20 January 2020

**Sport and big business come together**

**to support bushfire-affected regions**

The **Victoria Tourism Industry Council (VTIC)** is delighted by the announcement made today by Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Martin Pakula bringing sport and big business to the heart of Victoria’s bushfire-affected regions.

**Victoria Tourism Industry Council Chief Executive Felicia Mariani** said this initiative will give a much-needed boost to regional communities trying to recover from the recent bushfire crisis in East Gippsland and the High Country.

“The devastating bushfires at the start of the new year have decimated the tourism industry at a crucial time when they would generate more than half the annual income in their businesses. Mass cancellations, and forward bookings that have all but dried up, have put incredible stress on our industry and they need people returning and putting money back into these communities,” Ms Mariani said.

“With over 115 organisations committing within days of the callout to hold their meetings and conferences in our bushfire-affected areas, this is the kind of support these regions desperately need. The outpouring of generosity from people around the world has been overwhelming, but what these communities are asking for right now is for people to come back and stay with them.”

These organisations have all pledged to stay a minimum of two nights on their regional visits and will look to commence these trips in the coming weeks and months. There is confidence that these initial businesses will pave the way for many more organisations to pledge their intention to bring their meetings to these affected areas.

VTIC is pleased to be able to support the pledging platform and coordination of these regional business meetings through Business Events Victoria (BEV). BEV is singularly focused on attracting business events to regional Victoria and is perfectly placed to assist in this important project. More information can be found at [www.businesseventsvictoria.com/bushfirepledge](http://www.businesseventsvictoria.com/bushfirepledge).

“This is the kind of commitment to regional areas we need to see, and not just from the business community. We can all do our part by booking a visit to regional Victoria. With the Australia Day long-weekend just around the corner and the Labour Day and Easter holidays approaching now is the perfect time to make your personal pledge to visit regional Victoria,” Ms Mariani said.

“The entire industry has been impacted by unprecedented cancellations creating a catastrophic cashflow crisis for our regional tourism operators and they need visitors coming back to support their towns and local communities.

“It’s great to see that high-profile personalities are also getting behind this recovery initiative by helping to spread this important message to their extensive network of followers. People like Rachel Griffiths and Dave Hughes are incredibly influential in shaping and shifting perceptions. Their support in encouraging people to get out and visit these affected areas will be invaluable to the effort.”

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*The Victoria Tourism Industry Council (VTIC) is the peak body for Victoria’s tourism and events industry, providing one united industry voice. Tourism and events are growth industries for Victoria and contribute more than $31 billion to the state economy each year and employ more than 230,000 people.*