

our outback communities FACING TOUGH 12 MONTHS WITH LOST TOURIST INCOME



We recently caught up with Longreach cafe owner Casey Owen to get her perspective on the impact of COVID-19 on our outback communities.

“There are not as many people on the streets around town, and business is definitely slower,” shares Casey, who just celebrated her business’ first birthday.

Easter usually kicks off the start of outback Queensland’s six month tourist season, but travel restrictions have left remote western Queensland communities wondering how they will survive without this year’s vital tourist income.

“It looks like our tourist season for the whole year is gone, and nearly every business in town relies on tourists in some capacity,” Casey says.

Casey believes Queensland’s cities and larger regional centres will have shorter recovery timelines than outback towns. “Once restrictions are relaxed and lifted, businesses and services in cities will see a rise in figures in a much shorter timeframe than those of us in the outback.”

“Tourists visit in the cooler months, so even if restrictions get lifted in a few months and tourists start planning trips, there's a big chance we won't see them until at least April next year.”

“Sadly some businesses might close down, and even for those still around next year, it could be a catch-up year financially,” shares Casey.

According to Casey, COVID-19 restrictions have created additional layers of isolation for outback communities. “Whether you live in town or out on a property, community events are significant for us. We may not see each other often, so it’s where we connect.”

“Not only have we lost our community events for this year, there is a real sense of uncertainty about what will happen next year. A lot of our events happen because of sponsorship and support from local businesses, so we’re concerned there will be less events next year, and we’ll lose really important ways for our community to connect,” she says.

Casey has adapted her café business in line with restrictions, offering takeaway, and the outback version of home delivery. “Some customers out on properties would come into town every weekend, but with the restrictions I haven’t seen them for four or five weeks. But they still order coffee beans and cakes, and we have them delivered however we can - with the groceries, or on the mail run.”

“Even though people on properties are isolated already, being another step further into it, it will be even longer than usual before they’re able to connect with people face-to-face,” Casey says.

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DURING COVID-19**

