

“Downright abhorrent” - AFTA

AFTA CEO Dean Long has pulled no punches in his assessment of the \$74 million underspend in the Government’s COVID-19 Consumer Travel Support Program (CTSP) (*TD* yesterday), furiously urging members to call and email their local Federal MP and ask for the immediate release of the approved funds.

“There have never been businesses in more need of support, and to be told as part of the Grant Process that being 90% down in revenue was not enough to be eligible for the full support package is downright abhorrent,” a member update yesterday said.

While AFTA has no expectation of a third round of the program, the release of the money - described by Austrade as “funding that wasn’t needed” - is part of a combined campaign also backed by CATO and ATEC, with the industry urged to tell Governments to “please release the funds. You have approved them. We need them. We need them to keep supporting travelling Australians”.

Etihad slashes commission

ETIHAD is the latest carrier to join the commission cutting frenzy for the Australian market, yesterday advising its local travel agent partners that it will reduce base commission to just 1% on Economy class bookings.

The move is being implemented on 01 Jul this year - the same date that cuts announced by rivals including Qantas and Emirates take effect.

“As the world begins to open up and return to some sense of normality, it’s clear that we still face some significant challenges and it may yet be some time until we can be confident that the impact of the pandemic is behind us,” the carrier’s update said.

“As part of our recovery strategy, and so that we can ensure we operate a competitive cost model, we have taken the tough but necessary decision to reduce our base commission for travel agents in Australia and New Zealand to 1% for Economy and 2% for First and Business bookings,” the carrier said.

“This decision has not been taken lightly, and we remain

committed to working with our valued travel agent community on this transition to a more sustainable partnership that ensures our mutual success.

“Thank you in advance for your continued support as we build a competitive yet viable model for the future,” the update concluded.

Etihad has been operating a limited schedule of flights to Australia during the pandemic, but last month announced the return of daily Sydney and Melbourne services to Abu Dhabi effective 27 Mar (*TD* 14 Feb).

Other airlines which have slashed base commission for local travel agents include Cathay Pacific, Singapore Airlines, American Airlines, Hawaiian Airlines as well as QF and EK.

Wings Away Travel out of ATAS

MELBOURNE’S Wings Away Travel & Cruiseland has had its participation in the AFTA Travel Accreditation Scheme (ATAS) cancelled.

The formal notice on the AFTA website says the agency breached Section 2.5 (d) of the ATAS Charter, which relates to business compliance and governance.

AFTA’s “Cancelled ATAS Participants” page is also now only listing ATAS members who have been suspended or cancelled, rather than those who have voluntarily withdrawn.

Today’s issue of *TD*

Travel Daily today has six pages of news including **Business Events News**, plus a full page from **Entire Travel Group**.

SAA refund access

SOUTH African Airways has advised that Australian and NZ travel agents can now apply for refunds of unused tickets through BSP Link or via consolidators.

Fare penalties will be waived for tickets issued prior to 24 Mar 2020, for travel from 20 Mar 2020 through to 26 Aug 2021, and there is a \$60 processing fee for all BSP refund applications.

Any new refund applications that have been submitted after 01 Jul 2021 are automatically being processed by the SAA team.

Agents can also alternatively register tickets for credit vouchers until the end of this month (by emailing EMDRedemption@flysaa.com), and once the original ticket has been converted to a voucher it can be used to book a new ticket, or transfer to another traveller until 31 Mar 2023.

Reissues must be completed by 30 Jun 2022.

SAA was placed into bankruptcy protection some months before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (*TD* 04 Dec 2019), and although it’s now once again flying within Africa, has said it is unlikely to relaunch long-haul routes such as PER-JNB without a fleet renewal.

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Tourism Aust plots future

TOURISM Australia (TA) MD Phillipa Harrison today laid out an optimistic vision for the industry's post-COVID recovery, highlighting key trends which are shaping the organisation's campaigns and future activity.

Harrison revealed the details of recent international consumer demand research and insights, saying the pandemic represented a "once-in-a-lifetime - I hope - reset moment and opportunity for renewal".

She highlighted that there is an estimated \$5 trillion stockpiled in bank accounts due to isolation downtime around the world, meaning international visitors are "looking to spend up and pamper themselves".

