

Australian Cruise Association Strategic Action Plan

February 2026



The Australian Cruise Association

The Australian Cruise Association (ACA) is a peak cruise industry association for Australia and the South Pacific region focused on growing and developing the industry in the region. The ACA is responsible for marketing and promoting the cruise industry, as well as collaborating with stakeholders to foster strategic planning and industry development.

ACA's wide-ranging membership, including ports, tourism organisations, service providers, and government agencies, enables it to provide a comprehensive perspective on sector priorities.

The Australian Cruise Tourism Industry

Forging the path

Cruise lines are experiencing record demand and are investing A\$100 billion+ in 80+ new ships, but Australia is losing competitiveness with the latest Australian figures revealing the industry fell short of delivering on its estimated economic impact by \$1.11 billion (-13.2%) compared to the previous year's record economic contributions of over A\$8.4 billion. This decline marks a departure from the strong growth trajectory seen in recent years. The downturn also highlights the Australian cruise sector's vulnerability to regulatory challenges and rising operating costs. The priority areas of this paper define the ACA focus areas, recognising that the delivery of outcomes sit not only with the ACA but with governments, ports, operators and other stakeholders.

¹ '2024-25 Value of Cruise Tourism', 2025, ACA.

² 'Cruise tourism delivers A\$7.32 billion economic impact for Australia', 2025, CLIA.

³ Ibid.

Cover image: Australian Cruise Association

The case for change

The Australian cruise industry is a vital pillar of the visitor economy and a significant contributor to the national economy, generating a record-breaking A\$8.4 billion in 2023-24 and supporting over 22,000 jobs in 2024-25 across the country¹.

Beyond major ports, cruise tourism delivers widespread benefits to regional communities, with shore-side spend reaching an aggregated A\$1.82 billion in 2024-25 across over 50 different ports nationwide with nearly 40% of this coming from international visitors².

With cruise sector activity and spending declining across most key indicators in FY24-25, disproportionately to international market trends, there is urgent need for coordinated action to restore momentum and growth in the Australian cruise tourism industry.



Total national economic output

2023-24 - \$8.43 billion

2024-25 - \$7.32 billion



Total employment (FTE jobs)

2023-24 - 26,370

2024-25 - 22,720



Total shore-side spend

2023-24 - \$1.9 billion

2024-25 - \$1.8 billion



Total passenger visit days

2023-24 - 4.3 million

2024-25 - 4.1 million

¹'2024-25 Value of Cruise Tourism', 2025, ACA.

Removing Barriers to Growth

Regulatory settings

Australia's cruise industry faces a complex and changing regulatory landscape. To unlock growth, attract investment, and keep the sector globally competitive, it's vital to address these complex and often inconsistent frameworks. When compared to competitor regions, the market perceives that Australia is rolling out the red tape, instead of rolling out the red carpet for their contributions to the Australian industry. The ACA is calling for streamlined, clear regulations that support both domestic and international operators. It is the position of the ACA that a coordinated approach to any regulatory reform is needed between Government, the ACA and CLIA.



Australian Cruise Association

Policy advocacy priorities

- **Reform customs, immigration, biosecurity, coastal trading and environmental regulations** to create a **fit-for-purpose regulatory framework**, to simplify compliance, reduce barriers to entry, and encourage innovation and investment.
- **Make permanent the existing exemption** under the Coastal Trading Act to provide long-term operational certainty and align with long-term cruise planning cycles.
- **Coordinate future regulatory reform** between government, the ACA, and CLIA to enhance Australia's reputation, and drive investment and regional expansion.
- **Increase resources and technology adoption** for the Australian Border Force (ABF) and Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) at key ports to increase efficiency and **reduce bottlenecks**.
- **Maintain and enhance whole-of-government collaboration** through the National Sea Passenger Facilitation Committee.

