Queensland Tourism Workforce Crisis
Resilience and Recovery Strategy

THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA

CREATE CHANGE

Date
4th October 2023

Acknowledgement of Country
The Queensland Tourism Industry Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work and live across Queensland, and recognises their continuing connection to the land, waters and culture. We also pay our respects to all First Nations people, past, present and emerging.

Image credit
Tourism and Events Queensland

In collaboration with

Contents

At a glance

2020
total participants

1690
survey participants

229
regional consultation participants

70
lab participants

25
interview participants

6
volunteer focus group participants

We thank the following Regional Tourism Organisations for hosting consultations:

Tourism Tropical North Queensland

Tourism Whitsundays

Outback Queensland Tourism Association

Southern Queensland Country Tourism

Destination Gold Coast

"I have to be resilient because things [drought, flood, market volatility] happen all the time – you just got to pick yourself off the ground and go again."

Project overview

Project lead foreword
Richard Robinson (PhD)

This strategy is the culmination of a three-year journey, working alongside The University of Queensland project staff, and project partner Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC). The project involved multi-method original research and extensive industry consultation. Funded by the Queensland Government's Advance Queensland scheme, the catalyst for this project was COVID-19 and its impacts, which significantly disrupted Queensland's tourism industry. This project aimed to provide an evidence base to support actions for recovery and resilience, and to foster 'presilience' – that is preparedness and planning to weather future adversity. The Strategy is designed with accessibility to various stakeholder groups in mind; whether they be operators, policy-makers, peak bodies, destinations, or industry sectors. We hope this Strategy is both a timely and enduring resource to support a sustainable Queensland tourism workforce.

QTIC CEO endorsement
Brett Fraser (AICD)

The COVID-19 pandemic holistically disrupted the tourism industry like no other crisis; exposing critical workforce vulnerabilities. For more than two decades, QTIC has served its members as a leading advocate for industry success. We regularly advocate for greater investment in industry and have delivered initiatives and programs aimed at supporting tourism businesses in attracting, retaining, and upskilling their workforce. Complementing this work, QTIC is proud to have partnered with UQ to develop this important Strategy. It is critical that evidence-based, industry-led commentary guide our future efforts in tackling tourism's workforce challenges. I encourage all those connected with the tourism industry and who rely on its success to utilise this invaluable resource. Together, we can shape the future of Queensland tourism.

Research timeline

Below is a summary of the combined studies (and outputs) of the project.

2021

Regional consultation

To understand workforce impacts of COVID-19 and resilience factors, we ran 14 workshops with 92 employees, operators, and stakeholders in 5 QLD regions.

2021

National survey

We analysed 1,015 survey responses to test:

- workforce characteristics, COVID-19 responses and interventions, and market adaptability; and
- an employee and organisational resilience building conceptual model.

2022

Volunteer workshop

Building on responses from volunteers to the 2021 National Survey, we held a follow-up workshop with six staff from a tourism volunteer firm.

Key findings

- Job security and financial hardship – biggest impact on workforce and operators.
- Workforce resilience enhanced with communication, leadership and support.
- Workforce resilience strengthened from 2020 to 2021.

- Most businesses adapted from international to domestic market.
- JobKeeper and JobSeeker highly subscribed, low awareness of other supports.
- Reopening of borders and vaccinations most helpful policy interventions.
- Women most resilient, accommodation more resilient than food service/retail.
- QLD employee and organisational resilience higher than other states.

- Volunteers, compared to non-volunteers:
  - are older and better educated.
  - work fewer hours but not empowered.
- Report higher wellbeing – marking them significant assets during crisis.
- Organisations under-utilise volunteer potential.

Reports available at **qtic.com.au/advocacy/policy-research/research-reports-and-projects**

2022

Consultation and survey

To track changes and investigate new challenges, we repeated the 2021 consultations with 55 participants across 5 workshops; and the 2021 National Survey, with 340 valid responses.

- EQ, org. learning culture and adaptive capacity drive employee resilience.
- Persistent structural issues inhibit attraction/retention of workers.
- Some COVID crisis supports ineffective – complexity, eligibility and delays.
- Family #1 influencer in workers' decisions to access resources.
- Worker resilience up from 2021 to 2022 – accommodation and QLD still more resilient.

