

INQUIRY INTO THE OPERATION OF THE TRADING (ALLOWABLE HOURS) ACT 1990

SUBMISSION

Pertaining to terms of reference item number 3. *The effects of trading hours regulation on the Queensland economy and on regional Queensland.*

We, the Mount Isa Tourism Association Inc. put forward our submission in favour of extending trading hours in Mount Isa to include Sunday trading.

For the purpose of our submission 'tourist' will include those traveling to Mount Isa for:

- Leisure; staying one night or more in free camping, paid camping/caravan parks, other paid accommodation, visiting and staying with family or friends.
- Leisure; day visitors staying one night or more in another location in close proximity (for example Cloncurry or Camooweal) and traveling into Mount Isa for day visits.
- Business; staying one or more nights in paid accommodation or with family or friends.
- Station owners/workers; staying one night or more in paid accommodation or with family or friends for the purpose of shopping, education, recreation, and medical appointments.

Mount Isa is a central tourism, industry and economic hub of outback north west Queensland. With the only sealed road connecting Queensland and the Northern Territory, Mount Isa positions itself as a gateway to (and from) the Territory, Gulf communities, and outback Queensland including the tourist hotspots of Winton and Longreach.

Not only is Mount Isa a destination in its own right, it is also the staging post for travellers to rest and restock before continuing on their journey. We have the only Coles and Woolworths in the entire outback Queensland region with the closest 770klm east in Charters Towers; or Katherine (1286klm) and Alice Springs (1169klm) to the west in the Northern Territory.

It is Mount Isa Tourism Assoc Inc (MITA) position that the restrictions imposed on non-exempt businesses to trade on Sunday has the following impact on Mount Isa's tourism economy in the following ways:

- Trading hours that differ from other places in Queensland causes confusion and frustration for tourists. It comes as a surprise to tourists that a major city of over 20,000 people, in a very remote part of the state, with the main employer operating 24/7, would not have access to one or more of the two major grocery stores on Sunday. It can be distressing for tourists who arrive late Saturday or Sunday with the expectation that they will have access to the same trading hours that are in place through the majority of Queensland. A more uniformed approach would take the guess work out.
- The exempt convenience shops in Mount Isa do not offer all goods and necessities that are reasonably expected to be available to consumers. Their offerings are limited and some are moving away from familiar lines and are stocking more culturally specific goods. With the closure of Walter's IGA in 2012 there is no longer an exempt store with the capacity to offer everything a tourist would expect to purchase to further enable their travels.
- Tourists will bypass Mount Isa in favour of destinations with more favourable trading hours. This will impact Mount Isa's ability to grow its tourism industry, developing more products, offering training and employment opportunities.

- In comparison Woolworths Katherine, where the population is half that of Mount Isa (10,617), enjoys the opportunity to shop on Sunday due to deregulated trading hours in the Northern Territory. The same can be said for Alice Springs. Both these destinations have a tourism focus and cater to the expectations of domestic, interstate, and international tourists.
- For the Mount Isa, and by extension north west Queensland, tourism sector to compete with other destinations such as those in the Northern Territory we need to bring our trading hours in line with community expectations.
- Guided bus tour operators who offer some onboard catering (morning/afternoon tea and lunch) find it problematic arriving into Mount Isa on Saturday or Sunday as the supplies they require for such a large group are difficult to get. This makes Mount Isa a less desirable destination for them to include on their itineraries.
- Since the closure of Woolworths in Pioneer in 2017 and Woolworths Cloncurry in 2019, Saturday trading at the remaining Woolworths and Coles in Mount Isa has been significantly impacted. On Saturday it is observed that staff struggle with restocking shelves to keep up with demand. Stock is often depleted, and checkout lines are long. This is cause for frustration for locals and does not leave a favourable impression on visitors to our city.
- COVID-19 and recent travel restrictions, both domestic and international, has seen a significant shift in how people holiday, where they holiday and for how long. Local tourism venue operators have noted that travellers are moving slower, taking their time, traveling more remotely and an increasing number of families are traveling with children. When state and international borders open Mount Isa needs to be prepared for an increase in demand for all products and services that travellers expect, including access to Sunday trading.
- Mount Isa Tourism Association is preparing for another shift in tourist numbers, demographic and consumer expectations when Queensland hosts the Olympics in 2032. To compete on an international stage Mount Isa needs to be well positioned and prepared for what we anticipate will be an increase in visitor numbers. Presenting ourselves as a mature outback city includes the ability for non-exempt businesses to meet the increasing needs of travellers, while not placing additional stresses on local consumers and staff. This will require a period of adjustment.

Kind Regards

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