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ABN 25 441 791 002  
ACN 147 573 706

4 September 2020

The Hon Michael Sukkar MP  
Assistant Treasurer  
Treasury of Australia  
Langton Crescent  
PARKES, ACT 2600  
AUSTRALIA

### Pre-Budget Submission 2020/21

Dear Assistant Treasurer,

I write on behalf of the Business Events Council of Australia (BECA), which is the peak body representing industry associations and key infrastructure of the business events sector (meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions).

#### The value of Business Events

Australia's business events industry has been one of the quiet achievers of the Australian economy – growing at around 6% annually since 2014, directly generating over \$35 billion in economic activity and employing over 229,000 people across a broad range of sectors and trades. In 2019, 43.7 million people attended more than 484,382 business events across Australia.<sup>1</sup>

#### Impact of the Coronavirus

The business events industry was one of the first industries to be impacted by COVID-19, one of the hardest hit and may be one of the last industries to recover due to the long lead times between booking and actually holding a major business event.

Since March, Australia's business events industry was rapidly shutdown with the escalation of government responses to COVID-19. The impact of the pandemic is being felt across the economy and as a result, 96% of business events scheduled for 2020 in Australia have been cancelled or postponed.<sup>2</sup>

Due to the escalating effects of COVID-19, on top of bushfires earlier this year, BECA has lead an urgent coordinated approach engaging Government – primarily through Austrade, Tourism Australia, National COVID-19 Commission Advisory Board, Treasury's Coronavirus Business Liaison Unit and the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources – as well as industry stakeholders to ensure support targets those areas most critical to the industry's immediate needs, its sustainment and its successful recovery.

#### Business Confidence

Business events have completely dropped off and stimulating demand for future events requires a return of business confidence across the economy. Until new business events are being planned, booked and providing cashflow to businesses, the industry is largely unable to maintain its large workforce when unsupported. This leaves the industry unable to sustain its capacity to recover or to position itself for a rebound when market conditions improve.

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<sup>1</sup> *Value of Business Events to Australia 2018/19*, Ernst & Young, March 2020

<sup>2</sup> *Lost Business Report: Impacts of COVID-19 on the Business Events Industry*, McCrindle, April 2020

***Business Events: delivering innovation, knowledge and performance for Australia***

**Business Events Council of Australia** is an alliance representing: Association of Australian Convention Bureaux • Australian Convention Centres Group • Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia • Meetings and Events Australia • Professional Conference Organisers Association



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An industry survey conducted by BECA, revealed when business events are allowed to safely restart, only 68% of respondents across the business events industry indicated that they are in a position to do so. These businesses will still find it challenging however as 67% noted they have no business confirmed for 2020 and 48% advised they don't have any business for 2021 confirmed either. As a result 52% of businesses believe it will take 1 to 2 years to recover while more than 40% of businesses believe it will take 3 to 5 years to return to pre-crisis levels.<sup>3</sup>

#### Recovery and Rebound Framework

The COVID-19 Business Events Recovery and Rebound Framework aims to sustain the business events industry and position it to rebound and grow effectively following the pandemic. A particular focus of the recovery has been the extension of the Government's JobKeeper arrangement beyond September 2020.

Without continued Government support the business events industry is not just facing a hiatus; it is facing a total dislocation and complete loss. We would be encountering a total rebuild of an industry from the ground up. We are uncertain whether we will ever get back to being able to compete globally if this situation transpires.

Border restrictions continue to impose the most significant challenge impeding the recovery of the business events industry. To overcome this, BECA's COVIDSafe Guidelines provide measures that enable business events to occur in COVID safe environments. These guidelines provide confidence for the States and Territories to lift restrictions to enable the restart of business events, which will see our industry rebound, boost the whole visitor economy and restart the transfer of knowledge across all industries. Without face-to-face meetings none of this can happen.

The business events industry also warrants recognition as a critical catalyst for the business-led, post-pandemic recovery of the Australian economy. Business events will play an important role in driving demand by providing a marketplace for rebuilding industry and public-sector networks, boosting investment and trade as well as fostering innovation, knowledge creation, education and cultural exchange.

I have attached our Recovery and Rebound Framework which supports the business events workforce and businesses and positions the sector to rebound and grow effectively following the pandemic.

