

MEDIA RELEASE

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VISA CHANGES A BOOST FOR TOURISM SECTOR

The accommodation industry will receive a much needed boost from the Federal Government's changes to Working Holiday Maker (WHM) visas, with the sector needing an injection of workers.

Tourism Accommodation Australia CEO Carol Giuseppi said the Federal Government's announcement on increased flexibility of access to WHM visas was great news for the tourism and accommodation sectors – and could not have come at a better time.

“There is a real need to fill the labour and skills gap created by growth in hotel investment and overall visitor numbers nationwide,” Ms Giuseppi said.

“With more than 270 hotels and 45,000 rooms in the development pipeline, 24/7 operations and high seasonality, particularly in regional areas, there is a need to attract more workers if we are to remain a competitive tourism destination. Backpackers help to fill the labour gap, and their personal spending drives the economies of many country and regional areas.”

Ms Giuseppi said the latest International Visitor Survey (IVS) figures show a decline in backpacker visits, nights and expenditure - particularly into regional Australia - “with a drop of 10.7% in visitor nights and expenditure in 2017-18, despite overall growth of 1.4% in international visitor arrivals to Australia and 4.53% growth in visitor expenditure.”

She said more action is needed to ensure Australia is an attractive destination for WHM.

“While we have the most comprehensive WHM program, our 2018 Visa benchmarking study, showed WHM visa fees (A\$450) are higher than most competitor destinations and, with annual CPI increases, this gap will continue to widen,” Ms Giuseppi said.

“Apart from explicit visa application fees, the real costs of visas include Visa Application Centre fees, courier fees for paper-based applications and the Passenger Movement Charge (PMC). The Passenger Movement Charge is the second highest departure tax in the world, and because it does not vary with distance it is the highest departure tax on short-haul sectors.

“We welcome the Government's continued support of the WHM program which recognises its importance not only to the agricultural sector but to the visitor economy.”

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