"As a destination that has always been perceived as expensive, this is a moment in time where people will be less sensitive about cost and see what we have to offer as higher value for money," she said.

The pandemic has seen people refocus on self, family and wellness, and part of that is seeing them look to tourism - a trend that could likely manifest as increased solo travel, holidays to reconnect with family and friends, and an increasing wellness element to travel.

Reconnecting with nature is also a fundamental driver as travellers seek wide open spaces and wilderness, with Harrison saying the research had indicated a craving for authentic wildlife

experiences.

Other trends which Australia can capitalise upon include the growing importance of sustainability in customer consideration, while "our Indigenous story is significantly growing in appeal".

"We need to educate people that it is not just desert, dot painting and weaving - it can be adventure, food and urban experiences, integrated into any itinerary and accessible anywhere in Australia," Harrison noted.

The rising cohort of "Digital Nomads" also provides an opportunity, Harrison said, with a likely trend to longer stays as people can work from anywhere.

The Tourism Australia MD said the organisation would continue its focus on high yielding travellers, who fly long-haul on a regular basis and "spend a large amount of their discretionary income on travel".

TA will maintain its focus on the 15 core source markets which represented 80% of inbound business in 2019, Harrison said.

"Brand" will be the top priority for the year ahead "as we take on the challenge of reminding the world that Australia is open and ready to welcome travellers back," she confirmed, with the current *Don't Go Small, Go Australia* promotion to be followed by another major global campaign towards the end of the year - more from Destination Australia on **page five**.

TTC's big solo push

THE Travel Corporation (TTC) today confirmed "substantial changes" to its approach to solo travel, with free and significantly reduced single supplement offers across brands including Trafalgar, Insight Vacations, Luxury Gold and Costsaver trips in 2022/23.

"TTC wants to make it easier and better value for solo travellers to return to travel, & for agents to tap into new markets and ultimately sell more," said The Travel Corporation President, Gavin Tollman.

"We are excited to be able to offer this to solo travellers so they can get back to doing what they love, seeing and experiencing the world, with the complete peace of mind they experience when travelling with our all-ages guided brands," he said.

"Importantly, we are happy to also be supporting our agent partners in bringing new offerings to market which will help them sell more," Tollman added.



Window Seat

IT'S not often that *Travel Daily* gets a mention in Parliament, but we're thrilled to report that the Hansard transcript of a Senate Estimates Committee hearing last month confirmed **TD** is how senior bureaucrats get their travel industry news.

Samantha Palmer, Austrade GM of Visitor Economy, was questioned by Senator Don Farrell about whether she reads travel sector publications.

Her very gratifying response was "I read *Travel Daily*. That's a trade magazine".

Slightly disappointingly, she added "I don't read it absolutely every day, but I do read it quite regularly, yes."

Samantha, we salute you and hope we can continue to help keep you (and the rest of the industry) informed.

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SIA links DWN/CNS

SINGAPORE Airlines will resume flights to Darwin and Cairns from the end of the month in line with a progressive ramp up of its international network.

The carrier confirmed it will fly three times weekly between Darwin and Singapore from 29 Mar using a Boeing 737-800NG aircraft via a denoted VTL service. Meanwhile Cairns services will be reactivated as a daily flight on 28 Mar, moving to three times a week from 30 Mar on board a narrow-body Boeing 737-800NG aircraft.

Rail Online discounts

RAIL Online is reminding agents that it is offering a 10% discount on Eurail Global Passes until 10 Apr for travel anytime within the next 11 months.

No booking fees apply and advisors can earn 7% commission on sales and the chance of scoring a \$50 gift voucher.

ACCC ticks CTM, HLO deal

THE Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's (ACCC) informal merger review of the acquisition of Helloworld Travel Limited's corporate operations by Corporate Travel Management (*TD* 11 Jan) has concluded that the deal is "unlikely to result in a substantial lessening of competition" (*TD* breaking news).

After particularly focusing on large clients, ACCC Chairman Rod Sims acknowledged that CTM and Helloworld Corporate are close competitors, in particular for government contracts.

"However the ACCC considered that Flight Centre will remain a strong local competitor able to compete for these contracts.