2022

Dyadic worker interviews and lab study

To probe why workers left the industry during the crisis, we interviewed 16 participants (twice each), alongside 9 of their 'significant others.'

We also ran behavioural tests with 70 frontline workers in the UQ lab.

- Worker attrition due to finances, family impact, burnout, no flexibility, exploitation.
- To return – job security, better pay, career opportunities, supportive workplaces.
- Crisis response measures linked with negative emotions.
- 'Self-depleted' workers seek support from co-workers/employers.
- Co-worker/employer support can improve job satisfaction and adaptive ability.

2023

Consultation and survey

To track changes and investigate new challenges, we repeated the 2021 and 2022 consultations with 82 participants across 5 workshops; and the 2021 and 2022 National Survey, with 335 valid responses.

- Labour market is slowly returning – crisis is now skills deficits.
- Non-work factors key, i.e. cost of living, housing shortages and affordability.
- All resilience measures in 2023 were lower than 2022.
- Organisational resilience declined significantly more than employee resilience.
- Resilience and anxiety indicators suggest operator exhaustion.
- Organisational resilience dropped after strong 2022 rebound.

Employee resilience actions

These are actions Employees can take to improve their own resilience:

Connect
- Regularly communicate with employers and co-workers
- Negotiate preferred arrangements (casual vs P/T)
- Seek social engagement

Wellbeing
- Prioritise work-life balance
- Thrive on downtime
- Access mental health and wellbeing supports

Skills and training
- Participate in professional development
- Seek educational opportunities
- Set career enhancement goals

Engagement
- Be active – any work improves resilience
- Find mentors
- Seek market incentives
- Be conscious of stress on leaders

Advocacy
- Focus on positives
- Take a zero-tolerance approach to harassment
- Consider unions/ representative membership

Definition
Employee resilience refers to the capacity of a worker to recover from and respond positively to workplace stressors.

Evidence
Employees with good work-life balance are more productive.

Resources

These are resources Employees can use to improve their resilience:

Work-related supports

Fair Work Commission
fwc.gov.au

QTIC Young Professionals Mentoring Program
qtic.com.au/workforce-development/young-professionals-mentoring

QTIC Tourism and Hospitality Career Guide
qtic.com.au/workforce-development/careers-tourism-hospitality

Back to Work
backtowork.initiatives.qld.gov.au

TBCP
theburntchefproject.com/australianambassadors

United Workers Union
unitedworkers.org.au/tourism-workers

Health and wellbeing

Headspace
headspace.org.au

1800RESPECT
1800respect.org.au

Beyond Blue
beyondblue.org.au

QLife
qlife.org.au

Lifeline
lifeline.org.au

Black Dog Institute
blackdoginstitute.org.au

R U OK?
ruok.org.au

Migrants and international students

1800 QSTUDY International Student Support Hotline
eqi.com.au/student-support/hotline

Fast fact
Workers who enjoy their roles are more loyal to their employers.

Definition
Learning culture is an environment where acquiring and knowledge sharing is a priority e.g., rewarding employee problem solving suggestions.

Further reading
According to the **Grattan Institute**, migrants, young people, casuals, part-time workers, and those working in agriculture and hospitality are more likely to be paid below minimum wage.

Operator resilience actions

These are actions Operators can take to improve their organisational resilience:

For employees
- Offer support networks
- Knowledge exchange between workers
- Offer emotional support
- Flexible work arrangements
- Training and development
- Offer incentives
- Prioritise job security
- Recognise non-work challenges

In the organisation
- Invest in leaders/managers
- Foster sustainable employment
- Succession planning
- Encourage collegiality
- Diversify products
- Be adaptable to change
- Communicate clearly and consistently
- Streamline procedures
- Empower volunteers

With industry and community
- Share resources
- Seek shared visions
- Hold critical conversations
- Identify and connect with local suppliers
- Engage with First Nations businesses
- Recruit from underemployed cohorts

"I was looking for mind numbing work... so I didn't have to think. I didn't have to use my brain. I was a bit, burnt out. Well not a bit. I was burned out."

Worker Gem

Definition
Organisational resilience refers to the ability of a business to respond to and rebound from adverse situations or events.

Further reading
The Australian Government's **White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities** seeks to partner with employers to develop programs to help underemployed cohorts into work.

