

28 June 2021

To the Tourism Industry Reference Panel

**Re: Queensland Action Plan for Tourism Recovery**

On behalf of The Next Economy, we wish to offer this submission to inform the Action Plan for Tourism Recovery and are pleased the Queensland Government is undertaking consultation.

The Next Economy works to generate greater awareness of the range of economic tools and practices that can be used to ensure the long-term wellbeing of both people and planet. We support a range of different sectors and regional communities across Australia to catalyse the emergence of sustainable, resilient and regenerative economic systems.

This includes undertaking work across Queensland to better understand regional perspectives on building a stronger economy that are pertinent to the development of an Action Plan for Tourism Recovery:

- [What Queensland Wants: Regional Perspectives on Building a Stronger Economy](#)

We welcome a plan to ensure Queensland's tourism industry can navigate the transition to a lower carbon economy and employ circular and regenerative economic principles to maintain Queensland's position as a world leading tourism destination. We have provided some responses to the questions drawing on our work and findings in the regions.

**What could be done at a local level to increase the benefits of tourism?**

- Review and broaden the remit and model of regional tourism organisations to work closely with LGAs to help coordinate and manage tourism locally, enhance quality and create added value for all stakeholders. Tourism needs a far more balanced approach of management with marketing.
- Tourism plans need to be designed to regenerate and benefit communities, not just industry players. Environment, culture and community should be engaged and represented on the boards and panels that undertake tourism decision-making, it is not just about business.
- Tourism of the past has tended towards an extractive economic model – looking for ways to turn local communities, cultures and environments into commodities primarily for the overseas market. Tourism of the future has the potential to invest in and regenerate local communities and environments, to be driven by goals to add value and produce well-being for everyone involved.
- Marketing campaigns should be able to demonstrate benefits to the local community and environment, and not just to business.
- Broaden the indicators of success. For example, the measures around spend and jobs should identify how much stays regionally or in the local community, and measures need expanding to identify social, cultural and environmental benefits and added value – for community and visitors.

- Authenticity is important for operators and destination managers, and to facilitate local procurement policies and campaigns, and product and experience development that has added value and societal benefits.
- Develop more cross-sectoral links, for example with agriculture and food, beverage and primary producers. Provide value-adds to their products and increase their revenue through farm experiences, tastings, farm-gate experiences. This also applies to other sectors such as transport, energy, heritage, national parks, wildlife etc.
- Facilitate and encourage more eco-accreditation and eco-tourism opportunities to help directly address some of the challenges regional communities are facing.

#### **How do you want Queensland tourism to be defined in the 2020s?**

- An industry to be proud of, that works to be regenerative, inclusive, accessible, ethical and sustainable.
- Resilient industry that is thriving in a sustainable way and manages supply and demand.
- Benefits communities and has a low environmental impact, low to no carbon products and events. A good example is the initiative of the Cairns Regional Council to be a 'Smart Green Capital'.
- A thriving Great Barrier Reef and natural wonders that are being protected and preserved.
- Quality over quantity, with a far broader basket of measures of success beyond visitor numbers and dollars.
- Re-orientates to focus on sustaining numbers and industry, increasing quality and value-add, and multiplying positive impacts as opposed to a narrow arguably unrealistic focus on ever-increasing growth in tourist numbers and spend.
- Future proofed and informed by appropriate scenario planning analysis and forward planning that includes looking at climate impacts.
- Beyond Southeast Queensland centric and facilitating regional dispersal and benefits. Encouraging travel to regional areas and improving measures and outcomes to reflect benefits to the regions.

#### **How do we make the best use of our tourism assets? In your own words, what is missing?**

- Tourism has evolved over time to take advantage of local communities, cultures and environments to generate money without contributing back sufficiently into those systems that are the foundation and the draw cards. This should be addressed in the action plan, recognising the need to protect and preserve tourism assets, especially natural, cultural, and historic tourism assets on which the industry relies. The industry has a responsibility, and the small proportion of businesses that have gained eco or cultural accreditation should be increased.
- A strong drive and steer for a quality, socially just and environmentally sustainable industry should be a core premise. The sector needs to be guided and supported towards good practice through strong policies, programs and measures of success – supported and led by the Queensland Government and TEQ. Queensland led the way in this regard over ten years ago, as [demonstrated by a paper that reviewed responses by Australian government tourism agencies](#) on climate change, sustainability and green business practices. This activity needs ramping back up and integrating into the tourism action plan and associated programs.

- Encouraging collaboration and partnerships, and tourism clusters to make the best use of and to protect tourism assets. Innovative regenerative projects and programs, facilitating more local and domestic tourism and benefits.
- Building back better should demonstrate benefits in terms of resilience, community, sustainability, culture and environment– it should not just be about economics.
- Regeneration as a term is referenced quite a bit in the discussion paper and is welcomed, but it is not clear from the discussion paper that the meaning of ‘regenerative tourism’ is fully understood. It is about balancing the economics of tourism with the well-being of communities and natural resources, to minimise harm and negative impacts and create the conditions for renewal and to flourish. Essentially it is a new form of placemaking that engages not just tourism organisations, businesses, visitors and governments, but most importantly the local community and residents including traditional owners.

