

Tourism Regulation Review Issues Paper

Summary of information requests

Information request 2.1

The Commission seeks views and evidence of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on nature-based and agritourism businesses in South Australia and how the related regulatory framework and guidance can be improved. Please provide details and suggestions for improvements.

Wilderness Escape Outdoor Adventure saw an increase of 22% in school camp business due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and the borders being closed to interstate destinations popular with schools such as Canberra, ACT and Sovereign Hill, VIC. We assume that these schools will most likely resume interstate camps next year, but it's been a great opportunity to introduce our brand and experiences to new clients, build new relationships and introduce a new audience to South Australia's nature experiences.

South Australia could perhaps investigate demand driving infrastructure opportunities for the educational tourism (edutourism) market, to drive interstate traffic here. Improving or adding group facilities within National Parks should be considered as well.

Another opportunity could be to partner nature-based, agritourism, edutourism businesses with the education department to create experiences that deliver organised, experiential learning, based on the Australian Curriculum. Or offer an avenue/platform for these businesses to clearly and quickly communicate their experience offering so that educators and schools can easily find them and book excursions or camps with a trusted, curriculum based, nature-based, agritourism or edutourism business.

One of our other businesses, Earth Adventure, was heavily impacted by COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, most of our business had been coming from international visitors and we lost multiple international study tours that were booked for 2020. We scaled back our offering and changed our product mix to suit the domestic market but this has seen very little in the way of bookings, like many tour operators and experiences across the state. However, the recent Great State Voucher campaign has had a positive impact for our tours, but it only runs for a short period and isn't sustainable long term.

Information request 2.2

The Commission would like to understand the contribution and significance of government and regulation among the business drivers of tourism firms.

- *How does government impact nature-based tourism and agritourism businesses in South Australia?*
- *What regulatory factors influence business investment and development in nature-based tourism and agritourism in South Australia?*

Please provide details and/or examples including timeframes for approvals and guidance and feedback from regulators on improvements to the application.

Two of our businesses, Wilderness Escape Outdoor Adventure and Venture Corporate Recharge are often not recognised as being part of the tourism industry, even though they are edutourism and corporate tourism businesses respectively. These two sectors that contribute enormously to the visitor economy both in the city and regions. By doing so, they are not getting the full picture of the needs of these sectors when planning and when building infrastructure, impacting the sustainability of the sites. This makes it hard to grow our business and to continue to use public land to offer our experiences and introduce people to National Parks.

Some of the processes to start a new activity or business in a National park or on Crown Land are prohibitive or difficult to navigate. The unsolicited proposal guidelines used by some Councils and sometimes in Government are often confusing, don't have formal timelines or structures, are subjective in assessment and generally don't encourage entrepreneurial business proposals, with Council and Government preferring to go through a competitive bid process, on the back of receiving an unsolicited proposal from an individual business. Clear and regular application rounds for business licenses would be a suggestion to help this scenario. Then it is always a competitive and fair bid process. A clear strategy around desired business and experience mix to help shape and guide the process would also be beneficial.

Short term licenses are another issue that impact nature-based and agritourism businesses, an operator will often need longer than 6-12 months to test a product to find out if it is viable and to build it up and the tourism trade distribution process generally requires products and rates to be locked in and available 12-18 months in advance. Not being able to package new product up for the tourism trade minimises the size of the market and likelihood of success.

Information request 3.1

Is the Commission's characterisation of the key regulatory issues for nature-based tourism businesses accurate and are there any other regulatory issues that should be considered?

Please provide evidence and examples.

How can these regulations be improved to support nature-based tourism projects while still achieving their objectives? Please provide examples from other jurisdictions where possible.

Outdoor recreation and educational experiences should also be included as nature-based tourism business activities, not just as agritourism activities.

Fees for children to visit National Parks are charged to a CTO but not to a school if they visit directly. Parks could support CTO's by encouraging schools to utilise a CTO for their excursion. It has been our first-hand experience in parks that schools frequently do not pre-book their visits or their camping stays with National Parks which can cause overcrowding and unexpected, unmanageable visitation. CTO's are required to book in advance and pay for each person.

