



QUEENSLAND
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QUEENSLAND TOURISM WORKFORCE CRISIS RESILIENCE & RECOVERY PROJECT

REGIONAL CONSULTATION WORKSHOPS REPORT

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PREPARED BY

The University of Queensland
in partnership with the Queensland Tourism Industry Council

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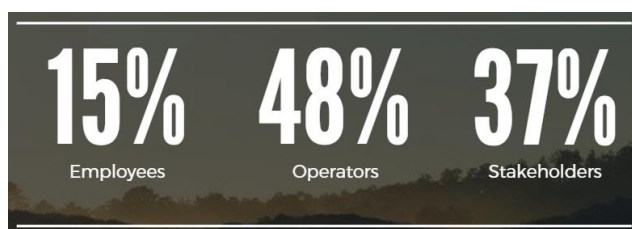
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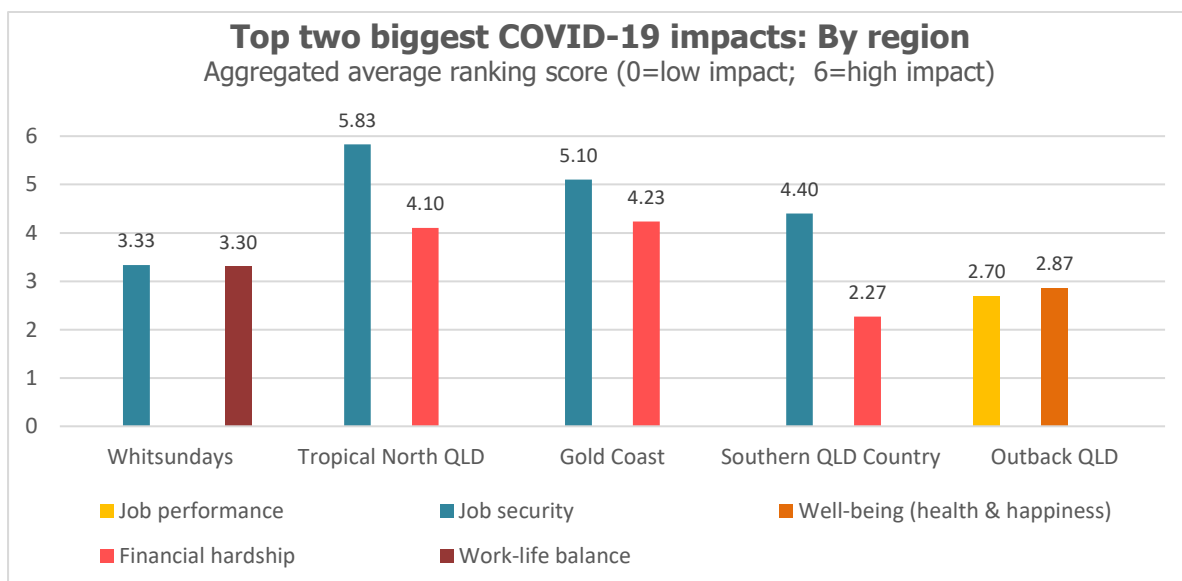
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

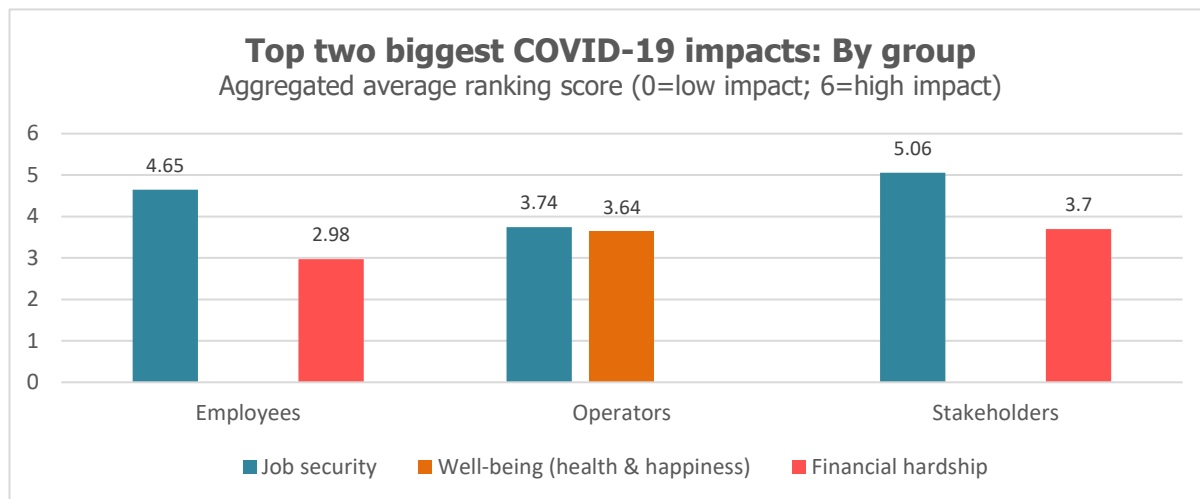
Between June and August 2021, a total of **15 Consultation Workshops** were conducted, to understand the tourism workforce impacts of COVID-19 and resilience factors, in five regions across Queensland: Whitsundays, Tropical North Queensland, Gold Coast, Southern Queensland Country, and Outback Queensland. Three groups were consulted: employees, or workers at supervisory level or below, operators, or business owners/senior management, and stakeholders, or representatives of organisations that work 'on', rather than 'in', the tourism industry (e.g., council, trainers, RTOs, peak bodies, airports etc). Nearly 50 percent of the **92 participants** in the Consultation Workshops were operators/senior managers, a little over a third were stakeholders, and just over a sixth were employees. Overall, more women (54) than men (38) participated.



On aggregate the biggest reported workforce impacts of COVID-19 across the five regions were on **job security** and **financial hardship**. Outback Queensland showed distinctly different results, due to the demands of increased visitation and labour shortages.



Across the three study groups (employees, operators & stakeholders), **job security** and **financial hardship** were also the biggest COVID-19 impacts with operators citing **well-being** impacts, resulting from the strain of uncertainty, as almost equal to job security.



Reported factors for **developing and enhancing workforce resilience** aggregated across the five regions and all three groups of participants, was dominated by **communication** and other interpersonal and intra- and inter-organisational **connectivity** practices. Requiring consistent **leadership** and **support** from policymakers, as well as within organisations and regions, was stressed.



INTRODUCTION: QUEENSLAND TOURISM WORKFORCE CRISIS RESILIENCE & RECOVERY PROJECT

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The COVID-19 pandemic has had unprecedented impacts on Queensland's tourism industry, and this has become evident in a range of workforce challenges. Funded by the Queensland Government's Advance Queensland scheme, this project seeks to find strategies for recovery and resilience through extensive consultation with three industry groups: employees, operators/senior managers, and stakeholders to support a staged recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic impacts and to develop workforce resilience and recovery strategies to weather future external shocks via a [Queensland Tourism Workforce Strategy V2: A crisis resilience and recovery plan](#). The project is led by Dr Richard Robinson, of The University of Queensland, in partnership with Queensland Tourism Industry Council.

METHODS & AIMS

In year one of the project there were two data collection deliverables, both designed to better understand the impacts of, resilience to, and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic on different tourism groups - and in different regions. This report summarises the first stage of data collection, which involved a series of in-region consultation workshops. The second stage involved an online survey, and its results will be summarised in a separate report.

Between June and August 2021, a total of 15 consultation workshops were conducted in five regions of Queensland: Whitsundays, Tropical North Queensland, Gold Coast, Southern Queensland Country, and Outback Queensland. Three groups were consulted with separately in each region, on the premise that the pandemic had impacted them differently and that they had differing views on resilience and recovery going forward. The three groups were: employees, or workers at supervisory level or below, operators, or business owners/senior management, and stakeholders, or representatives of organisations that work 'on', rather than 'in', the tourism industry (e.g., council, trainers, RTOs, peak bodies, airports etc).

Across the five regions 14 tourism employees, 44 operators and 34 stakeholders participated in the consultation workshops, totalling 92 participants. Each workshop lasted approximately 90 minutes and conversations were facilitated by the project lead. An interactive tool, Mentimeter®, was used to enable participant reflection, to stimulate conversations and to produce data visualisations, which feature in this report. In all, twelve of the workshops were conducted face-to-face in-region, with some participants joining virtually. Three workshops were conducted entirely via Zoom, due to lockdown or travel restrictions.

In this initialising stage of the project the aim of the regional workshop consultations was to understand; the tourism workforce impacts of COVID-19; how workforce resilience changed

in the 18 months between early 2020 and mid-2021; the key aspects of tourism workforce resilience, and practices that enhanced workforce resilience.

This report, using data visualisation wherever possible, begins with a summary of the consultations according to region, highlighting trends in the region and differences between the three groups. The report concludes with a summary across regions, highlighting trends across the State and differences between the three groups. It should be noted that this report is descriptive in nature, rather than involving any high-level analytics or critique, and aims to provide timely feedback to regions and State stakeholders on the main themes emerging from each workshop. It is designed as a stimulus for further dialogue, rather than as an endpoint, and we acknowledge that many of the valuable points that were made were not always able to be included in this report due to space issues but are being considered in further in-depth analysis.

A WORD FROM QTIC'S CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Our industry has weathered many crises in the past and operators have time and again demonstrated impressive resilience and adaptability. However, the current COVID disruption has brought an entirely new level of challenges to our tourism and hospitality industry, with long-term impacts likely to persist for some time. As an organisation QTIC also had to respond to the many complex difficulties that operators face and we have engaged intensely with governments to find innovative and effective solutions wherever possible.

Workforce issues and opportunities have long been a focus for QTIC's work and we have built up relevant expertise, particularly through our partnerships with training and research institutions like the University of Queensland (UQ). The COVID crisis has played out with enormous ramifications, for employers, employees and for communities and is now creating industry-wide difficulties as we try to craft a path towards a recovery.

