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MEDIA STATEMENT

International tourism numbers represent calm before future statistical storm

Today's release by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) of short-term overseas visitor arrivals for the 2020 financial half year (to 31 December 2020) will disappointingly deliver the likely high-point in international tourism for our country into the foreseeable future.

Taking the future January 2020 reporting period into account and timing of Chinese New Year, the December 2019 ABS figures represents the marker around how the major impact of the summer bushfire crisis and onset of coronavirus on our tourism and visitor economy will be assessed.

ABS Overseas Visitor Arrivals data for the year to December 2019 produced 9.4 million in short-term visitor arrivals. On paper this is another record inbound visitor outcome for Australian tourism.

The figures indicate China has been replaced by New Zealand as our largest inbound market in visitor volume for the first time in some period, restoring a historic precedent. China has been both the leading inbound international market in numerical terms, but still remains of greatest financial value to the Australian tourism industry.

ATIC's strong concern remains for many Australian tourism enterprises, particularly in our regions and how they're coping, given the dramatic slide in Chinese visitors that has been occurring.

ATIC Executive Director Simon Westaway said the backdated figures prove what a strong and vibrant export sector tourism is within the Australian economy, the 1 million Australians the sector directly employs and over 300,000 local enterprises that deliver world-class appealing product.

"Sadly, these strong international tourism visitor figures to the 2020 financial half year represent a calm before the future statistical storm from the subsequent dual impacts of the bushfire crisis and rapid emergence of coronavirus impacting international travel to Australia amongst our major source markets," Mr Westaway said.

"Both industry and Australian governments need to be collectively credited for sticking the course around a robust, long-term tourism and visitor economy plan – *Tourism2020* – of which the next future chapter *Tourism2030* will aim to build upon and beat. *Tourism2030* will require greater adaptation around industry resilience, improved sustainable performance of small tourism business enterprises and greater leveraging of a larger suite of visitor markets to offset any single market decline.

"The time for strategizing is some time away as ATIC believes this unprecedented set of conditions driven by coronavirus and directly afflicting our \$150 billion visitor economy requires immediate responsive action to better support beleaguered tourism enterprises and regions. ATIC last week constructively outlined areas of opportunity to the Australian Government.

"ATIC stands as one with our industry and the Australian Government around the current appropriate public health response to coronavirus. But we also continue to take a stand around how we must effectively and swiftly pivot and best partner with the Chinese visitor market at the right strategic time when the opportunity soon presents."

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