

MEDIA STATEMENT



THE HEART OF THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

For immediate release
August 5, 2020

URGENT JOBKEEPER EXEMPTIONS REQUIRED FOR THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

The Whitsundays is asking, “can the Federal Government provide an exemption to eligible tourism and hospitality businesses to allow them to access JobKeeper for new employees?”

The tourism and hospitality industry, particularly in The Whitsundays, ordinarily has a high turnover rate of staff, many of which are transient. This has resulted in a significant number of tourism and hospitality employees leaving their jobs during the pandemic to return home to family or to take up roles in industries less affected by COVID 19.

For businesses looking to rebuild and recommence operations, many are forced to recruit new staff to replace those that have left. Newly recruited staff by default are not eligible to receive JobKeeper payments and, as such, the Jobkeeper support shrinks markedly for the industry and every month border closures apply.

Over the past four months, at least 25% of the tourism and hospitality staff in The Whitsundays have become ineligible to receive JobKeeper. This number will continue to increase over the next four months, as many businesses have lost in some case 50% of previously underwritten JobKeeper staff and have had to replace them with full cost personnel. The payments to support tourism and hospitality businesses in the Whitsunday region have halved over the past eight months, while operating costs have remained consistent with what they were prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key representatives from the Whitsunday tourism industry are unambiguous in their message on behalf of the entire sector, to implore the federal government to provide exemptions through the JobKeeper package for tourism and hospitality businesses. The eligibility criteria connected to JobKeeper for many of these businesses are having a drastic impact on the financial viability in the short and longer term.

Many of The Whitsundays iconic tourism businesses commenced operations again in June, or will be reopening over the next four weeks; therefore, they have needed to employ new staff to fill empty positions. Hamilton Island, the largest employer of tourism and hospitality staff in the region, reopened Saturday 1st August. Visitation to Hamilton Island currently is made up of 70% interstate visitors, predominantly from NSW and VIC. With the Queensland border now closed to these visitors, critical impacts will be felt not only for Hamilton Island but right across all businesses in this tourism reliant region.

As Australia enters the second wave of COVID-19, these businesses are relying on the Federal Government’s JobKeeper stimulus to survive. However, with so many new employees not eligible and the border closures in place, the financial impacts will be dire for the Queensland tourism industry.

- ENDS -

The Whitsundays, located in the heart of the Great Barrier Reef, surrounded by 74 island wonders and home to the pure white silica sands of Whitehaven Beach. A visit to The Whitsundays is a feast for the senses. The stunning natural landscapes of coast and islands are dotted with secluded beaches, resorts and friendly towns. Whether you choose to base yourself on the coast or on the islands, there’s so much to do; you will have to work out how to fit it all in!

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**Tourism
Whitsundays**

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About Tourism Whitsundays: Tourism Whitsundays (TW) is the organisation responsible for destination marketing and visitor attraction for the Whitsunday region. It is the lead agency recognised by Tourism and Events Queensland and the Whitsunday Regional Council to lead the promotion of the region as a tourism destination. Tourism Whitsundays markets all aspects of the region including the Great Barrier Reef, Whitsunday Islands and Coast, accommodation, boating and sailing, fishing, touring, recreational activities, adventure, dining, shopping, weddings and honeymoons, conferencing and business events.

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