Understanding the specific issues facing stakeholders in different regions and in different sectors is critical for us to help develop effective policies and response measures. Through this particular project collaboration with UQ, QTIC and the industry will gain better insight to guide us in our engagement with decision makers in industry and in government. An informed, evidence-based approach is the only way to find solutions to the challenges before us. QTIC appreciates the work done by the UQ team to help shape a prosperous and sustainable future for tourism.

TOURISM WORKFORCE FUTURES WORKSHOP

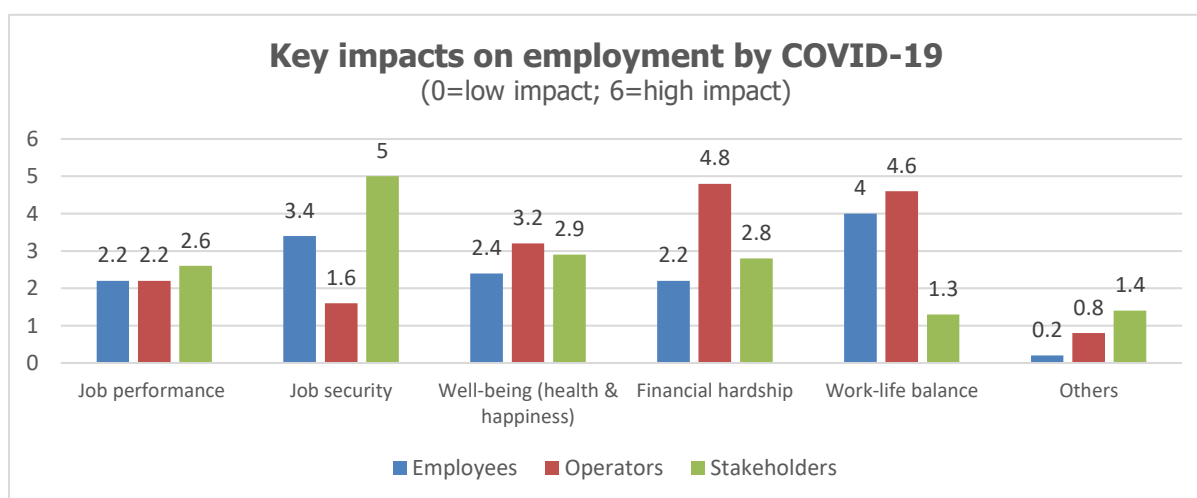
SUMMARY NOTE: WHITSUNDAYS REGION

On 14th June 2021, 21 tourism employees, operators and stakeholders¹ from the Whitsundays region participated in a series of Tourism Workforce Workshops, as part of the Advance Queensland funded “[Queensland Tourism Workforce Strategy V2: A crisis resilience and recovery plan](#)” Project. This Summary Note shares a synopsis of discussions, in particular highlighting differences between the three groups (employees, operators & stakeholders).

KEY FINDING #1

COVID-19 employment impacts

- **Work-life balance** is the biggest **employees'** impact, especially for those juggling childcare, followed by **job security** impacts, reflecting a lack of control and uncertain futures.
- **Financial hardship** is problematic for **operators** due to rolling business shutdowns and housing/accommodation availability for workers. Business finance recovery is heavily dependent on government assistance, which operators feel they cannot count on. **Work-life balance** was reflected by working long hours in stressful and emotional circumstances.
- **Job security** is the biggest workforce impact for the Whitsundays region according to **stakeholders**, mainly relating to labour leakage (leaving the region/country). Lacking infrastructure (e.g., transport, affordable housing, community service etc.) was flagged as a barrier to retaining workers. **Well-being/mental health** over time is a significant issue compounded by (re)concurrent crises/disaster impacts, such as Cyclone Debbie.

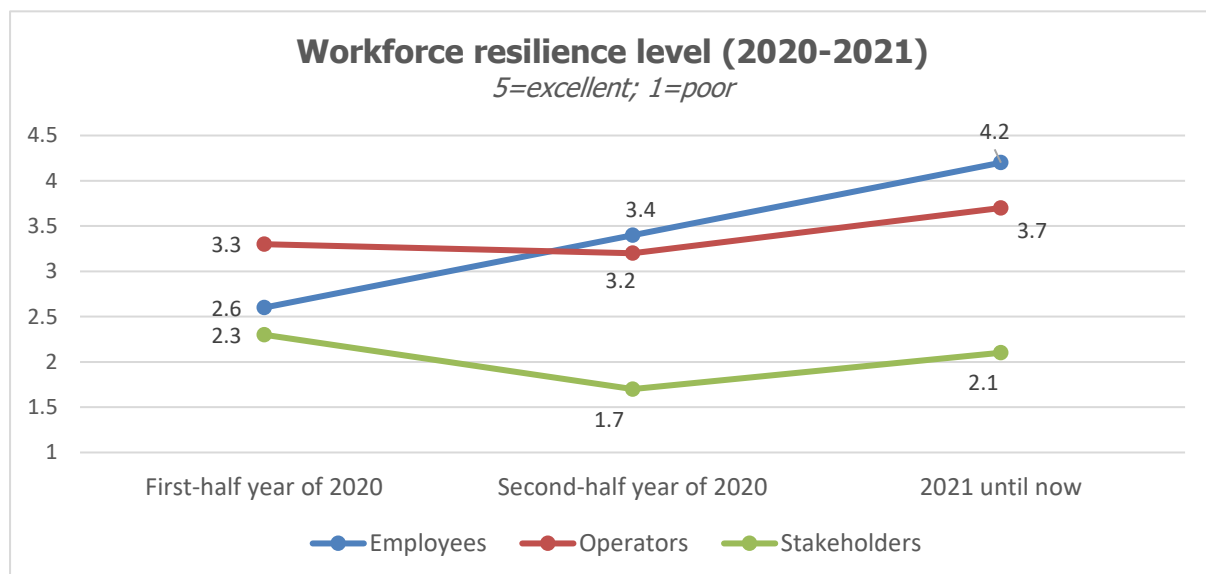


¹ Employees are workers at supervisory level or below, operators are business owners or senior management, and stakeholders are representatives of organisations that work ‘on’, rather than ‘in’, the tourism industry (e.g., council, trainers, RTOs, peak bodies, airports etc).

KEY FINDING #2

COVID-19 & workforce across time

- **Employee** resilience was lowest in early 2020 due to fluctuating labour demands and uncertainty of border closures etc. but has gradually improved over time.
- The second half of 2020 was slightly more challenging for **operators** – finding it difficult to motivate people to travel and rebook. Fatigue dealing with unexpected, recurring lockdowns and/or border closures. Government policy on national border closures has caused a ripple effect on employment losses across states.
- **Stakeholders** assessed overall workforce resilience as relatively poor compared to the other groups. The main concerns were tourism/hospitality employees moving sideways to other industries/sectors and not returning. JobKeeper payments only provided short-term solutions for retaining employees.
- Overall, the **operator and stakeholder** groups were least positive about workforce resilience, and showing less or moderate improvement, whilst the employee group reported a strengthening of workforce resilience despite less job certainty and supports. At the regional level, stakeholders considered tourism/hospitality workforce as non-resilient due to labour market insecurity.



KEY FINDING #3

Developing workforce resilience

- Across the three groups, **communication, (organisational) support, training, encouragement, job security and leadership** were most highlighted as factors to increase resilience.

- Key aspects for **employees** were **communication, support, encouragement** and **(futures)positivity**. **Clear policies and procedures** to follow (e.g., COVID-19 plans) are important to cope with uncertainty.
- **Operators** also noted **communication, support,** and **trust,** but also highlighted **housing/accommodation availability** as an issue for staff (government housing policy issue). The **state-wide border closure approach** is challenging workforce resilience, increasing uncertainty and fluctuations in business operations.
- **Stakeholders** emphasized **education, training, job security** and **liveability** as key aspects to develop workforce resilience, which is currently lacking for the tourism/hospitality sector in Whitsundays. Councils can provide an employee welcome package to encourage youth/groups attracted to the region by showcasing services.



KEY FINDING #4

Management practices enhancing workforce resilience

- **Employees** cared more about the assistance and connections organisations created. These include “**team building activities**” and particularly “**recognition of employees’ achievements and efforts**” (informal or formal). Shared vision communications and development through team meetings were critical for belongingness.
- **Operators** emphasized “**employee upskilling/training programs**” (roles diversification) and “**employee bonuses, reward, and recognition practices**” to support long-term team development. “**Succession planning**” was also noted as important for sustainable workforces.
- **Stakeholders** discussed key management practices at the regional level, mainly “**enhancing training for clear career pathways**” through upskilling staff and specific tertiary education opportunities as part of employment, enhancing timely and rapid career

development opportunities. Other key practices included “**partnerships for workforce development**” and “**mentoring and inspiring leadership development**”.



REGIONAL 'GEM' – Two stakeholders in dialogue contrasted tourism with other regional industries:

“[Being from a multi-generation farming family] 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” ...

“We’re [tourism operators] still first generation, [we need to] develop as a community... to provide opportunities here versus my first thought being ‘I’m going away’, even when it comes to study... so there's a resilience piece”.

