

Outback Queensland Tourism Association

Queensland Tourism Industry Reference Panel Submission

SUMMARY OVERVIEW

The Outback Queensland Tourism Association (OQTA) has prepared this statement in consultation with key stakeholders to identify the opportunities and the barriers we will need overcome to position our region for success after COVID-19.

The information in this statement aims to assist the Tourism Industry Reference Panel providing recommendations to government and industry and in developing its new Action Plan for Tourism Recovery.

BACKGROUND

The OQTA is the peak tourism marketing organisation representing a diverse and distinct region that covers more than two thirds of the area of Queensland. Our members include accommodation providers, attractions businesses, tours and cruises, hospitality outlets, sporting facilities, meetings facilities and many other tourism-related businesses as well as 19 local governments stretching from the Gulf of Carpentaria to the NSW border.

Outback Queensland is a distinct regional tourism organisation area like no other. With a region like ours, you can understand that we need to approach things differently - from how we do business, to planning and implementation of initiatives. This same consideration applies to how we need to approach investment in our region, to ensure we can continue to deliver our important contribution to state-wide tourism and ramp up our contribution to Queensland's recovery success.

Investment in the Outback for Queensland's COVID recovery success

Tourism is a significant component of Outback Queensland's social and economic structure, welcoming 1.83 million visitors to the region prior to COVID-19. The region is host to an incredibly diverse tourism offering including Australian culture and heritage, adventure, natural wonders, and the increasingly popular paleo experiences. Our events are the linchpin to our success attracting people from across Australia to visit the region.

The beginning of travel restrictions in 2020 coincided with the start our region's traditional tourism season, delivering a significant blow to our tourism and hospitality sector from the start. While we recognise the multiple impacts of COVID-19 we also see that it has created an array of opportunities and possibilities. This includes fundamentally changing the way in which destinations need to engage with a new world of consumers.

Outback Queensland has a strong track record in domestic marketing. Despite our small budget we have great results. OQTA was proudly the first outback region to start recovery for the domestic market and hosted the sold-out *Outback Queensland Muster* in Brisbane in February 2021 - the first major travel trade event in Queensland since COVID restrictions came into place. So, when Tourism and Events Queensland launched its state-wide Good To Go campaign, we were the region that could stand up and say we truly were "Good To Go".

We have a small funding base with \$485,000 matched investment from Tourism and Events Queensland. With a small business demographic in the Outback, our income through membership is restricted and we face limited avenues for additional in-region investment. Our 19 local councils are the backbone of our membership base and despite their small rate base, budgets and local challenges they recognise the importance of OQTA and the power of marketing their tourism product collectively.

We make every dollar count and on a small budget we make great things happen and proudly stand shoulder to shoulder with multi-million-dollar regions.

But this isn't sustainable. As the wider region continues to deal with multiple impacts including drought, population decline, aging or insufficient infrastructure and now COVID, we need to look beyond the current model as part of the Queensland Tourism Recovery Plan.

Queensland's road to recovery has started in the Outback

Outback Queensland has a key role to play in Queensland tourism's COVID recovery. We are in a unique position of remaining COVID-free, adapting quickly to restrictions, avoiding extensive hard lockdowns, and welcoming an increase in interest from local travellers. This response would not have been possible without the investment and hard work of our operators in the preceding years which has seen new and refreshed product ready to go at this critical time.

Our region continues to respond to the COVID-19 challenges in the short-term, key partnerships across the tourism network will be critical to support the implementation of action items.

Outback Queensland has remained focussed its vision: *to position Outback Queensland as the number one choice for an authentic Australian outback experience and adventure.*

To deliver on this vision we have already developed our Destination Marketing Plan (DMP) that considers the new realities of working within and beyond the world with COVID-19. The DMP identifies five key pillars that now, more than ever will be pivotal to our post-COVID success:

1. Destination stewardship (leadership and sustainable tourism)
2. Destination marketing
3. Product development and experience delivery
4. Visitor services and trade readiness
5. Enabling environment (advocacy, investment in access, transport, and service infrastructure, etc.)

These pillars are underpinned by the following principles:

- Be flexible and responsive to changing COVID-19 market threats and opportunities
- Embrace digital technology and link with face-to-face service outcomes
- Build on existing signature experiences and supporting product and service infrastructure
- Leverage economic, investment and diversification plans
- Quality experience delivery and a customer first service mentality
- Formalise new partnership agreements with Local Government.
- Disperse visitors and deliver economic return to the local community

With a strong strategy already being implemented, our region is in a prime position to offer valuable insight. What we need now is the support and investment that can help us make our vision a reality.

Guided by our DMP and stakeholder feedback, OQTA provides the below response to the Designing Our Tourism Future Discussion Paper.

OUTBACK QUEENSLAND TOURISM ASSOCIATION RESPONSE STATEMENT

Our response statement brings together ideas, first-hand experience and the challenges faced by our members.