The invoicing for park fees for CTO's is haphazard, with various practices in place which results in delayed invoices, lack of consistent information and detail on invoices, which makes it very difficult for a small operator to keep track of, reconcile against individual booking expenses and to pay. A complete overhaul of the system should be undertaken to streamline and automate the process from a central source. Our businesses have spent over \$85,000 in parks fees over the last 3 years, which is a considerable cost and also a lot of invoicing and payments. Perhaps there could be a scaled fee for CTO's, payable annually or quarterly to reduce the accounting administration.

An area where there could possibly be some more regulation would be around ensuring CTO's and their staff are fully qualified and compliant for the activities they are undertaking, especially in the outdoor recreation space.

It is increasingly difficult to find suitable, affordable insurance as an outdoor, adventure tourism, edutourism and corporate tourism tour operator. It would be great to see support around insurance from government.

Information request 3.2

Is the Commission's characterisation of the key regulatory issues affecting agritourism businesses accurate and are there other regulatory issues that should be considered? Please provide evidence and examples.

How can these regulations be improved to support agritourism projects? Please provide examples from other jurisdictions where possible.

And

Information request 3.3

How can the current processes for applying for licences, permits and development approvals for nature-based and agritourism businesses be improved? What are the highest priorities? Please provide examples and relate to specific licenses, permits or application processes.

Planning, development, permits and licenses take a long time to be approved and processed and push out project timelines and increase costs unnecessarily.

More flexibility around zoning and land use would be good and would allow for easier testing and trialling of activities and allows for time critical, agile pivots like we've needed and seen happen this past year during the COVID-19 pandemic. It allows for income diversification, which will hopefully mean more sustainable businesses.

Grant processes vary considerably across local, state and federal government, it would be good for this process to be easier to navigate and to apply for funding. Applications are lengthy, require a huge amount of information and usually require a business to engage external assistance to complete them successfully.

We had a scenario this year with SafeWork SA, where we wanted to implement a new electric winch to one of our amusement structures. We wanted to continue to operate the amusement structure using the existing manual winch mechanism, that was already licensed and approved, while we were going through the SafeWork SA approval for the electric winch mechanism. SafeWork SA did not permit for this to occur and as such we lost 3-4 months revenue, and had to spend significant staff time working through this approval process with SafeWork SA. We estimate that this shutdown cost our business \$140,000. The timing of the shutdown was also our peak season and when we were hoping to be able to generate some income after what had been a dismal year due to Covid-19. There was a lack of empathy and no sense of urgency from SafeWork to help us get running again as quickly as possible. We agree with your other stakeholders that the culture of how regulators interact with business should be raised and reviewed as part of this tourism regulation review.

Information request 3.4

The Commission seeks views, evidence and advice on any regulatory barriers to:

- *the development or operation of short-term accommodation;*
- *development or operation of visitor transport;*
- *access to public infrastructure;*
- *attracting and retaining staff; and*
- *adopting digital technology by nature-based and agritourism businesses.*

These regulatory barriers could include requirements placed in legislation or regulations, as well as the behaviour of regulators including the consistency of interpretation, timelines, transparency, coordination between regulators and willingness to provide advice.

We'd like to see outdoor leaders and tour guides on the skills shortage list and enabling working holiday visa people who secure work to be able to get a visa in this area easier.

The past year has been difficult to attract and retain staff and there is a shortage of skilled staff in the outdoor sector. To get staff upskilled to the level that is needed is a considerable cost to the business. Some of the ratios for qualified staff to participant are restrictive and make it harder for our experiences to be viable.

Information request 3.5

How does South Australia's regulatory framework for nature-based and agritourism businesses compare with other states? Please identify any state or other jurisdictions that

provide examples of best practice for any nature-based tourism and agritourism regulatory areas. Please provided details and/or examples.

No response.