TOURISM WORKFORCE FUTURES WORKSHOP

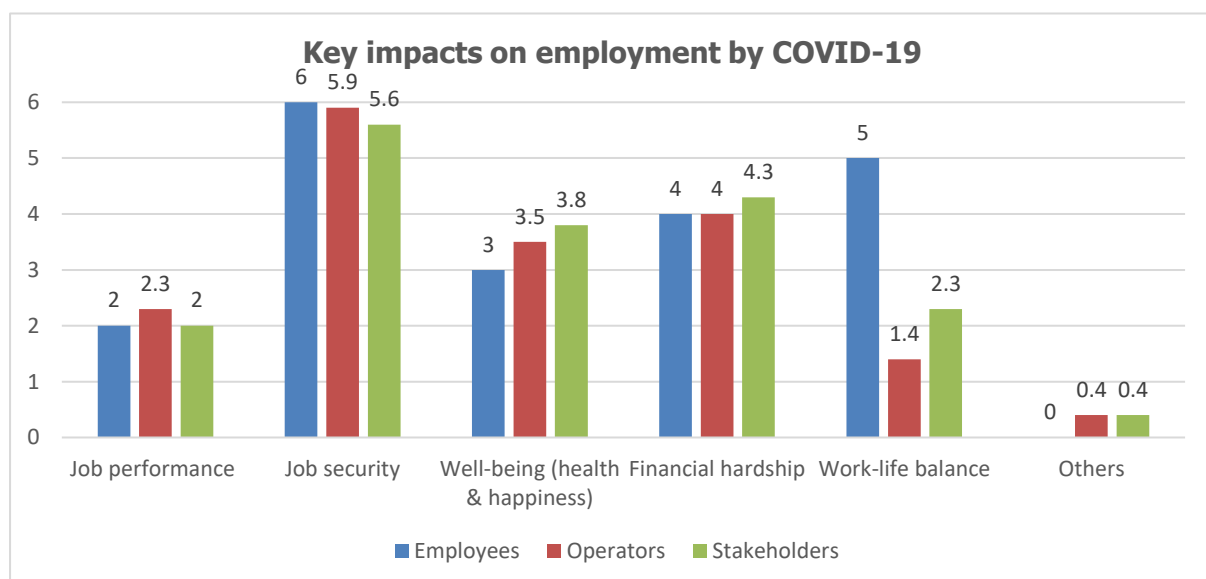
SUMMARY NOTE: TROPICAL NORTH QUEENSLAND REGION

On 18th June 2021, 22 tourism employees, operators and stakeholders² from the Tropical North Queensland region participated in a series of Tourism Workforce Workshops, as part of the Advance Queensland funded “[Queensland Tourism Workforce Strategy V2: A crisis resilience and recovery plan](#)” Project. This Summary Note shares a synopsis of discussions, in particular highlighting differences between the three groups (employees, operators & stakeholders).

KEY FINDING #1

COVID-19 employment impacts

- **Job security** was the biggest impact on employment by COVID-19 across the three groups.
- **Employees** experienced anxiety with **job security** and were **financially** stressed by income losses. Some considered switching industries for more secure jobs. **Work-life balance**, on the other hand, was considered in a positive way whereby those working from home had more time to spend with families, or part-time and casual work translated into less intense work demands and even extended periods of leave.



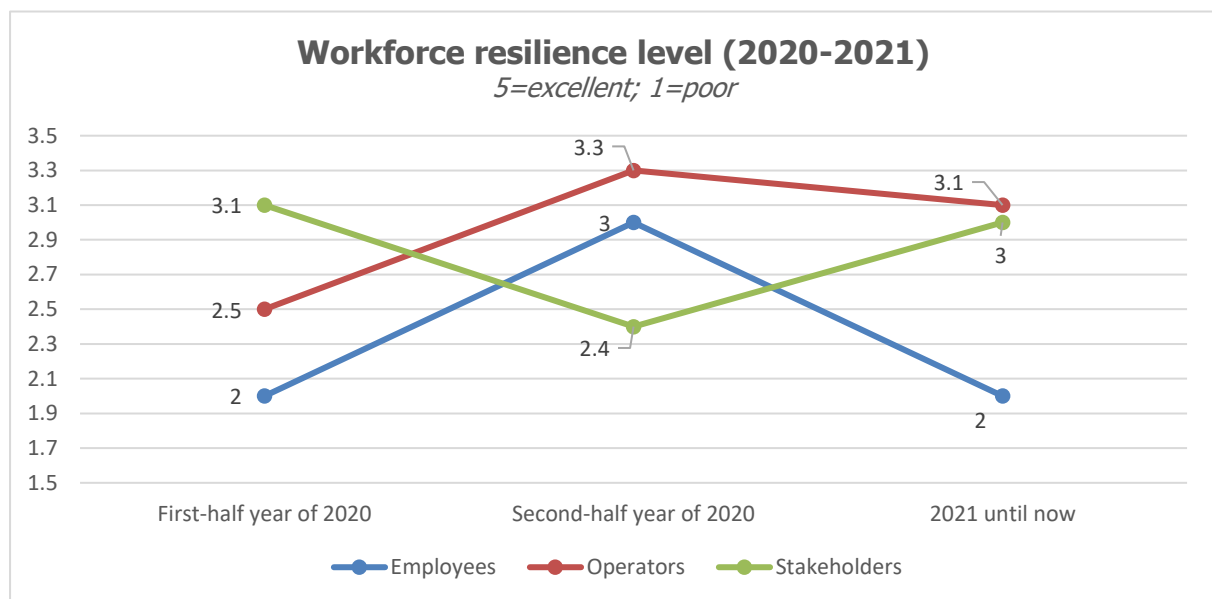
² Employees are workers at supervisory level or below, operators are business owners or senior management, and stakeholders are representatives of organisations that work ‘on’, rather than ‘in’, the tourism industry (e.g., council, trainers, RTOs, peak bodies, airports etc).

- **Operators' job security** concerns were reflected by 'environmental uncertainty' during the crisis. This was followed by **financial hardship** and **well-being issues** because of decline in travellers, working extended hours and dealing with various stresses due to changes in operations; often this led to business close-downs and families losing livelihoods.
- **Stakeholders** also rated **job security** high due to job redundancy (e.g., events industry decline) and uncertainty in the COVID-19 environment. Ongoing government support for the industry was considered vital, to counter **financial hardship** and **mental well-being issues**.

KEY FINDING #2

COVID-19 & workforce across time

- **Employee** resilience rated highest in the second half of 2020 due to their confidence that things would bounce back (e.g., Job Keeper) and moral support networks. However, their resilience was showing signs of diminishing because of a compounding effect impacting on their job security and well-being.
- Similar patterns of workforce resilience were shared between **employees and operators**. The decrease of resilience in 2021 was due to a loss of hope with repeated lockdowns. Workers migrated to other industries and were unlikely to return.
- **Stakeholders** show an opposite trend regarding resilience from the other two groups. **Overwhelming pandemic fatigue** and **uncertainty regarding the future** are two major reasons for a decrease of resilience in late 2020. Middle management resilience gradually improved as they felt safer and more secure in their roles into 2021.



KEY FINDING #3

Developing workforce resilience

- Across the three groups, **communication, leadership, social support, job security,** and **information transparency** were most highlighted as factors to increase workforce resilience.
- **Employees** cared about **effective communication** with companies, especially on a more personal level with **social supports** and **building connectedness**. However, virtual communication could be challenging due to less personal connections.
- **Operators** noted **communication** for resilience that included (1) short & sharp summaries of government and industry on resources accessibility (e.g., grant programs) and information transparency (e.g., international border openings), and (2) concise/accurate messaging to employees to avoid misinformation through social media platforms.
- **Stakeholders** emphasized that **leadership** is required to positively set the shared goals for industry recovery. Leaders are also important to control information sharing with the industry, facilitating communication, and investing in workforces to enable more training and innovation.



KEY FINDING #4

Management practices enhancing workforce resilience

- For **employees**, “**government incentives**” (e.g., JobKeeper) and “**counselling supports**” were key to enhancing workplace experiences and retain employees through times of crisis.
- **Operators** emphasized “**better incentives for employment**” to attract, train and retain employees for the T&H industry, such as EAPs and training schemes. Another highlight was “**open and flexible communication**” across all departments, as well as between upper management teams and front-line staff. More importantly, government interventions are crucial in the TNQ region, but eligibility information was unclear for businesses, compounded by red tape. Industry specific advisors are needed to assist policy communication and interpretation.
- **Stakeholders** discussed “**better communication from management to workers**”, “**stronger incentives for employment**” such as permanency, career progression, training, and support services. Also, empowering employees to assume leadership roles could also be beneficial to encourage skills and knowledge transfer.



REGIONAL 'GEM' – Acknowledging long standing issues of job security and skilled labour shortages (relying on government policy supports)

“At this point, everybody has second, third, fourth and fifth jobs... I am not going to give up my other job to work two weeks full-time during the school holidays and then lose my other jobs” ...

“[we’ve been] lobbying in the media... saying we’re going to have a workforce shortage of highly trained specialised staff that we can’t pull out of nowhere... why can’t we as a tourism sector put some plans in place [to go overseas and] identify highly skilled people and pay for their quarantine to come over...”

TOURISM WORKFORCE FUTURES WORKSHOP

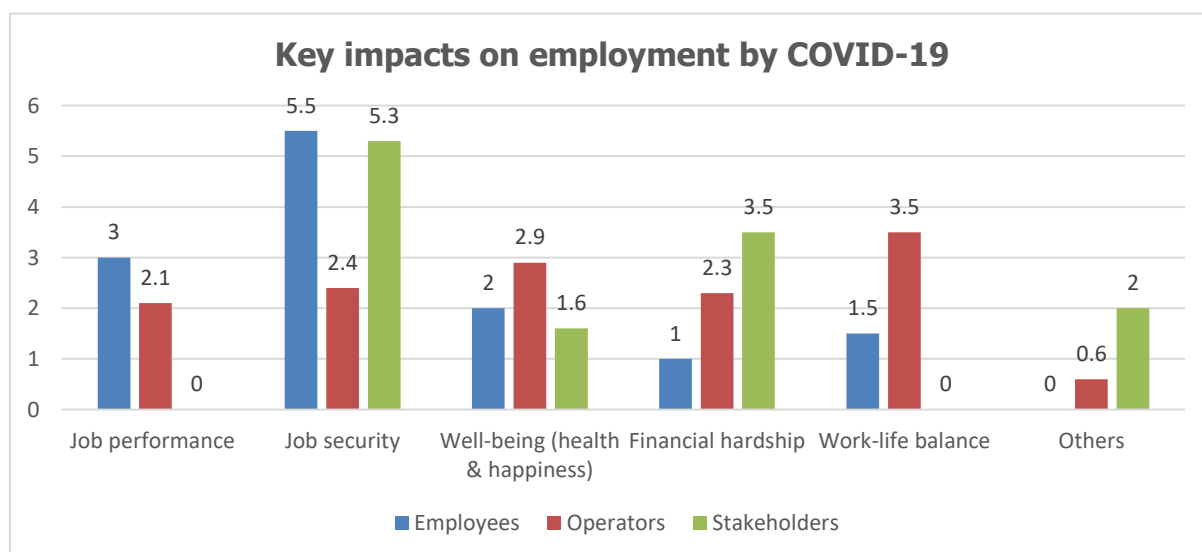
SUMMARY NOTE: SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND COUNTRY REGION

On 12th July 2021, 23 tourism employees, operators and stakeholders³ from the Southern Queensland Country region participated in a series of Tourism Workforce Workshops, as part of the Advance Queensland funded "[Queensland Tourism Workforce Strategy V2: A crisis resilience and recovery plan](#)" Project. This Summary Note shares a synopsis of discussions, in particular highlighting differences between the three groups (employees, operators & stakeholders).

