

For immediate release
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Tourism industry calls for North Qld travel bubble

The tourism industry is calling for a North Queensland bubble allowing unrestricted travel in the Cairns, Townsville, Whitsundays, Mackay and Outback regions by June 12 when Stage 2 COVID-19 restrictions start.

Regional Tourism Organisations Tourism Tropical North Queensland (TTNQ), Townsville Enterprise, Mackay Tourism, Tourism Whitsundays and the Outback Queensland Tourism Association are urging the State Government to lift the 250km restriction on recreational travel within North Queensland.

Tourism Whitsundays Chief Executive Officer, Tash Wheeler acknowledges the great work the government have been doing to guide Queenslanders through such a terribly challenging time.

“Premier Palaszczuk and her government have been navigating us through uncharted waters! There was no instruction manual for how to handle this; I believe our state government has shown leadership through such uncertainty, because of this we have had no positive cases in the Whitsundays for over a month,” Mrs Wheeler said.

The North Queensland region is from the Marlborough Stretch north, and the unrestricted travel call does not include the lockdown arrangements for Indigenous communities.

James Cook University (JCU) Professor in Medicine John McBride, who is based at the Cairns Clinical School, said JCU academics were keen to work with the tourism industry in North Queensland to develop guidelines to ensure the safe reopening of the businesses.

Tourism Whitsundays CEO, Tash Wheeler said North Queensland does not have the population base of the South East Queensland to support tourism businesses.

“Our regions are so reliant on tourism; I don’t believe a one size fits all approach can work across Queensland, which is why we need an extension on the 250-kilometre zone.

“The upcoming school holidays will be an opportunity for many tourism operators. And as such, they have been preparing their business to ensure they are COVID safe and adhere to the guidelines laid out by the federal government.

“We need to see North Queensland reopen as soon as possible with a travel bubble as well as fast-tracking our region to Stage 3 to enable businesses to reopen prior to these school holidays; it will be the start of what is needed to re-energise the North Queensland economy.” Mrs Wheeler said.

Mackay Tourism Chief Executive Officer Tas Webber said the blueprint is there for this plan to be activated.

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“We’re calling for what has already been earmarked for the outback region in Stage 2, where travel within the region for recreational purposes is allowed, is applied to the wider North Queensland region from Mackay north to Cairns and west to the Northern Territory border,” he said.

The five tourism bodies are encouraging the Queensland Government to consider the processes in place in Western Australia, Northern Territory, and South Australia where broader interstate travel has relaxed due to low infection rates, similar to the situation here in North Queensland.

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