I welcome the opportunity to provide further advice on the industry's strategic value to the Australian economy and BECA's recovery response to the global pandemic.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'V Findlay', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Dr Vanessa Findlay  
Chair, Business Events Council of  
Australia +61 417 163 746  
[vfindlay@businesseventscouncil.org.au](mailto:vfindlay@businesseventscouncil.org.au)

<sup>3</sup> BECA Future Confidence and JobKeeper Impact Report, August 2020

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Members of the board of the Business Events Council of Australia:

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**(BECA Deputy Chair)**

Chief Executive Officer,  
International Convention  
Centre Sydney

Australian Convention  
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**Michael Matthews**

President,  
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Association  
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**Barry Neame**  
**(BECA Treasurer)**

President,  
Professional Conference  
Organisers Association



**KEEPING  
AUSTRALIA  
MEETING**

**Nigel Keen**

Director,  
Exhibition & Events  
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ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALASIA

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**MEA**  
Meetings & Events Australia

*Business Events: delivering innovation, knowledge and performance for Australia*

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# COVID-19 Recovery and Rebound Framework

for the Australian Business Events Industry



An alliance of Australia's business events industry



Association  
of Australian  
Convention  
Bureaux

Australian Convention  
Centres Group



**EXHIBITION & EVENT**  
ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALASIA



**MEA**  
Meetings & Events Australia



**KEEPING  
AUSTRALIA  
MEETING**

An alliance of Australia's business events industry:

- Association of Australian Convention Bureaux
- Australian Convention Centres Group
- Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia
- Meetings and Events Australia
- Professional Conference Organisers Association
- International Convention and Congress Association - Aust

# Recovery and Rebound Framework Synopsis for the Australian Business Events Industry

## Context

The business events industry has been one of the quiet achievers of the Australian economy – growing at around 6% annually since 2014, **directly contributing over \$35 billion in economic activity in 2019 and employing over 229,000 people across a broad range of sectors and trades.**<sup>1</sup> In 2019, 43.7 million people attended more than 484,382 business events across Australia.<sup>2</sup> The direct industry gross value added by business events now sits at more than \$17 billion.

Over the past seven months, Australia's business events industry rapidly shutdown with the escalation of government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of the pandemic and the Australian Government's response is being felt across the economy. For business events, our reliance on in-person gatherings and interactions of people have left it particularly exposed to the necessary ongoing public health orders and restrictions. As a result, **96% of business events scheduled for 2020 in Australia have been cancelled or postponed.**<sup>3</sup> Major international events due to be held in Australia in 2021 are increasingly in doubt.

Across the business events industry, the required cancellation of events has seen a near 100% loss of revenue. **The total lost value for the business events industry is estimated at up to \$35.7 billion over the next 12 to 15 months.**<sup>4</sup> Revenue for January and February of 2020 was already reduced to approximately 10% year-on-year due to the impacts of the summer bushfires and the escalating COVID-19 situation internationally. As early as January, before governments formally put in place their restrictions, global associations and businesses were making the decision that the risk was too high for their members and employees to be travelling.

For business event operators, this has prompted difficult business decisions including cuts to casual workforces and redundancies for part-time and full-time staff, many of whom have built careers in the industry. Staffing losses across the industry were initially estimated at over 92,000 between the end of 2019 and 30 June 2020.<sup>5</sup> **The situation is unprecedented – the business events industry is not just facing a hibernation; it is facing a total dislocation and complete loss.**

The Australian Government's economy-wide measures to support businesses, employers and employees (in particular the JobKeeper Payment) are an important lifeline to many in the industry and will help support some of the business events industry's workforce over the immediate term through to the cessation of JobKeeper 2.0 in March 2021 (including those who were previously retrenched before Government support measures).