KEY FINDING #1

COVID-19 employment impacts

- **Job security** was the biggest impact on **employees** at the beginning of the COVID-19 uncertainty but became more stable later in 2020. Following this was **job performance** (visibility), affected by working from home patterns and less interaction with co-workers and less visibility on work performance.
- **Work-life balance** and **well-being issues** lead impacts for **operators**, due to skilled staff recruitment challenges (e.g., chefs) and burnout. Training program interruptions led to skills shortages - needed as businesses transitioned to COVID-19 conditions. **Policy assistance** was required to improve and shorten training programs.



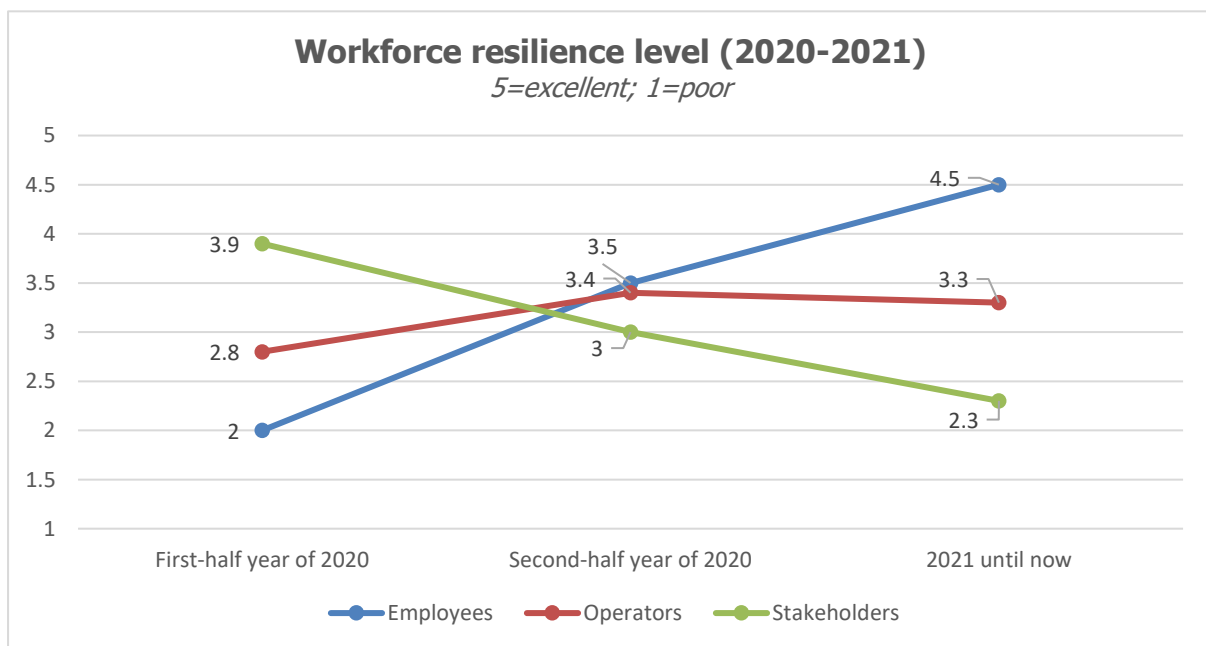
³ Employees are workers at supervisory level or below, operators are business owners or senior management, and stakeholders are representatives of organisations that work 'on', rather than 'in', the tourism industry (e.g., council, trainers, RTOs, peak bodies, airports etc).

- **Stakeholders** highly ranked **job security** and **financial hardship**. From a regional perspective, difficulties finding skilled labour for small and medium businesses is a big challenge. Small businesses lack access to Employee Assistance Programs due to costs, being time-poor and over-committed.

KEY FINDING #2

COVID-19 & workforce across time

- Workforce resilience for some **employees** increased since 2020. They gradually adapted to new environments with new technologies applications in some workplaces.
- **Operators** perceived workforce resilience as flattening since 2020. Employees and managers were efficient and adaptable to new environments (the longer the more resilient) through experience development (active learning) from COVID-19 impacts.
- In contrast, **stakeholders** saw workforce resilience decreasing since 2020, mainly due to labour fatigue and leakage to other industries. They fear these workers will never come back. Career development, more job opportunities, and cross-training for multi-tasking are important to improve this situation.



KEY FINDING #3

Developing workforce resilience

- **Employees** highlighted **communication** (COVID-19 related information sharing), **team building exercises**, and **flexible work conditions** as key resilience aspects.
- For **operators**, key elements for workforce resilience included **constant and consistent communication** re new directions and advice from stakeholders, decisive **strong leadership** in determining employees' futures, **confidence**, **calmness**, and **(emotional) support**.
- **Stakeholders** noted **leadership**, **connection**, and **support** as key elements of workforce resilience. Leadership was discussed at both government and industry level with tourism peak bodies taking initiatives to lead and communicate the future picture (planning) as well as encouraging business-to-business supports. Key challenges included finding the **right tone in communications**, efficient **platforms for communication** (quantity vs. quality), staff training (team fatigue) etc. **Policy and training reforms** are required to encourage younger generations to come to the industry and ensuring their healthy and safe working conditions (*e.g., no overworking or abused by employers*).



KEY FINDING #4

Management practices enhancing workforce resilience

- **Employees** emphasized “**team building activities**”, “**professional development**”, and “**leading with resilience and reflection**” (personal reflection skills to review the past and plan) as key practices. Employee “**empowerment and involvement**” was considered important to increase employee resilience by providing flexibility via decision-making - and trust-building with employees.
- **Operators** highlighted “**trusted sources of information**”, “**agility of [tourism] system[s]**” and “**confident and compassionate leadership**” to adapt to changing circumstances, “**employee involvement in decision-making**”, and “**employee multi-task training and reward systems**”. “**Staff sharing and collaboration**” was mentioned by multiple operators within the same industry sectors - to deliver job security and enhance skill sets.
- **Stakeholders** noted “**flexible work arrangements**” and “**trust and relationship building within teams**” such as showing empathy, regular check-ins, and emotion regulation to support employees’ mental health. “**Knowledge sharing and information transparency**” is also important in effecting clear communication with employees on business crisis management plans and, future directions and guidance from upper management.



REGIONAL ‘GEM’ – Plugging program and skills gaps with time-consuming on-the-job training:

“...if you're running accommodation, it's a range of different platforms that you have to be looking at separately... 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...”

“...a lot of our staff had downtime at work so they would implement additional training... getting them into a classroom and having them get trained up so that we can prepare for the future with a lot of our staff multi-skilled...”

TOURISM WORKFORCE FUTURES WORKSHOP

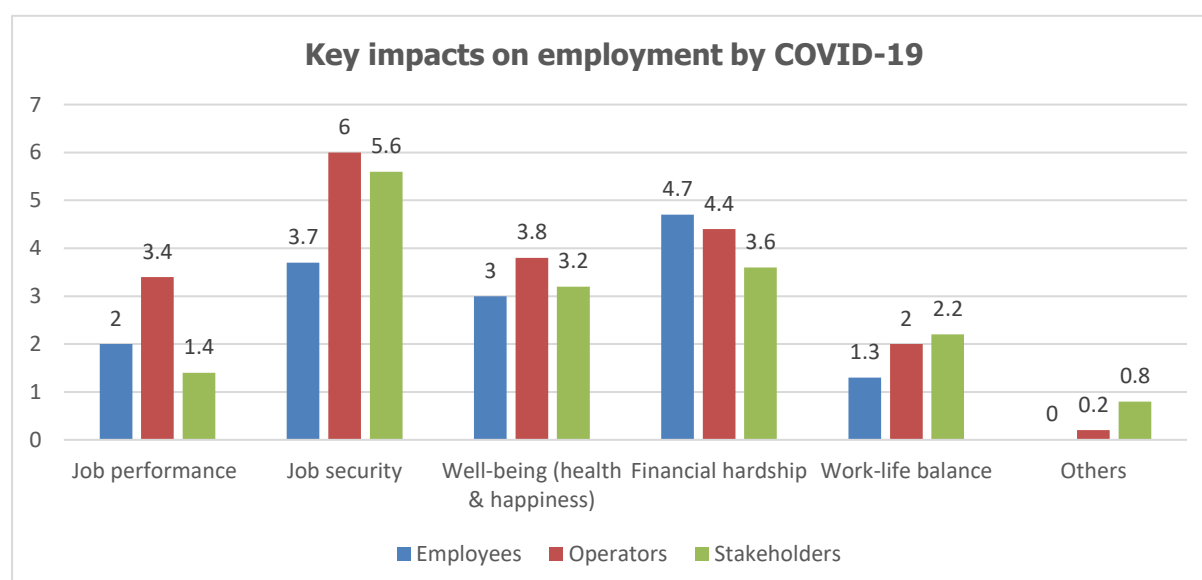
SUMMARY NOTE: GOLD COAST REGION

On 15th July and 4th August 2021, 17 tourism employees, operators and stakeholders⁴ from the Gold Coast region participated in a series of Tourism Workforce Workshops, as part of the Advance Queensland funded “[Queensland Tourism Workforce Strategy V2: A crisis resilience and recovery plan](#)” Project. This Summary Note shares a synopsis of discussions, in particular highlighting differences between the three groups (employees, operators & stakeholders).

