



Roundtable Summary – Travel and Tourism

Date: Thursday 13 June 2024

Hosts: Dr Angela Jackson, Panel Member, Commonwealth Government COVID-19 Response Inquiry

Participants: This roundtable brought together a range of participants from the travel and tourism industries, including peak bodies, organisations and private enterprise, to discuss the experiences of the travel and tourism sectors during the pandemic.

Purpose of this roundtable

- The travel and tourism industries were among the most affected during the pandemic, with border closures and movement restrictions having a significant impact on business operations across these sectors.
- This roundtable provided travel and tourism industry representatives with the opportunity to share their thoughts on what the Australian Government did well during the pandemic and what could be improved for a future crisis.
- The travel and tourism industries are significant contributors to Australia's economy, playing a critical role in the movement of people internationally and internally, and supporting our cultural identity.

What we heard at the roundtable

- A clear, coordinated and centralised approach to communication around public health measures, including border closures and re-opening, would have improved the ability of businesses in the travel and tourism industries to better plan and operate (where possible) during the pandemic. Additionally, a longer notice period would have allowed industries to be better prepared for recommencement once public health measures were withdrawn.
- An increased understanding from Government of the operating environment of businesses within these industries would have resulted in support measures that were more effectively targeted. These industries would benefit from a forum for engagement with the Government that is utilised broadly, not just during times of crisis.
- The pandemic resulted in significant workforce capacity issues across both of these industries, which remain ongoing. This capability loss was particularly pronounced in the travel sector, where a significant number of airline pilots either transitioned out of the industry or pursued overseas opportunities.
- The assumption that these industries could resume operations immediately once borders re-opened and public health measures were withdrawn did not take into account the reduced workforce capacity caused by the pandemic.

COVID-19 Response Inquiry

- JobKeeper provided vital support to travel and tourism businesses during the pandemic. However, the exclusion of certain casual employees and temporary visa holders had a disproportionate impact on these industries, where these workers are heavily concentrated.
- Public health measures should recognise the essential nature of some sectors within these industries that perform or support critical functions, such as airports and airlines. Clear and consistent definitions would provide more clarity and assurance across industries.