For the remainder of this year, it is now clear that the business events industry will not be in full recovery mode given the long lead times for events to be held and revenue to start flowing again. In fact, without the ongoing support from the JobKeeper extension, the number of businesses that would have gone broke and staff who lost their jobs would have increased dramatically at the end of September. The longer term situation is looking bleak – without new business events being planned, booked and providing cashflow to businesses, the industry is

<sup>1</sup> Value of Business Events to Australia 2018/19, Ernst & Young, March 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Lost Business Report: Impacts of COVID-19 on the Business Events Industry, McCrindle, April 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

largely unable to maintain its large workforce when unsupported. This leaves the industry unable to sustain its capacity to recover over the medium-term or to position itself for a rebound when market conditions improve. Demand for business events has completely dropped off and stimulating demand for future events requires a return of business confidence across the economy, significant upfront investment, resourcing, retraining and industry coordination.

The situation is immediate and distressing for an industry that has been growing annually and was, just months ago, successfully showcasing Australia's credentials to major business event decision-makers and planners from across the globe.<sup>6</sup> It requires the industry, led by the Business Events Council of Australia (BECA), to act and partner with the federal, state and territory governments to provide and facilitate targeted support to the business events workforce and businesses. This will require close engagement with the Australian Government (primarily Austrade, Tourism Australia, The Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources and Treasury's Coronavirus Business Liaison Unit) and a coordinated effort across industry stakeholders to ensure the support that is developed and delivered, targets those areas most critical to the industry's immediate needs, its recovery and its successful rebound.

**The business events industry warrants government recognition as a critical catalyst for the business-led, post-pandemic recovery of the Australian economy.** Business events will play an important role in:

- rebuilding industry and public-sector networks, partnerships and research collaborations
- building business confidence, trade and investment
- boosting the leisure and tourism sectors
- acting as marketplaces for buyers and sellers
- fostering innovation, knowledge creation, education and cultural exchange
- catalysing industry growth and future employment
- facilitating regional dispersal and development

The business events industry has the potential to be a key supporter across the Australian economy through its recovery and rebound if this is properly managed and supported by well-developed policy aligned to Australia's competitive strengths. Business events are unique because they are the only tourism sector that provides a vision of confirmed future business. This information can be used by governments and their departments to maximise the benefits, beyond tourism, that these events offer.

This document outlines a Recovery and Rebound Framework for the Business Events industry, including key challenges and solutions that can guide the development of a targeted industry support package.

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<sup>6</sup> Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Media Release, 3 December 2019. Available from < <https://www.trademinister.gov.au/minister/simon-birmingham/media-release/showcasing-australias-credentials-leading-business-events-destination>>.

## Framework Principles & Summary

The Business Events Recovery and Rebound Framework is designed with the belief that although the market for business events will be forever changed, the new world of business events will see a surge in demand driven by a renewed premium on in-person contact for governments, businesses and associations.

BECA has developed this Recovery and Rebound Framework by identifying key challenges facing our industry and those gaps that are not alleviated or solved by the Government's existing stimulus and support measures.

As an industry, we want to emerge from the crisis in a position to help build business confidence across the Australian economy and, when the time is right, grow Australia's share of global events in what will be a highly competitive and disrupted market.

Several principles underpin the development of the business events industry's Recovery and Rebound framework:

1. Business events was one of the first industries to be impacted by COVID-19 and may be one of the last industries to recover due to the long lead times - particularly for major business events (up to 4-6 years).
2. Business events for 2020 have had to be put on-hold, rescheduled or completely cancelled due to government restrictions on gatherings and travel. There are now also increasing concerns for the first half of 2021.
3. Virtual events can act as a backstop but are in no way a replacement for in-person events, do not support local employment and cannot not deliver the broader benefits of business events.
4. Business events are a catalyst for Australia's broader economic recovery, local employment reactivation and job creation.
5. The holding of business events is a key signal of business confidence across the economy.
6. Business events have a symbiotic relationship with many other industries including airlines, hotels and venues, transport, catering and cleaning. This means our industry's recovery is highly dependent on the simultaneous recovery of other enabling industries in the tourism and hospitality ecosystem.
7. As the government moves to lift restrictions, a robust and sustainable distinction can be made between highly organised and managed business events in controlled settings from mass gatherings.
8. Recovery of business events will be geographically phased as restrictions ease and business confidence returns on intra-state, inter-state, "safe" regional (eg with New Zealand and within APAC) and "safe" international travel.
9. Australia's global market position in its rebound will be underpinned by the country's ongoing containment success, health service capacity and global health and hygiene reputation.
10. The global business events market will be subdued for several years but unique opportunities for Australia will exist.