Unlocking Industry Potential

Economic and social contributions

Cruise tourism is a major driver of economic and social benefits across Australia, delivering over \$7 billion annually to Australia's economy and supporting more than 22,000 jobs nationwide⁴. By unlocking new opportunities and removing barriers to the cruise industry's contributions, the industry can deliver even greater value to communities nationwide. The ACA's advocacy is focused on maximising these benefits through coordinated policy, smart investment, and strong regional partnerships.



Policy advocacy priorities

- **Secure funding** for the development of an industry-led **national cruise tourism strategy**.
- **Recognise cruise in national tourism policy** and **include cruise data in Domestic Tourism Statistics and International Visitor Surveys** to measure contribution accurately.
- **Promote enhanced destination development** to enable less-developed destinations to share in economic benefits, boost local industries, and create regional jobs.
- Enable **flexible cruise operations** through increased development activities to unlock increase socioeconomic benefits in the national visitor economy.
- Encourage **partnerships between cruise operators and regional suppliers**, including First Nations communities.
- **Invest in workforce development** and training to upskill locals, supporting industry growth and guest satisfaction.

⁴ 'Cruise tourism delivers A\$7.32 billion economic impact for Australia', 2025, CLIA.

Building Tomorrow's Industry

Infrastructure and port development

Modern, efficient, and reliable infrastructure is essential for a thriving cruise sector. Addressing capacity constraints at major ports and investing in regional facilities will drive sustainable growth and more diverse itineraries and spread economic benefits further. The ACA advocates for targeted infrastructure upgrades and national planning to future-proof Australia's cruise industry.