"In addition to Flight Centre, there are large overseas-based TMCs such as Amex GBT, BCD and CWT who could expand in Australia if CTM sought to increase prices," Sims said.

He added that large customers

may also be able to sponsor entry or expansion, "therefore the ACCC considers that there will likely be sufficient competition post-merger to constrain CTM".

The ACCC said it had consulted a wide range of market participants including competitors, customers, suppliers and industry bodies.

"Most market participants, including customers, did not express concerns about the proposed acquisition," Sims said.

Helloworld CEO Andrew Burnes said the company currently expects the transaction to be completed at the end of Mar.

The overall deal is worth \$175 million, including \$100 million in cash and \$75 million in Corporate Travel Management stock, which will be held in escrow for a year.

Helloworld brands included in the sale include QBT, AOT Hotels, TravelEdge and Show Group in Australia, as well as APX and Atlas Travel in New Zealand.

G sanctions Russia

G ADVENTURES has made the call to cancel all tours in Russia, with travellers booked on departures to be fully refunded.

In a wide-ranging response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, CEO Bruce Poon Tip also noted the operator would no longer accept Russian nationals who reside inside Russia to go on its trips, nor will it be taking bookings from Russian agencies.

"Unfortunately, these sanctions and forced global isolation will impact everyday people who may not agree with - and who may even be brave enough to protest - their country's politics," Poon Tip lamented, adding the new policy was essential in applying pressure to "invoke change".

"At this advanced stage where war has already commenced, there are only three options: deposed leadership, a complete regime change, or retreat from actions already taken," Poon Tip argued.

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Conflict clearing the air

FOLLOWING the Russian invasion of Ukraine, hordes of airlines are cancelling or rescheduling services which overfly the two countries.

In addition to cancelling all flights to Russia, KLM Royal Dutch Airlines has also ceased four services which overfly the country - Amsterdam to Seoul, Shanghai, Beijing and Tokyo.

Swiss International Air Lines has also cancelled all flights to Russia, and three overflying services, to Shanghai, Beijing and Tokyo.

Virgin Atlantic will no longer overfly Russia, however it has not cancelled any of its services, instead Virgin told **Travel Daily** that such flights, from Islamabad to London and Manchester; and London to LHE and DEL, will take anywhere from 15-60 minutes longer than typically scheduled.

Japan Airlines' flight from Tokyo-Helsinki will continue

Virtuoso expands

HOT on the heels of adding six new travel agency members in Australia to its network (**TD** 02 Mar), Virtuoso has added 12 local members to its Regional Preferred Partner Program.

The initiative, which launched last year, provides Virtuoso-affiliated travel advisors with access to exclusive experiences.

Twelve new partner members have been added in recent weeks, including four tour operators; Australian Geographic Travel, Australian Luxury Escapes, Crooked Compass and Renaissance Tours.

Further additions to the program include Shangri-La The Marina, Sofitel Auckland Viaduct Harbour, Sofitel Fiji Resort and Spa, Sofitel Queenstown Hotel and Spa, Sofitel Wellington, The Fullerton Hotel Sydney, The Reef House Boutique Hotel and Spa, and The Old Clare Hotel.

For more details on Virtuoso members & suppliers, see **HERE**.

to overfly Russia, despite the airline cancelling its flights to the country and suspending its European codeshares with Finnair (as well as British Airways).

JAL also revealed its HND-HEL service "may reroute depending on the situation".

MEANWHILE, as the airline industry continues to recover from the pandemic, and fights its way through the Russo-Ukrainian war, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) said it only expects air passenger numbers to climb beyond 2019 levels by 2024.

IATA said traveller numbers are expected to reach 4 billion in two years' time - 103% of pre-pandemic numbers.

TA seeks US partner

TOURISM Australia (TA) is reportedly on the hunt for a new North American PR agency as part of its continued assault on the US market to restart the country's tourism sector.

TA is searching for an agency to develop creative activations in the US that would augment its existing global marketing campaigns, with the short-term focus to be supporting the reopening of international borders and the resumption of key travel channels.

QF ups gear to PER

MORE than 23,000 passengers are booked to travel this week on Qantas and Jetstar flights to and from Perth, Qantas Group confirmed this week, with CEO Alan Joyce labelling the resumption of WA air travel as an "emotional week" for Aussies.

