



Senator The Hon Marise Payne
Minister for Foreign Affairs
PO Box 6100
Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Foreign Minister Payne,

Re: Moving towards an Australia-Republic of Korea COVID-19 safe travel corridor

I write on behalf of the Australian Chamber of Commerce in the Republic of Korea (AustCham Korea) to bring to your urgent attention the **critical impact** the ongoing cross-border travel restrictions are having on our members and their ability to conduct business operations in the important Australia-ROK business corridor. We respectfully ask you to consider an easing of travel restrictions between Australia and the ROK, towards the greater goal of establishing an Australia-ROK COVID-19 safe travel corridor.

The ROK is Australia's third largest export market and fourth largest two-way trading partner. We note that the ROK is listed as one of the four "first order" relationships identified in Australia's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper. It is a good and reliable friend to Australia. The economic and strategic links between Australia and the ROK are underpinned by extensive people-to-people and organisational connections which are heavily reliant on physical travel between the two countries for personal, academic and business purposes.

Due to COVID-19, businesses reliant on in-person client meetings, on-site inspections and global production networks have been unable to continue many of their commercial and manufacturing activities. Although virtual teleconferencing has helped alleviate some of the impact, the travel restrictions have been keenly felt within the business community, particularly in education, transportation, financial services and commodities.

AustCham Korea urges the Australian Government to consider the resumption of cross-border travel between Australia and ROK, balanced against the necessary public health requirements imposed by COVID-19. Building upon the steps already taken in supporting essential global supply chains, travel and freight services, we respectfully urge you to push for the reinstatement of the ROK's visa waiver program for Australian citizens – and the reciprocal easing of restrictions on Koreans wishing to enter Australia and Australians wishing to travel to Korea.



Resuming medium-to-long term visa-supported exchanges in business, education and working holiday sectors is a priority, however we also believe that reinstating the mutual visa-waiver program is an essential step towards returning the bilateral relationship to pre-COVID-19 levels. The visa-waiver program supports short term visits for B2B meetings and / or site visits that are essential for signing Australia-Korea projects and investments.

In addition to business travel, Korean tourists – currently reduced to virtually zero – would bring significant benefits to revitalising the Australian economy. Korea represents Australia’s 10th largest market for visitor arrivals and sixth largest market for total visitor spend – amounting to \$A1.5 billion visitor spend (December 2018). Given that Australia’s tourism sector has been severely impacted by the pandemic, a framework that would allow safe cross-border tourism between Australia and Korea would represent an opportunity to inject millions of dollars into the Australian tourism sector.

Australia and the ROK have both achieved great success in managing the COVID-19 crisis and have much to share in their pandemic health policy responses. The ROK has managed the pandemic successfully without closing its borders.

It would be beneficial for both nations to reap a first mover advantage by resuming travel and bilateral business activity when it is safe to do so. To this end, AustCham Korea urges you to consider establishing an Australia-ROK COVID19 safe travel corridor to ease the current travel restrictions between our two nations, balanced against the need to protect public health. We are cognizant this would require rigorous public health measures to facilitate safe travel. However, if both governments can find the right balance between public health and economic needs, then Australia and the ROK stand to benefit on the long road towards economic recovery.

In conclusion, we sincerely appreciate your ongoing collaboration with the Korean Foreign Minister on managing the COVID-19 pandemic and thank DFAT for repatriating so many Australians from here and elsewhere. We respectfully seek your consideration of the issues we have outlined towards our end goal of optimising the important Australia – ROK relationship.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Raciti
Chair
Australian Chamber of Commerce in Korea