

## Queensland Outdoor Recreation Federation request

In June 2020, the Outdoor Education Providers industry COVID Safe plan was prepared by Queensland Outdoor Recreation Federation (QORF), with assistance from Department of Public Works and Housing (Sport and Recreation).

Outdoor education programs help prepare people for productive valuable lives by delivering education outcomes, while also providing mental health benefits that are sorely needed for many in our communities at this time.

For many years, Queensland's outdoor education industry has operated in the context of risk management and safety assessments. The pre-existing control measures and systems in place across the outdoor education industry have allowed swift and thorough implementation of the specific protocols set out in the Outdoor Education Providers industry COVID Safe plan.

One of the protocols contained within this industry plan is a requirement that client group sizes be limited to 100 persons, as follows:

Total number of people per client group attending must not exceed 100 people (e.g. school-aged children, teachers and support personnel)

This group size protocol, combined with additional responsibilities being placed on school staff by concerns about COVID1-9, is having the effect of schools cancelling outdoor education programs.

A relaxation is sought on the requirement in this industry plan that group sizes be limited to 100 persons.

This group size limit of 100 persons was implemented when the plan was first approved on 26 June 2020, when Queensland was in Stage 2 of restrictions. At that time, group size limits of 100 persons were part of the planned restrictions throughout Stage 3. The position regarding group size restrictions during Stage 3 restrictions was later changed, but this requirement remained in the approved Outdoor Education Providers industry COVID Safe plan.

Capping client group numbers does not necessarily reduce the number of people attending the venue as schools are continuing to send the whole year cohort by splitting the cohort into multiple client groups. This action increases the number of adults required to service the increased number of client groups as:

- Additional Group Leaders are required to support program delivery as they are restricted to interacting with only one client group for the duration of camp. As it is difficult find Group Leaders with skill sets to deliver all activities associated with a program additional staff are needed to cover skills shortages, and a backup is required for each client group in the event a staff member calls in sick.
- Sending multiple client groups from the same school requires additional adults to attend camp for pastoral care purposes, that being, each client groups requires a floating teacher to coordinate/ respond to issues. For instance, where a school could have sent one female and one male adult to accompany a group of 120 co-ed students, that school may need to send two female and two male adults to accompany that same cohort of students if split into two smaller groups. By involving additional adults, this could potentially increase risks of adult to adult

transmission. Access to additional staff may not be practical for all schools, which could lead to school camps being cancelled.

Splitting a school group into sub groups makes it harder to keep them separate from other school groups on site, which affects access, egress and availability of facilities. By keeping a school in one group, it will be far easier to keep them in totally separate areas for their full visit.

Education Queensland do not ask their students to social distance at school. Client groups larger than 100 people from the same school congregate at the school prior to boarding buses, and students are not required to segregate when travelling to and from the camp venue.

Schools use camps for pastoral outcomes as much as health and physical outcomes - splitting same school students into separate client groups affects the positive pastoral outcomes camps deliver.

Were a student to be diagnosed as being COVID positive, it would be unlikely Queensland Health would only be concerned with the students/staff associated only with that client group. As people diagnosed as being COVID positive are contagious up to 4 days prior to displaying symptoms, and school camps are typically 3 days in duration, it would be more than likely the whole school cohort would be monitored due to the potential contact taking place at the school prior or post camp.

### **Risk management approach**

If schools remain as one group the control measures in place are far simpler as the single schools uses the same single facilities at any one time and allows greater distancing and time between facility use of other schools on site. Simpler control measures are generally more effective than complicated control measures.

As per other industry plans, venues have implemented enhanced hygiene and social distancing measures including structured social distancing of participants from the same school in areas such as at arrival, induction and dining times

- This may include seating provided which is spaced to ensure students are distanced when receiving instructions or dining
- Students are instructed to wash their hands upon arrival to camp, and before and after every structured interaction with staff (meetings, activities, dining etc)

As client groups largely consist of schools, the booking processes are formalised, structured, completed in purpose built booking systems, and are undertaken well in advance of attendance (often a year in advance) . As such, camps are well organised and detailed and accurate contact tracing information is obtained and client groups are informed prior to attending camp of the COVID risk mitigation strategies. Upon arrival, it is standard practice for all attendees to be inducted on the risk mitigation strategies that have been implemented at the venues.

On behalf of the outdoor education industry, we request that this requirement regarding group size limits be removed from the Outdoor Education Providers industry COVID Safe plan.