Since the reopening date for WA was announced on 18 Feb, Qantas and Jetstar have added 60 return interstate flights for each week in Mar - representing around 40% of the Group's pre-COVID capacity.

Let (travel) freedom ring!



NEW Visit USA Australia President, The Great American West's Caroline Davidson, believes the United States is ready for an influx of Aussies now that the two countries are finally open to each other.

Speaking to **Travel Daily** at the Visit USA Australia Hybrid Expo last night (**inset**), where she was elected the chapter's new President, Davidson said concerns about other markets around the world - particularly Europe - would make booking a trip to the United States an even more simple and likely proposition for Australian travellers.

"The stability in America, and the affiliation with wide open spaces, are the things that people are looking for in travel right now," Davidson declared.

"I've just got back from [the United States], I found it as welcoming and as exciting and as amazing as ever, probably even more so.

"Australians have travel to the US in their hearts, they're huge repeat travellers to the US, and I think we're just holding back the floodgates."

Davidson's hopes are shared by markets she represents through The Great American West - which acts on behalf of destinations such as the Dakotas, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming - states which are crying out for the visitation of Australian skiers they missed during the pandemic.

"The ski areas that are hugely popular with Australian skiers," Davidson enthused.

"Australia was hit with the Omicron variant, a wave they



weren't expecting, and so I think that possibly that was something that the American ski fields were looking forward to that they didn't quite get.

"All of that pent-up demand, I'm warning those ski fields, it's coming...that pent-up demand is already realising itself in earlier forward bookings than previously."

Davidson was confirmed last night as Visit USA Australia's next President, taking over from Kent Marketing's Lucy Rowe, who will now serve as Secretary.

The rest of the Committee will be comprised of Vice President David Clark (Tauck), Treasurer James Hewlett (Collette), and fellow members Nicole Bennett (Delta Air Lines), Belinda Harvy (Discover The World), Penny Brand (Gate 7), Joanne Motta (Utah Office Of Tourism), Andrea Robinson (Disney Destinations), Jennifer Gaskin (Hawaii Tourism Oceania), Anne Lee (I Love NY), Tommy Lindblad (United Airlines), Amber Wilson (Rocky Mountaineer), and Carolyn Nightingale (Linkd Tourism).

In all, more than 60 travel advisors heard from more than 20 American exhibitors yesterday evening at QVB's The Tea Room in Sydney, with ever-zany Richard Reid emceeding the night.

Pictured are Julie King & Associates PR & Communications Director Sarah Stevenson with Davidson, Reid and Rowe.



HEADBOX MAKES ITS VIC DEBUT

UK-HEADQUARTERED event technology company HeadBox has made its debut in the Victorian market following successful launches in the Sydney, Brisbane and Perth markets.

The company's specialist platform is designed to match event organisers with venues, as well as plan, track and manage event spend more efficiently.

CEO of HeadBox Australia, Ali Lord (**pictured**), said the launch of HeadBox in Victoria was timely as the state's events industry is poised to bounce back from the worst of the pandemic.

"Over the past 18 months we've seen many businesses restructure event teams and a large decline in event professionals, now with the hospitality industry reopening and events back on the agenda, businesses are looking to new technologies and outsourcing



strategies to plug the resource gap," Lord said.

"Our technology streamlines venue research, digitises proposals, shares data and insights and provides access to in-house event planning to source creative solutions and do the heavy lifting," she added.

HeadBox claims its software enables planners to save around 20% on their annual spend and roughly eight hours of time per event operated.

The next local markets in the company's sights are Adelaide and Canberra, which will likely see a rollout later this year.

TA focuses on business events

TOURISM Australia (TA) continues to promote the local business events sector, with MD Phillipa Harrison leading the charge today by hosting one of the largest gatherings since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 2022 Destination Australia event (see **page 2**) at Melbourne's CENTREPIECE welcomed more than 600 in-person delegates, as well as over 400 who joined online from across the country and the world.

As well as outlining a range of initiatives and campaigns, Harrison noted that "our work in business events hasn't slowed down".

"Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have helped secure 35 events through our Bid Fund program, launched a domestic campaign and rebuilt our international assets including our website.

"Given the size of the prize, it remains a critical pillar and focus for us," she said.