Data point
Our research shows volunteers skills and experiences are underutilised.

Evidence
Young workers look for employment opportunities aligning with their values.

Resources

These are resources Operators can use to improve their organisational resilience:

Industry groups and associations

Queensland Hotels Association
qha.org.au

QTIC Advisory Groups
qtic.com.au/advocacy/
committees-advisory-groups

Accommodation Australia
accommodationaustralia.org

Restaurant and Catering Industry Association of Australia
rca.asn.au

Industry Workforce Advisor Program
qtic.com.au/workforce-
development/industry-
workforce-advisor-program

Tourism Australia
tourism.australia.com/en/
resources/industry-resources/
building-your-tourism-business/
working-with-tourism-australia

The Tourism Group
thetourismgroup.com.au

Australian Business Events Association
abea.org.au

Education and training

Study Queensland
studyqueensland.qld.gov.au

TAFE Queensland
tafeqld.edu.au

Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training
desbt.qld.gov.au/training

Business, government, and sustainability

Business Queensland
business.qld.gov.au/
industries/hospitality-tourism-
sport/tourism

Jobs Queensland
jobsqueensland.qld.gov.au

Back to Work
backtowork.initiatives.qld.gov.au

Fair Work Ombudsman
fairwork.gov.au

Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
australianchamber.com.au

Working with First Nations Tourism
qtic.com.au/indigenous-tourism/
best-practice-guide-for-working-
with-first-nations-tourism

Sustainable Hospitality Alliance
sustainablehospitalityalliance.
org/resource

EarthCheck
earthcheck.org

Ecotourism Australia
ecotourism.org.au

Stakeholder resilience actions

These are actions Stakeholders can take to improve the resilience of the industry:

For employees

- Attract via apprenticeships and development programs
- Retain through skills, training, and education investment
- Prioritise work-life balance, housing affordability, and accessibility needs
- Consider non-work domains – family and social supports
- Encourage worker voice and representation

In organisations

- Greater investment in traineeships/pathway programs
- Develop business learning and succession planning resources
- Promote awareness of business supports
- Incentivise mature-age workers (attraction and retention)
- Encourage and support social enterprises
- Government loan/low interest rates/tax breaks for SMEs

With industry and community

- Consistent policy messaging (across government)
- Minimise restrictions at times of crisis
- Maintain policymaker and industry dialogue
- Continue assistance programs
- Renewed focus on positive industry image
- Relaxation of visa holder working hours
- Bespoke policies targeting at risk cohorts, regions, and sectors
- Focus on long-term solutions and policy beyond electoral cycles
- Leverage 2032 Olympic/ Paralympic opportunities

"I think there might be opportunities to handle it in a better way or to show more flexibility and sometimes to be just nice… and more caring for your staff and the personal things I have to do."

Worker Gem

Evidence
Studies show that established networks prior to crisis lessen the impacts of an event.

Resources

These are resources for Stakeholders to improve resilience of the tourism system:

Industry

Industry Workforce Advisor Program
qtic.com.au/workforce-development/industry-workforce-advisor-program

QTIC Advisory Groups
qtic.com.au/advocacy/committees-advisory-groups

Tourism Australia
tourism.australia.com/en/resources/industry-resources/building-your-tourism-business/working-with-tourism-australia

The Tourism Group
thetourismgroup.com.au

Business, government, and sustainability

Business Queensland
business.qld.gov.au/industries/hospitality-tourism-sport/tourism

Jobs Queensland
jobsqueensland.qld.gov.au

Back to Work
backtowork.initiatives.qld.gov.au

Fair Work Ombudsman
fairwork.gov.au

Austrade Strategy for the visitor economy – THRIVE 2030
austrade.gov.au/en/how-we-can-help-you/programs-and-services/thrive-2030-strategy

Australian Government White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities
treasury.gov.au/employment-whitepaper/final-report

Best Practice Guide for Working with First Nations Tourism
qtic.com.au/indigenous-tourism/best-practice-guide-for-working-with-first-nations-tourism

