

Long-term thinking for the regional visitor economy - bushfire recovery

Australian Regional Tourism (ART) welcomes Tourism Australia's domestic and international marketing campaigns to support bushfire recovery. However, what is needed now is long-term thinking to enable regions to become resilient, adaptable and thrive into the future.

The conversation needs to be much bigger than a marketing campaign.

Research conducted by ART indicates that greater support, including financial assistance, is needed for businesses that have been directly, and indirectly, affected by the bushfires. The factors currently impacting businesses and regions include cancelled bookings, inability to attract visitors and cash flow management. Ongoing support needs also to cover regions impacted in non-declared bushfire zones.

Longer-term concerns being reported by directly, and indirectly, impacted regions include:

- Closure of small and local businesses due to financial strain
- Loss of regional products and experiences
- Loss of skilled staff in regions
- Damage to regional brand
- Prolonged drought

To support Australia's regional visitor economy, we must focus our efforts on the six industry identified tourism priorities below. Following the bushfires, every one of these priorities has a heightened urgency. Through a National approach to delivering on the agreed priorities, we can strategically maximise Government funding and drive significant benefit for our regional visitor economies.

While significant focus is on the damage to Australia's international brand, it is essential that we do not lose sight of the regional visitor economies impacted by bushfires and primarily reliant on a domestic market.

Enabling infrastructure	Ensure better access to regions and supply of digital infrastructure. Critical to regional areas becoming more accessible, competitive and attractive.
Provide strategic industry advice	Provide regional intelligence to inform National Tourism Policy. Provide strategic advice from industry that supports regional needs in relation to grant funding programs.
Reliable and useful data	Improve the accuracy, relevance and usability of tourism data to better equip regional destinations in planning for future tourism developments.
Regional dispersal	Provide for better dispersal of growing international markets into regional destinations. Develop research and marketing to convert first time visitors into return overnight regional visitors.
Skills shortages	Address the shortage of skills and labour in regional areas that is restricting industry productivity and growth. Undertake a national approach to address the skill gaps.
Product development	Support the development of new regional product and experiences such as agritourism that will give more reason for visitors to travel to regional destinations.