TOURISM REVIEW	Drivers
<i>Aviation</i>	<i>How to rebuild aviation access with best suited frequency and airport pairs</i> Increase flights to the region through new packaging models <ul style="list-style-type: none">- There is great potential to use the Alliance Airlines model adopted this year that has proved to be a great success providing flights into Winton and other Outback towns (initially three flights to Winton and now has grown to five with all seats filled).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This model has delivered excellent PR for Outback Queensland helping to attract more opportunities across our region for travel agents to engage with the tourism product. - The pricing of the flight packages is perfect for the day traveller to experience the Outback.
<p>Events</p>	<p><i>Implications for events sector / and using Events as enablers to experience and itinerary development</i></p> <p>Grow events beyond the one-size fits all</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Events are an excellent way of drawing tourists into the region. - Major events put our region on the map, domestically and internationally. - Sale of tailor-made itineraries/tour packages by travel agents would see visitors extend their length of stay which generates benefits across the Outback region by staying longer in their accommodation, creating more opportunities to eat out and explore other parts of the region.
<p>Indigenous tourism product development</p>	<p><i>Delivery to consumers</i></p> <p>Increased capability, funding access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indigenous product in Outback Queensland is growing as is the demand for these experiences. - Aboriginal-owned businesses need to have support to increase or gain capability to develop, deliver or enhance Indigenous tourism products and experiences. - Increased capability will help advance these opportunities and secure funding to deliver the tourism product or experience. - So much untapped potential in the region. Existing cultural sites and connection to country. - Jobs, community, environmental and economic benefits particularly for the very remote and disadvantaged areas.
<p>OQTA funding model and boundary</p>	<p><i>Funding model to support</i></p> <p>Maintain relevant and realistic RTO boundaries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This is something OQTA needs to manage and not grow the footprint too far outside its boundary. - Limited budget and resources would hinder the management of a larger footprint. - The current budget is unsustainable for such a large region – the remit of OQTA goes beyond marketing campaigns as operators look for guidance, business development support, funding support, networking opportunities and more.

<p>Infrastructure development</p> <p>Trade ready product development</p>	<p><i>The need to be shovel ready and constant focus on updating our museums and attractions to be ready for the new visitor – families, international, education groups</i></p> <p>Support infrastructure development from the grassroots, to reach ‘shovel ready’ investment level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This is a BIG one for the Outback region. - Aging or non-existent infrastructure. With increased demand and use, we need to increase investment and have things always happening. Not just one off. Also need to consider longevity, improvements etc. - Winton Shire Council is presently working with Albert Stafford to produce a policy for new investment and especially in the accommodation sector for new infrastructure development. - Attractions such as Australian Age of Dinosaurs (AAOD) are leading the way in this development. - The success of AAOD other existing museums and attractions demonstrates the need further investment in partnership across the board to continue to grow, attract return and new visitors and remain sustainable businesses. - A great example of the importance of ongoing investment and partnerships is demonstrated with the likes of the Stockman’s Hall of Fame and Qantas Founders Museum – with investment secured and projects already underway pre-COVID we have the great result of having product and jobs continuing through a significant downturn and then ready to launch at this critical time. - Adventure market – global trend in adventure seekers and different styles of accommodation. We need to make is accessible and safe and ensure our communities/economy makes something out of it. - Connectivity – travellers want to stay connected. Important role in sharing experience with others and promoting the region. Also important for safety for travellers and locals alike.
<p>Ongoing skills development</p>	<p><i>Technology and business capability, labour force attraction</i></p> <p>Deliver industry skills development opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Program of enticing large agricultural companies AA Co, NAPCO, McDonalds, Paraway etc to embrace tourism, encourage station stays, additional revenue streams, enhanced knowledge of workings on cattle stations. - Online booking systems accommodation, caravan parks, tours, attractions - Educate our sector to aim for cashless transactions to make it easier for the customer to buy. - Consolidation of digital information - major point of contact with links - Improve engagement with tourist through regular social media competitions - hero shots etc.
<p>Natural assets & our environment</p>	<p><i>Taking advantage of our unique natural assets</i></p> <p>Product development and practical measures to take advantage and promote our natural assets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support and connections for small business through business development and investment to build or grow. Small businesses have already implemented great ideas and there is great enthusiasm to do more. - Potential to take advantage of our natural assets and ‘share the love’ among our national and state parks with long walking trails across western Queensland. - Payment for Queensland National Park entry with funds to be used for maintenance. - In the future, the environment and natural assets will be a big deciding factor on destination choice. The remoteness, open spaces, and existing adaptability

	<p>to environmental changes of our Outback region is such a great advantage – we need to be looking to this future and tap into these advantages.</p>
<p><i>State-wide connections</i></p>	<p>Outback Queensland has a key role to play in Queensland tourism’s COVID recovery.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We are in a unique position of remaining COVID-free and being able to step up to the increase in interest from local travellers. - We are already on the road to recovery and have great runs on the board. And so far, haven’t had the programs and funding dollars that our coastal mates have had. - Outback Queensland has been asking for a drive tourism strategy for the State for a long time. This would provide a boost across all regions – drawing travellers through the regions as they still look to travel locally. - We know how to market the Outback domestically, that’s what we do best. And TEQ expertise in the State. Therefore, we need more funds through this recovery plan to market intrastate tourism.
<p><i>Obstacles to progress</i></p>	<p>Investment and partnerships need to take into consideration the obstacles to progress which are often unique to Outback Queensland.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Housing for staff. - Good quality accommodation for independent travellers (min 4 star). - Connectivity within regions (air, rail, road). - Understanding of the value of tourism experiences. - An expectation of free product (enhanced by council providing free product) when could be provided a local business which would deliver greater benefits all round. - Industry minimum wage for guides – there is no scaling and it needs it. - Lack of trade ready product. - Infrastructure to help spread and reduce rubbish (toilets, shelters, rubbish bins etc particularly in western areas and on National Parks, public lands). - Tourism: short term reactions versus long term plans