

NW Coast Rebuild Opportunities

The North West Coast has experienced significant hardship due to the government's necessary response to Covid 19. The restriction over one 3 week period combined with an overall period of restrictions that may exceed 4 months means that employment and business losses may be catastrophic.

The Employment history of the Coast is fragile and in the main dependent on spending patterns of locals and tourists. With a population based heavily reliant on welfare the potential for another period of generational unemployment should not be underestimated.

There will be strategies promoted by both State and Commonwealth Governments and in this short paper 2 further strategies are proposed.

What will probably happen commercially on the Coast

- 20-25% of owner operator businesses will fold or simply not restart
- Approx. 5,000 to 10,000 further individuals will lose their employment (there a figures suggesting 20,000 state wide but if 80% of businesses lose 1-2 staff and 20% owner operates close this will exceed 5,000)
- People are still going to be nervous about going out
- Net disposable income will be used for essentials

And this means

- Bunnings, Coles and Woolies will continue to do well
- Businesses that support these larger stores will do well
- Many other small businesses will struggle

Some of the expected longer-term consequences:

- Travel and tourism will potentially lose a season of trade or at least a significant proportion thereof.
- Social isolation practices have the potential to lead to longer term habits forming that make this practice the norm. With a vaccine still 9 months away, there will be limits on social activity going through the summer thus normalizing behaviors
- Hospitality will get a bit of a kick but not to the levels many may anticipate.
- Part time seasonal work in picking product for market will be a continued labor option
- Increased government spending on welfare.
- Increased government spending on the full range of human services
- Government spending on big infrastructure projects
- Government will look at small localized projects to stimulate the economy
- Localized responses will be fragmented

It is envisaged that:

- There will be a National Campaign in Australians holidaying locally
- Reluctance at the National Level to increase unemployment benefits in the longer term
- Campaigns targeting small business and small-scale manufacturing will materialize but probably without the capital to make them workable.

Historical Approaches with some learnings:

Since the 1930s governments have responded to significant economic threat by pouring money into building roads, housing etc to keep the economy moving and to encourage spending.

These schemes date back to the depression and we have seen variations right through to the GFC and if we look carefully at budgets over the year's we can see how government has supported infrastructure spending to keep the economy ticking.

The problem with many of these is the gestation period to full blown action.

A number of these schemes have been progressed in crisis moments that are focused on maintaining morale, improving skills and keeping the unemployment numbers under control.

These strategies are useful as they manage to keep the working population engaged, ensure money moves through the economy but equally importantly enable flow on too many other industries as a by product of that activity. We should expect similar approaches from government in responding to COVID 19.

It is contended that the NW Coast, which has experienced the most stringent lockdowns and is already one of the most fragile employment bases in the nation should present options that can achieve the goals of Infrastructure Development, Skills Enhancement and improving the flow of cash in the economy. Some of these may be 'big' infrastructure projects but the employment base of the Coast is based historically upon selling and the economy naturally reflects that.

This is the time to look forward and look to those projects that can "set the coast up" for the future.

Bang for the buck with cruise ships is a no brainer but maybe it would be better to concentrate on getting all the many thousands of travelers who embark and disembark the ferry to spend more time on the Coast and to add more into that economy.

What Could Happen

Following are 2 suggestions:

1. Improve Coastal Tourist infrastructure: With most analysis demonstrating that the Coast relies on the tourist dollar to maintain its economy the imperative must be to improve the physical infrastructure and this should include improving tourist destinations off the beaten track but also to build an e-based platform to promote the coast to tourists. ie when you hear people talk about the great walks in Tassie you do not so much hear about the magnificent walks available on the Coast. The potential boost to the region, to the unemployed, to industry in supporting this project would be significant.
2. Promote the Agrarian magnificence of the Coast. The Coast has a rich Agrarian history and there is great potential build upon this market and thus companion it with Cottage Industries, Arts and Culture and Tourism.

1. Improve Coast Tourist Infrastructure

The Coast relies to a large extent on tourism to drive its economy. A significant proportion of dollars moving through the economy come from this mechanism and with the spirit based in Devonport the task has to be to keep tourists on the Coast for longer. It is a sales based economy relying on day to day spending patterns in locals and tourists.

This opportunity seeks to maintain employment, increase skills and improve upon the tourist infrastructure along the coast.

As many as 5,000 principally hospitality and sales based employees will need something to occupy them as things pick up. These individuals will generally spend any income they have as they live day to day. Expand but change the job keeper to 'job enabler' and provide not a full pay but a value over centerlink. Build their skills whilst keeping them engaged.

We increase their skills to improve upon their customer service capacity to respond to the new environment. We endeavor to make them more employment resilient.

At the same time we deliver real improvements in tourist infrastructure.

What would they do?

Maintain and Develop pathways, walkways, improve signs, bike tracks: (let's not underestimate the tourism potential in disability through accessibility); marine dive sites, playgrounds, camping sites, picnic areas, undertake planting and removal of noxious plants, undertake clean ups for disabled or elderly.

Some teams would do physical activities but others may be engaged in improving signs, developing e marketing for the Coast, for tourist business on the Coast.

Participants would develop team skills, planning and time management, ordering, compliance, reporting and communication alongside those skills required to undertake the work tasks.

The endeavor would be time limited to 18 months with new members recruited into teams as individuals go back to work.

Idea: Examine scope for disc golf courses across the Coast. Becoming the next big thing in competition and tourism

Task 1. In each municipality a solid number of upgrades or developments are identified for crews. It is important to get community buy in to this project so each municipality would have a Group of around 6 tasked with identifying sites...maybe some form of community workshop.

Walking Clubs, Councils, Parks and Wildlife and Rotary etc would need to be involved but may also include young people, disability and/or elderly.

