



AUSTRALIAN
CAMPS ASSOCIATION
More people outdoors more often

Victorian camps sector in crisis

Value of the outdoors

There are 190 camps in Victoria, offering experiences to groups from all backgrounds – schools, faith-based groups, families, sporting clubs, special interests, etc, etc.

The sector totals 24,000 beds and turns over around \$285M p.a.

The [Australian Camps Association \(ACA\)](#) estimates that the camps sector provides outdoor education programs (focusing on personal development qualities such as resilience, independence, leadership and communication) for in excess of 145,000 Victorian primary and secondary students per annum.

The issue

Australian Camps Association members are experiencing severe financial stress as a result of COVID-19. This has been exacerbated by the Department of Education and Training's (DET's) advice to schools in mid-March to cancel or postpone all camps. This advice has not been updated since.

In the absence of any updated advice, schools and school councils are defaulting to the original directive, despite other state's progress on this matter, and the fact that camps are in fact both open and well prepared to manage the safety of participants and their own staff.

The camp sector in Victoria lost in excess of \$125M in term 1 and term 2 forward bookings within two days of the original DET directive. This looks set to repeat into terms 3 and 4 as schools now begin to cancel their camp programs that had been deferred from earlier in the year.

No one doubts that this was a necessary action at the time, however there is no reason to continue to follow this path given the easing of restrictions in all other areas.

Benefits of camps for young people

Independent research www.oypra.org.au clearly shows that camps (1) decrease anxiety, (2) increase connection to schools, (3) increase connection to peers and (4) increase efficacy. There is no better way to improve every student's mental and physical health than to take part in a camp, especially as students return to school following such a long period of social isolation.

The camp experience is the ideal way to re-integrate and re-socialise students.

Impact on regional economies

Camps are almost universally located in regional Victoria, and thus rely on local communities for support services (activity, catering, housekeeping and maintenance staff, transport and food supplies). COVID-19 comes hard on the heels of a severe bushfire season with its attendant bushfire smoke and air quality concerns which had a severe impact on regional towns. We must understand that this is an issue that affects the livelihoods of entire regional communities, not 'just' camps.

The camps sector is well prepared to return to work

The ACA has worked with [Outdoors Victoria \(OV\)](#), the [Outdoor Council of Australia \(OCA\)](#) and other outdoor peak bodies across Australia to provide the resources our members need to safely return to work. These resources include a [COVIDSafe Workplace Plan for Camps](#), a [COVID-19 Guidance Document for Camps](#) (co-produced with the [Christian Venues Association](#)) and a Return to Play Plan for Camps (under preparation).

What we are asking

We simply ask DET to provide guidance to schools that will allow the camps sector to plan for a timely return to service. Continued tardiness in providing advice will be disastrous to the Victorian camps sector, indeed there may very well not be a camp sector if this situation is to continue indefinitely.

We confirm that our sector is not looking to proceed outside of health guidelines, but is keen to follow the lead set by other states in phasing camps back into the school agenda.

For more information

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