



April 2021

Committees for our Cities and Regions call for a nationally consistent approach to post COVID recovery, supported by structural reforms

The Committees for Cities and Regions Australia and New-Zealand network renews its call for a consistent and collaborative approach across local, state and national jurisdictions to help our cities and regions return to the vibrant and safe places we have come to expect.

While Australia and New Zealand have done better than most in managing the COVID-19 health crisis, the pandemic has greatly tested our economic resilience and competitiveness.

Our trade exposed industries are particularly challenged. The international health crisis has severely curtailed critical export earners such as international education and the visitor economy. COVID-19 has deepened the geo-political instabilities and the tensions with Australia's largest export destination, China. Jurisdictions must work together to diversify our international export markets.

COVID-19 has thrown into sharp focus the importance of structural reforms to underpin sustained economic recovery in priority physical and social infrastructure sectors. These include the creation of a renewable and circular economy, social and affordable housing, optimal population distribution and growth, skilled migration to support innovation and the economy, diversification of export markets and better coordination between cities and regions. These require investment and clear national policy settings.

A list of 6 priority focus areas is attached.

Collaboration and good governance remain the foundation for our recovery and future resilience.

We need consistent standards for a common recovery roadmap to protect and support our communities while balancing economic opening and recovery efforts.

Structures like Australia's National Cabinet have shown the benefit of coordinated decision-making and execution. The deep confusion in and delays on the vaccination rollout (in both countries) and differing responses to quarantine and lockdowns exemplify the negative consequences for economic recovery and competitiveness of not taking a common approach and applying common disciplines.

The Committees urge cooperation by all levels of government, industry and community stakeholders to build the standards and plans that will drive our social and economic future.

Actions

In November 2020, [the Committees listed six common actions to underpin the return of our social and economic strength](#). They remain relevant today.

At its 12 April 2021 meeting, the C4 network identified 6 priority focus areas:

1. Housing Affordability

Affordable housing is a foundational community and economic issue and the absence of an adequate pipeline of social and affordable housing is a serious problem for cities and regions. Affordable housing for key workers will be particularly important to foster stability, innovation and a start-up economy as well as the essential services sector. It is not acceptable that people are being pushed further from where they work, and the community, health and mental health problems that arise from this.

State and Federal governments should make use of a suite of local, state and federal planning and taxation tools, built on reliable data to address this problem. It will also require public investment to increase social housing stock to catch up to demand.

2. The Visitor Economy

The Visitor Economy represents a significant proportion of GDP, through its contribution to jobs and spending in areas like events, hospitality and accommodation. In New Zealand, the visitor economy represented a sizable 5.5% of National GDP and in Australia, a significant 3.1, prior to the collapse arising from Covid-19. The fall in Visitor economy GDP is much worse than for the rest of the economy.

We are slowing down recovery in the sector by inconsistent approaches to borders, quarantine, tracking and tracing. Both national governments' tourism support packages must target cities and regions jointly as gateways to one another to increase visits and length of stay.

We welcome the creation of the ANZ travel bubble and look forward to building on this bubble with other jurisdictions which have successfully managed the pandemic such as Singapore, Taiwan and the South Pacific region.

3. International Education

To remain competitive and save jobs and knowledge, we need to bring international students back at scale, quickly and efficiently. Competitors in the US, UK and Canada, where the COVID situation is much worse, are already taking away our market share, with long term consequences. If ever there was a case for a joint approach by our national, state and local governments to make this happen, now is the time.

International Education is both Australia and New Zealand's fourth largest export. It is estimated to support 250,000 jobs in Australia. International education brings skills and investment with enormous benefits for our economy, our community and our health. 60 per cent of the economic contribution from international education comes from students and their families spending money in Australia on housing,



food, transport and tourism. 40 per cent of our graduate students are researchers who contribute to our knowledge, including on key public health challenges such as fighting COVID, cancer and mental health challenges.

We need to build community support for the idea that state of the art quarantine and tracking and tracing can bring 40,000 Australians home and bring back international (and domestic) students at scale.

4. Population policy and skilled migration for mission fit cities and regions

Australia is currently one of the safest and secure places to live and do business in a COVID world.

To take advantage of this opportunity and help build a more resilient and competitive Australia and New Zealand, we must accelerate our skilled and business migration programs. Population distribution policy can leverage the post COVID-19 trend for migration from our largest cities, take the pressure off large urban centres and support distribution to more medium-sized cities and regional areas.

Integrated settlement and transport planning can better connect the cities to regions, to the greater mutual benefit of cities and regions.

5. Clean energy investment and jobs

A renewable energy strategy for a circular economy is within our sights. Local jurisdictions are leading the way, with old energy cities and regions already developing plans for transitions to clean energy infrastructure and jobs. A whole of government approach, taking into account global activity, will turbo charge opportunities and ensure our jurisdictions become world leaders in clean energy technologies while supporting our manufacturing sector.

6. A risk-based approach to COVID management

A consistent approach to borders, quarantine, tracking and tracing is vital to our economic recovery and international competitiveness as we emerge from the health crisis.

All jurisdictions should develop a more situation specific and nuanced approach to locking down communities and their economies commensurate with actual risk. The more we can avoid a stop start approach, the quicker the economic recovery.



The 'Committees for' Network can help

Our 'Committees for' are not politically motivated. They are a unifying voice working in the long-term interests of their cities and regions, rather than the interests of any particular sector or individual organisation.

The Committees, which represent more than twenty Australian and New Zealand cities and regions, have been meeting during the COVID-19 crisis to draw from their broad cross-sectoral membership to determine how to rebuild economic and community strength.

Now more than ever we need cross-sectoral and impartial collaboration to help us on the road to recovery.

The Committees stand ready to collaborate with governments, community and the private sector to drive the key areas that will underpin our economic and social strength.

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