KEY FINDING #1

COVID-19 employment impacts

- **Employees** found **financial hardship** the biggest impact of COVID-19 due to the uncertainty of business operating environments (lockdown or not), albeit improved by JobKeeper. **Job security** was also a concern given uncertainties while some remaining employees saw opportunities given the lack of skilled workers providing ample work.
- **Operators** considered **job security** the biggest impact for employees after business close downs. Sudden and repeating lockdowns affected confidence in the T&H industry (→decrease in **job performance**) leading to staff leakage to other industries. **Financial hardship** impacted owners/operators with no alternative business plans.



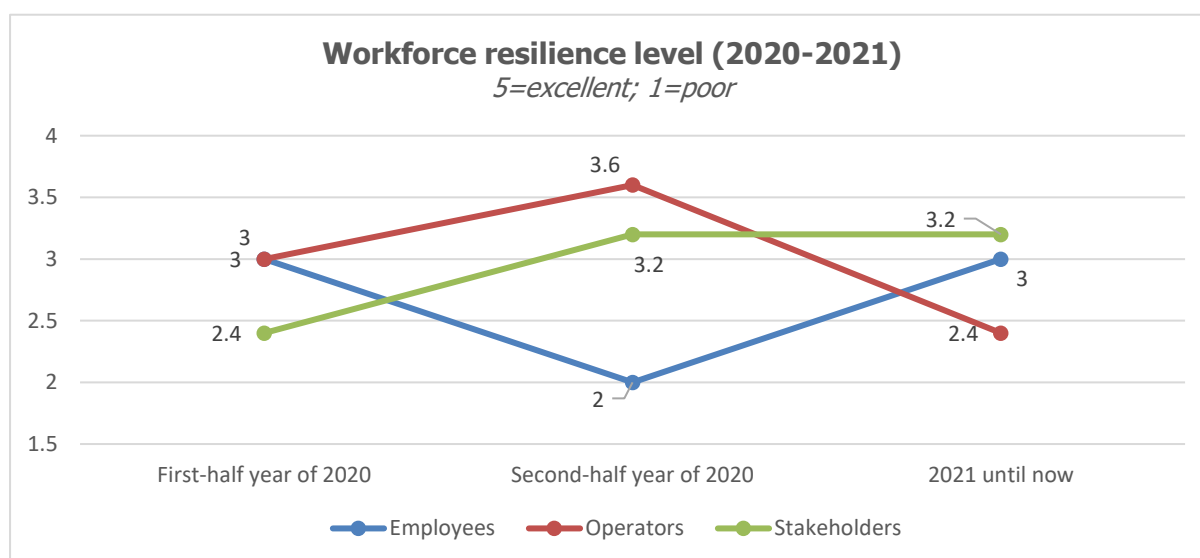
⁴ Employees are workers at supervisory level or below, operators are business owners or senior management, and stakeholders are representatives of organisations that work ‘on’, rather than ‘in’, the tourism industry (e.g., council, trainers, RTOs, peak bodies, airports etc).

- **Stakeholders** noted **job insecurity & business vulnerability** as major issues for their workforce. **Staff well-being** was salient for hospitality workers as mask-wearing and social-distancing limited the service experience. This affected the motivation of workers and their job performance. Stakeholders also recognized that employees dealt with short-term contracts and regular service cancellations (job insecurity), limited face-to-face interactions (job performance), and limited personal development opportunities in the workplace.

KEY FINDING #2

COVID-19 & workforce across time

- **Employees** reported workforce resilience as relatively satisfactory in the new environment but experienced a decrease in the second half of 2020 because of the difficulties of being isolated and having less income. This somewhat improved in 2021 with some resilience fatigue reported - but with more job opportunities coming up. Mental health worsened due to the long-term effects of COVID-19.
- **Operators** were initially optimistic about workforce resilience after dealing with floods and fires and experiencing a strong sense of community togetherness. This perception of resilience continued with JobKeeper support later in 2020 but dropped sharply in 2021 due to the end of JobKeeper and more uncertainty amid the COVID-19 environment.
- **Stakeholders** saw resilience as poor at the start of 2020, but more job opportunities and vacancies opening in the second half of 2020. However, this has not improved in 2021 and concerns were raised about the creation of "COVID-19 compliance jobs" – that is additional staff to enforce check-ins, mask-wearing and other COVID-19 protocols, despite the on-going uncertainty.



KEY FINDING #3

Developing workforce resilience

- Overall, across all three groups, highlighted aspects for developing workforce resilience were **communication, collaboration, social support, leadership, and connectedness**.
- **Teamwork** together with **belongingness** and **shared values** were important for **employees** in dealing with stress and improving working experiences. **Communication** at different levels was essential to create a shared vision and **clear career focus** was key to building long-term commitment.
- **Collaboration** was the key resilience factor for **operators**, such as across departments within firms, small businesses resource-sharing (labour, marketing opportunities), and collaborating with industry bodies to resolve issues and develop potential strategies. Other key aspects included **inspirational leadership** to enhance staff retention in the T&H industry.
- **Stakeholders** highlighted **communication** for resilience-building through getting more information from government about the situation and giving clear and consistent instructions for businesses on what to do. **Optimism** was also important for team development and confidence building – *"a light at the end of the tunnel"*.



KEY FINDING #4

Management practices enhancing workforce resilience

- Key practices praised by **employees** were “**initiatives focused on wellbeing and mental health**”, “**constant communication**” to keep employees updated, “**career progression**” opportunities with a clear development goal, “**team building activities**” to motivate employees in a reactive ‘stop-go’ working environment, and “**staff empowerment**” to enable their voices in decision-making and solutions.
- **Operators** highlighted “**staff empowerment**” as a key management practice to; (1) engage employees in decision-making and sharing responsibility in small businesses, and (2) developing freedom within organisational hierarchies for effective problem-solving in larger businesses.
- Highlights from **stakeholders** included “**employee involvement in organisational change**”, “**flexible work arrangements**”, such as rostering and discovering jobs, and non-financial benefits to attract, motivate and retain staff. The industry is calling on support regarding business insurance, and business capability programs for higher job security, but relying on “**government initiatives to augment their management practices**”.



REGIONAL ‘GEM’ – 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.”

TOURISM WORKFORCE FUTURES WORKSHOP

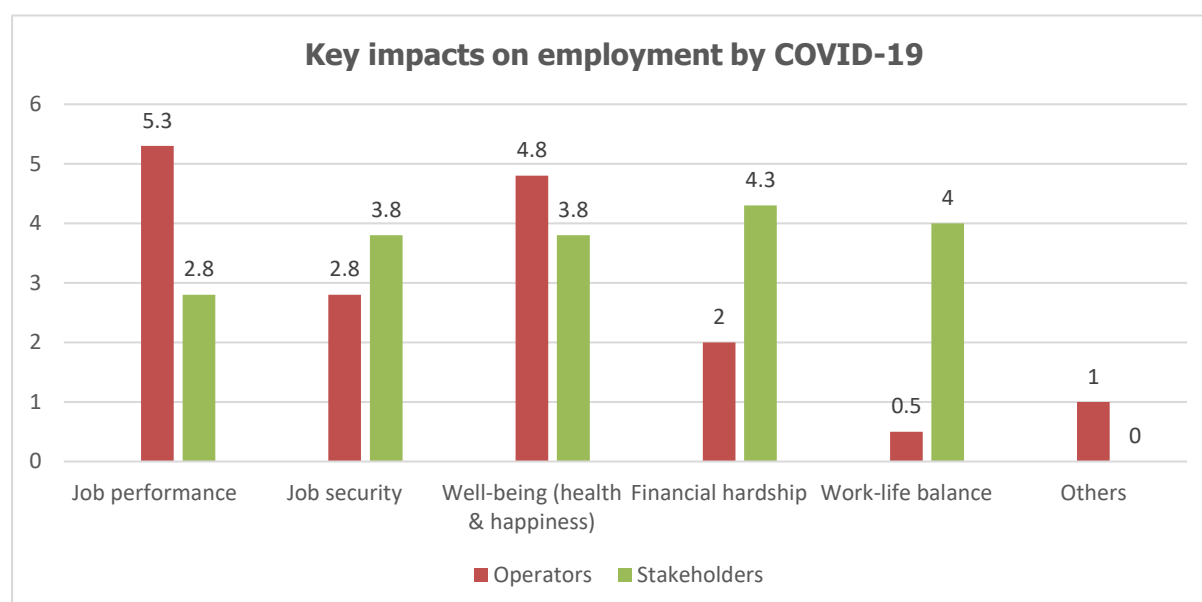
SUMMARY NOTE: OUTBACK QUEENSLAND REGION

On 19th and 20th July 2021, 9 tourism operators and stakeholders⁵ from the Outback Queensland region participated in two Tourism Workforce Workshops, as part of the Advance Queensland funded “[Queensland Tourism Workforce Strategy V2: A crisis resilience and recovery plan](#)” Project. This Summary Note shares a synopsis of discussions, in particular highlighting differences between the two groups (operators & stakeholders)⁶.

KEY FINDING #1

COVID-19 employment impacts

- **Job performance** and **well-being issues** are the two biggest employment impacts for **operators**. Insufficient skill sets and insufficient staff across multiple departments compromise expected job performance. Well-being issues are triggered by working extra hours and being sensitive to demanding visitors coming to the region since COVID-19.



⁵ Operators are business owners or senior management, and stakeholders are representatives of organisations that work ‘on’, rather than ‘in’, the tourism industry (e.g., council, trainers, RTOs, peak bodies, airports etc).