OECD Tourism
oecd.org/cfe/tourism

UN World Tourism Organization
unwto.org

World Travel and Tourism Council
wttc.org

"Connect with people in the local communities instead of internationally. Let's support local businesses... there were suppliers who came out of the woodwork and people had absolutely no idea... I think that understanding what you've got in your own backyard or neighbouring councils or areas is instrumental."
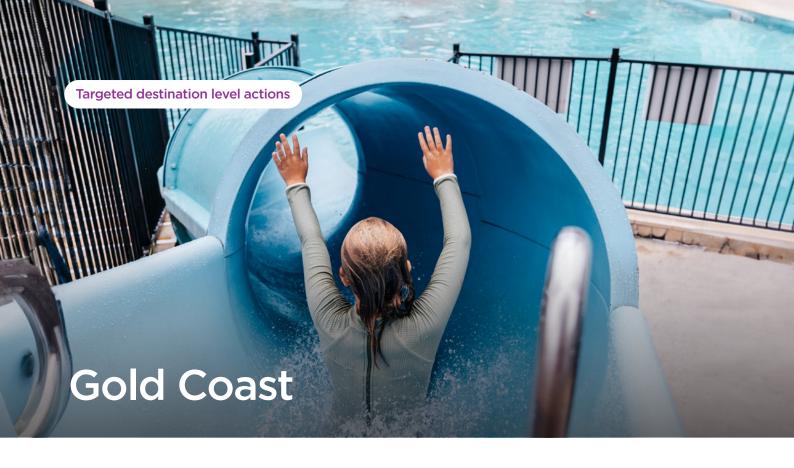
Operator Gem

Fast fact
Sustainability involves environmental, economic, and social elements.

Evidence
Research shows proactive risk management can lessen impacts of crises. Operators and destinations can implement reactive, adaptive, protective, and proactive strategies.

Gold Coast

Regional gems

On employees

• Difficulties adapting to new market conditions:

"Staff are not used to the markets that are being attracted into the region [e.g., long stay camping, caravan, families/groups] … they haven't had time to upskill or reskill… because of limited resources."

• There are not enough trained or skilled staff meaning operators are employing staff that they would not have considered prior to the pandemic.

• There is a consensus that it is a "candidates market," meaning operators need to offer greater incentives to attract or retain workers.

• Specialty areas i.e., Marine tourism face systematic barriers to appropriate training in their region

On transport

While some accommodation is available, transport can be problematic in non-central areas as commuting time and distances are unreasonable.

Localised actions

+ Adaptability to domestic markets

+ Drive organisational learning culture

+ Foster organisational support

+ Communication and collaboration

+ Social support, connectedness

+ Inspirational leadership

+ Coach/mentor/train young leaders

+ Value/nurture mature workers

+ Empower/dignify employees

+ Lobby government re: initiatives

Outback Queensland

Regional gems

On accommodation

Low availability of affordable housing is a concern. While some operators offer their own accommodation, there is a shortage of rentals.

On employees

While operators survived on backpackers for the season, there is still a shortage of skilled workers such as qualified chefs.

On services

Geographically dispersed populations create challenges for the regular and personalised delivery of auxiliary services supporting tourism.

On the future

"Even though you think you're doing really well we're going to fall off a cliff, so we need to prepare government [by regular reporting] for that."

Localised actions

+ Accommodation availability

+ Smooth boom/bust cycles

+ Seasonality strategies

+ Recognise manager distress

+ Tyranny of distance

+ Policy support gaps

+ Youth drain to cities

Queensland Country

Regional gems

On accommodation

"We actually have people from Brisbane and Ipswich who've moved into our longer–term caravan parks because of issues around affordability... that has then pushed out those individuals who would usually take up those caravan occupancies... as you have that creep down around affordability, there will always be a market that gets pushed out. And it will be your itinerant workers. It will be those people who would want short stay accommodation."

On employees

Operators were unable to hire enough workers at some stages of the pandemic and were then over-reliant on seasonal workers:

"We have to spend a lot more time onboarding staff that we do recruit because of shortage of actual skills... it's time to review what the training programs are for getting people trained up..."

On destination

Part-time operators inhibit a consistent 24/7 visitor experience also impacting secure employment.

Localised actions

+ Consistent communication/tone

+ Team building/professional development

+ Flexible work

+ Leadership/support/trust

+ Knowledge sharing

+ Skills and training policy reform

+ Policy makers connecting better to SMEs

+ Volunteer capabilities

Tropical North Queensland

Regional gems

On accommodation

Not only lack of affordable housing, but also availability.

