

The Executive Officer  
Rural and Regional Committee  
Parliament House  
Melbourne 3002

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Re: Inquiry into Rural and Regional Tourism**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback through the *Inquiry into Rural and Regional Tourism*.

The LBIBC and Lake Bolac community is traditionally a farming community but many businesses such as LBIBC, food outlets and accommodation are also extremely reliant on the tourist trade. We are deemed to be part of the Grampians region.

As a small community, 193 township residents (ABS 2001) and local population (15km radius) approximately 500, we are extremely fortunate to have a naturally occurring tourist attraction in the freshwater Lake Bolac and a large flow of traffic through our town as we are located on the busy crossroads of Glenelg Highway and Ararat-Mortlake Road.

VicRoad traffic counters indicate daily traffic in the vicinity of 1600 vehicles per day travelling through Lake Bolac. No surveys have been carried out to date on the number of occupants per vehicle.

The local residents and groups all agree that there is more that can be done, in terms of tourist attractions and tourism promotions, to meet the needs of those staying in or travelling through the area. This has been highlighted with the drying out of our lake in recent months, drastically reducing recreational use.

The attached comments generally relate to the township of Lake Bolac and the enormous untapped potential. This document has also been emailed to [rrc@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:rrc@parliament.vic.gov.au)

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

Yours sincerely,

**Lyn Webster**  
**Centre Manager**  
0409 005 346

**Karen McIntyre**  
**President**  
0409 504 237

## COMMENT ON ISSUES CONCERNING RURAL & REGIONAL TOURISM IN VICTORIA

- Towns such as Lake Bolac already have a dependency on tourism. They are fortunate to have a captive audience (located on the intersection of busy Glenelg Highway and Ararat-Mortlake Road), a good location (popular spot to break travel or holiday), a popular natural attraction (1460 ha freshwater Lake Bolac), a grand historic attraction (Narrapumelap Homestead, Wickliffe) and good amenities (toilets, tourist information, accommodation, food, petrol, public computers). Yet these attractions are not to be found on the popular tourist information websites, website maps and publications.

Many small towns such as Lake Bolac are overlooked in National, State and Regional tourist promotions. There is no reference to our town in touring guides, town descriptions or on maps on popular tourist websites [www.australia.com](http://www.australia.com) or [www.visitvictoria.com](http://www.visitvictoria.com). And there is very little reference on [www.visitgrampians.com.au](http://www.visitgrampians.com.au).

For those planning trips and to encourage visits to rural and regional Victoria it is essential that maps be extensive as the alternative routes and the smaller towns along the routes are not well publicised.

- A website, linked into the regions 'visit' website, is also needed for our town with the same easy to find name 'visitlakebolac'. This should be a government funded initiative to assist towns to improve awareness in the tourist market, whilst not clogging the regions 'visit' website.
- Smaller towns such as Lake Bolac require funding to develop their tourist infrastructure and attractions.

The economic benefit to be gained from tourists through the town is potentially great but untapped. Assistance is required to build attractions to encourage travellers to stay longer or stay overnight. We already have the accommodation (motel, caravan park and lake foreshore camping) however, signage, vegetation, walking tracks, BBQ area and shade is required to enhance our existing attractions.

Sourcing funding is difficult due to the highly competitive nature of funds for tourism development with smaller towns often forming a queue behind the larger regional towns.

- Paid for advertising – Jigsaw magazines, excludes smaller towns. Currently the activities promoted in the region (scenic, adventure, arts, food and wine) seem to be limited in categories and to those paying for advertising. This obviously excludes many smaller towns for a variety of reasons.

Firstly, the categories need to be reviewed to ensure smaller towns are listed. Categories that would suite our town include: major events, markets, golf (non members welcome), bird watching, fishing/boating, nature based camping, homesteads and private gardens (as opposed to National & State Parks). Secondly, there should be a free listing (in addition to the paid for advertising).

This will ensure that there is a genuine guide for the traveler offering a comprehensive list of what to see and do.

## COMMENT ON ISSUES CONCERNING RURAL & REGIONAL TOURISM IN VICTORIA (continued)

- Alternative touring routes. There is a lack of acknowledgement of the alternative popular touring routes. In our shire the preference is to promote the Western Highway and Wine districts (generally located north of the highway). In our tourist region, the Grampians region, the preference is to promote the Great Ocean Road, Grampians National Park and Western Highway.

Whereas a popular alternative route is Western Highway, Grampians National Park and Glenelg Highway. The Great Ocean Road, Warrnambool and Glenelg Highway. Or the Western Highway (to Ballarat), Glenelg Highway, Mt. Gambier, Limestone Coast and Adelaide.

Lake Bolac 'feeds' tourists into many adjoining and further a field tourist regions such as, The Grampians National Park via the Southern Grampians (Dunkeld, Willaura), to Hamilton, Mt. Gambier, Adelaide, Warrnambool, Ballarat and Melbourne via the Glenelg Highway.