In line with the Australian Government's own principles for stimulus and industry support measures, the initiatives proposed are:

- Targeted towards challenges unique to the industry;
- Timely, in that they can be delivered immediately and for a defined period of time;
- Aligned with other arms of policy, for example, the Event Here This Year campaign and Trade and Investment Priority Areas;
- Designed to make use of existing mechanisms, for example, repurposing or modeling new support mechanisms from the existing Business Events Bid Fund Program, the Advance Program and the Government's own events plans and procurement processes across its departments and agencies; and
- Designed to lift productivity, across our industry and across the Australian economy by acting as a catalyst for other industries in their recovery.

## Phased approach

The framework is divided across two phases, 'recovery' and 'rebound'. Each phase pursues different aims.

The **recovery phase** covers the short- and medium-term, with a focus on the domestic situation and market. This phase aims to:

- maintain industry capacity
- build local confidence and demand for business events; and
- develop industry strategy and practices for the future market

BECA has focused its immediate efforts on developing the recovery initiatives as a priority.

The **rebound phase** covers the medium- and long-term with a focus on regional and global markets. This phase aims to position the industry to take advantage of new regional and global market opportunities.

These aims support our industry's overarching '**Recovery and Rebound**' goal: to support the wellbeing of our workforce and businesses through the crisis, and to emerge together, ready to take on the new world of business events.

To achieve this goal, we need to take a phased approach that recognises that the international business events market will take longer to recover than the domestic market in Australia.

We predict that as the Australian economy recovers there will be a strong preference for Australian companies to hold their events domestically only (this may be the case for the next 2-3 years). For Australian companies there will be more certainty about the public health situation here in Australia and greater predictability in necessary travel and meeting arrangements. This is likely also the case for foreign businesses and associations within their home countries.

On this basis, the *Business Events Recovery and Rebound Framework* is designed to first rebuild the domestic market into 2021 through targeted incentives, corporate, association and government-led business events that support national economic priorities. The strategy is to use this domestically focused period to ready our industry for the opening of the regional and international business events markets. This approach also leverages the use of any public funds to the exclusive benefit of Australian industries; companies; associations and event holders, by utilising business events as a catalyst for economic recovery across key Australian industries.

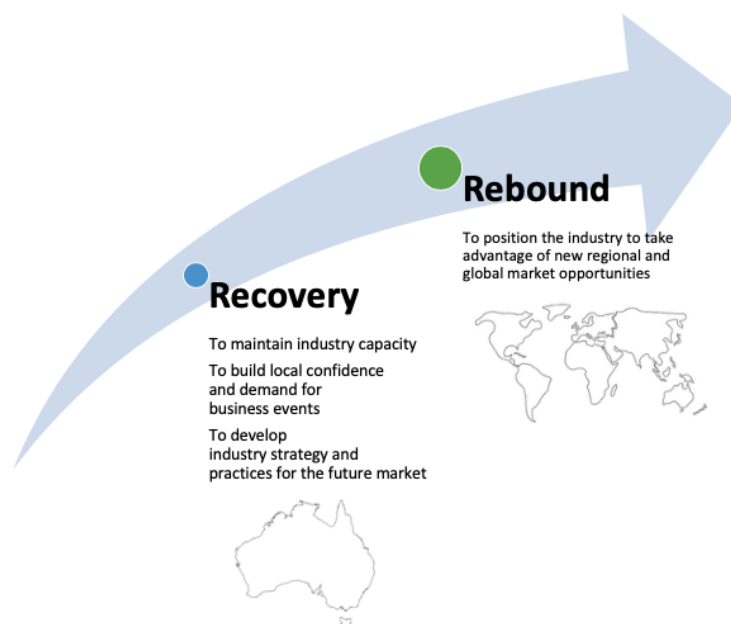


Figure 1 The Recovery and Rebound Framework takes a two-phased approach

The sections below outline the key industry challenges and proposed support initiatives for each phase.



