



## Media Release

27 January 2021

### **ALARMING IMPACT OF BORDER CLOSURES ON MURRAY REGIONAL TOURISM**

Murray Regional Tourism, the peak cross border tourism organisation for the Murray region in NSW and Victoria plays a critical role in the visitor economy.

Prior to COVID-19 the region would welcome annually 6.5 million visitors across our river communities with around 2,500 tourism businesses providing fabulous experiences. Visitors spent nearly \$2 billion in direct expenditure and enjoyed 10 million nights in the region. Over 18,000 people were employed in tourism related businesses and the second largest employer in the region.

Tourism operators have been savaged over the past year as a consequence of rolling Coronavirus restrictions compounded by the lengthy and sustained border shutdowns severely impacting the visitor economy.

We recently conducted a survey of our operators in conjunction with Albury City Council to quantify the impact of the 2020 New Year's Eve and early January 2021 closure of the Victorian border with New South Wales.

Over 400 businesses provided input to this research with the impacts of the border closure felt significantly by all businesses with the largest response from accommodation, food and drink and retail sectors.

Key findings are:

- A decline in visitor numbers is being felt widely with over one third (37%) of tourism businesses believing visitor numbers have reduced by a massive 61-99% since the border closure when compared to the same time last year.
- Greatest impact of the border closure on businesses included:
  - Reduction in turnover (72%),
  - Cancellations (70%),
  - Reduction in bookings (60%),
  - Last minute postponements (52%) and
  - Reduced hours of staff (51%)
- The financial impacts vary in its representation from respondents. Losses range from 15-20% decline in revenue and 100% cancelled bookings through to a \$1million fall in accommodation turnover

- When compared to this time last year, forward bookings for the next three months have fallen across the board, with 39% of respondents having seen a staggering fall between 61-99%
- 78% of tourism businesses see a fall in future revenue for the same time period
- 74% of tourism businesses previously qualified for Job Keeper. Of those respondents, 66% are no longer eligible. This is largely due to businesses having a strong December and no longer meeting the 30% downturn
- Approximately a quarter of tourism businesses are likely to make staff redundant as a direct result of the border closure
- Other items of note include difficulty to gain interstate technical support, logistical issues and travel time of crossing the border, confusion and misinformation and mental health of staff
- Stock wasted (perishable and non-perishable items) as a result of the border closure ranges from \$100 through to \$50,000

We must now restore confidence in people's propensity to travel to ensure the longer term future of our visitor economy.

#### **Quotes attributable to Murray Regional Tourism Chair, Wendy Greiner**

"The Murray region's tourism industry has been decimated by the border closures. To have it slammed closed again on New Year's Eve caused further disruption to many holiday makers, and compounded the impact on tourism businesses placing the viability of many of these at risk."

"Murray Regional Tourism is currently in discussions with State and Federal Governments for a range of economic and social support measures to ensure the survival of 2,500 small to medium businesses we represent on both sides of the NSW and Victorian borders."

"Our communities of interest have implored us to advocate on their behalf to ensure their immediate viability and longer term future. Importantly, the saving of regional jobs is critical to their economic recovery."

#### **About Murray Regional Tourism**

Murray Regional Tourism works in partnership with Destination New South Wales, Visit Victoria, Destination Riverina Murray, 13 local government areas and several regional tourism organisations to grow the visitor economy across the Murray region. The

Murray region spans 1,700 kilometres of the Murray River from Albury Wodonga to Mildura Wentworth.

**Media Contact**

Wendy Greiner, Chair, Murray Regional Tourism Ph 0419 608 239