



October 13 2020

The Hon Martin Pakula MP
Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events
Minister for the Coordination of Jobs, Precincts and Regions: COVID-19
Sent by email: martin.pakula@parliament.vic.gov.au

c.c. Andrew.abbott@ecodev.vic.gov.au

Dear Minister Pakula

As the business events industry leading industry membership organisation, Meetings and Events Australia (MEA) is writing to you again on behalf of our Victorian membership to seek urgent support for the recovery of our industry.

Since March, our industry has not been able to operate. Hotels, venues, event planners, conference managers, exhibition suppliers, audio visual companies, speakers' agencies, theming and production companies and a range of other support providers have had to cease operating with their revenue decimated and talented staff unable to operate. The impact of the closures due to COVID19 has not discriminated; it has affected our members – large, medium and small businesses as well as sole traders and freelancers.

Whilst much needed funding has been made available to our industry colleagues in tourism and hospitality, the events industry has been overlooked by the various rounds of funding or grants programs announced by the State. This is inconceivable.

As you are aware, business events are the highest yielding sector in Victoria's visitor economy. In the FY19 business events injected 12.85 billion of economic benefit to Victoria, attracting 12.67 million business event delegates and exhibitors and directly supporting 84,730 jobs. This sector brings direct benefit to our regional areas with an estimated \$475 million contribution to the visitor economy in the regions supporting some 3,127 regional jobs annually.

Yet, here we are in October with no road map that supports indoor business events commencing as a step towards our recovery.

We understand consideration is being given to how to conduct major events safely in Victoria such as the Melbourne Cup, the Boxing Day Test and Australian Open, all high profile and valuable contributors to the city. However, we do not seem to have gained any traction from the discussions we and our business events colleagues have been involved in at the Tourism, Events and Visitor Economy Roundtables nor the meetings and discussions we have had in collaboration with VTIC with Government.

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Our research undertaken as part of the Business Events Council of Australia (BECA) indicates the business events industry will look at more than a full year of 100% revenue loss. JobKeeper has enabled our members to stay engaged with their staff over the past six months however as this contribution reduces towards the completion of the program in March, businesses are gravely concerned about the huge staff losses they will be forced to stand down given their inability to earn revenue. The research shows organisations are forecasting it will take longer than 12-18 months to return to business, albeit to a different level to pre-COVID19.

BECA's latest research released last week demonstrated our industry has not only been impacted significantly for 2020 but this continues into 2021. Event Managers reported that 62% of their business has already cancelled, postponed or moved to 100% virtual for the first quarter of 2021 and 57% have taken the same action up until the first half of 2021.

This has devastating impact on the supply chain of events professionals needed to deliver events, many of which are small businesses; it will mean job losses and it will also mean Victoria will lose its prized position as a world leading destination for business events.

We need engagement with you Minister and we need urgent action to support our industry.

To assist, we have identified 3 key areas for consideration:

Business Events CAN operate in a controlled environment

Indoor business events should be viewed as controlled gatherings rather than public mass gatherings. Unlike a concert or sporting events, business events are highly organised events more similar to the workplace than a mass gathering.

The controlled safety measures that we can instigate across our supply chain and the data collection we undertake in the lead up to the event and onsite will ensure we are able to keep our guests and our people safe. We are able to address any additional detail, format or health and medical assessments required by Health Authorities.

A distant quotient of 1 person per 2 sqm will enable business events to commence whilst still observing maintaining safety measures.

Our members have their COVID Safe plans ready to implement. Considerable work has been undertaken to ensure as an industry we can provide safe and hygiene environments for our guests, stakeholders and our own people. The guidelines reflect the responsibilities of the entire supply chain of providers who contribute to a business event – the venue, the organiser, the exhibition builder, audio visual company, photographers, entertainers, transport suppliers, hotels etc.

Business Events CAN be introduced in a staged process

It is also important to note that business events do not operate the same way as indoor hospitality, café venues or a tourism operation. Whilst we form part of the broader tourism sector, the events sector needs its own staged recovery strategy.

Currently Victoria is around 4 months behind the implementation of business events in other states. Our members in other states have been able to operate with limitations and with a staged measured and tested response increasing at moderate levels.

As examples, the current status is NSW allows corporate events up to 300 people or 1 person per 4 sqm, whatever is the lesser amount; ACT can meet with 100 people with no restrictions and can apply for consideration with events for 500 or more; QLD can conduct events of 500 with a COVID Safe plan; SA has no number restrictions however the 1 person per 2 sqm applies.

They have reached these current levels as a staged approach but it has enabled some events to be held and to start to build the much needed consumer confidence in participating in business events again.

Victoria is not even able to conduct virtual meetings in a confined broadcast studio at this point given the current restrictions.

Are we able to facilitate a discussion with the other states to understand the measures they have put in place with industry, government and the health departments to enable this staged approach to be considered and implemented?

Business Events CAN commence with a road map

The very nature of the events our sector delivers requires time to plan and take them to market. When restrictions lift, our return to delivering events will not be immediate. There will be lag time required to implement the planning, marketing and the end delivery of the event.

This is why it is imperative that advance notice is provided to our industry of when we are permitted to conduct sizeable events so the necessary preparations can be made in readiness to plan and market events.

The national business events market is integral to Victoria's success. We will not see the impact of international conferences until in 2022, so 2021 has to be focused on enabling national business events to be held in our city. The appetite is there however the lack of confidence in our State is debilitating.

The window of opportunity to conduct business events in the last quarter of 2020 is limited but we need this available to us to enable us to leverage off these experiences and build consumer confidence.

If Victoria does not have an effective road map in the immediate weeks for business events, significant levels of business for our state are at risk of being cancelled, moving to virtual or moving to other states into 2021.

This means a loss to the state of business, jobs and Victoria's renowned reputation in the delivery of international and national business events.



A cohesive approach is required and the business events industry represented by MEA is ready to support your Government in this undertaking.

Our industry leaders have been demonstrating their willingness and commitment to work with your Government to achieve the safest and most effective outcomes for our industry and the State but this needs to be escalated to ensure we are in a position to save our industry, businesses and jobs and to be able to maintain our state's well earned reputation as a leading business events destination.

We need your immediate consideration Minister and request a meeting be held with your office, the Health Department and key industry representatives to provide valuable advice to assist the Government in addressing this situation.

We thank you for your consideration and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Kate Smith'.

Kate Smith – National Chair