

Lorne Bush House  
Cottages

22<sup>nd</sup> April 07

**THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER  
RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMITTEE  
PARLIAMENT HOUSE  
MELBOURNE VIC 3002**

**Submission to Inquiry into Rural & Regional Tourism**

**The issue- potential impediments to the sustained growth of regional tourism, economic activity & jobs is the one we would most like to make comment on.**

Having lived in Lorne for 50 years, having been involved in the tourism & hospitality industry for the past 20 years and having established our own tourist accommodation business 11 years ago- we feel that we are acutely aware of impediments to the sustained growth of tourism in this Surf Coast Shire and more particularly for Lorne- the so called Jewell in the Crown along the Great Ocean Road.

-The implementation of the new planning zones for Rural Areas that were introduced by State Government in the Surf Coast Shire in Feb 2006, we believe, has resulted in some unforeseen consequences, which are at odds with the Government's stated policies on Planning, Tourism and Equity for all Victorians.

We built and own 5 cottages and trade as Lorne Bush House Cottages just a few minutes drive from Lorne, on the Colac-Dean's Marsh Rd. We have lived here for over thirty years and have seen many planning decisions imposed upon us, with little consultation and what appears to be limited rationale. This new rural zone that we have been transferred into (Rural Conservation Zone) is having a dramatic effect on our business. The manner in which this new zoning has been implemented means that many businesses similar to ours may not even be aware that the future of their business and their own personal economic future, are now in jeopardy.

Our tourism accommodation business is consistent with the Lorne Strategy Plan, the Great Ocean Road Strategy, and Victorian Coastal Strategy and State Tourism Policy. We provide nature-based accommodation for tourists from Australia and overseas. Our guests enjoy visiting this area and experiencing what the Otways have to offer - walks, waterfalls, mountain biking etc as well as the beautiful ocean and beaches.

Under the previous Environmental Rural Zone schedule, we were permitted to provide unlimited tourist accommodation, with a permit. Now we are prohibited to do so unless it is in conjunction with agriculture, a rural industry or a winery and even then only up to a maximum of 6 dwellings. The Rural Conservation Zone seems in fact to be inconsistent with your Government's stated policies & strategies which state their aim is to "encourage and facilitate more high quality accommodation including nature-based accommodation in key towns" (Great Ocean Road Strategy - p36). Surely Lorne is a key town on the Great Ocean Road.

1860 Deans Marsh Road  
Lorne Victoria 3232 address

PO Box 27 Lorne  
Victoria 3232 postal address

03) 5289 2477 telephone  
03) 5289 1992 facsimile  
0411 471 939 mobile

info@lornebushcottages.com.au email  
www.lornebushcottages.com.au website

Our property cannot and never has supported agriculture, a rural industry or winery. It is impossible to do so as the land is agriculturally unproductive and unsuitable for such uses. What we do have is accommodation that makes best use of the land and meets both State and Local Government policy objectives. We have town water, power, phone, and could possibly be connected to the township waste water treatment facilities. The existing tourist accommodation businesses in the Lorne hinterland do not sit comfortably in the Rural Conservation Zone. They now appear to be carrying out a prohibited practice as none of them are associated with agriculture, the rural industry or a winery and never would be due to the nature of the environment in which they have evolved. Small family businesses such as ours are becoming increasingly more difficult to remain viable in competition with the high-rise and high-density apartment dwellings that are becoming the prevalent, modern image of Lorne. Increasingly, these small family businesses are required to increase their number and type of accommodation to meet the changing nature of the tourist trade Lorne sees - often only an overnight stop off point for international travellers on road to the Twelve Apostles. With the translation to the Rural Conservation Zone, this option of business growth is no longer possible.

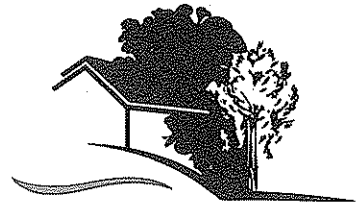
There are six accommodation businesses and one arts and cultural centre in the Lorne Hinterland that will not be able to develop further due to the fact that they are now included in these new rural zones. None of these businesses are based around Agriculture, rural industry, or wine, but nevertheless they contribute significantly to the Social and economic wellbeing of the community and tourism benefits for the region and the State.

If tourism is the main industry in Lorne then one would logically assume that the Rural Zones applied to Lorne's hinterland area would encourage and foster tourist pursuits. Looking at the Rural Zone choices we note that both the Farming and Rural Conservation Zones provide for agricultural use. Both zones allow group accommodation with a permit but only in conjunction with agriculture a rural industry or a winery and limited to a max of 6 dwellings.

In the Rural Activity Zone where "agriculture has primacy", other uses may be established but only if they are compatible with the agricultural, environmental and landscape values of the area.

In the Rural Living Zone "A landowner may apply for a permit for a range of accommodation, tourism, recreation and commercial uses". In fact the Rural Living Zone is the only zone that is not agriculturally dependent and the only zone that allows for stand-alone tourism activities. This zone also provides for residential use in a rural environment, which would seem an appropriate use of private properties within close proximity to the Lorne urban area, in combination with their tourist activities. This combining of tourist and low-density residential usage of private land would also serve to solve some of Lorne's acknowledged problems, that is, a desperate lack of worker accommodation and affordable housing/land for young families.

The Rural Land Planning controls currently implemented in the hinterland of Lorne are too restrictive in that they do not allow diversity of land use nor do they allow the full



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tourist potential to be reached. No one is disputing that high quality agricultural land should be protected for farmers, respecting the needs of farmers, this is to be commended. But the imposition of these zones on non-agricultural land and on non-farmers is therefore disrespecting the need of the non-farmers, in this case tourism operators. We want to see the present zones changed so that rural landowners can make the best use of their land, for the social, economic and environmental benefit of all.

A case in point is our recent application to the Surf Coast Shire to erect a large free fly bird aviary as a tourism attraction for International and local visitors to our area. It was refused as it did not fit in to the schedule to the Rural Conservation Zone. The concept has the support of the councillors, the Surf Coast Tourism board and the Surf Coast Economic Development Committee but the planning office refused the application as "it does not meet the condition of the Rural Conservation Zone that it must be in conjunction with the use of the land for agriculture, rural industry or winery as none of these uses are present on the land."

We would like to see the Rural Living Zone implemented in some areas of the Lorne hinterland so that, existing land uses are legitimised, tourism can develop to its full potential, the shortage of worker accommodation and affordable land/ housing could be addressed [with specific conditions applied], and potentially we would then be working toward a reversal of Lorne's current community demographic imbalance as outlined in the Surf Coast Shire's "Your Visions" community profile and the social and economic implications of this.

We ask that this Inquiry into Rural & Regional Tourism review the current rural zones so as to allow the people and businesses that have been unintentionally caught up in the transition of these new zones be allowed to continue with their plans, business development and growth for the social, tourism and economic benefit of the towns, the Shire and the State.

Your Sincerely

Chris & Carol Tutungi.  
Phone 03 52 891992  
0438 891992

1860 Deans Marsh Road  
Lorne Victoria 3232 address

PO Box 27 Lorne  
Victoria 3232 postal address

03) 5289 2477 telephone  
03) 5289 1992 facsimile  
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