## Phase 1: Recovery

### Challenges

Viability of industry businesses and organisations is at immediate risk with no cash-flow or forward pipeline of business events. Though new Government measures support some employee wages until March 2021, there is limited productive activity for the workforce to undertake. There is a limited ability of industry businesses to lift business confidence and stimulate demand among domestic businesses and associations to hold events. The business events industry faces a significant challenge in maintaining its workforce throughout 2020 because business events unlike most other industries cannot just be turned back on again once restrictions are lifted – the shortest lead times are between 3-6 months for an event to be held. And restart is being further complicated by the confusion and inconsistency in the range of restrictions and measures being used around the country. This is particularly challenging for businesses that operate across many jurisdictions. Further, as business events do recommence, organisers and staff will need to upskill and implement strict COVIDSafe health and hygiene practices.

### Aims

- To maintain industry capacity
- To build local confidence and demand for business events
- To develop industry strategy and practices for the future market

### Initiative 1.1 – Government as an events leader

Government-held events, event sponsorship and delegate participation are a major source of income for the business events industry across Australia. In 2018-19, there were over 57,600 meetings and conventions held by governments (federal, state and local) across the country with over 413,000 delegates in attendance.

Commonwealth departments and agencies are major sponsors of business events across Australia and send staff as delegates to attend relevant meetings and conferences. There are over 180 Commonwealth Government departments and agencies. Many of these (particularly the larger organisations) hold major conferences and events in cities across Australia (including in regional areas) annually. Some examples include:

- The Australian Public Service Commission's APS-wide conferences held in every Australian capital city and Townsville
- The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Science Outlook Conference (Canberra) and the Outlook Regional Conference Series (held in various regional locations)
- The Department of Defence's Defence Force Air Show
- Australian Government Economist Network's Conference

The Australian Government's approach to its own events and conferences (as well as sponsorships and delegates) can be reformed to not only deliver professionally designed, managed and world-class events but at the same time directly support the Australian business events industry.

There are two proposed actions to be pursued under this initiative:

- (1) BECA proposes a coordinated approach across government departments and agencies to maintain booked meetings and events (where appropriate) and to bring forward planning and procurement for their planned events over 2020, 2021 and 2022. This could initially be led at the Commonwealth level with an eye to expanding the initiative to include States and Territories.
- (2) Secondly, BECA asks that Commonwealth departments and agencies not cancel existing registrations and sponsorships of events and conferences including not to seek return of deposits, but rather put all bookings that are in the risk category on-hold to be rescheduled for a later date.

### Initiative 1.2 – Australian Business Events Catalyst Fund and Loan Facility

Business events have a long lead time from the planning and booking phase to the actual holding of the event (up to 4-6 years for major international business events). This means that cancellations of planned events and

the lack of new events being planned or booked now due to COVID-19 will impact the industry both over the immediate and longer term. As such, the business events industry may be one of the last industries to recover from the COVID-19 crisis.

This is further impacted by the industry's reliance on international travel. As the Australian economy recovers there will be a strong preference for Australian companies and associations to hold their events domestically only (this may be the case for the next 1-2 years). There will be more certainty about the public health situation here in Australia and greater predictability in necessary travel and meeting arrangements. This is likely also the case for foreign businesses and associations. Further, with international travel set to only return gradually there is a strong need to focus on the domestic business events market. The recovery of business events will be geographically phased as restrictions ease and business confidence returns – intra-state, inter-state, "safe"-regional and "safe"-international.

Business events are driven by business confidence and there is little the business events industry can do itself to stimulate demand across Australian industries and businesses. Currently the demand for business events has completely dropped off with the majority of events scheduled for 2020 in Australia cancelled, postponed or on-hold until there is greater clarity about the lifting of restrictions.<sup>7</sup> Major events scheduled for 2021 are also in doubt.

Without planned events going ahead and new business events being planned, booked and providing cashflow, the industry is largely unable to maintain its workforce when unsupported. As such, the industry is unable to sustain its capacity to recover over the medium-term and be positioned for a strong rebound when market conditions improve. The Government's JobKeeper program will support employees in the industry through to September. Without urgent confirmation that events can go ahead (and with gathering sizes that make it viable, noting the 3-6 month lead times) many businesses will be unable to retain staff beyond the period for which there is Government support.

BECA propose a significant government fund to incentivise Australian businesses and associations to book, plan and hold events before the end of 2021/22.