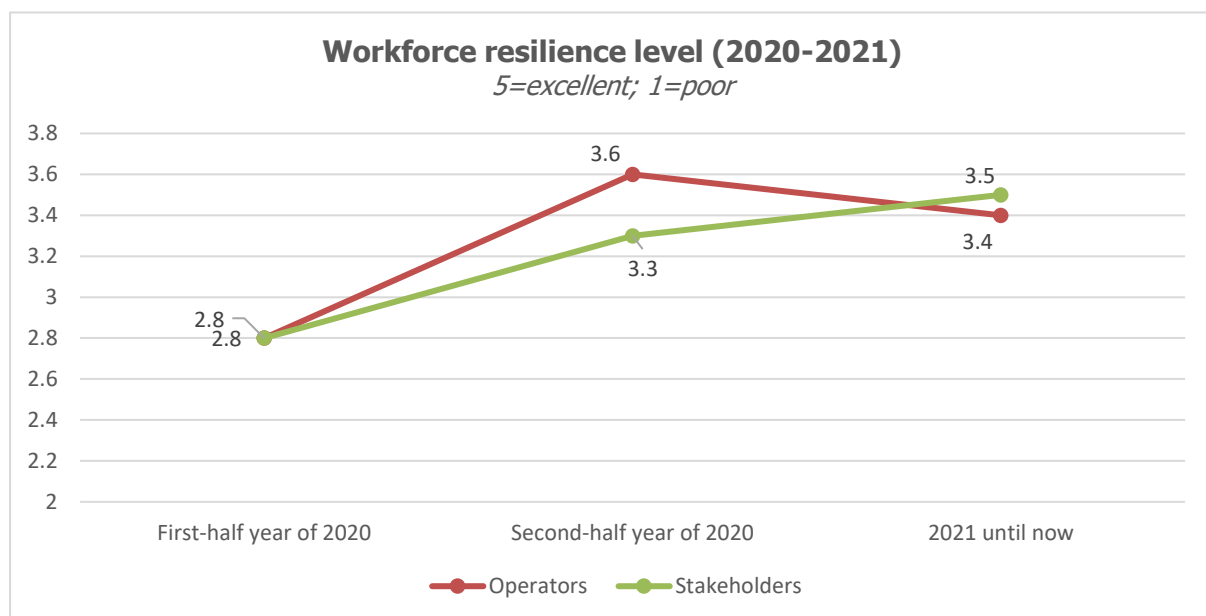
⁶ Note, despite extensive recruitment efforts, including via regional socials and radio interviews, no employees volunteered to participate.

- **Stakeholders** saw **financial hardship** as the main impact when COVID-19 first hit. The payment scheme from the government was helpful to pay and retain employees, but long-term policy support is required for the future. **Work-life balance** and **well-being issues** gradually became the long-term impacts due to working overtime, multitasking, labour shortages, higher wage demands and 'pandemic fatigue'. While career development workshops were running in the Outback (e.g., small business financial counselling programme by the state and federal governments), less was offered re health & well-being.

KEY FINDING #2

COVID-19 & workforce across time

- Perceptions of workforce resilience in 2020-2021 generally steadily increased amongst **operators** and **stakeholders**.
- Fear of the unknown dominated in early 2020 for **operators**. This situation improved later in 2020 when new staff were hired, more visitors arrived and more attractions and areas opened, also generating diversity work opportunities.
- **Stakeholders** also noted increasing resilience since 2020 as many new projects (e.g., museum, product, and infrastructure) came online during the COVID-19 crisis, particularly in larger towns. However, this resilience relies on environmental factors, for example further outbreaks and/or international border reopening.



KEY FINDING #3

Developing workforce resilience

- **Operators** noted **communication** and **leadership** as the key elements for workforce resilience development. **Communication** was about ensuring clear and consistent information sharing with one voice, avoiding over-communication, and expressing positive messages to inspire people. **Firm and strong leadership** (including government) was needed to deal with uncertainty and develop viable business plans.
- **Stakeholders** noted **resources** (e.g., remuneration, supporting resources for home-office), **connectedness**, and **strong leadership** to provide guidance as key elements for workforce resilience.



KEY FINDING #4

Management practices enhancing workforce resilience

- **Operators** discussed **“Employee Assistance Programs”** (e.g., team-building exercises, opportunities to communicate with managers), **“Job Payment Schemes”**, and more **“flexible working arrangements”** for employees. **“Well-being supports for managers and operators”** were also important due to a lack of skilled employees.

- **Stakeholders** highlighted “**sharing services**” to avoid repeating tasks workload (e.g., sharing employee benefits or health and safety systems), “**collaboration incentives**” (rewards to encourage collaboration which are time-consuming and hard to mobilize), and “**employee empowerment and recognition**” for front-line employees (e.g., creating initiatives, decision-making) for resilience management practices.



REGIONAL 'GEM' – Fear of international travel resuming stripping away domestic demand:

“...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 to say there will be a cliff, and we need everybody to be focused on that, because this is a struggle here... we need to know the pain point so that we can help” ...

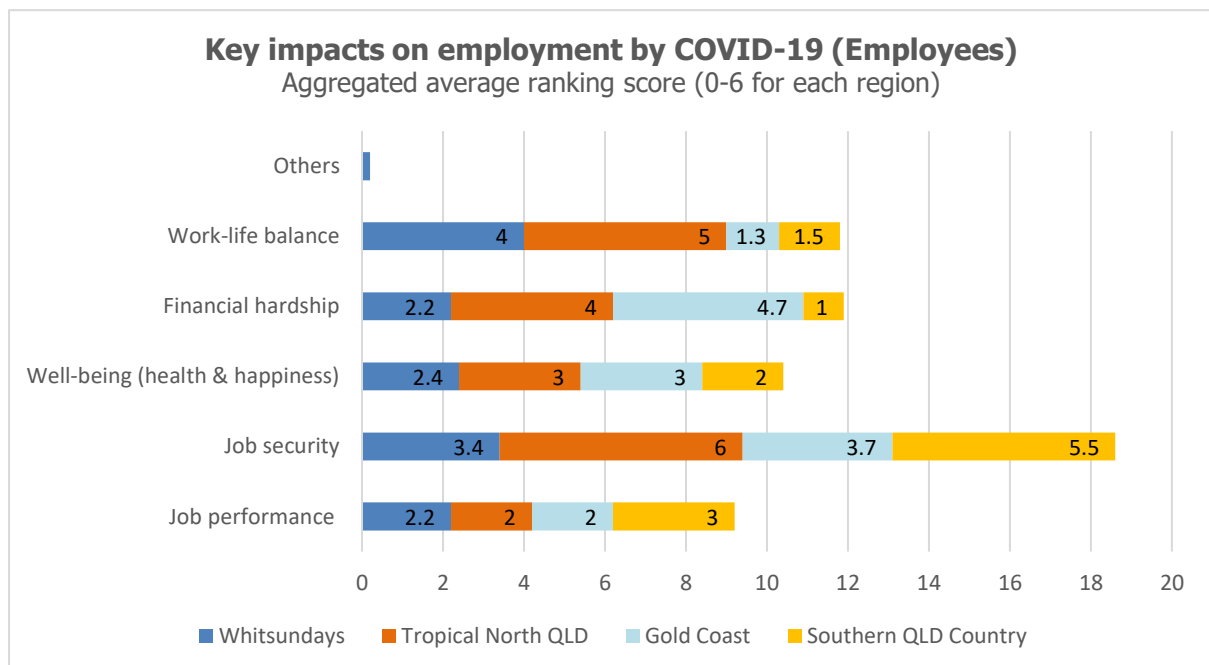
CROSS-REGIONAL COMPARISON AND SUMMARY

Five regions in Queensland participated in the Tourism Workforce Workshops from June to August 2021. In total, 14 employees, 44 operators, and 34 stakeholders from different regions contributed their insights to the development of the Queensland Tourism Workforce Strategy for crisis resilience and recovery. This cross-regional summary compares the differences and similarities between the five regions – and for each group⁷.

EMPLOYEES GROUP SUMMARY (FOUR REGIONS)⁸

COVID-19 employment impacts across regions

- **Job security** is the biggest impact of COVID-19 for *employees* across four regions due to on-going uncertain futures. Following are **financial hardship**, **work-life balance**, **well-being**, and **job performance**, respectively.
- More specifically, *employees* in both *Tropical North QLD* and *Southern QLD Country* regions rated **job security** the biggest impact. *Gold Coast* and *Whitsundays* employees reported **financial hardship** and **work-life balance** the most impacted aspects, respectively.

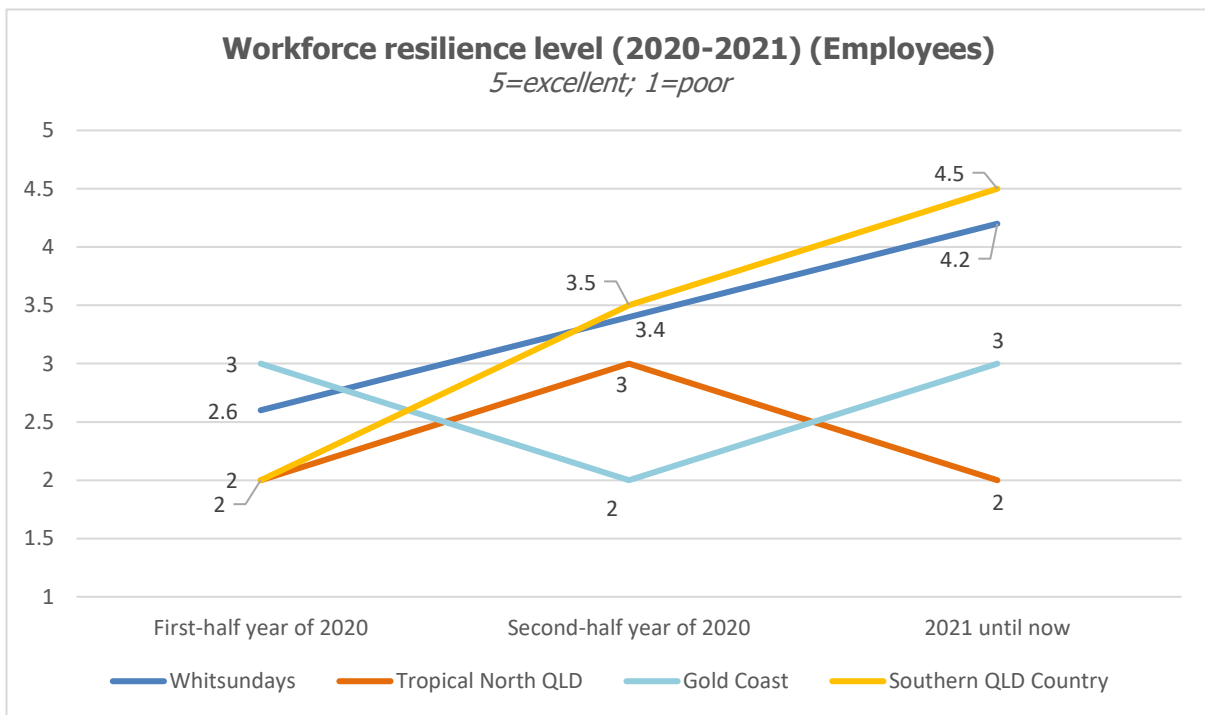


⁷ Employees are workers at supervisory level or below, operators are business owners or senior management, and stakeholders are representatives of organisations that work 'on', rather than 'in', the tourism industry (e.g., council, trainers, RTOs, peak bodies, airports etc).

