

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **TOURISM SACRIFICED IN GOVERNMENT CASH GRAB**

The Turnbull Government has jeopardised the growth of Australia's visitor economy and put at risk the ability of the tourism sector to become one of the nation's largest employment sectors by treating the sector as a cash cow.

The Tourism & Transport Forum, Australia's leading tourism and transport advocacy group, said the Government has handcuffed Tourism Australia at a time the nation's visitor economy is on the verge of becoming a jobs and wealth-generating juggernaut.

"As the national economy continues to transition from the end of the mining boom to a diversified services-based economy, investing in tourism and transport as the key growth areas of the future should have been a no-brainer," TTF Chief Executive, Margy Osmond, said.

"However, instead of recognising the tourism sector as the next super-growth sector, the Government has ripped \$35 million out of Tourism Australia over the next four years, and in the process put at immediate risk tourism jobs right across the country – jobs that are dependent on the hundreds of thousands of visitors that come to our shores off the back of Tourism Australia's destination marketing.

"The harsh reality is that we simply cannot grow the visitor economy to its full potential in the face of extraordinary competition from other markets when the budget of our primary marketing vehicle has been so drastically reduced."

In more bad news for the sector, visa application charges will now be indexed in line with the CPI.

"Australia is now one of the most expensive countries in the world to obtain a visa for. This visa increase is an extremely short-sighted move that will make it even more expensive for international tourists to come to Australia," Ms Osmond said.

"The task of competing against the multitude of other destinations for the international tourist dollar has just become a whole lot harder."

Ms Osmond said the highlight of the 2017-18 Federal Budget for the tourism and transport sectors was undoubtedly the \$5.3 billion over ten years to begin construction of the long-awaited Western Sydney Airport.

"Securing funding to build the Western Sydney Airport has been at the top of TTF's list for many years now, and we are very pleased to see the Turnbull Government has finally made a rock-solid commitment to get it off the ground," Ms Osmond said.

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“The benefit of the Western Sydney Airport to the region’s visitor economy cannot be overstated - it will be a massive economic engine that will drive investment and jobs growth through the roof.

“However, it is disappointing the Government has failed to recognise the urgent need for rail access from the airport to the Sydney CBD as a critical piece of infrastructure that will benefit the NSW’s visitor economy and support the long-term development of Western Sydney.”

Ms Osmond said the Government has missed a critical opportunity to fund projects that improve national productivity and the liveability of our cities, including the Melbourne Airport Rail Link and Brisbane’s Cross River Rail.

“Overall, this Budget is a disappointment to the visitor economy. We welcome the announced spending on roads, rail and airports, which will provide a boost for domestic tourism. However, our concern is that the cut to Tourism Australia funding and the increase in visa fees will reduce the international competitiveness of Australia and seriously jeopardise the potential of the sector to boost Australia’s growth and create jobs.”

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