



Press release – for release Friday 21 January.

Education hypocrisy - with pubs and sporting events to go ahead but no to incursions, camps and outdoor learning experiences.

Outdoors SA together with Christian Venues Association and the Australian Camps Association is calling upon the South Australian Government to reconsider the statement made by the Department of Education¹ on 14 January that states that camps and excursions cannot be undertaken as part of the return to school program. It is hypocritical that within the same policy ‘Outdoor Learning’ is promoted whilst outdoor providers are being penalised. It is insincere to allow for the opening of clubs, pubs, restaurants and community sporting events whilst closing off peak educational opportunities that have a positive impact on student wellbeing and the state’s economy. This is especially true for all high school students where this population’s vaccination rate is over 80%.

It is critical that the camps and led outdoor activity sector are once more allowed to operate to benefit the health and wellbeing of all South Australian students.

Luke Duncan, from Outdoors SA, the state’s peak body for the outdoor education sector has expressed strong concerns about the inequality of this blanket policy and its negative impacts on outdoor education providers and students.

“We welcome the efforts being undertaken to protect South Australians from the spread of COVID-19, and the return of students in years 1,7,8, and 12 to face to face learning. However the banning of outdoor education experiences is directly in opposition to the same policy position to encourage outdoor learning”

“We do know that indoor environments are where high transmission can occur and it seems illogical that other industry areas such as pubs and clubs can operate and yet our sector that takes people into the great outdoors, where fresh air and social distancing naturally occurs is banned. It does not make sense that the same students cannot go on a school camp, but can attend other clubs and large events on the weekend”

Since 2020 the camps and led outdoor sector has prepared industry plans to mitigate the risk of the spread of COVID-19. Outdoors SA and the Outdoor Council of Australia prepared a National COVID Management Plan in May 2020 and local operators have been able to operate and meet Health SA requirements continually since.

There are many studies that show the positive effects of connection to nature. Student stress has arisen due to the COVID impacts and we know that outdoor education including camps and led outdoor activities can support students in this difficult time. The Outdoor Youth Programs Research Alliance reported from a study of nine years that outdoor programs can improve youth anxiety and mental health challenges.²

¹ Education Policy 14 Jan <https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/default/files/return-to-school-and-covid-safe-measures.pdf>

² OYPRA Research Findings <https://outdoorssa.org.au/news/outdoor-youth-programs-research-alliance/>



The outdoors sector in South Australia is worth over **\$469 million contribution to the state's economy** and supports around **8,100 direct and indirect full-time equivalent jobs**.³ This sector faces millions of dollars in losses, but it is the lost opportunity for positive educational experiences that will have the most impact.

The national and state peak bodies of the sector are unified in their request for the continuation of camps and led outdoor activities in South Australia.

Graeme Janes, CEO of Christian Venues Association states “not only is this ban on school camps again creating unfair hardship on those who rely of this sector for their livelihood it is robbing thousands of kids the opportunity of creating bonds and memories. This is especially true for the main thousands of South Australian children to rely of their Year 7 school camp to form new friendships and create community whilst navigating the changes that entering High School bring.

Australian Camps Association CEO, Rod Thomson, said “Camps and led outdoor activities are proven to support the mental health and wellbeing of young people. Given the challenges our students have faced, it is important that the South Australian Government support them and their families by allowing camps and led outdoor activities. Their continued operation is integral to South Australia as we advance along the social and economic road to recovery from the stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic. Getting our children and youth outdoors by providing opportunities for them to grow outside the classroom is essential for their health and wellbeing”.

Luke Duncan – Outdoors SA

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Rod Thomson – Australian Camps Association

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³ Marsden Jacobs, South Australia Nature-Based Outdoor Economy key estimates. Outdoors SA can provide.