



Image: RSPCA South Australia

## A QUICK SNAPSHOT OF ART'S BUSHFIRE RESPONSE SURVEY RESULTS

Regional tourism is a vital sector of the Australian economy and key to the sustainability and vibrancy of many of our communities. Tourism Research Australia reports that nearly half of the nation's tourism expenditure (44 cents in every tourism dollar) occurred in regional Australia during the 2017-18 financial year. This contribution provides \$51 billion to regional visitor economies. This much needed boost means around one-third of tourism-related businesses and more than half of the country's tourism workforce is located and employed in regional Australia. Tourism itself accounts for 4% of economic output and 8% of jobs in regional Australia.

Despite this significant contribution, many regional destinations across Australia are currently experiencing one of their biggest challenges ever faced as they undertake the recovery from this season's devastating bushfires.

For many of the affected regions the bushfires occurred during their peak periods of visitation, for others the bushfires follow a challenging period of prolonged drought, and in some regions they are currently facing the implications of both factors.

While there will undoubtedly be an impact to Australia's brand and image as a safe destination, it will take some time to realise the full impact of the bushfires on our regional visitor economies.

As the peak body representing the interests of regional tourism across the country, Australian Regional Tourism (ART) is focused on the needs of regional business owners and destinations, and will continue to advocate of behalf of industry to achieve the greatest benefit for our industry.

To inform and assist with our advocacy efforts, ART conducted a survey of business owners and industry stakeholders seeking feedback on the short, medium and long term support needed.



# BUSHFIRE RESPONSE SURVEY SNAPSHOT

## IMPACT OF THE BUSHFIRES ON REGIONAL BUSINESSES

The overwhelming feedback received is more support is needed for regions that were indirectly affected as well as those that were directly impacted by the bushfires. A substantial percentage of the survey respondents (89%) have been impacted by bushfires, with just over half (53%) responding as being significantly impacted. Despite this, the majority (94%) of respondents have had no damage to their business premises.

When asked what factors are most impacting their business, the following responses were received:

- Cancelled bookings or orders (66%)
- Unable to access or attract visitor/customers (51%)
- Cash flow management (36%)
- Other (27%)

The most commonly received feedback for 'other' was relating to negative media reports and miscommunications broadcast during the fires, such as general statements about a region being impacted when there was very little or no damage experienced. These portrayals along with negative perceptions as a result of the drought have caused substantial damage to regional brands across many areas of Australia.

Other less common, but equally disruptive factors being faced include being unable to access their town or business, restoration of communications and services, unable to access staff or supplies, need for building repairs and settlement of insurance claims. Impacts on the regional visitor economy and concerns for the longer term are focused on:

- Closure of small and local businesses due to financial strain (71%)
- Damage to regional brand (58%)
- Safety perceptions of the region (49%)
- Loss of regional products and experiences (49%)



## WHAT SUPPORT DOES THE REGIONAL VISITOR ECONOMY NEED TO RECOVER?

To support the recovery of Australia's regional visitor economies, we must be timely in our response in the short term, and think more strategically for the medium and longer term to ensure the continued growth of our tourism industry.

While international visitors are essential to the success of Australia's tourism industry, due to various reasons including regional dispersal, many regional destinations are dependent on domestic visitors. This is clearly demonstrated by responses received for ART's survey, with the majority (81%) responding that 10% or less of their visitors are travelling from overseas. Only four respondents reported that 50% of their visitors are international, one responded 60% and a further one reported that 95% of tourists are international visitors. These respondents were from Fleurieu Peninsula – SA, Eyre Peninsula – SA, Macarthur region – NSW, Southern Downs region – QLD and Kangaroo Island – SA. This highlights the important role the domestic market has in assisting regional destinations to recover and while ART welcomes Federal funding to support Tourism Australia's recent domestic campaign, the regional tourism industry needs more than marketing.

### 1. Short term action and support

Based on feedback received from respondents, immediate support and action is required for recovery. Suggestions for the short term and links to regional tourism top priorities include:

- Financial support and cash flow assistance for small businesses, such as short term low or no interest loans and support for businesses indirectly impacted not just those directly affected,
- Marketing and promotion encouraging visitors to spend, including book now and visit later through campaigns and positive media stories (regional dispersal),
- Marketing support and training for small businesses (regional dispersal),
- Repairs to infrastructure, including roads and communications (enabling infrastructure), and
- Mental health support.

### 2. Medium term action and support

Once normality and 'business as usual' returns to the affected regions, the need for assistance will continue. Suggestions received from respondents for medium term support include:

- Development of infrastructure, including water, roads and communications (enabling infrastructure),
- Marketing and promotion, including continued positive media stories encouraging visitors to travel domestically and spend their money in regional Australia (regional dispersal),
- Financial support and cash flow assistance for small businesses,
- Training for a skilled workforce, including understanding and managing the effects and impacts following natural disasters, and cash flow management (skills shortages),
- Climate change and environmental action, and
- Continued mental health support.

### 3. Longer term action and support

With greater consideration and strategic thinking required, action will be essential for success of regional visitor economies in the long term. Feedback received from respondents includes:

Climate change and environmental action, including planning and development to support water security (enabling infrastructure),

Development of infrastructure, including roads, communications and renewable energy (enabling infrastructure),

Ongoing marketing of regional areas to domestic and international markets (regional dispersal), and

Product and experience development (product development).

Refer to ART's [Bushfire Recovery Position Statement](#) for further information about the top six regional tourism priorities and the long-term thinking required for the regional visitor economy bushfire recovery.