



20 April 2021

Prime Minister Hon Scott Morrison MP and First Ministers of Australia
National Cabinet
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2603

Dear Prime Minister and First Ministers,

National Cabinet – Proposal for a border re-opening working group

We understand Australia will soon address how and when we can safely re-open our international borders. We appreciate the issues of international borders and how they are managed will be done very carefully and in partnership with the states and territories in terms of how the quarantine program works.

Proposal – establish a border re-opening working group

The AHA respectfully requests to be included as part of discussions pertaining to the re-opening of international borders. We propose National Cabinet establish a working group to assist with risk assessment and planning on Australia’s border re-opening strategy. Organisations such as the AHA that stand to win and lose the most economically should be members of the working group.

We also note that AHA and TAA members, have provided many of the quarantine hotels, and as such have significant first-hand quarantine expertise and insights that could inform the border reopening process.

Home quarantine - Reward for a few is not worth the risk

We understand one of the options under consideration is to allow Australians to travel overseas and return to self-isolate in their own homes. This provides far less certainty and protection than the current hotel quarantine process. There is no evidence yet that the vaccine will prevent the transmission of the virus between people. In our view, home quarantine will certainly increase the risk of COVID spreading in the community. Put bluntly, some Australians will ignore any direction to isolate at home and not receive visitors for two weeks. Self-regulation will not work.

The past year has shown us any COVID outbreak in a city, suburb or town will see State Governments impose immediate lockdowns or new restrictions. After more than a year successfully battling through the pandemic and now enjoying many freedoms again, our industry and the broader community do not want to return to lockdowns, capacity restrictions on important events like weddings and funerals and not being able to have both parents watch their children’s sport on a Saturday. The impact on our employees and the economy will be equally devastating.

The most to gain, yet the most to lose

From an economic perspective, the AHA and our accommodation division, Tourism Accommodation Australia, have both the most to gain and the most to lose. The economic risk is made even greater by the lack of any financial “safety net” (despite repeated requests) for the businesses and their

workers which might be shut down at any time during a future COVID outbreak caused by international travellers.

While our members will obviously welcome the eventual return of international travel and skilled workers, they are also aware they remain on the economic front-line when it comes to the risk of further lockdowns and domestic border closures if any international border re-opening goes wrong.

Conclusion

There is considerable anxiety about how and when international borders will be re-opened – but we all know it needs to happen at some stage. The AHA’s 5,000 members and more than 250,000 workers are always amongst the first to be locked down when things go wrong. This is exacerbated by the absence of comprehensive financial “safety nets” for locked down businesses at either the federal or state levels.

A small step such as a working group where the AHA could participate in risk assessment and mitigation would ease our concerns. Thank you for your consideration of this proposal.

Yours faithfully,



STEPHEN FERGUSON
NATIONAL CEO