

**MEDIA STATEMENT**

14 September 2020

**ATIC calls for 12-month visa extension for remaining Backpackers**

The Australian Tourism Industry Council (ATIC) has called for a 12-month visa extension for all remaining backpackers in Australia.

Australia welcomes 150,000 backpacker visitors at any time generating \$3.2 billion in tourism spending in 2019. But COVID-19 has seen backpacker numbers dramatically fall by over 50%.

ATIC Executive Director Simon Westaway said with 70,000 backpackers still here the free-falling number of remaining backpackers on working holiday visas required an urgent circuit breaker.

“A one-year extension for all remaining backpackers’ visa conditions stabilises the Working Holiday Maker (WHM) Program at a critical time for tourism and industry,” Mr Westaway said.

“The absence of backpackers is being harshly felt through the dual loss of usual working holiday maker spending and dwindling seasonal workers inside many tourism businesses and towns.

“Backpackers travel extensively through Australia taking up hard-to-fill roles across key regional industries including tourism and hospitality as well as areas of agriculture and horticulture.

“The current situation sees recovering regions unable to meet returning local visitor demand in many places where numbers of local businesses do not have enough workers to cater for them.

“Backpackers are highly valued and their rapid decline in number is proving particularly detrimental to regional businesses and jobs and in their efforts for recovery out of COVID.

“Tourism businesses like hostels and specialist backpacker accommodation and bus and transport offerings that specially cater for backpackers no longer greet many of these high-valued tourists.

“Without urgent Federal Government intervention, despite their existing focus on the issue, we genuinely fear the WHM Program will all but stop in its tracks by early 2021!

“This is because the response to COVID-19 has contributed to a hard-closed international border, tight caps on international arrivals and a high outflow from Australia of departing backpackers.

“ATIC believes Australia’s continual high-appeal to backpackers could easily be turned into a catalyst for future international visitor recovery and backs a fast-tracked pilot program for them.”

Mr Westaway said ATIC had outlined to the Morrison Government a multi-point plan to sustain and long-term retain the backpacker market and this closely aligned with key industry advocates.

Tourism Research Australia analysis showed backpackers pre-COVID generated 46 million visitor nights, spending \$3.2 billion across all States and Territories including with high regional dispersal.

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