



**Adventure Tourism Victoria's Response to the
Interim Report of the Inquiry into the Working Holiday Maker Program.**

On Tuesday, September 15th 2020, the Joint Standing Committee on Migration published their Interim Report of the Inquiry into the Working Holiday Maker Program.

Adventure Tourism Victoria (ATV) welcomes any opportunities that look to increase visitation to Victoria (and Australia) through the working holiday visa program. We believe the best and easiest way to do this is by improving visitor experiences by removing any friction and solving any issues that exist in the program's current format.

The interim report makes many positive recommendations that ATV warmly receives, including but not limited to:

- Increasing age limits to those source countries with 30 year caps to 35 years
- Reissuing 417 and 462 visa holders who left the country due to Covid-19 renewed visas for a nominal administration fee
- Granting source countries on a case by case basis depending on key health objectives
- Extend the Northern Australia provision, allowing work in hospitality, tourism and other industries to apply in all regional, rural and remote areas.

In addition to this and as the committee does, ATV recognises the successful restart of the program being extremely important to many sectors recovery post-COVID19. The tourism sector will undoubtedly be the last to recover and it needs all the extra help it can get to keep tour operators, hostels and everything in between open.

With that in mind we would urge amendments and changes to some of the recommendations.

Recommendation 7

1.89

'Enable current Working Holiday Maker visa holders who have had to leave the country, or were unable to enter the country and make use of their visas, to reapply for either the 417 or 462 subclass visas, paying a nominal fee with priority processing times.'

We would like to suggest that this fee is extremely low, or removed completely in order to not dissuade anyone from coming to Australia. These people have already paid for their visa once and with our numbers already in decline, travel possibly being harder and more expensive in the immediate future, we need to give ourselves the best chance of people returning and high fees would not do that.

Recommendation 4 focuses on people extending their time in Australia. We'd like to remove any red tape and keep it simple and clear-cut by suggesting that anyone that landed in Australia after January 1st and has stayed in Australia, be given an extension to their visa (1 year) regardless if they have done their specified work or not.

This would not only allow more people to be here to pick fruit and to make up for any shortfall in the Australia Gap Year Initiative, but also allow people that have not been able to maximise the



potential of the Program due to Government restrictions, to still travel the country thus benefiting the tourism industry and economy in general

In addition to this we'd welcome reduced application fees for the 417 Working Holiday Visa program for at least the first 2 years of the program's restart. The easier we can make it for people to get back here quicker, the bigger benefit to Australian industry.

Tourism in Australia is in crisis and WHM holders will be key to it's recovery. The average spend of a WHM visa holder is \$10,600* in Australia with an average stay of 153* days. Tourism accounts for 6%* of Australia's total workforce and in regional settings over 8%*. WHM visa holders visit more locations, spend more money and offer a greater cultural exchange than any other key market segment. They offer mobility and flexibility to industries in regional areas such as tourism, healthcare, agriculture, construction and hospitality that fill employment shortfalls that Australians can't and haven't filled.

Whilst the Joint Standing Committee on Migration focused a lot on the Agriculture Sector and rightly so, it also needs to note the vital part the WHM plays in other industries and Adventure Tourism Victoria urges them to not forget about the tourism industry in our most desperate hour of need.

ATV's submission also focused on several other areas of improvement to the program, in a bid to remove any obstacles and pain points a backpacker may have in order for them to have the best possible experience, resulting in more excited and willing applicants in the future.

These included but were not limited to:

- Reduced WHM visa fees.
- The simplification of how to count days for the required specified work 2nd/3rd year visa.
- A simpler application process for the 2nd/3rd year visa.
- More information and accessibility on how to find specified work.
- A more regulated approach to specified visa extension work. With the aim to reward good employers and give employees confidence in the program, we suggested an Approved Employer list similarly to that of the Seasonal Workers Program. This would be a definite action looking to remove unlawful employers from the system.

Whilst our immediate focus for our members is on how to get WHM back in the country, we absolutely remain committed to working with the government on how we can best implement these suggestions too.

We hope to further have a positive impact on the WHM program and hope our suggestions are taken into consideration.

Yours Truly,

Adventure Tourism Victoria