Harrison said targeting business events visitation was part of TA's ongoing focus on high-yielding travellers, with Australia's location meaning it's a "place where people have to invest time and money to visit".

Ideas exchange

FCM Meetings & Events and Marina Bay Sands are set to launch a revamped "Ideas Exchange" to meet the needs of the MICE & travel industry.

The new concept will see event partners and thought leaders meet over dinner to discuss the sector's biggest questions & pose new ideas, with the first event taking place tonight in Sydney.

Tough WA rules slam events sector

WHILE much of the headlines this week have centred on Western Australia's borders easing, the state has also implemented tough new caps on public outdoor events.

In line with the state's own health advice to deal with an influx of visitors, outdoor events will be limited to 500 people, with attendees also mandated to wear masks and stay two square metres apart.

The new regulations will impact a host of events slated to take place in WA soon, including a Jimmy Barnes concert planned this month.

In response to the strict measures, Missy Higgins said she was cancelling both of her WA gigs this weekend, while Midnight Oil also stated the band would either cancel or reschedule gigs, labelling the policy "deeply frustrating".

ICC reconciliation

INTERNATIONAL Convention Centre Sydney (ICC Sydney) has launched its second Reconciliation Action Plan this week.

The two-year strategy document will see the venue work with First Nations businesses through its supply chain, greater community engagement, and work with recruiters to attract more First Nations staff.

MEETINGS 2022

A NEW host city, a new venue and new exhibitors are all set to be unveiled at Business Events Industry Aotearoa's MEETINGS 2022 taking place on 15 and 16 Jun in Otautahi, Christchurch.

"With many of our over 150 exhibitors at MEETINGS for the first time, the show floor will be buzzing with activity, and creative energy from across New Zealand," BEIA Chief Executive Officer Lisa Hopkins said.

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Ready for a ride to the top



CT PARTNERS is optimistic about the year ahead following positive outcomes from a recent member meeting in Sydney.

Held at the Hyatt Regency Sydney, the meeting provided an opportunity for network and supplier updates, as well as for the group to meet new members from ATPI and Aurora Travel.

The focus throughout the day was analysing the current economic and business challenges that lay ahead both externally & within the industry.

CT also heard from guest speakers, including Applied Sense's Jorge Fernandez, who covered a wide range of topics, including the need for new

fee structures, new customer approaches and optimising what success looks like in the procurement process.

The business finished the day with a presentation from Mandarin Oriental Bangkok's Geoffrey Webb and Peter Hession, with plans afoot for CT's next conference to return to its "home" in the Thai city later in 2022, after a two-year absence.

At the end of the day, CT members and management were joined by 20 key supplier partners for drinks, with all in attendance, including Chief Executive Officer Matt Masson, agreeing it was fantastic to be able to meet colleagues face-to-face again.

APPOINTMENTS



WELCOME to Industry Appointments, *Travel Daily's* Thursday feature which has the latest job appointments from across the industry. If you have just appointed someone to a new position and would like to update the industry email appointments@traveldaily.com.au.

Julie Rogers has recently started a new position representing the **Ponant** and **Paul Gauguin** brands in the local market. Rogers is now the Director of Sales in the Asia Pacific, after enjoying more than seven years with Ponant working in various business development roles. Before joining the cruise line, Rogers was the Group Sales Manager Asia Pacific for Rocky Mountaineer.

SKYE Suites has announced the appointment of **Barbara Liu** as Director of Finance for the group. She arrives in the role with more than 16 years of finance experience, having worked across various senior finance roles with different brands under the Accor portfolio, including Accor Invest Hotel Portfolio and The Ovolo Group. Her work has taken her abroad in the past, including stints in Singapore.

Air Canada has recruited **Eunica Pineda** to be its new Sales and Marketing Specialist in the Australia and New Zealand markets. She was previously working with the carrier as its Revenue and Sales Optimisation Coordinator, and before that was with Singapore Airlines for two years working in various sales roles.

Air transport provider **Accelya** has appointed **Abdullah ('Apo') Ozkececi** as SVP Commercial & Regional Head for Asia Pacific. Ozkececi will be based in Singapore and lead the commercial and contractual relationship between the business and airline customers in countries including Australia and New Zealand.



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