

On 8 April 2020 the Senate established the Select Committee on COVID-19 to inquire into the Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, the committee has held six public hearings via videoconference to examine the government's health and economic response to the pandemic. At the committee's first public hearing on 23 April, committee Chair, Senator Katy Gallagher, highlighted the importance of the inquiry: **This committee is a key vehicle to provide accountability, transparency and scrutiny of the Australian government's response to the pandemic for the Australian people. Over the next 18 months we will work tirelessly to shine a light on every aspect of the national response.**

Invited Submission

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

RE: COVID-19

28 May 2020

The National Capital Attractions Association (NCAA) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19.

The NCAA is a member based organisation, representing the tourism industry in the capital region. This includes capital region attractions, events, accommodation partners, venues and other businesses that support the industry in Canberra and the surrounding region. The NCAA is active in advocating to local and federal government on behalf of the tourism industry in tandem with other tourism bodies locally and nationally. The NCAA seeks to work with members to develop valuable partnerships, undertake successful cooperative activities, and set and lead the agenda for growing and sustaining the tourism attraction industry in Canberra.

NCAA's members include eighteen national institutions across ten Federal portfolios (see page 2) and many privately owned attractions and businesses, a total currently of 50 members.

We have addressed the inquiries' terms of reference listed below as relevant to our member institutions and have highlighted some recommendations for the committee to consider. During the inquiry we would welcome any opportunity to provide additional evidence or comment on other evidence obtained by the committee.

- a. the Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- b. any related matters.



NCAA Members 2020

Australian Parliament House	Mantra Macarthur
Australian War Memorial	Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House
Brochure Distribution Services	National Arboretum Canberra
Bush Capital Lodge	National Archives of Australia
Canberra Airport	National Capital Exhibition
Canberra and Region Visitors Centre	National Dinosaur Museum
Canberra Centre	National Film and Sound Archive
Canberra City YHA	National Folk Festival
Canberra Convention Bureau	National Gallery of Australia
Canberra Glassworks	National Library of Australia
Canberra Institute of Technology	National Mail & Marketing
Canberra Museum & Gallery	National Museum of Australia
Canberra Theatre Centre	National Portrait Gallery
Capital Country Holiday Park	National Zoo and Aquarium
Cockington Green Gardens	Old Bus Depot Markets
CSIRO Discovery Centre	Questacon-The National Science and Technology Centre
Deep Space Communication Complex	Royal Australian Mint
East Hotel	Summernats
Electoral Commission	Telstra Tower
Events ACT	This Week in Canberra
High Court of Australia	Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve
Ibis Styles	University of Canberra
King O'Malley's	Visit Canberra
Lanyon Homestead	
Leumeah Lodge	

a. the Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic;

The NCAA was pleased with the initial access to information from federal members such as the telephone meetings conducted via Minister Birmingham's tourism coronavirus updates, facilitated by the National Tourism Incident Communication Plan (NTICP) commencing in February. This vital engagement allowed us to update members and industry in general in the Canberra Region as to impacts, support and the way forward during the height of the pandemic.

There was concern expressed that a great deal of the funding seemed to be focussed on marketing initiatives, particularly for the international market. Whilst NCAA was supportive of funding being funnelled into Tourism Australia for domestic marketing, international spending seemed (and still seems) to be a step too far without an understanding of when we will be able to welcome back these visitors.

This initial spend on marketing seemed to be in place of more vital support for tourism businesses, many vary small enterprises, with limited cashflow who need to be kept afloat whilst we wait for markets (both domestic and international) to recommence.

The tourism industry is particularly impacted by the closing of borders and there was an opportunity to provide support for more heavily impacted businesses, such as those that could demonstrate international market reliance, which did not seem to be forthcoming.

The NCAA has many members who are privately owned organisations, a case study from Cockington Green Gardens is provided below to provide an insight of the impacts and support utilised:

“As a private business reliant on Tourism, early 2020 has proven to be the worst financial period ever experienced in our 40 years of operation. Between the bushfires and adverse smoke conditions, then quickly followed up by the closing of our doors on the 20th of March in response to the Covid crisis, Cockington Green Gardens found itself with no income and no way to support our nearly 50 staff members, as a result we stood down our entire workforce within days of our closing.

The great relief we felt when Job keeper and Job Seeker were announced by the Federal Government, it gave us hope that we could possibly see our way clear to make it through to reopen our business moving forward and also protect the livelihood of our best asset, that is our staff.

Our business was in the fortunate situation of having a reasonable cash position at the time of closing, our liquidity was of great assistance in the early stages of Job Keeper. Less fortunate businesses would have struggled to progress through the initial phases of Job Keeper, without borrowing to finance the first payments.

At a time when we would expect leadership from our Government, The Sarah Family finds itself very appreciative of the assistance given by the Federal Government, Opposition, state and territory Governments for the ongoing support and the leadership that has allowed for the tourism sector and other affected sectors the opportunity to open our doors much sooner than we imagined initially. Whilst some would complain about some confusing forms and taxation issues, it has been a time when Government has moved quickly and decisively in support of industry and its people, we are thankful for the assistance we have received.”

Many of NCAA's members are federally funded institutions (see page 2 above) across a diverse range of portfolios and so a coordinated response and recovery is difficult. None of these national institutions have qualified for any assistance but have continued to operate in a mothballed state and staff have been paid for that work.

The most difficult thing for staff within these organisations has been the lack of clarity in guidelines and the divisions between States has been unnecessarily complicated. Many are part of a very small team and there is possibly an opportunity to recruit additional staff members in attractions to be a COVID Clean ambassador – pointing out the hand sanitiser, offering to open doors, or demonstrate using your elbow on a lift button and so on.

Small businesses within federally funded institutions such as catering operators are external businesses who are suffering significantly. This has been a focus area for government, with reports being requested by relevant departments and we understand some MP's have reached out to operators directly. It could be an issue at the time of re-open. Some cafés have taken up Job Keeper, but many haven't. Of the 30,000 businesses registered in Canberra only 8000 have taken up job keeper so many have not been able to afford to keep staff on.

Cultural institutions need to be projecting a sense of comfort, even safety, and being welcoming. This is particularly important in encouraging the domestic market to holiday at home, pointing out safe places that are right on their doorstep, and emphasising how these collections are there for all Australians and not just an elite few.

b. any related matters.

The NCAA is a member of the Australian Tourism Industry Council (ATIC) and trades as the Canberra Region Tourism Industry Council (CRTIC), along with managing Quality Tourism Framework accreditation and the Canberra Region Tourism Awards. Through these programs we have been able to provide for members a Tourism Recovery module and a COVID Clean checklist and accreditation for businesses to strategically plan as restrictions ease and businesses look to providing a safe environment for visitors.

Contact information

The NCAA looks forward to providing any additional information if required.

Contact:

Dr Naomi Dale (President)

National Capital Attractions Association / Canberra Region Tourism Industry Council