

21 August 2020

## **BECA appears before Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 for reinforcements to support Australia's \$35.7 billion industry**

- *BECA has called for targeted government support that will build confidence and create momentum for people to get back to in-person business events.*
- *Border restrictions continue to impose the most significant challenge impeding the recovery of the business events industry.*

The [Business Events Council of Australia](http://www.businesseventscouncil.org.au) (BECA) appeared before the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19, represented by Dr Vanessa Findlay, Chair of BECA, and Andrew Hiebl, CEO of the Association of Australian Convention Bureaux, to reinforce the case for ongoing support for Australia's \$35.7 billion business events industry and the 229,000 people it employs<sup>1</sup>.

Like many other sectors in the visitor economy, Australia's business events industry is experiencing a hiatus. Measures have been put in place to sustain the industry in the short term, however, with state border closures maintained and continued restrictions on gathering size, further support will be needed if the industry is going to get through this.

At the hearing BECA called for targeted government support that will build confidence and create momentum for people to get back to in-person business events.

BECA Chair, Dr Vanessa Findlay said, "We are continuing to work with Government in line with the recovery and rebound framework for the business events industry to drive industry specific support packages that will regain business confidence and drive momentum to see the return of business events".

Border restrictions continue to impose the most significant challenge impeding the recovery of the business events industry. To overcome this, BECA's COVIDSafe Guidelines differentiate business events from mass gatherings and introduces measures that enable business events to occur in COVID safe environments. These guidelines provide confidence for the States and Territories to lift restrictions to enable the restart of business events, which will see our industry rebound, boost the whole visitor economy and restart the transfer of knowledge across all industries. Without face-to-face meetings none of this can happen.

BECA is also working with Minister Birmingham, the Treasury Coronavirus Business Liaison Unit, the National COVID-19 Commission and the insurance industry to resolve the insurance issues that are undermining confidence in planning events. Dr Findlay explained to the Senate Committee that "We haven't been able to gain clarity from the insurance industry that an event that is cancelled as a result of a pandemic is actually covered. And, of course, that severely undermines the confidence of people to book an event and know that, if it's cancelled as a result of government restrictions, they can cover costs".

JobKeeper continues to be a vital lifeline for the business events industry with job losses predicted to exceed 90,000 before the wage subsidy scheme was introduced<sup>2</sup>. It is now estimated that around 110,000 employees across the industry are being supported by JobKeeper which is supporting 96% of businesses to retain their employees.

<sup>1</sup> *Value of Business Events to Australia 2018/19*, Ernst & Young, March 2020

<sup>2</sup> *Lost Business Report: Impacts of COVID-19 on the Business Events Industry*, McCrindle, April 2020

***Business Events: delivering innovation, knowledge and performance for Australia***



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Last year over 480,000 business events were held in Australia and over 43 million people attended a business event in the form of a meeting, convention, exhibition or incentive event. In a recent survey conducted by BECA, 67% of businesses said they don't have any business events confirmed for 2020 and 48% of businesses said they don't have any business events confirmed for 2021 either<sup>3</sup>.

AACB CEO, Andrew Hiebl, said during the hearing, "While enquiry levels remain relatively high, risk of future lockdowns and restrictions imposed on business events by states and territories hit confidence and make it extremely difficult for organisers to sign supplier agreements and pay deposits. In addition, our industry has invested time and effort to develop COVID safe plans, but in many jurisdictions, are not able to enact them."

Dr Findlay concluded her evidence to the Committee by outlining a program that is under development "for business events industry businesses to provide a level of support that they need about making decisions around sustainability and viability into the future". Dr Findlay pointed out to the Committee that "we have now faced, close to zero revenue for six months. While it might be reasonable to expect a business to look after itself for that period of time anything beyond that is now very serious danger territory for every business in our industry".

BECA will now package up the very comprehensive survey data that has been collated, together with the Business Events Industry Recovery and Rebound Framework and the BECA COVIDSafe Guidelines and provide them to the Committee as a basis for their ongoing considerations and for use in their report.

The full transcript from BECA's appearance is available on request.

**- ENDS -**

**For more information visit:** [www.businesseventscouncil.org.au](http://www.businesseventscouncil.org.au)

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#### **About BECA:**

The Business Events Council of Australia (BECA) was formed in 1994 as a peak industry body. It provides an umbrella structure for the key industry associations operating in the Australian business events sector: The Association of Australian Convention Bureaux (AACB), Australian Convention Centres Group (ACCG), Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia (EEAA), International Convention and Congress Association (ICCA)-Australian Chapter, Meetings and Events Australia (MEA) and the Professional Conference Organisers Association Inc (PCOA).

As the peak industry body for the business events sector we provide a single voice for the industry and liaise with the federal government and relevant agencies on matters common to all sectors of the industry. Our members represent the cross-section of the industry and we work together to build a strong voice for all sectors of the industry.

Business Events are major drivers of the Australian economy and generate trade, investment, employment, knowledge sharing and also stimulate the visitor economy.

For more information visit: [www.businesseventscouncil.org.au](http://www.businesseventscouncil.org.au)

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<sup>3</sup> BECA Future Confidence and JobKeeper Impact Report, August 2020

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**Business Events Council of Australia** is an alliance representing:  
Association of Australian Convention Bureaux Australian Convention Centres Group Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia  
Meetings and Events Australia Professional Conference Organisers Association