RNZ

Tourism industry hopes minister will offer some solutions to industry challenges

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The tourism industry is hopeful Tourism Minister Stuart Nash will offer some solutions to the challenges facing their sector.

Tourism Minister Stuart Nash is today expected to speak at the Navigating the Future conference in Nelson. Photo: RNZ / Samuel Rillstone

The Tourism Export Council of New Zealand (https://www.rnz.co.nz /news/national/472509/tourism-export-council-conference-attracts-270-tour-operators-to-nelson) is hosting its 'Navigating the Future' themed conference in Nelson this week.

The programme confirms Nash will speak at the conference on Wednesday

afternoon along with the three co-chairs of the Tourism Industry Transformation Plan, Gráinne Troute, Heather Kirkham, and John Crocker.

Less than an hour away, in the Tasman town of Mārahau, Brendan Alborn operates the Abel Tasman AquaTaxi, Mārahau Sea Kayaks, Mārahau Beach Camp, Abel Tasman Centre, and restaurant Hooked.

He has faced workforce issues historically as it is a seasonal business with 80 percent of their business volume arriving between the middle of October and the end of March.

During Covid, he said, that had been amplified to the point their restaurant could not open its usual hours because they could not get enough staff, particularly working holiday visa holders.

They needed another 25 to 30 people before business ramped up.

Alborn was hopeful the government would consider further visa changes to make it easier for more overseas workers to come in, to relieve the pressure ahead of summer.

"Really needs to be opened up so it's not a skills-based or a qualifications-based visa, it's people that can come in and do these jobs that don't specifically require qualifications, they just require perhaps a little bit of experience, but just a whole lot of good attitude."

It would be debilitating if the demand returned this summer and they could not meet it because they did not have enough staff, he said.

Paradice Entertainment offers ice skating, mini golf, escape rooms and laser tag in Auckland, as well as seasonal events nationwide.

Managing director Chris Blong said staffing was its biggest challenge at present, whether struggling to find enough staff or covering gaps when people were sick.

He was pleased there seemed to be a lot happening in the events industry and hoped they would face fewer hurdles in their recovery.

"It's anything that helps them fire up for the summer will make the biggest difference.

"I think the urgency of things is really important and that's being able to sort of anticipate too, not just be reactionary."

It was important to have long-term plans like the Tourism Industry Transformation Plan and aim to attract high value tourists, but it would not be an immediate change and the industry needed to get back on its feet in the short term, Blong said.

"As much as it's great to have these wonderful plans and everything else, I think there needs to be more anticipation and to move faster, because as far as I can see around the rest of the world, they may be moving on faster than we are."

The Tourism Industry Transformation Plan's initial focus is aimed to address workforce issues in the tourism and hospitality industries.

Late last year, government-funded initiative Go With Tourism hosted a wānanga to develop solutions (https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/business/456109/tourism-industry-must-work-with-educators-to-build-best-workforce) to improve and build the workforce.

Programme director Heidi Gillingham said she hoped some of the suggestions would be included in the government's plan to address workforce issues.

"The tourism and hospitality accord obviously garnered quite a lot of attention initially so it will be quite interesting to see what they decide to do with that, and obviously off the back of some of the discussions around training and industry micro-credentials there's been quite a lot of movement."