

Media Release

18 July 2018

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS TO BOOST GREATER HUNTER ACCOMMODATION INDUSTRY

The NSW accommodation industry in the Greater Hunter region is set to enjoy a substantial boost in visitation following today's announcement by Virgin Australia and Newcastle Airport to commence international services between Australia and New Zealand from November 2018.

Currently, international visitors represent 5% of visitation to the Hunter region and 22% of total visitor nights.

CEO Tourism Accommodation Australia, Carol Giuseppi said the new flights represent a tremendous opportunity to grow the region's visitor economy.

"Today's announcement further reinforces the growing importance of Newcastle as a globally competitive gateway city, with significant development already underway," she said.

"Importantly, this growth will come from both leisure and business visitors to the region.

"Increasing access for international visitors via direct flights into Newcastle Airport will provide more time to explore the greater region, in particular the Hunter Valley with its world-class accommodation, wineries and restaurants and Port Stephens with its wonderful beaches and national parks.

The announcement also provides further confidence to significant regional investors in the visitor economy, with a 170-room Holiday Inn Express Newcastle West set to open later this year and a range of other projects in planning that will add to the 6,500 rooms currently in the region."

"Without doubt, the real winners of today's announcement are the accommodation and tourism businesses in the Hunter region who support close to 21,000 jobs and currently make a \$2.3 billion direct and indirect contribution to the economy.

Phil Kasselis, Managing Director of Pro-invest Hotels Group, the operator of the Holiday Inn Express hotel, welcomed the addition of international air services to Newcastle. "This city has changed enormously over the past decade. Increased infrastructure development has increased Newcastle's and the wider region's appeal as a commercial, medical, educational and tourism hub, for the benefit of all residents and visitors to the region".

The Hunter Region's largest hotel and tourism investor Dr Jerry Schwartz, who owns three hotels in Newcastle and the Hunter Valley, as well as the Hunter Valley Convention Centre, Lovedale Brewery and Blue Sky Airlines, also welcomed the announcement.

"We believe there is great opportunity to grow leisure, conference and business travel from New Zealand, with the Hunter Valley offering exceptional tourism attractions as well as one of Australia's leading regional conference and events centres," said Dr Schwartz.

"Newcastle can become an exciting new gateway city for international travel to Australia's east coast, with easy air, road and rail access to Sydney and other destinations along the coast."

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For further information please call Craig Vaughan on 0423 796 382