

Coronavirus: Tourism, hotels want 'a Qantas lifeline too'

By **RICHARD FERGUSON**, REPORTER and **ROSIE LEWIS** REPORTER

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Hotels and pubs are demanding Scott Morrison give them the same \$500 weekly retention payments the government is handing airlines Qantas and Virgin, amid warnings thousands of tourism and hospitality businesses will fail post-JobKeeper.

Australian Hotels Association chief executive Stephen Ferguson has written to the Prime Minister calling for either an extended cash flow boost or staff retention payments after wage subsidies end in March, saying the costs of the pandemic will hurt his members.

Other major tourism and hotel groups are also asking to get the “same level of support” as Qantas and for funding for the struggling \$4.1bn JobMaker hiring credit scheme to be redirected towards supporting their post-COVID futures.

Under the government’s \$1.2bn tourism and aviation package unveiled this month, major airlines will continue to be paid \$500 direct support payments for international employees, the same as JobKeeper wage subsidies, after March.

Mr Ferguson said the Morrison government should expand those retention payments to his sector, or allow businesses to keep the tax they forward from employees’ wages on to the Australian Taxation Office.

“Given the vaccine rollout is predicted to be completed in about six months, what we are asking for are targeted, temporary measures of support until that process is complete.”

Hospitality and tourism leaders have broadly condemned Mr Morrison’s tourism stimulus, which centred on half-price airline tickets to government-picked holiday destinations.

Australian Chamber of Tourism chairman John Hart said sections of the tourism sector deserved the “same level of support” as the major airlines.

Restaurant and Catering chief executive Wes Lambert said: “The JobMaker initiative has failed. That support should be given to tourism, the arts, aviation and hospitality — the sectors hit worst by COVID.”

Josh Frydenberg on Monday remained firm that JobKeeper would end this month, but he told The Australian the food and accommodation sectors would be supported via tax cuts, business incentives and skills funding. “We want to see the accommodation and food industry... bounce back strongly.”

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