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## **ABS data reflects bleak reality of Victoria's tourism industry**

The Victoria Tourism Industry Council (VTIC) sees the latest figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as a stark warning of the dire situation being faced by the state's tourism sector. The data shows that Victoria is the worst impacted state, with a decline of 7.3% in payroll jobs since commencement of COVID-19 restrictions in mid-March.

**VTIC Chief Executive Felicia Mariani** said, "These latest stats from ABS reflect the sad reality of what our industry has been through and continues to experience in the grip of the coronavirus pandemic. While a decrease in job performance in the state was the worst in the nation at 7.3% against a national decline of 5.6%, Victoria was also hit the hardest in the Accommodation and Food Services area, with a decline of 24.4% since mid-March as compared to a national average of an 18.1% decrease."

Regional Victoria was equally affected with some of the highest drops in job performance in the nation, topping double-digit deficits in two regions.

"Latrobe-Gippsland and the North West of the state topped the chart, both seeing a 10.2% decline in payroll jobs for the region from mid-March to 11 July.

"Inner Melbourne, however, has not been shielded from this pain, reflecting a 9.2% decrease in performance since the inception of Stage 3 restrictions. While we have always relied on our capital city as the engine room to drive tourism performance in our state, we need to recognise that the city has been incredibly marginalised through this pandemic.

"Major events, business events, live performances and international visitation have supercharged the growth of Melbourne's visitor economy over the last five years. With these key assets off the table for the foreseeable future, the impacts on our capital city have been palpable," Ms Mariani said.

As new coronavirus cases in Victoria continue to climb, the sector is bracing for advice as to whether restrictions will be extended come 19 August, meaning tourism and hospitality operations will need to maintain their limited trade or full hibernation even longer.

"Lockdown 2.0 has shattered our operators across the state and the glimmer of hope that was created during early reactivation in June has all but extinguished through July. Many operators are now facing the grim prospect that they may not be able to survive through to the other side of this crisis.

"It's imperative that industry is engaged with Government now to start planning for whatever the reopening phase may look like. Operators across the events, live performance, tour and transport and attractions sectors have done incredible work to illustrate how focused and prepared they are in providing a safe and regimented process to support reopening.

"While we appreciate it's impossible to put a timeline or target on when that might occur in the current circumstances, getting the industry involved now in shaping the steps to reactivation is vital to the future of the industry," Ms Mariani said.

**Media contacts: Ellana Katos: 0400 976 889 | Felicia Mariani: 0477 113 370**