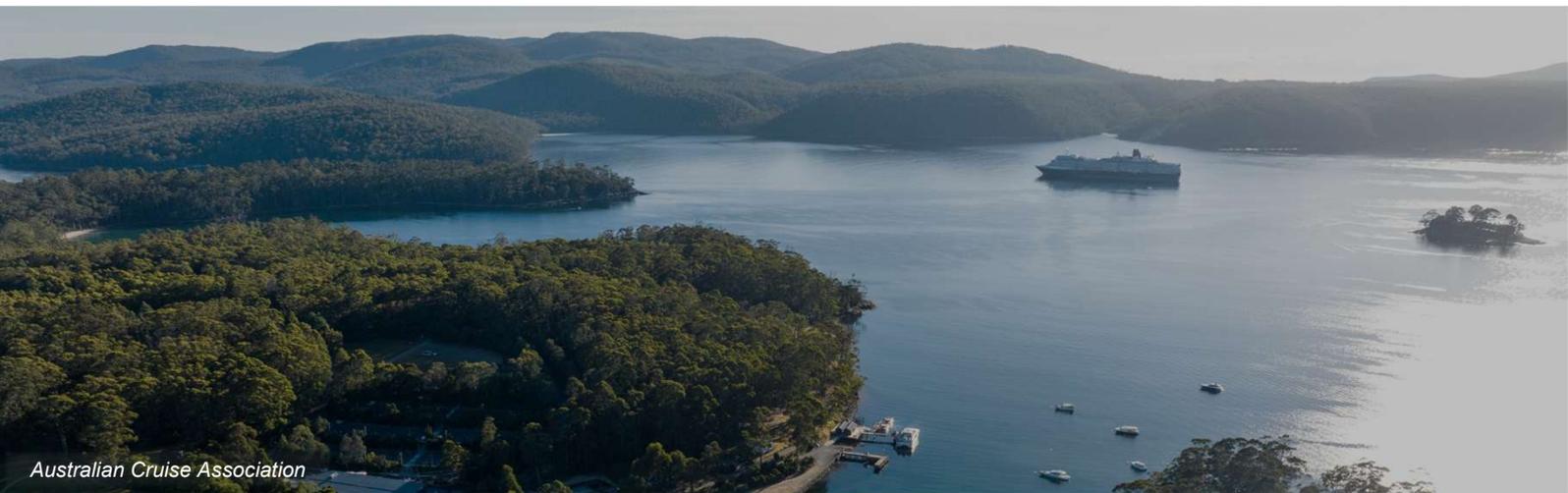
Policy advocacy priorities

- **Promote investments in physical and operational infrastructure** upgrades to key ports to accommodate larger, next-generation vessels and improve passenger flow systems.
- **Coordinate a national approach for infrastructure planning** to ensure consistency and scalability across all Australian ports.
- **Upgrade existing regional port infrastructure** to relieve pressure on major hubs and enable more diverse cruise itineraries.
- Identify and **prioritise investment zones** to guide public and private funding and encourage long-term planning.
- **Offer incentives** for cruise lines to include **emerging regional ports** in their itineraries, accelerating the development and visibility of these locations.
- Develop **soft infrastructure** and **supporting local businesses** and service providers with tools, training, and connections to fully capitalise on port upgrades.

Preserving our Landscape

Sustainability and stewardship

Environmental responsibility is central to the long-term success and social licence of cruise tourism in Australia. Cruise ships represent just 1% of global maritime emissions, yet the industry faces significant regulatory and technological pressures to lead in sustainability practices. Combined, the industry is already investing heavily in research in clean fuels and delivery of shore power⁵. By continuing to champion sustainable practices, investing in green technology, and building strong partnerships for ecosystem protection, the industry leads in stewardship. The ACA is focused on making sure the sector's growth is firmly aligned with Australia's environmental goals and community expectations.



Australian Cruise Association

Policy advocacy priorities

- Promote the **rapid adoption of green technologies** supported by government incentives.
- Accelerate collaborative **investment in shore power infrastructure and future fuel facilities** between government and industry, to ensure Australia remains competitive.
- Support effective regulation that is not excessively burdensome and ensuring **requirements** are **proportionate** to the cruise sector's share of **maritime emissions**.
- **Secure sustained funding for research initiatives** focused on mitigating cruise impacts and informing best practice.
- **Foster partnerships with community groups, environmental organisations, and local authorities** to protect sensitive ecosystems, promote responsible and sustainable tourism practices.

⁵ 'Environmental sustainability', CLIA, <https://cruising.org/environmental-sustainability>.

Committed to Collaboration

Community, political and industry engagement

Strong partnerships between industry, government, and communities are essential for the cruise sector's resilience and reputation. Effective engagement builds trust, drives reforms, and ensures growth reflects local needs and aspirations. The ACA is committed to leading transparent communication, unified policy development, and meaningful partnerships at all levels – advocating for a collaborative approach that underpins a sustainable and successful cruise industry.



Australian Cruise Association

Policy advocacy priorities

- Invest in targeted programmes to rapidly **upskill local workers** in hospitality, tourism, transport, and maritime services.
- Strengthen operational resilience and security through **advanced digital systems**, such as **digitising passenger clearance and compliance checks** and implementing integrated platforms for real-time data exchange.
- Allocate additional resources to **coordinated marketing campaigns** to promote Australia's cruise offerings to stimulate demand in underutilised regions.
- **Invest in policy development and advocacy initiatives** to streamline regulatory requirements, reduce barriers to entry, and encourage sustainable practices within the industry.
- Develop consultation and partnership programmes to build **social licence with communities**.
- Develop a coordinated national strategy to **align the interests of local, state and national governments**.

Australia's Cruising Opportunity

The Australian cruise industry plays a critical role in the national visitor economy, generating record economic value and supporting thousands of jobs across 50 ports across metropolitan and regional Australia⁶. Cruise tourism connects global visitors to communities nationwide, creating opportunities for regional growth, local business participation and diversified tourism outcomes.

● Ports receiving economic benefit

 ship visit days

 pax visit days



⁶ 'Cruise tourism delivers A\$7.32 billion economic impact for Australia', 2025, CLIA.

Map source: The Value of Cruise Tourism 2024/25, 2025, ACA & CLIA