**What practical measures can and should be taken to ensure tourism helps regenerate natural environments, and bring greater awareness as well as economic benefit?**

- Broaden the state’s tourism indicators and reporting of measures of success to include social and environmental indicators, including [emissions as estimated by Griffith University](#).
- Make clear commitments and set targets for issues like eco-accreditation, emissions reduction, and encourage all regional tourism plans and strategies to incorporate similar measures.
- Tourists and communities expect the tourism industry to play their part, but only around 250 Queensland tourism businesses are eco-accredited and a limited number are engaged with the Queensland Government’s free ecoBiz program to increase their operational efficiencies, reduce costs and negative impacts, and protect the environment. For a state reliant on its natural environment and culture to attract tourists, this is poor by any standards. Strategic objectives, targets, incentives and marketing opportunities should be developed to improve the position.
- Expand on Queensland Government programs such as the decarbonisation and resort rejuvenation program with operators and islands on the Great Barrier Reef extending out to all tourism operators.
- Upgrade tourism assets, accommodation and other facilities with renewable energy and battery installations; energy efficiency programs; and refurbishing older buildings.
- Industry and visitor footprint / awareness campaigns are needed, to help drive better practice and choices.

**Do you see any additional trends or emerging changes that we must also consider?**

- Climate change would seem to be a major omission from the discussion paper and is critical to include in the action plan. The first policy focus area from a report by Ernst and Young produced for the Queensland Government is to “embed climate considerations in tourism policy” (p.9 in the link below).
- The Queensland Government has funded two key pieces of work that clearly set out the challenges and opportunities from climate change for the industry and its iconic natural assets, it is strongly recommended that the recommendations in these reports are integrated into the new action plan:
  - Ernst and Young Report - [Capitalising on Queensland’s opportunities in a zero net emissions future](#)

- QTIC Report - [Building a resilient tourism industry: Queensland tourism climate change response plan](#)
- Climate change [poses a significant threat to Queensland's iconic natural wonders](#), in particular the Great Barrier Reef (GBR). The bleaching of the GBR would seem to be a critical trend and concern that will impact tourists and tourism to Queensland more broadly, especially as UNESCO has recommended it should be listed as 'in danger' to ensure appropriate action is taken for its protection. The plan should commit to protection of the Great Barrier Reef, supporting industry and visitors to become actively engaged in campaigns and operational practices that protect the reef. Examples could include carbon neutral business operations and supporting eco-tourism and edu-tourism ventures such as engaging tourists in reef monitoring and restoration programs.
- Environmental and social responsibility more broadly is an important issue for the tourism industry and an increasingly important consideration for consumer choice. The Queensland tourism industry needs to be able to demonstrate responsible practice, through its products, measures of performance, communications, and through accreditation and recognition.
- Tourism 4.0 is worthy of attention - automation, electrification and new low-emission technologies in tourism, aviation, and transport such as electric vehicles will change the way the sector operates. Queensland Government programs should help the industry to advance and lead through innovation, investment and showcasing best practice.
- The sharing economy and associated disruption presents opportunities and challenges for tourism that should be considered and embraced in the action plan.
- A range of key trends and challenges for tourism toward 2030 are identified below<sup>1</sup>:



<sup>1</sup> A New Indicator Framework for Australia's Visitor Economy (Griffith Institute for Tourism, 2019)

### What are your ideas for the future of Queensland's tourism industry?

- Provide an authentic, real, unpolluted and natural Queensland experience.
- Innovation is encouraged and supported through R&D, feasibility studies, innovation hubs, hackathons and demonstration projects.
- Tourism should demonstrate quality, community, cultural and environmental benefits.
- Utilise champions within the industry to drive and stimulate innovation, best practice and excellence.
- Value tourism professionals and staff at all levels, ensure good working conditions and establish new reward and recognition schemes.
- The Queensland beach experience is unique and is one of the reasons people travel to Queensland - the warm clean oceans, reef and fish, wide-open spaces, few people, wildlife, and serenity. It would be appropriate to learn from the mistakes made in Cala Jondal and Santorini (referenced in the discussion paper) as they are destinations which are losing appeal from over-tourism and negative impacts to the community and environment. These destinations are actively limiting numbers of tourists.
- Increase tourism sector engagement in programs to improve operational efficiencies, for example the Queensland Governments free ecoBiz program (or similar) and national NABERS scheme. Supporting tourism operators to become carbon neutral and zero waste.
- Support and respect First Nations communities and culture, to enable First Nations communities to develop Indigenous tourism opportunities and businesses, especially on Country. A good example is the recently launched Talaroo Hot Springs initiative of the Ewamian people of North Queensland.
- Facilitate authentic and cultural experiences, increase tracks and trails for walking, mountain biking, horse-riding, wildlife, and nature opportunities.
- During our consultation activities, respondents identified a range of opportunities to diversify the tourism industry and attract domestic travellers, these included: festivals and events (music, art, cultural and sporting); agri-tourism; eco-tourism and conservation volunteering; renewable energy tourism; adventure tourism; cultural tourism; and food and wine tourism.
- Support more local, community and artistic inspired events, not just big one-off events and ensure events and the Olympic Games are carbon neutral and zero waste.
- Pay more attention to developing education and business tourism opportunities, and link to other sectors such as agriculture, energy and transport.
- Closer links need to be made between tourism and transport policy especially since the Covid-19 crisis, the Queensland Tourism and Transport Strategy should be revisited and refreshed.
- More support and funding provided to assist sustainable transport options. This includes support for the aviation sector to transition toward innovative and more sustainable models, to redesign itself for the future. The image and reputation of aviation are going to become increasingly important to manage. High speed rail options along the Eastern seaboard also need to be investigated and developed.

