



SENATOR THE HON. JONATHON DUNIAM

Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries
Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism
Deputy Manager of Government Business in the Senate
Liberal Senator for Tasmania

MC20-000719

Mayor David O'Loughlin
President
Australian Local Government Association
8 Geils Court
DEAKIN ACT 2600

Dear Mayor O'Loughlin

Thank you for your letter of 21 August 2020 to Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment regarding a motion submitted by a council(s) to the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) for debate at ALGA's National General Assembly (NGA). Minister Birmingham has asked me to reply on his behalf, and I apologise for my delay in responding to you.

I note the cancellation of this year's NGA because of COVID-19, and that the ALGA Board agreed that motions of strong community concern, where appropriate, should be referred to the Australian Government. I note also that you have informed the council(s) who submitted motions, that you have referred a motion to Minister Birmingham and that your intention is to publish my response on the ALGA website to inform discussion at the 2021 NGA.

The Australian Government's priority since the emergence of the pandemic has been to protect the health of all Australians. Measures put in place to suppress the virus, such as travel restrictions, social distancing and limits on social gatherings, have largely been successful in flattening the curve and slowing the growth of cases in Australia. Various flare-ups show the importance of continued discipline and vigilance. The task now is to ensure Australians can return to work in a COVID-safe workplace.

COVID-19 has resulted in the most severe global economic crisis since the Great Depression. In response, the Morrison Government committed unprecedented support, saving lives, cushioning the blow and helping Australians remain in work. Our Economic Recovery Plan, outlined in the October Budget, will create jobs, rebuild our economy and secure Australia's future. In addition to the Government's unprecedented support measures such as JobSeeker and JobKeeper payments, the October Budget committed an additional \$25 billion in direct COVID-19 response measures, as well as our \$74 billion JobMaker plan to ensure Australians can get back to work as soon as it is safe to do so.

As the Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism, I am acutely aware of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry. The industry was affected early with the onset of COVID-19 through the closure of international borders, and then with domestic movement and travel restrictions. I also recognise the industry will be one of the last to fully emerge from the crisis as it will be some time before international borders fully re-open. That is why the Government has responded comprehensively with whole of economy measures and also with targeted measures for the tourism industry recognising that it was disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

The motion you have referred to me calls on the (State and) Commonwealth Governments to provide effective support to Councils dealing with high visitation impacts on iconic Australian destinations, by exploring additional funding support and/or revenue raising initiatives that can be used to help meet the costs of servicing visitation and improving the sustainability of these areas.

You would be aware that since you wrote the Government has made a number of significant announcements of support for the tourism industry, which have positive implications for local government in terms of bringing visitors back to regions and improving sustainability of areas, providing businesses and governments at all levels with more revenue which may be directed towards local costs of servicing visitors.

In the October Budget, the Morrison Government announced the next phase of our tourism recovery plan, with over \$400 million dollars of support directly targeted to tourism recovery, including providing record funding to Tourism Australia. This is in addition to a suite of measures that will benefit the tourism industry, including the JobMaker hiring credit, tax cuts for over 11 million Australians, and a cash flow boost for companies with a turnover up to \$5 billion by allowing them to temporarily, up to June 2022, offset tax losses against previous profits and tax paid in or after 2018-19 through a temporary loss carry back.

As part of the 2020-21 Budget measures, the Government announced the \$50 million Recovery for Regional Tourism Fund to support nine tourism regions which are heavily reliant on international tourism. The Recovery for Regional Tourism program will help businesses in these regions to retain and create jobs by driving visitation, spurring demand and improving product diversity to attract visitors. This will help regions achieve greater leverage from the domestic tourism market and to ensure there is a vibrant, internationally focused tourism industry still in place when international visitors return.

Also, as part of the Budget, the Government announced an additional round of the Building Better Regions Fund (BBRF). This round provides \$200 million for projects to boost local infrastructure in regional communities, \$100 million of which will be dedicated to tourism-related infrastructure, delivering targeted support for regional tourism. This BBRF round is expected to open late this year.

A range of projects funded under the \$1 billion COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund have also assisted in maintaining regional tourism attractions, boosting tourism visitation and preserving Australia's environment as part of the Government's economic recovery plan. Similarly, funding under the \$76 million Regional Tourism Bushfire Recovery Package has continued to provide assistance to those regions affected by the summer bushfires.

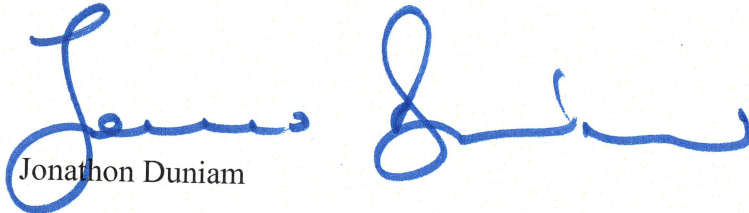
In partnership with industry and state and territory governments, we are continuing to deliver our plan to fight the virus and protect lives, while helping businesses through the economic impacts, and seeking to build confidence and momentum in our economy to come out of this pandemic in as strong a position as possible.

Our aim, which accords with and supports the motion, is to provide effective targeted support to regional Australia which will improve the long term sustainability of these areas, including those local governments dealing with the impacts of high visitation on iconic destinations.

Our tourism industry is incredibly resilient and has bounced back in the past from other crises. I have no doubt that will be the case again, even in these unprecedented times.

Thank you again for your letter and for sharing the motion from your ALGA member council(s).

Yours sincerely



Jonathon Duniam

17 / 11 / 2020