



Friday 16 April, 2021

Patrick O'Brien, Committee Manager
Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament of Victoria

Dear Mr. O'Brien

RE: INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE TOURISM AND EVENTS SECTORS

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to The Legislative Council's Economy and Infrastructure Committee's inquiry into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism and events sectors.

Grampians Tourism was established in 2009 and is the peak industry body for tourism in the Grampians region. It encompasses and is directly supported by Ararat Rural City, Horsham Rural City, Northern Grampians Shire, Southern Grampians Shire. Our primary purpose is to deliver a coordinated approach to marketing, product development, infrastructure investment and industry development for the Grampians Region.

There are over 800 mostly small businesses and 4,200 people in the Grampians region who are reliant on visitor spend. Community sentiment has remained very positive and local communities are supportive of local businesses re-opening.

The worldwide crisis of COVID-19 has exacted a decimating impact on the visitor economy in the Grampians region.

Throughout 2020 until now the effects of COVID 19 of course have been immense. The resilience, and positive attitude of our local tourism operators has been simply amazing.

In 2020 Grampians Tourism Board approved the following.

- Creation of a new Tourism Crisis Response & Grampians Recovery Taskforce
- Adopted the terms of reference for Grampians Recovery Taskforce

The principal role of the Tourism Crisis Response & Grampians Recovery Taskforce sub-committee is to work with industry businesses, associations, peak bodies and government to facilitate the best regional outcomes for the recovery of the Grampians region.

Events in the Grampians region is important for generating awareness for our destinations and helps to drive increased visitation and yield. A host of community, cultural, sporting, agricultural events and festivals contribute to the social fabric of our region.

COVID -19 has decimated the event landscape with all events during 2020 cancelled and many large-scale events planned for early 2021 have also been cancelled.



Most event organisers have missed a whole year and hope to re-schedule the event this year. Despite the positive intentions, some event managers expressed concern that their events may not re-commence at all, following the effects of the pandemic, due to potential loss of volunteers, momentum or sponsors.

Our priority is to work closely with our two hero events - Grampians Grape Escape which has been cancelled again for 2021 and in financial difficulty and Seriously Shiraz to ensure future viability.

When the international borders were closed, the businesses who were reliant on international trade and distribution channels were directly impacted and are struggling to survive today. The international border closures left a \$20m hole in our local economy and translates to approximately 275,000 international visitor nights in the Grampians region.

In December 2020, after the opening of Metro Melbourne and strong regional visitation, Grampians Tourism launched a new Industry Partner Program with four partner categories for the period 1st January to 30th June 2021. New Partner Program has resulted in 56 Industry Partners representing 65 individual businesses across the region industry contributing \$45,000 to Grampians Tourism Budget.

Grampians Tourism has also supported free ATDW listings and resulted in the highest number of listings on record, and the total business listings Jan 2020 v Jan 2021 has increased from 160 to 312 – an increase of 95% of business listings over the last 12 months. These new listings improve our www.visitgrampians.com.au digital offering and adds amazing new content to our destination website.

As a direct result of COVID -19 Grampians Tourism created a new Shop Online section on the consumer website to support local creators and makers in the region. This was a new call to action and promoted via owned channels during COVID lockdown.

The Summer period continued to be strong in 2021 for the Grampians region and most businesses across the region have experienced unprecedented levels of visitation.

This spike in post COVID visitation has created operating issues as many businesses struggling to maintain consistent levels of operations due to labour shortages.

All businesses are back to full operation levels and Metro Melbourne visitation has filled some of the international visitation gaps. Some businesses have reduced operating hours / days to ensure staffing levels maintained and not overworked.

Forward bookings and outlook for the next 6-months is looking positive and while international boards remain closed, we will continue to see good levels on domestic/intra-state visitation.

Workforce has long been an issue in this region and was exacerbated post lockdown.

Generally recovery for our region has been strong with increase visitation from Metro Melbourne and post COVID has shown that our regional brand of big nature and open spaces has been extremely appealing to the Melbourne consumer who now celebrate a road trip to region Victoria.



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With winter just around the corner there will be a Victorian exodus to warmer weather and as international borders start to re-open there is a fear amongst local businesses that the next few months could put a halt to the current positive economic recovery

Please contact me should you require further information or clarification.

 Yours faithfully,

Marc Sleeman
Chief Executive Officer