

SUBMISSION FOR THE INQUIRY INTO REGIONAL AND RURAL TOURISM.

Name: Susan McGill and Kaye Munro
(Specially Appointed and Authorised Sub Committee)

Organisation: Bairnsdale Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

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Tourism Region: Gippsland

Tourism sub region: East Gippsland

City: Bairnsdale

Main tourism features of sub region:

Gippsland Lakes, High country Omeo region, Buchan Caves, Croajingalong NP.

SUMMARY OF SUBMISSION

Bairnsdale and this region relies heavily on tourism growth which has a big flow on effect largely through real estate investment. Local businesses generally unaware of this.

Good transport services essential due to distance from major population centres. Insufficient at present.

Large areas of public lands with ecotourism potential underdeveloped.

Poor reporting of our comparatively mild weather and sensational reporting of natural disasters affect visitation.

Large family attractions, convention facilities, trade fairs, events absent.

Difficulties in dispersing much needed benefits of marketing throughout region.

Predominance of very small businesses with small budgets in a huge region with a small population makes cooperative planning for and marketing of the region difficult.

Detailed responses:

We will address each of the references listed by the Committee:

- **The economic benefits of tourism in regional areas, including the flow-on benefits to other regional businesses and industry;**

Bairnsdale is the business and retail centre of the region and although most of the areas tourism traffic passes through this city it is not generally perceived as part of the tourism experience by either the visitors or the business community.

However, recent Autobarn statistics revealed through post-code recordings of all sales that Bairnsdale had the highest tourist component in their sales of all 90 Autobarn outlets. We suspect this is true of many retail businesses.

Our major real estate agents see tourism as a big driver for sales in the region. This means industries related to building do very well as places like Paynesville grow.

As the Lakes villages rely on Bairnsdale for most goods and services our city benefits from the flow-on effect.

Because of this very real link between tourism and prosperity in the region natural disasters such as the bush fires which affect tourism also affect business in general.

This was proven in the recent disaster with all but fire-related businesses losing income.

- **Potential impediments to the sustained growth of regional tourism, economic activity and jobs.**

We can only respond in relation to our own region. Many of the points made are 'potential impediments' rather than 'present impediments'.

1. **Lack of commercial bus service following the Sydney to Melbourne Coastal Drive.** This limits backpacker and other access to our region. Legislation unchanged since 1936 and which was put in place when the rail service to Orbost (now defunct) opened prevents this vital service.

Suggestion: Deregulation. A bus line which promotes its service in the UK and Europe running right through this route would be of great benefit to tourism.

2. **Lack of geographical awareness of the whole of Gippsland in the public mind.**

Gippsland is now being marketed as a whole. This is sensible but when the public are not aware of the total area it can mean parts of Gippsland are not benefiting from excellent marketing in the way they should.

Suggestion: That those entries/exits to Gippsland along the Sydney-Melbourne Coastal Drive and the Great Alpine Way be marked with repeated sculptural structures on either side of the highway. These need to be permanent, large, eye-catching and to be associated with the name 'Gippsland'.

3. **Lack of a commercial airline service in Bairnsdale.** Shire is presently undergoing negotiations regarding this.

Suggestion: Could this inquiry recommend support for such a service?

4. **Lack of developed access and supporting tourism product for spectacular natural features** E.g. Little River Gorge, Errinundra Plateau waterfalls, remote coast line in Croajingalong and the Ninety Mile Beach.

Suggestion: Long term plans be established to enable these assets to be appropriately developed for high end/ high yield eco-tourism.

5. **Sensational reporting of natural disasters.** Gippsland is very large. The Lakes are large. A fire in Gippsland is not necessarily a fire in Orbost! A blue-green algae bloom at Duck Arm is not necessarily a reason to cancel your Metung boating holiday.

Suggestion: Media must be more aware of how sensationalist reporting damages tourism and be made accountable for economic losses incurred by businesses as a direct result of poor reporting. Tourists need to be informed, not alarmed.

6. Distance from major population centres.

As roads improve and by-passes are built this impediment is lessening.

Suggestions: Seal the Barry Way thus creating another major tourist drive this time linking Canberra to the region.

Lengthen passing lanes between Traralgon and Mallacoota. In holiday times these roads are crowded with cars pulling boats and caravans. Travel can be doubly slow because there are not enough opportunities to pass mainly because the passing lanes are too short.

7. Lack of signage/product to encourage dispersal away from iconic destinations.

Suggestions: Use local people to identify good short scenic routes linking Lakes towns to inland destinations and sign post these so that local BTA's can produce combined promotion/marketing aimed at the Lakes villages during peak times.

8. Development without improved environmentally sustainable regulatory controls could result in water shortages and undesirable ecological impact on the lakes and forests.

