and were able to reduce our bank repayments to interest only.

SUPPORT & GRANTS

- We were a 'specifically named industry' for lockdown. We closely followed the Hotel industry, and yet we didn't qualify for a lot of help. It should have been industry specific as well but more often that not it was how you were set up with the ATO. We are set up as a 'Partnership' due to advice, early on, from our accountant. We are a small 'Mum and Dad' business. 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. To put Job Keeper in perspective, and by no means are we ungrateful, but, \$3000 a month covered our Electricity ... and nothing else. Utilities expenses did not take a break during Lockdown. 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. Our business employed us?

REGIONAL LOCKDOWNS

- We were included in Lockdown 2.0 without ever having seen a case of COVID in the North East. Our business was closed, and then subsequent restrictions made trading and travel almost impossible. This arbitrary decision made by the Premier cost us money and knocked the 'Potential' of our business backwards by two years on a lease and mortgage that are a ticking clock. We have to sell our house to eliminate some debt in our business because are loan repayments, due to the freeze the banks put on our payments during lockdown, will be simply unachievable on a monthly basis. This was a hard decision we made a week ago.

BUSINESS VICTORIA, BUSINESS NORTH EAST & TOURISM

- In a similar vein the the arbitrary decision to include regional Victoria with Melbourne restrictions also applies to tourism promotion for Chiltern. We are part of an historic gold town and yet we are lumped into an area/region that Tourism Victoria consistently refer to as the 'High Country'. It's pretty simple – this is not the high country.
- There needs to be a more specific approach for regions outside of Melbourne, instead of such a broad stroke all the time.
- I believe marketing for Tourism, outside of Melbourne, needs to be more focused.

CONCLUSION

Our experience is that many of the support **funding sources** were simply unattainable. Criteria used to determine eligibility were too onerous, often too prescriptive (have to registered with Worksafe) and often announced long before the conditions, package or requirements had been worked out. There needs to be greater industry and stakeholder consultation so these packages can be more targeted.

In addition, I would like to see a **more targeted approach to Lockdowns**. No one is arguing the threat of COVID, but the actions have to be commensurate with the threat. If it's in Melbourne, it's in Melbourne. If it's in Colac, lockdown Colac. Not the entire state.

Tourism campaigns need to be more targeted. If we are to attract people back to Chiltern, we can't pretend we are the high country. We could be the gateway to the high country, we could be an historic town and linked to the Rutherglen wine district, but we are not the High Country.