This initiative could be a demand-side investment extension of Business Events Australia's "Event Here This Year" campaign and would be an important injection of confidence into growth sectors of the Australian economy.

BECA realise the need to balance the focus on bidding for international business events with a targeted public investment to stimulate local events that will contribute to Australia's economic recovery.

An idea for the fund would be to align support to industries key to national economic recovery – where Australia has competitive advantages.

For example, events could be aligned to the Australian Government's Trade and Investment Priority Areas (a focus of the Government's current Bid Fund Program) or its funding of six Growth Centres in sectors of competitive strength and strategic priority. Commonwealth support for priority business events in key sectors of the economy will inject business confidence and enhance the ability of business events to catalyse their recovery and reactivate and grow local employment. Support for trade and consumer shows in these same areas further enhances the contribution of such a fund.

The priority business events fund could also align to the priorities and efforts of the National COVID-19 Coordination Commission.

Features of the program could include:

- A rebate to Australian businesses and associations in key recovery industries to cover the costs of changing their existing event bookings due to COVID-19.
- An incentive payment to Australian businesses and associations to book and hold major new events in Australia before the end of 2021/22. This could include covering part or all of an event deposit, providing a matching portion of the total event costs, providing a rebate per attendee or percentage of event cost at the successful completion of the event.

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<sup>7</sup> *Lost Business Report: Impacts of COVID-19 on the Business Events Industry*, McCrindle, April 2020.

- A Government underwritten loan facility that allows business events to be booked, deposits paid and planning work to commence. If the event needed to be cancelled or postponed as a result of COVID-19 restrictions, the loan would not be repayable. Such an initiative could also be extended to provide a dollar-matched contribution from the Government (a loan repayment of 50% of the total value) for events that meet key criteria and are held before the end of 2021/22.

BECA proposes codesigning the funding criteria with Austrade, Tourism Australia and other key departments and agencies, including consideration of:

- Key industry criteria
- Business, association, exhibition eligibility
- Event size
- Event length (eg full-day, multi-day)
- Event timing (eg held before end of 2021/22)

### Initiative 1.3 – New national business events growth & marketing strategy and online events planning tool

BECA propose the development of a new whole-of-government strategy for growing the business events industry and its economic and employment contribution to Australia. This should be developed in close collaboration with industry and form part of the efforts and strategies of Austrade’s short to medium term rebuild agenda and then also the longer term Tourism 2030 initiative.

At the government-level, the arrangements and policy basis for the business events industry has not changed since the 2008 National Business Event Strategy.<sup>8</sup> The COVID-19 situation will significantly change the domestic and global markets for business events, providing an opportunity to recast the policy and program settings that seek to boost the Australian business events industry.

The development of the strategy could:

- include research on the domestic and international markets (in a phased approach) and an accompanying creative marketing strategy aligned to Austrade’s development of Australia’s Nation Brand and Tourism Australia’s Event Here This Year initiative.
- consider enhancement of national surveys and data collection for business events and be complemented by enhanced data capability.
- include a national audit and infrastructure study of local and regional events industry capacity and potential – transport, venues, accommodation, catering, attractions, events planners, local industries, etc. Such an audit (and its information/data) would support informed planning, investment attraction and growth especially in regional areas. It would also underpin the creation of a public facing, interactive and online events planning tool that stimulates demand for business events and facilitates business event dispersal into more regional parts of the country.
- be led by a new assistant minister/parliamentary secretary for events which would recognise the significance of this market sector and ensure national coordination by bringing together commonwealth, state and territory events ministers to oversee the industry’s recovery and rebound.

### Initiative 1.4 – National business events industry skills & training

BECA is committed to ensuring that industry skills and training initiatives are supported during the recovery phase to maintain and improve the industry’s capacity in light of changed market conditions and requirements. BECA members, develop and deliver accredited education, mentoring and training programs customised for the business events industry and delivered by industry experts, providing continuing education opportunities for professionals in all stages of their career. In the industry’s recovery phase, it will need particular support in bringing through a new cohort of staff, to refresh skills and to support the development of COVIDSafe skills. Industry training organisations, and in particular the industry’s RTO and skills and training leader – Meeting and

<sup>8</sup> Business Events Industry Strategy Group (convened by the Minister for Tourism, Energy and Resources), *A National Business Events Strategy for Australia 2020*, 2008. Available from <<https://www.businesseventscouncil.org.au/files/BES%20full%20doc%20Nov08.pdf>>.

