

8 March 2019

Dear Ms Mather and the Beyond Tourism 2020 Steering Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft report developed by the *Beyond Tourism 2020* Steering Committee. Australian Regional Tourism (ART) have held consultations with the broader regional tourism base and would like to offer the following feedback.

The report identifies several opportunities for growth and the importance of the visitor economy to the country, however, greater consideration into the practical management of visitors into our towns and villages needs to be addressed as a key challenge and opportunity.

Local Government

The role Local Government plays is not adequately addressed, and the following key points need to be addressed as a matter of priority.

1. Reinforce that Local Government are collectively a large and important stakeholder in the visitor economy and we request that this be reflected in the Beyond 2030 Strategy.
2. It is strongly agreed that cross government collaboration is critical for success of the visitor economy long term.
 - a. it is critical Local Government have a voice in any policy making decisions and it is concerning no Local Government Representative or regional tourism representative was selected on the Beyond 2030 Steering Committee
 - b. Local Government representation needs to be present on all decision-making processes and policy making decisions going forward.
3. The Beyond 2030 should formally recognise the importance of Local Government in managing the impacts of the Visitor Economy as a key challenge and opportunity to 2030.
4. Recognising the role Local Government plays
 - a. as a major investor in assets that directly drive visitation and overnight stays, like entertainment centres, pools, parks, reserves and caravan parks.
 - b. in managing the "on ground" visitor experience, influencing return visitation and quality of customer experience.
 - c. in attracting investment and strategic planning
 - d. in marketing and visitor attraction
5. Formally recognising the challenges increased visitation puts on infrastructure and Local Government resources.
 - a. with high importance placed on identifying the need for cross government collaboration in supporting and growing the visitor economy into the future.
 - b. place high importance in cross government funding to support strategic built infrastructure to support tourism growth opportunities and every day management

including roads, telecommunications, built attractions and hygiene infrastructure like parking, toilets and signage.

Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs) and Local Tourism Organisations (LTOs)

Reference to Regional and Local Tourism Organisations is required as these groups are fundamental to the sound running of the tourism industry in regional and remote areas, and even some capital cities. Whilst some may question the inclusion in the report of organisations that focus on smaller regions than State Tourism Organisations (STOs), that question is easily answered by the following points:

1. Many RTOs and LTOs still qualify for the Export Development Marketing Grants, demonstrating they work in the international space as well as at domestic and intra-state/territory levels.
2. RTOs and LTOs work closely with, and at times are funded by, STOs, aligning with STO priorities.
3. Without RTOs and LTOs, a critical link directly to the coal face of the tourism industry is severed. There is only a cursory mention in the document that the tourism, travel and hospitality industry mostly consist of micro, small and medium businesses, and without the direct link RTOs and LTOs provide with these businesses, their voices and needs are lost.

Visitor servicing and Visitor Information Centres


A national strategy should include the network of over 450 information points, outlets and visitor servicing premises across Australia. Visitor Information Centres (VICs) provide crucial information to visitors, with multiple studies of Australian context showing that traveller contact with VICs leads to longer length of stay and higher visitor spend. VICs require their own action item, focussed on providing timely information and booking services to travellers when, where and in the methods the travellers choose (being customer focused).

Agritourism product development

We note the inclusion of Agritourism product development in the draft report and support its inclusion. Agritourism is quickly gaining momentum and development of this tourism stream is designed to create new regional experiences that provide diversification for farmers and enhance the social fabric and visitor appeal of regional and remote destinations.

Regional dispersal

ART support the need for specific targets to be set for international visitation to regional Australia however there needs to be accurate and reliable data to measure visitation for assessment and planning processes. While these targets are crucial if we are to truly address regional dispersal, we can't overlook the need for a robust strategy to enable stronger partnerships to be formed across government, local council and industry. Local government, regional tourism boards and industry associations, such as ART, need to be better supported to play a stronger role in driving the capacity of our regions.



Better coordination needs to be sought to form a linkage between regional hero destinations promoted by our national tourism organisation and the regions capacity, infrastructure and ability to manage the influx of visitation to the regional as a result of significant international exposure.

High focus needs to be placed on delivering quality regional experiences which can only be delivered with focused training and skill development programs in regions. Support needs to be given to National industry bodies, such as ART, to utilise and develop already established networks and digital platforms. This will enable an undertaking of regional skill audits, identify gaps and deliver a skill development training program online, and in-region.

Visionary business development and the ongoing development of people is crucial to the plan.

ART support a higher focus on capacity building and product development with mentoring and training targeted at the business level. Training programs should be national and delivered and developed by industry to enable continuity and shared learnings.

1. Increasing international market share will depend largely on operators and key decision makers to deliver an evolving, creative product. Discussion has centred on innovation and entrepreneurship but there is a shortfall within industry to actually build real, robust skill and talent within these key areas.
2. A key component has been a focus on the IT component of tourism business. We must also focus on skill in the back end of operations, the internal factors in order to get the front-end right.
3. By working on the cultural aspects of doing business within the sector we will be able to attract the best and brightest talent. The people that are seeking tourism as a robust career and rather than a transient phase to another industry. This is more a matter for operator development and creating the workplace environments the next generation want to commit to. Rather than a matter purely of workforce development we must approach it from both sides. Build greater learning and development and create the workplace environments that can truly nurture its people. World class workforce development is only ever going to be as successful as the workplace in which staff must work within.
4. We must focus on building skill to industry now on dealing with disruption and future competition. AirBnB are now in the experiences market, in addition to accommodation. We must work with industry to learn to compete smart and move beyond a focus on accredited training.

Aviation

ART support the inclusion of the de-regulation of domestic air routes. Destinations need to be able to attract sustainable and competitive airlines to provide affordable airfares with sufficient capacity.

Investment in technology solutions and industry resilience

Providing support to develop innovative industry communications, and to adopt a sense of united community - a united tourism industry working together with all levels of government, industry and community is needed to build resilience.

The ART led “Tourism Hub” is a collaboration of government and private sectors who have developed a central platform to access tourism research, news and opportunities. Integrated within the Tourism Hub is the *Australian Regional Tourism Community*. Its purpose is to end isolation and facilitate connectivity in regional destinations. Connecting with like-minded tourism professionals enables the sharing of knowledge and advice, and to collaborate on developing best practice solutions to common challenges.

The value of connecting regional destinations and sharing of knowledge and experiences should not be underestimated. Investment into the continued development of these types of platforms is required and needs to be acknowledged within the strategy so that regions can continue to be innovative and build resilience.

ART commend the effort of the Tourism Beyond Tourism 2020 Steering Committee on the release of the draft report. We look forward to seeing the progression of the draft report and future Tourism Strategy.

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