Suggestions: Short term- more strategically placed waste disposal for boats on the lakes; more eco-product in National Parks;

Long term - a university in this region to qualify environmental scientists and tourism industry people in East Gippsland and to undertake research regarding eco friendly high yield tourism potential in this region.

9. Losing our Tourism Manager for Gippsland will be difficult for the region – we need his leadership longer so that new structures can be firmly established and working well before his position is removed.

- **The effectiveness of current programs to promote and enhance tourism to regional Victoria.**

We are grateful for the appointment of Chris Buckingham as Tourism Manager and Destination Gippsland Inc. Chair.

A new cohesion is being experienced throughout East Gippsland and links are being forged with greater Gippsland.

The new structures now in place are very valuable to the industry.

East Gippsland Shire now has a strong Tourism Strategic Plan which is progressing well and connected to the industry through a Tourism Advisory Board. This Board links to other Advisory Boards concerned with Economic Development and Arts and Culture. A Shire Tourism Officer co-ordinates all tourism bodies.

All of this means we are achieving greater participation in promotional exercises and a more inclusive approach resulting in a stronger more united tourism industry.

The new East Gippsland Regional Business and Tourism Association works closely with all local BTA's and the Shire.

Current Leadership Programs should continue to strengthen and stabilize all of these new ventures.

The promotion of the Sydney to Melbourne Coastal Drive and the Great Alpine Road have brought more overseas visitors and this is growing.

- **Initiatives to increase international and domestic visitors to regional Victoria.**

- 1. Eco-product along the Sydney to Melbourne Coastal Drive between Mallacoota and Marlo.**

Our National Parks in this area are wonderful but under-manned, under developed and as a result they are vastly under-utilised.

- 2. Good weather for boating and fishing, walking and bike riding in shoulder seasons needs to be publicized.**

Suggestion: At present official weather reports do not give good coverage of East Gippsland, especially around the Lakes and the hinterland. Temperatures and wind speeds should be taken at sea level at Lakes Entrance as this is the weather that will interest most tourists. Can this be altered by the powers that be? Our reliably warmer-than-Melbourne autumn/winter weather is a great advantage, which cannot be utilised well to increase visitation without the Weather Bureau's help.

- 3. A high quality family attraction of world class is needed for the area.**

Suggestion: Consider something as wonderful as the Drumheller Dinosaur Museum in Canada. It needs to be unique, exciting and generous in what it offers. It could be a combined project involving education, Parks and private investment.

4. Bairnsdale needs a permanent iconic attraction based on gardens – National Callistemon Collection, Waterwise garden walk along old railway line, river and park walks and bike tracks all linked through Botanical gardens, landcare areas and CBD. We are in a busy tourism area as well as a prime vegetable growing region. It seems sensible to create an attraction based on plants.

- **The effectiveness of measures to address the short and long term effects of natural events such as bushfires, floods and drought on regional tourism.**

We recommend that the Gippsland Tourism Response and Recovery Group be used as a model when such events occur. We hope this expertise will be utilized to help in such events as blue green algae bloom in the Lakes as well as for larger scale events such as the recent bushfires.

- **Opportunities to increase private and commercial investment in regional tourism infrastructure and ecotourism.**
 1. Convention centre in Bairnsdale including facilities such a theatre, Art Gallery, Restaurant.
 2. Joint government and private and educational developments in National Parks
 3. Family attractions: fun parks, High Country Cattlemen Hall of Fame, Paynesville Wooden boat museum, etc.
 4. Indigenous operators offering an experience of the Lakes', rivers and high country indigenous history and culture.
 5. Industry shows such as boat and caravan expos, expos based on gardening and horticulture. It would be good to get national/state trade shows which are relevant to the regions out of Melbourne. This would give the regions themselves as much exposure as the industries. After all, World Expos and Olympic Games move from country to country for just this reason why not from region to region on a State level?

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this survey. We wish the committee success and hope the results of the survey are helpful to government.



**Bairnsdale
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Commerce
& Industry**

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23rd May 2007

The Executive Officer and Committee
Mr Damian Drum MLC,
Ms Gayle Tierney MLC,
Ms Kaye Darveniza MLC,
Mr John Uren MP,
Ms Wendy Lovell MLC,
Mr Russell Northe MLA,
Mr John Vogels MLC

Rural and Regional Committee,
Parliament House,
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Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for undertaking this much needed Regional Tourism Inquiry.

We are well aware of the time it will demand of you and appreciate your willingness to listen to our concerns and ideas.

We wish you the best in your endeavour to understand the different needs of each region.

We hope our submission will help further the Government's vision for statewide Tourism Excellence.

Yours sincerely,

Loueen Goodall
Member Executive Committee
BCCI.