Events Australia, are currently tailoring, extending and fast-tracking additional products and courses that will assist our industry to maintain an engaged workforce and get back on its feet as soon as possible. Some examples of these are outlined below.

### *Fast Track Events Training Scheme*

The business events industry was already experiencing a skills shortage prior to COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> As the event industry recovers, it will need skilled event professionals to plan and deliver business events as the demand for in-person meetings returns. Planning for these events will take some months prior to their delivery.

The Fast Track Events Training Scheme is designed to reskill workers and attract young people to the events industry by funding them to study event management through Universities, Colleges or Vocational Education and Training accredited courses.

The scheme would operate as a scholarship program that would fund an estimated 500 students to study in events. This would also include students in regional Australia as they would be able to access online courses in event management that would reskill and upskill people in regional centres. This is vital to assist students and entry level practitioners located in remote and rural areas to access certified courses and improve the nation's skills base.

Such training would be a targeted investment in ensuring productivity in the short-term and building capacity across our workforce to enable the industry to rebound strongly.

### *COVIDSafe Business Event health and hygiene micro-credential*

A large percentage of the current workforce in the Australian business events industry have been stood down as evidenced in recent research estimating that over 92,000 event professionals have lost their jobs.<sup>9</sup>

The advent of COVID-19 and the repercussions that it will have on the management of business events will involve training to upskill event professionals on the new approaches to health and hygiene.

Given the breadth of the events industry across Australia and the multi-disciplinary nature of the industry it would be practical to develop a national training program that could be offered online to all those working in the business events industry.

This would be a national program that would have input from health experts to ensure proper health standards would apply. The course could be offered free to all the industry to ensure it is accessible to all.

BECA is seeking advice and guidance from government on the most appropriate approach and model to use to sustain our skills and training capacity and where support may be available while the industry recovers.

### *Initiative 1.5 – World-leading health safety practices across Australian business events*

BECA recognises that an opportunity exists to secure a restart of the industry much sooner than the allowances that will need to be made for mass gatherings. Because business events are an extension of the workplace and delivered in a controlled environment, organisers, personnel and attendees are able to take steps that will minimise the health risks from COVID-19. Importantly, this includes that all persons related to a business event are fully contactable and traceable.

As the Government moves to lift restrictions, BECA and its Safety and Hygiene Subcommittee seeks to work closely with officials to ensure a robust and sustainable distinction can be made between mass gatherings and gatherings of people in controlled settings.

The development of COVIDSafe Guidelines for the Business Events Industry underpins this distinction and allows for the restart of business events and the reinvigoration of the businesses, industry groups and associations that rely on business events for their own success, as soon as possible.

### *COVIDSafe Guidelines for the Business Events Industry*

The Guidelines focus on five key areas, providing advice on managing a business event during the planning phase, the event itself and following the event. The Guidelines are to be considered, adapted and implemented by

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<sup>9</sup> *Lost Business Report: Impacts of COVID-19 on the Business Events Industry*, McCrindle, April 2020.

industry stakeholders, and will be updated as health advice develops (using the main sources of Government information including from the Department of Health and Safe Work Australia) and the industry gains experience in best-practice safety and hygiene regimes as knowledge continues to develop about the virus and its characteristics.

The Guidelines:

### *Ensure personnel and personal safety*

- Manage the use of hygiene products and materials (e.g. masks, hand sanitiser)

### *Enable physical distancing*

- Provide barriers, markings and flow directions in all public spaces
- Ensure sufficient size venues to meet government requirements for space/person

### *Increase health and safety measures*

- COVID training for all business events personnel
- Manage access controls, registrations and contact details for all event personnel and attendees
- Health screenings
- Initial deep-clean of venues and equipment
- Enhanced regular cleaning- before, during and after an event
- Sanitation stations – easily accessible and mandatorily used
- Ensure best-practice ventilation
- No-touch policies