⁸ Note, despite extensive recruitment efforts, including via regional socials and radio interviews, no employees volunteered to participate in Outback QLD region.

COVID-19 & workforce resilience across time & regions

- *Employees’ resilience had similar **steadily improving patterns** in *Whitsundays* and *Southern QLD Country*.*
- *Tropical North QLD* experienced a **bounce back in confidence** due to **financial supports** (e.g., Job Keeper) in mid-2020 but dropped in 2021 due to **continuous lockdowns**. In contrast, workforce resilience on the *Gold Coast* dropped in late 2020 because of **loss of income and isolation** and gradually increased in 2021 as more job opportunities emerged.



Developing workforce resilience & challenges of implementation across regions

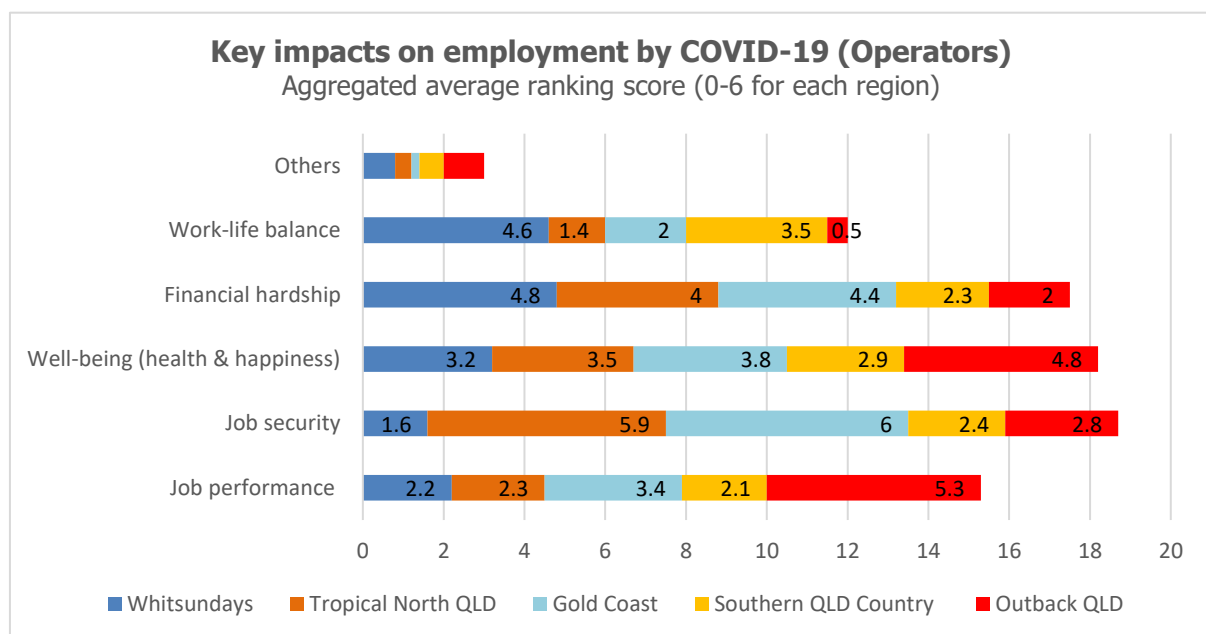
- Employees saw **communication, support, leadership, teamwork, flexibility, encouragement,** and **positivity** as the key aspects to build workforce resilience.
- However, key challenges were **connected employees** and **relationship-building** during lockdowns and work-from-home environments. **Effective and direct communication** was problematic in bigger companies that lacked employee empowerment and recognition/acknowledgement processes.



OPERATORS GROUP SUMMARY (FIVE REGIONS)

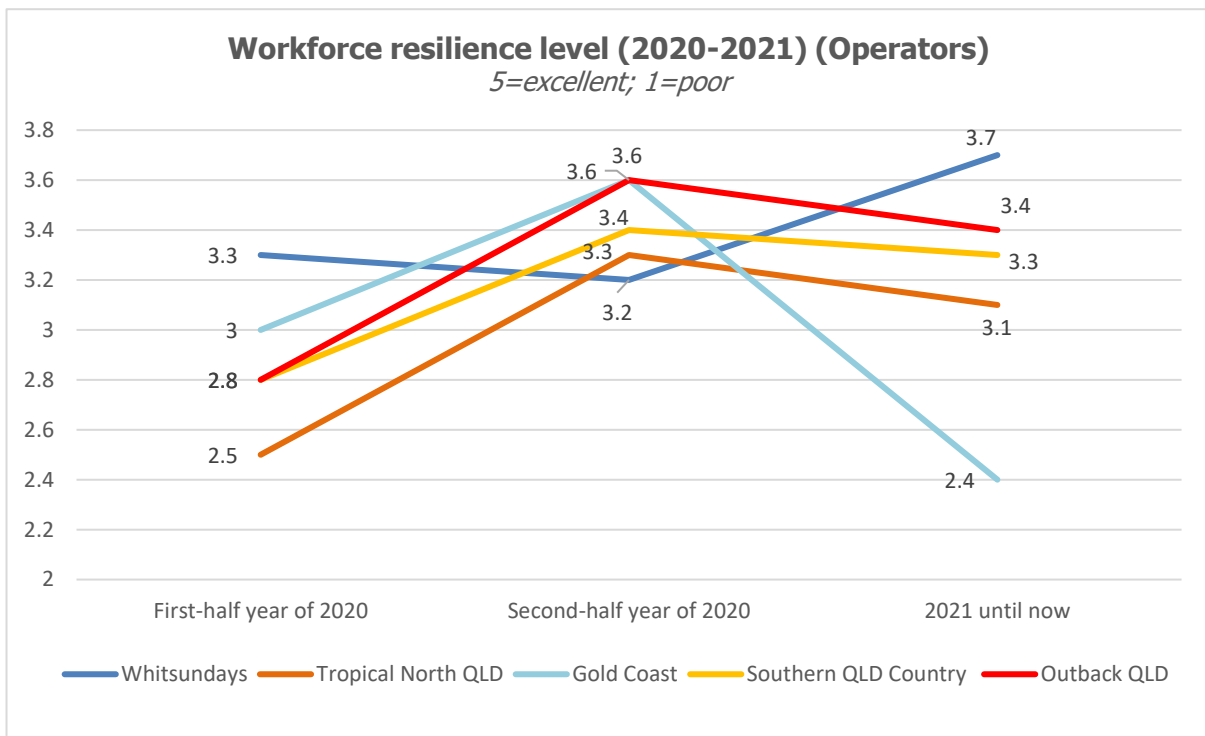
COVID-19 employment impacts across regions

- Operators' top three perceived impacts on local employment were **job security**, **well-being issue**, and **financial hardship** in these five regions.
- More specifically, operators in *Tropical North QLD* and *Gold Coast* rated **job security** the biggest impact, while in the *Whitsundays* the biggest impacts were **financial hardship** and **work-life balance**. In contrast, in *Outback QLD*, operators had more concerns with **job performance** and **well-being issues**. *Southern QLD Country* rated quite evenly across different impacts, somewhat highlighting **work-life balance issues**.



COVID-19 & workforce resilience across time & regions

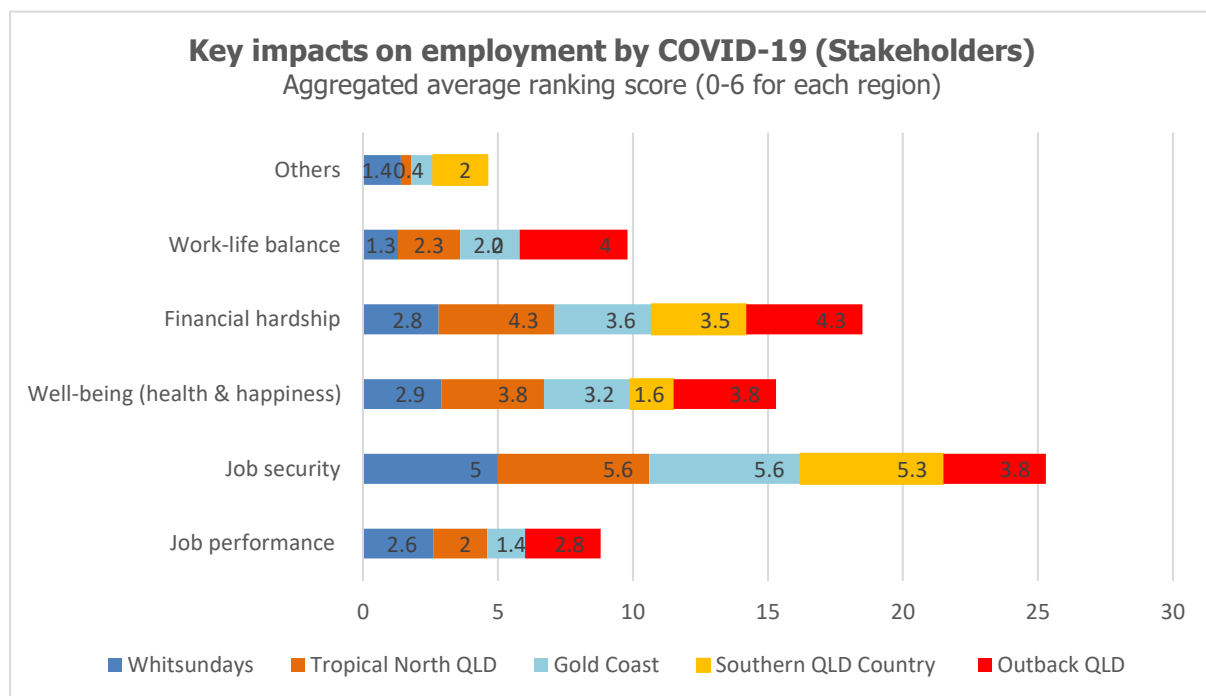
- *Operators* in all *four regions* except *Whitsundays* saw workforce resilience strongly increasing across 2020. This is because of **adaptability activities**, sense of community, **recovering work opportunities** etc. A synchronous decline of resilience in 2021, for those four regions, was due to **repeated lockdowns** and **loss of hope for the future**.
- In contrast, *operators* in *Whitsundays* saw a slightly decrease in workforce resilience in late 2020 due to pandemic fatigue and **difficulties in attracting visitors**, but resilience bounced back in 2021 with more **adaptation to the “new normal”**.