This 'cross-over' is not handled well in tourist websites and publications.

- Tourist regions. The main focus in the Grampians region, and rightly so, is the Grampians National Park. The name Grampians has a different meaning to those towns not on the immediate border of the National Park. The main focus of promotions is the Western Highway and towns located on this road. However, travellers to the Grampians National Park and Melbourne/Adelaide will often travel to their destination via the Western Highway but return via Glenelg Highway. This is not promoted anywhere.
- Tourist regions. Confusion with boundaries and alternative names exists. For example, the coastal towns of Portland and Warrnambool are not included in the Grampians but it seems that the coastal town of Nelson is. A separate promotional strategy is needed for the smaller towns not in the immediate vicinity of the Grampians National Park.
- There is not enough funding for all the potential tourism projects, which is understandable. However, smaller towns such as ours have greater difficulties accessing funding for projects. For example, we would like to develop our town precinct with a BBQ area, gardens and walking track. A walking/bike track is also needed around the lake. Alternative shade to replace trees lost in the January 2006 cyclone is needed. And finally, the town needs sewerage in order for proposed sub-divisions and new buildings to occur, which in turn will attract more businesses which will attract more visitors.

The wider region however, has so many requirements on the available funding that we are finding it difficult, slow and cumbersome to make significant headway.

Perhaps a separate amount of funding is required for towns under say a population of 500 so they can receive funding for projects in a shorter time frame, removing the competition with larger towns for available funds.

## COMMENT ON ISSUES CONCERNING RURAL & REGIONAL TOURISM IN VICTORIA (continued)

- Priority is given to towns with an accredited tourist information centre. This does not necessarily correlate to the appeal of a town. Lake Bolac for example is located on a busy highway and has a lake which is popular for camping, fishing, boating, yachting and skiing. It also has an Information and Business Centre which is open 7 days a week. However, the Information Centre is not accredited, due to not meeting the requirements that Tourism Victoria impose and therefore misses out on the many benefits from being accredited.

We are independent of the Ararat Rural City Council, and under current rulings, cannot 'tag' onto the council's Ararat Visitor Information Centre's accreditation. Tourism Victoria imposes the following requirements to enable accreditation. It could be perceived that these are designed to exclude a small town such as ours:

- Payment of substantial annual fee. This is significant for a small, predominantly voluntary organisation.
- Full time permanent staff member/s in centre at all times. We operate 7 days a week with a permanent part-time manager and volunteer staff.
- Opening times 9am to 5pm daily. We are open 9am to 5pm weekdays and 10am to 4pm on weekends.
- Must belong to a local tourism association. Our shire has a local business association, of which we are a member, but does not have a local tourism association.

One of the great difficulties we have experienced in trying to promote our tourist information centre is that of road signage. It appears that Tourism Victoria have a monopoly on the word 'information' and the yellow and blue 'i' symbol that indicates a visitor information centre. If we are not accredited we cannot access the signage.

We are forbidden to use any information 'i' symbol as the accredited symbol is the only one allowed on VicRoads roads in Victoria. We are also informed by VicRoads and Council that we cannot use the word 'information' or 'visitor information' on a sign to direct traffic to our information centre as this is in conflict with Tourism Victoria.

Rather than restricting the use of signage and services for Tourism Victoria, we feel that centres such as ours should be encouraged to provide additional visitor information to the travelling public. It is in the interest of the State of Victoria and Australian tourism to do so, as well as assisting the local economy.

Our centre is in a brand new purpose built facility with excellent parking, helpful and knowledgeable staff and volunteers, stocked with brochures, local products and services available for purchase, public computers/broadband internet, located on a major highway and open 7 days a week. To our knowledge no one from Tourism Victoria has ever visited our centre.

We would be happy to discuss ways in which we could work with Tourism Victoria to enable exemption or modification of their current rules to be more inclusive and welcoming of rural and regional communities such as ours.

## **COMMENT ON ISSUES CONCERNING RURAL & REGIONAL TOURISM IN VICTORIA (continued)**

- Short term and long term effect of natural events. Lake Bolac was in the path of a cyclone in January 2006 resulting in many mature trees being lost from the main streets and around the Lake. Structural damage was also caused to many businesses and silos. The trees were popular shade for tourists camping or travelling through town and are greatly missed.

Local businesses have suffered greatly from the drought due to the lake drying and campers deciding to holiday elsewhere and because district farmers have had one of their worst years ever.

Bushfires in the Grampians and North East also affected us. Travel was cancelled completely or alternative destinations sought during the fires and during the recovery (to unaffected destinations). The fires in the North East meant funding was diverted from our region, which was still reeling from the effects of its own fire and drought.

Businesses are still coping with rebuilding from storm damage and the effects of the drought.