On employees

- Structural issues remain prescient. For example, outside perceptions of the industry, lack of flexibility from employers
- Ambiguity about who is responsible for training

"Acknowledging long standing issues of job security and skilled labour shortages (relying on government policy supports)"

On operators

Specialised tourism services (e.g. AV, tour guiding), especially SMEs more vulnerable than larger tradition tourism business and risk being neglected.

On support services

Lacking wrap-around support services to enable recruitment and retention of diverse groups (e.g. disability, First Nations).

Localised actions

+ Effective communication

+ Employee resilience and learning culture strong

+ Social support/connectedness

+ Leadership

+ Knowledge sharing/transparency

+ Policy incentives for employment

+ Seniors and volunteer capabilities

+ Housing (whole of government)

Whitsundays

Regional gems

On accommodation

Limited housing available in the region. Some operators have leased houses to help staff, but are unable to fill them causing an economic burden.

On employees

- Operators are looking to hire, but it is difficult to find appropriate and motivated employees
- Locals that would have previously taken up roles like housekeeping have not returned

On the industry

- Lack of stability of operators has flow on effects on employee experiences
- Spiraling insurance costs impacting ability to maintain requisite workforce
- Marine sector struggling to get appropriate training in their region for job ready workers

Localised actions

+ Communication and tone

+ Professional development and team building

+ Flexible arrangements for workers

+ Supportive leadership

+ Destination knowledge sharing

+ Skills and training policy changes

+ Support 'keystone' marine industry

+ Harness local underemployed market

Accommodation

Employee and organisational resilience in accommodation sector was consistently higher than tourism services (inc. retail) and food and drink sectors.

Factors which distinguish accommodation sector

Evidence
Our research shows that impacts are felt differently according to size and ownership structure of business.

At employee level

- More women (higher resilience)
- More full-time workers
- Younger front-line workers and mature supervisors

At organisation level

- Empowered employees
- More mature and larger businesses
- Large multi-national hoteliers – more flexibility

Food and drink service

Employee and organisational resilience in food and drink service sector was consistently lower than accommodation sector.

Factors which distinguish food and drink service sector

At employee level

- Dominated by women
- High levels of contingent workers
- 25–34 age group largest cohort
- Fewer staff accessing supports/resources

At organisation level

- Learning culture and organisational support low
- Less empowered employees than accommodation

Definition
Organisational support is when employees perceive they are encouraged and given assistance e.g., valuing opinions.

Further reading
Research from the University of Queensland shows that the majority of food and drink service workers have experienced and/or witnessed staff harrasment and abuse.

Tourism services

Employee and organisational resilience in tourism service sector was consistently lower than accommodation sector.

Factors which distinguish tourism services sector

At employee level

- Dominated by women and younger workers
- High levels of contingent workers
- More distress, anxiety and stress
- Fewer staff accessing supports/resources

At organisation level

- Learning culture and organisational support low
- Less empowered employees than accommodation

Evidence
Studies show, learning culture predicts organisational resilience.

Destination workforce resource

Workforce attraction and retention

Workers are key to the industry. COVID-19 demonstrated the need to improve conditions to retain and attract workers. All actor groups play a role in making work more secure, safe, exciting, and to offer incentives to reduce region to city drain. Further, housing issues need to be resolved. Focus on culture and vibe of industry, not pay – and target key influencers (e.g., parents, career advisors).

Communication, leadership, and collaboration

Consistent messaging, leadership and supports from policymakers are critical in times of crisis. Leaders should work with employees and operators (in-region) to capitalise on local knowledge and experiences – to seek solutions before, during, and after crises.

Training, development, and empowerment

All stakeholders need ongoing training to prepare them for crises. Employees, managers, and volunteers alike crave career development and promotional opportunities which enhance resilience and organisational/ industry loyalty.

A community approach

To endure crises, businesses, industry and not-for-profit groups, and local government can build a united 'destination approach' – with input from and engagement with the needs of the broader community. All actors can help revitalise tourism regions' employer/ employee brand.

Wellbeing and social support

Non-work factors are key to workforce resilience. Factors such as work-life balance, secure accommodation, and family and wellbeing supports are critical to improving circumstances. Accessible (in-person) wellbeing programs need to be offered in regional areas.

Research team

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