### What do you see as the obstacles to progress?

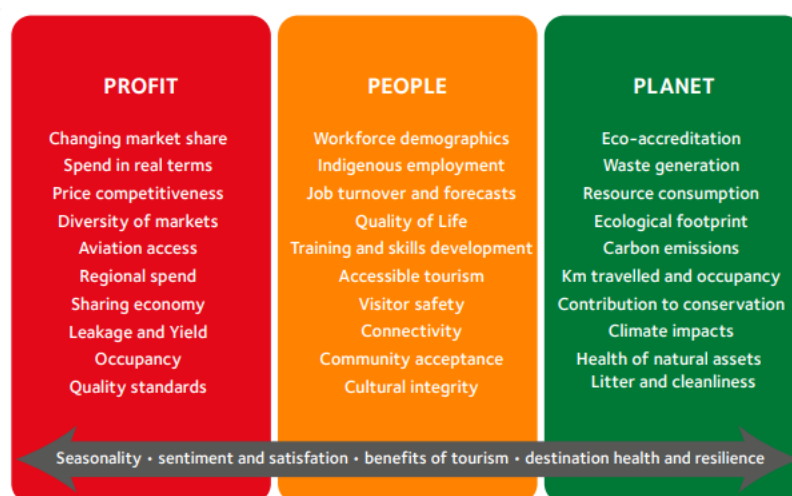
- Old fashioned thinking and traditional views on tourism and progress present obstacles. The world is changing, and tourism and tourists are changing with it. The Queensland action plan for tourism recovery should be innovative and inspiring in its vision and shifting the goal

posts, preparing and positioning tourism for the next 5-10 years. Tourism can be a catalyst for regional regeneration, add value to a wide array of stakeholders, and help deliver economic and climate resilience – but it requires new creative ways of thinking.

- The Next Economy highly recommends a review of what other destinations are doing to ensure tourism is regenerative and what makes their approach, strategies and plans different. For example, please review the work of [Visit Flanders - Travel to Tomorrow](#).

*“The experience of travelling changes travellers, the places they visit, and the people and local communities who 'make' and inhabit these places. That’s why tourism is more than simple economics. We want to investigate, design and stimulate that 'more' part so that all those involved in the tourism industry can derive the maximum benefit from it.” [Visit Flanders](#)*

- Need to consider and incorporate into action planning and decision making wider global drivers of change and risks such as those identified by the [World Economic Forum](#) that will impact the tourism industry, such as extreme weather and climate action failure that have high impact and high likelihood.
- Need a system thinking approach, recommend an independent review of the current tourism management system and structures, including roles and remits of TEQ and the RTOs. Need to examine if the current system is still fit for purpose and delivering what is needed for the future.
- Limited research and evidence base with little future proofing, there is a need for some future scenario planning and analysis, and more research and data to fill the apparent gaps in knowledge.
- The current measures of tourism’s performance are limited in scope, are largely volumetric in nature, lagging (focussing on past performance) and have a strong economic leaning. A broader basket of performance measures are needed that incorporate leading indicators, and cover a range of economic, social, cultural and environmental domains. Getting the right balance of indicators is critical for creating, nurturing and evaluating tourism, in order to achieve better long-term policies and a visitor economy that is resilient, inclusive, sustainable and innovation led. An example of some broader tourism indicators is provided below<sup>2</sup>:



<sup>2</sup> A New Indicator Framework for Australia’s Visitor Economy (Griffith Institute for Tourism, 2019)

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We thank you for the opportunity to input into the action plan and welcome further opportunities for involvement.

Yours sincerely



Dr Emma Whittlesea  
**Community Transitions Program Director**  
**The Next Economy**

[e.whittlesea@nexteconomy.com.au](mailto:e.whittlesea@nexteconomy.com.au)

0411 530941