Projects could be as basic as signage, advertising materials, e based engagement with potential tourists, but it will also be maintaining or developing sites, camping grounds, cycle ways, walk ways etc. Some may be engaged in assisting

charities to gear up. Need to remember that many of the new unemployed will be young women who may not take to physical work so some projects are needed that assist them to focus on customer services.

It should focus on the potential to enhance the current tourism profile through increased accessibility and ambience to opportunities but should also look at opening up the greater region to include some of the great opportunities off the tourist track.

It would be important to ensure that projects are not just part of Councils or Parks day to day work schedule but are stand alone and seen as definite projects to improve amenity outside those works. Note: A number of projects should be e-based and these may not be located within Councils.

Task 2. Establish the enabling structures

While Task 1 is being completed the supporting enabling structures will be established. Ideally Councils will provide the physical and administrative supports to each project and would be compensated for this in the project costs. "Pay" for the work crews will be the responsibility of Centrelink under current formula being utilized by the Commonwealth in response to COVID 19.

Part of the "sell" for this idea is it enables jobkeeper and jobseeker to be redirected into "the workforce" reducing unemployment.

Existing services through TAFE, Group Training, Business and Support to the unemployed would be engaged as required to ensure skills that are developed by participants are formally recognized.

Take a longer view, prepare yourself, and do whatever you can to get through. Start laying the foundations for whatever comes next. This should be the lens through which we build into the future to make people coming back the workforce more resilient. Unfortunately, it is not something we are programmed to do and therefore we don't do it well through existing support mechanisms.

Mentoring has become a trendy way of describing support. Mentoring and Coaching is much more than support and care needs to be taken before minimising the importance of this skill in building capacity.

*A mentor/coach would be assigned to each work group and spend at around 1 hr per fortnight with each participant including the supervisor with the goal of assisting the participant to achieve full time work. To make this activity more mainstream they would be titled **project leaders** but they need to have Coaching skills. They would in the main be semi retired with lots of experience in people management. There would be a senior project leader who would support the other managers but as with the others would be part time.*

The senior project leader would be responsible for identifying key learnings from the endeavor.

The mentor /coach would not focus specifically on skills but on the participant capacity: involving home, history, progress, planning and lifestyle. Our goal should be to develop more resilient individuals who can respond positively to the emerging requirements in work settings.

Task 3. Costing the Projects

The Groups with the assistance with Shires will cost each project based upon materials, hire, fee for service costs, contracting. The costing would need to include supervision and council costs.

In this project part of the training and supervision would be the management of the project by each group. The group will map out each project by task and by day providing an overview of costs. In the delivery phase and again as part of the training members would be responsible for purchasing or engaging contractors. Some contracting may be through the council but the emphasis should be upon supporting local businesses.

A proposed budget of \$10-\$15 million not including salaries to participants. Project Leaders

Task 4 Recruit Supervisor and Crew

The potential to establish work crews that are “supported” by councils, Tafe, small operators etc could see xxx individuals mobilized into work settings on a subsidized training wage based on 30-35hrs per week, and a further group on a lower subsidy of around 10-25hrs per week.

Crews would ideally be quite small in number with ideally less than 7. The Supervisor would be experienced in managing staff and ideally will have some expertise or skills in the project platform. The supervisor will sign off on each task taking into account OHS and will sign off completion of tasks.

The Project Manager/ Coach would sit across up to 5 crews @4hr each per week.

Crews would be recruited from those individuals who are out of the workforce due to COVID 19. This is not a project for the already long term unemployed but designed to put people in the best position to get back to work. Some of the learnings from this project may inform other strategies for the long term unemployed.

2. The Agrarian Way

Supporting Agriculture and Cottage Industry

The Coast has a rich soil base and the capability to supply much of the daily requirements that sustain us and we need to build from this base. As we come out of this pandemic we need strategies that can assist agriculture and cottage industry to be supported and enabled to thrive.

The agriculture and cottage industry markets represent a fantastic opportunity to re badge the Coast as a Tourist destination.

Other areas in the State have effectively established models through which tourists plan their enjoyment of the State but the NW Coast lags somewhat in presenting itself positively for tourists to enjoy the richness of the Coast. The Coast has so many fantastic natural tourist hotspots and there is scope to link from Cradle Mountain to Stanley as **an agrarian hotspot** and the best time to do this would be now. This is opportunity knocks to build links between these industries and the towns as produce of choice for coasters.

*Thought: Why the Coast didn't market itself as the potato capital of Aust 40 years ago is astonishing and this opportunity should be revisited once again. The notion of an **agrarian hotspot** promoting **clean, health, natural product** whether this be flowers, cherries, breads, liquor, cheeses, meats, and the plethora of other fruits and vegetables that can be grown year round right along the coast. When partnered with arts, pottery, wool products etc, there is capacity to repackage the Coast.*

To support these industries Councils, Government may look at establishing depots at key traffic spots along the coast at potential outlets for producers direct to the public.

Markets play a very effective role in linking producers to the public and depots would not replace but rather supplement what is already a successful means of linking producers. On market days depots would be closed and signs would be in place directing people to closest markets. Maybe 3-4 depots between Sassafras and Queenstown would provide stopping points with potential to add information and advice on local walks, points of interest.

In undertaking this project it would be essential to keep a strong overview on tourism capability.

The goal should be to turn 3-4 days on the coast after disembarking the Ferry to 6-7 days. In other word's trying to fill in the gaps between Cradle Mountain, Stanley and the Gordon. The Agrarian Way would potentially link tourists to sampling natural local produce and as a bi product leading to a refresh of some of the potential dining experiences that people may experience in their travels.

Allow around \$2- \$4million to support this project.