### *Implement maximum gathering control*

- Adapt systems and processes including for registrations, catering, crowd flow
- Manage number of attendees

### *Encourage and enforce measures*

- Display measures and sanitation requirements
- Ensure role and routine clarity for all business events personnel, including on-the-day point of contact for managing issues and concerns
- Medical facilities onsite
- Monitor real-time movement of people and have mechanisms in place for corrective action

## Phase 2: Rebound

BECA has focused its immediate efforts on developing the Phase 1 Recovery initiatives as a priority. The Rebound initiatives outlined below are indicative of the areas which BECA and its members will prioritise once the consideration, development and implementation of the chosen set of Recovery initiatives is underway in collaboration with the Government.

### Challenges

Positioning and marketing for success in the new global market.

### Aims

- To position the industry to take advantage of new regional and global market opportunities

### Solutions

- Research, marketing, promotion and facilitation

#### Initiative 2.1 – Bid Fund Program renewal and extension

A commitment to extend and boost the funding available through the Business Events Bid Fund Program and amend the criteria to encourage more bids and provide greater flexibility.

#### Initiative 2.2 – International research, marketing and promotion

Aligned to a new national business events growth and marketing strategy (Recovery Initiative 1.3), BECA calls for funding to support international research, marketing and promotional activities.

#### Initiative 2.3 – Visa simplification for incoming business events attendees

In line with the Government's stated commitment to visa simplification, BECA members are working with the Tourism Visa Advisory Group (convened by the Department of Home Affairs) to examine opportunities to ensure Australia's visa system supports the business events industry. Here, BECA supports the development of mechanisms by which the federal government can waive or reduce visa application fees for large groups of qualified international delegates to stimulate corporate incentive travel in the recovery phase.

#### Initiative 2.4– Export Market Development Grant extension

Continue to increase investment in the Export Market Development Grant (EMDG) scheme in line with demand in order to grow and nurture export opportunities by Australian businesses, including those in the business events industry.

An increase in investment in the EMDG should come with a review of the assessment criteria and funding approach to ensure that those groups and bodies who have the capacity and capability to make significant contributions to rebuilding export markets are able to do so. A particular case in point are the convention bureaux (as approved bodies), whose role it is to market cities and regions to the world with the specific goal of securing large international business events. Currently, they are penalised with regard to grants funding due to their public private partnership structures. The current rules around government funded entities accessing the EMDG effectively limit the amount of overseas promotion convention bureaux can do. Convention bureaux have consistently seen their grants reduced in line with other government funding received, even in instances where the other funding does not relate to the same activities. During the post-COVID rebuilding phase, some minor changes to the EMDG mechanism would enhance the returns to the Australian economy.

#### Initiative 2.5 – Improved Business Events data and metrics

Enhance the survey capacity and capability for business events by investing in a robust aggregated and segmented data system (as identified by the Beyond Tourism 2020 Steering Committee). While there are some data tools currently used in the industry, these are sporadic, often based in individual jurisdictions and do not form part of a national system that allows for holistic insight and assessment of contribution and performance.

Early work indicates that for less than \$500,000, a national data collection tool could be developed and rolled out as a partnership between Government and industry, where industry takes responsibility for data collection from a wide cross section of business events. From a time-series perspective, the post-COVID operating

environment provides the perfect time to commence a new approach to the collection, monitoring and analysis of the business events industry.

## About BECA

The Business Events Council of Australia (BECA) was formed in 1994 as a peak industry body for the business events industry to liaise with the federal government and relevant agencies on matters common to all segments of the business events industry.

The Council provides a formalised umbrella structure for the key industry associations operating in the Australian business events industry. BECA's members are:

- Association of Australian Convention Bureaux (AACB)
- Australian Convention Centres Group (ACCG)
- Exhibition and Event Association of Australasia (EAAA)
- Meetings and Events Australia (MEA)
- Professional Conference Organisers Association Inc (PCOA)
- International Convention and Congress Association (ICCA) - Australian Chapter

It is BECA's role to develop business events industry positions on issues of common interest and communicate those views to government and relevant agencies. BECA also provides a forum for the industry associations to exchange information and cooperate on appropriate matters, with a view to strengthening and growing the business events industry in Australia.

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