

## Victorian tourism industry presents platform to reopen

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Leading representatives of Victoria's tourism industry have today launched a proposal to reopen the state's visitor economy using safe and staged processes that have worked in other states.

Industry leaders have undertaken a detailed review of gradual reopenings underway in NSW, SA and Queensland, and have put forward an alternative roadmap for Victoria to allow business to resume operations under strict safety controls.

Within the industry's proposed framework:

- **Indoor dining** would be permitted at the next easing of restrictions with a cap of 20 people seated indoors per space, with up to two spaces per venue (for a maximum of 40 customers), under the one person per four square metre rule. If case numbers and type remain controlled, the next goal would be to move to one person per two square metres, and then to ultimately remove caps. Cleaning, signage and record keeping requirements would consistently apply. Large scale venues seating 100+ would be able to negotiate reasonable caps within density quotient requirements.
- **Business events** would operate with up to 50 people from 30 October, including venue staff, hosts and delegates, subject to the one person per four square metre rule, and subject to the business registering as COVID Safe and having an approved COVID Safe Plan. If case numbers and type remain controlled, the goal would be to increase the cap to 100 by 1 December and move to one person per 2 square metre rule on 1 January.
- Open-air **attractions and outdoor venues** would operate subject to the one person per four square metre rule within the expanse of their total footprint and subject to the business registering as COVID Safe and having an approved COVIDSafe Plan. As in other states, a family bubble would count as one within the patron cap limitations (i.e. one per four square metre). This would allow operations like helicopters, hot air balloons and commercial tour vehicles to operate and make outdoor adventure boat trips viable.

The industry groups said it was clear Victoria could not reach the benchmarks the Andrews Government set in its roadmap and it was time for a new approach. It comes as leading epidemiologists agree the current standards are unachievable and the World Health Organisation's Special Envoy on COVID-19, Dr David Nabarro, says lockdowns should not be used as a primary method of controlling COVID-19.

Victoria Tourism Industry Council (VTIC) CEO, Felicia Mariani, said: "The Victorian tourism industry has been bleeding jobs and revenue since the 2019 bushfires. Some Victorian businesses had a chance to reopen after the first lockdown, but this time around we were told no, and we understood that when case numbers were sky high.

"However, it has been incredibly hard for us to see NSW accommodation, business events, attractions and dining opening when they have similar daily case numbers to those we are seeing now in Victoria," Ms Mariani said.

"NSW had more new cases than Victoria multiple times this week, but they proceeded with plans to double the number of people allowed in outdoor venues and increased the number of people allowed at outdoor concerts to 500.

"It's time for the Victorian Government to change gear and focus on measures that will ensure safety while businesses operate because extending the shutdown cannot be a permanent solution to COVID-19."

The industry leaders' review considered how restrictions affecting the visitor economy were managed across four Australian states to understand how other jurisdictions staged reopening, the level of cases being managed at the time, and the factors for success to inform its platform.

A focus on regulatory compliance, small steps, and effective contact tracing were key.

Victoria's tourism industry is calling on the Victorian Government to:

- **Remove the unachievable target** of a rolling 14-day average of 5 new cases a day
- **Lift travel restrictions by 30 October and allow visitor economy businesses to reopen with strict conditions** including COVIDSafe Plans, density and distancing quotients and patron caps
- **Commit to reviewing quotients and caps monthly** and adjust up or down depending on infection trends, giving business a clear path back to COVID-normal operations
- **Introduce COVID Marshals** to facilitate re-opening of business. Based on the [South Australian model](#), COVID Marshals are employees dedicated to ensuring operations comply with COVIDSafe Plans and regulations
- **Require patrons to provide all information necessary to support DHHS contact tracing.** This may include the use of QR Codes, apps, or proof of ID requirements, all of which are used effectively interstate. A consistent state-wide approach is preferred by industry to ensure the most effective health and safety outcomes.
- **Require DHHS to liaise with industry peak bodies directly to help assess and manage risk** as Victorians return to normal life as has been done in other states, where those collaborations helped ensure continuing COVIDSafe environments in hospitality and other businesses.

The Victorian Government COVIDSafe principles, including wearing a mask, staying home when sick or unwell, physical distancing (1.5 metres) and good hand hygiene would continue to apply.

Ms Mariani said the industry was ready to start small and build slowly, noting that indoor attractions, events with ticketed seating, and business events had more control over people movements and better information for contact tracing than general retail environments and supermarkets.

Indoor attractions like aquariums, museums and galleries were ready to implement initiatives such as staggered bookings and timed ticketing to control the flow of patrons through facilities.

"The industry is singularly focused on its obligations to the communities in which it operates, and operators have invested enormous effort in preparing their COVIDSafe Plans and ensuring all practices and processes are in place as directed by government," Ms Mariani said.

Kate Smith, Chair of Meetings and Events Australia, said business events already kept detailed registration information on every delegate that could be used for contract tracing, with technology solutions such as apps and wearables available to track contacts and ensure people stay 1.5m apart.

"The sector, which once employed almost 85,000 people, including 3000 in the regions, is looking at 12 months of close to zero revenue. Given current restrictions, Victoria is not able to operate virtual events from broadcast studios. Business event organisers have cancelled, moved to virtual or have postponed 62% of their business in the first quarter of 2021 and 57% for the first half of 2021," Ms Smith said.

"Some business events have been lost to other states. Business events by their very nature take time to plan and implement. Once permission is given, there will be a lag time of up to 12 months to bring some of the large high economic yield events to market."

Accommodation Association CEO Dean Long said: "It's time for a more commonsense approach that strikes a better balance. The reality is that unless this happens sooner rather than later, more businesses including hotels and accommodation providers will be forced to shut their doors for good."

The industry position was developed by VTIC, the Accommodation Association of Australia, Australian Camps Association, Meetings and Events Australia, Tourism Accommodation Australia (Vic), and the Victorian Caravan Parks Association, along with various Regional Tourism Boards from across the state.

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