STAKEHOLDERS GROUP SUMMARY (FIVE REGIONS)

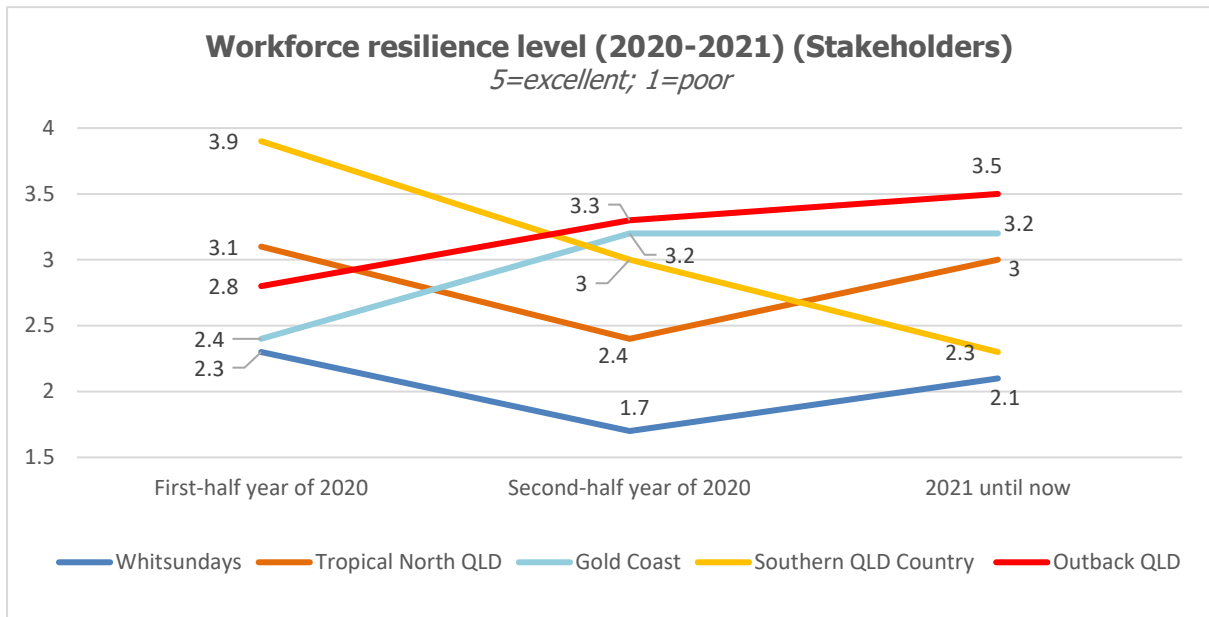
COVID-19 employment impacts across regions

- Like *employees*, **job security** was also the biggest impact of COVID-19 for *stakeholders* across the five regions. This was followed by **financial hardship** and **well-being issues**.
- More specifically, *stakeholders* shared similar views in four regions (except for *Outback QLD*) and ranked **job security** the top issue. *Outback QLD*, *stakeholders* considered **financial hardship** and **work-life balance** the two most impacted aspects.



COVID-19 & workforce resilience across time & regions

- *Stakeholders* in *Whitsundays*, *Tropical North QLD*, and *Southern QLD Country* felt a strong decrease in workforce resilience in late 2020 due to **labour leakage from T&H to other industries, overwhelming pandemic fatigue, and uncertain futures**. While only *Whitsundays* and *Tropical North QLD* had a lightly bounce back in 2021 due to improved **middle management resilience**.
- In contrast, *stakeholders* in the *Gold Coast* and *Outback QLD* saw poor resilience at the start of 2020 when COVID-19 first struck but developed positive resilience in late 2020 and 2021 due to **more job opportunities/vacancies** and **new projects coming online**.



Developing workforce resilience & challenges of implementation across regions

- *Stakeholders* highlighted **leadership, communication, support, connection, training, job security, connection, empowerment, and resources** the key aspects to building workforce resilience.
- However, key challenges to implement these included having **right tone in communication** (efficient, clear, simple, empathetic) and providing more **social support** with **less human resources**. They stressed the importance of **politicians assuming effective leadership to assist businesses** with **shared visions**. **Limited resources for staff upskilling and training** were also a critical challenge.



BEST POLICY & MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR WORKFORCE RESILIENCE

During the workshop consultations numerous innovative and adaptive responses to the crisis were noted. Furthermore, a range of actions and supports were identified as necessary for continued recovery. The following section summarises these findings from the consultations.

POLICY SUPPORTS

Labour Skills Shortages Policy

- *Workforce attraction via* **employee training programs** and **education development**
- **Apprenticeship and traineeship programs** to *attract, train, upskill, and fast-track talent*
- *Workforce retention through* **employee development programs (clear career pathing)**, and **work-life balance schemes**
- Workforce attraction and retention via **housing accessibility and affordability schemes**

Driving Demand and Dialogue

- *Facilitate mobility and travel by* **easing lockdowns** and **border closures**
- More **consistent leadership** and **policy messaging**
- Enhanced **policymaker and industry partnership dialogue** (*e.g., information sharing, clear two-way communications for decision-making*)
- Continued **assistance programs** to *support vital industries (e.g., increased flights availability)*

MANAGERIAL PRACTICES

Staff Upskilling, Empowerment, and Recognition

- Offer ongoing **professional development, career progression opportunities** and **education programs** to enable employees to *work towards a shared goal*
- In small businesses, support **employee empowerment** by inclusion in *decision-making, problem-solving and shared responsibilities (e.g., creating initiatives)*
- In bigger operations, provide employees '**freedom within frameworks**' to *identify and resolve problems*
- Empower employee **involvement in organisational change**, to *play an active leadership role*
- Consider **employee bonus programs** (*e.g., rewards*) to *recognise and acknowledge employee contribution and effort* (also for volunteers)

Job Security, Operations, Performance & Collaboration

- *Sharing resources across the industry* regarding **employee benefit systems** e.g., human resources, services, health and safety plans etc.
- Lure employees with **flexible or tailored working arrangements** (e.g., rostering) and or **alternative employment contracts**
- **Business product diversification & flexibility**, specifically for *service-based sectors that cannot pivot to work-from-home mode*
- **Knowledge sharing** from mature/retired employees to younger generations to *retain organisational and community cultural capital* in dealing with crises/disasters etc.
- Engage in **critical conversations** with a variety of stakeholders for *shared visions*
- Promote **collaboration incentives** to *augment the benefits of collaboration* as opposed to drawbacks (e.g., time-consuming, different goals)

Well-being & Mental Health, Support & Connectedness

- **Streamline organisational procedures** to *reduce employee mental health and wellbeing issues*
- Promote employee **supporting networks & relationship building**
- Enact effective systems to **take care of your leaders** (e.g., work-life balance, and healthy working style) - which can also reflect on employee well-being (*less stress from leaders*)

Communication & Leadership

- Practise **clear, efficient, simple**, and **consistent communication** regarding *future planning*
- Explore **leadership initiatives** in management & **strong leadership** in decision-making (*decisive in determining employee futures to reduce uncertainty*)
- Provide **emotional support to employees** via *empathetic leadership*

EMPLOYEE ACTIONS

Well-being & Communication

- Access **employee assistance programs, employee counselling** and publicly available **mental health and well-being services** (*telephone or face-to-face*)
- Thrive on the downtime and make the most of **work-life balance** when not working (*e.g., home-schooling and time with family*)
- Engage in **regular communication** with employers/co-workers

Connectedness

- Participate in **social support networks**
- Remain open to **understanding the stress on leaders** in your organisation/community
- Negotiate the **best work arrangements possible** for you with employers *e.g., part-time vs casual*
- Partake in **professional development, career enhancing** or **education** initiatives

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Job performance	Key criterion for organisational outcomes and success. Assessment of whether an individual reaches a goal or set of goals within a job, role, or organisation
Job security	Probability that an individual will keep/lose their job (related to the mental health of workers)
Well-being	A complex combination of a person's physical, mental, emotional, and social health factors which link to happiness and life satisfaction
Work-life balance	Equality of time or satisfaction across an individual's multiple life roles (<i>e.g., work role and family role</i>)
Employee/workforce resilience	<i>Individual perspective:</i> a self-regulatory process involving inner regulation leading to personal growth in reaction to traumatic workplace hardships, occurrences, and experiences <i>Organisational perspective:</i> an organisation's capability to quickly react and adapt to internal and external threats to its workforce
Employee assistance program	A work-based intervention program designed to enhance the emotional, mental, and general psychological wellbeing of all employees
Employee development program	A work-based intervention program designed to improve an employee's broader skills as a person over an extended time involving a more holistic approach (<i>e.g., learning, training, education, mentoring, interpersonal relationships</i>)
Flexible work arrangement	An agreement between a workplace and an employee to change the standard working arrangement to better accommodate an employee's commitments out of work. Flexible working drives employee engagement and productivity as well as boosting employee well-being and happiness.

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