



**Business & Tourism Anglesea
(BATA) Inc.**

ABN: 94 136 712 047

P.O. Box 189, Anglesea VIC 3230

27 May 2007

The Executive Officer
Rural and Regional Committee
Parliament House
MELBOURNE, VIC 3002

Re: Inquiry Into Rural and Regional Tourism

My name is Ari Lingam and I am responding in my capacity as president of Business & Tourism Anglesea (BATA). I operate a bicycle retail business in Anglesea and I am also a resident of Anglesea. In addition to my community involvement with BATA, I am on the Surf Coast Shire's Surf Coast Tourism Board and I am the founding president of the Anglesea Bike Park Committee of Management.

Through my involvement in operating a local business and being part of the above community organisation I feel I am well qualified to provide this inquiry with feedback relating to the issues that face small communities in identifying, developing and implementing tourism opportunities.

Background

Anglesea is a small coastal community situated between Torquay and Lorne on the Great Ocean Road and approximately 30 minutes from Geelong. The town has a permanent population of around 2000 people and is totally surrounded by The Great Otway National Park and The Anglesea Heath.

Businesses comprise of retail, hospitality, accommodation, trades and services. Alcoa operates a power station and coal mine in Anglesea and there are a number of camps catering primarily to school groups.

The challenge that faces many Anglesea businesses in retail, hospitality and accommodation is seasonality of trade. The summer period and to a lesser extent the school holiday periods provide the majority of most of these businesses' trading. BATA and the Surf Coast Tourism Board have identified the need to create a vibrant year round

local economy and it has been acknowledged that tourism is the cornerstone of this strategy.

BATA has identified that a huge opportunity exists in developing Anglesea as a nature based adventure tourism destination with mountain biking as its core tourism product. Based on tourism research mountain bike tourism alone has the potential to inject millions of dollars into the Anglesea community on an annual basis.

The Opportunity – Develop Anglesea as a World Class Mountain Bike Destination

The town of Anglesea has a unique set of attributes which can make it stand out on a world class level for year round adventure based tourism:

- Located on the coast on the iconic Great Ocean Road
- A town totally surrounded by natural bush that has the ideal terrain for mountain bike trails
- Established tourism infrastructure – accommodation, hospitality and retail
- 1.5 hours from Melbourne, 30 minutes from Geelong
- Access to major airports – Avalon, Tullamarine
- Ideal environment to develop other nature based, outdoor adventure tourism products
- Supportive and active community
- Broad demographic appeal – young, old, male, female families

Anglesea has already taken its first steps to realising this vision with the newly completed Anglesea Bike Park which consists of a professionally designed world class standard mountain cross track.

The next step is the development of a network of purpose built mountain bike trails which can be directly accessed from town. It is the development of these types of trails which attracts the majority of mountain bike tourism.

The development of world class mountain bike trails will attract local, state, national and ultimately international events which will further enhance Anglesea's reputation as a world class mountain bike destination.

Benefits

The development of mountain bike trails can deliver economic, social and environmental benefits.

Economic Benefits

- Year round tourism
- Millions of dollars annually into the local economy
- Mountain Bikers are a high dollar value demographic
- Attract the Mountain Bike enthusiast who will bring their family & friends because Anglesea is an iconic holiday destination
- Unique tourism product which differentiates Anglesea from other coastal towns
- Flow on effect to other Anglesea businesses not related directly to tourism
- More employment both permanent and casual
- Increased business investment
- New business opportunities
- Attract local, state, national & international events

Social Benefits

- Health, Fitness & Well being
- Appeals to all ages, males, females and families
- Combat obesity problem
- Community involvement through trail building and trail maintenance days
- Community ownership of the trails
- Offroad connections between towns
- Mountain bike tourism gives communities opportunities without threatening their environment or community values

Environmental Benefits

- Connects people with the environment which creates respect
- Protection of the environment with sustainable trails
- Mountain bikers are a fitter more active group which contributes thousands of voluntary man hours to protecting and rehabilitating the bush
- Help manage threats to the bush by motor bikes and four wheel drives
- More people in the bush covering greater distances can reduce undesirable activities such as illegal dumping and camping
- Mountain biking on properly created trails has the same or less impact than walking
- Mountain biking is carbon neutral and noiseless

Issues

The development of mountain bike tourism for Anglesea has been embraced by the broader community, businesses and the Surf Coast Shire. Indeed a great deal of time has been invested by individuals, community groups and local government to develop this strategy which will deliver triple bottom line outcomes and addresses the key points in this inquiry's terms of reference.

The number one issue the Anglesea mountain bike tourism strategy faces in moving forward from concept to reality is the reluctance of **Parks Victoria** to support our local initiatives. The inquiry's terms of reference addresses:

"potential impediments to the sustained growth of regional tourism, economic activity and jobs"

The Anglesea community has identified the mountain bike tourism opportunity and its ability to deliver in all key areas that are important to the town and its long term prosperity. The community has also recognised that the type of tourism development that it desires must be in keeping with its core values and natural environment.

In spite of our community driven initiative Parks Victoria displays an inflexible policy and short sighted vision when our proposal, which clearly has massive benefits for Anglesea and serves to protect the environment, is met with a lack of interest.

The real threat is that if Anglesea cannot take advantage of developing in harmony with its natural environment then less desired development, as seen in surrounding coastal towns, may be the alternative. Ultimately alternative development options for Anglesea will result in fewer people benefiting and at the cost of the town's unique character and its natural environment.

Proposed Action

Parks Victoria must recognise that Community values and economic values must be of equal importance to environmental values.

Parks Victoria must demonstrate more flexibility in its land management decision making processes and policies by first and foremost listening to how local communities envisage using their natural environment to benefit socially, economically and environmentally.

Parks Victoria needs to adopt a partnership approach with local communities and that subsequent development of policies should embody that partnership.

Parks Victoria must recognise that the way they currently engage and respond to local communities is deficient and flawed and creates a strong feeling of resentment which is counter productive for all concerned.

If Parks Victoria is to change then it must give its officers and the community a simpler framework of implementation of changes to land use.

Conclusions

Parks Victoria acts like a large bureaucracy because it can and does not engage the local community because it doesn't have to. Its officers hide behind outmoded legislation and unnecessary red tape.

This has to change for the sake of local communities and the environment. Parks Victoria must become accountable to the local communities where it manages our public land.

In an era where local, state and federal governments are empowering rural communities to create their own vibrant and sustainable futures it is unacceptable that government bodies like Parks Victoria actively stand in the way.

The State Government of Victoria must realise that, for all its good intentions, if any of its departments are out of touch or not in line with its policies then the effectiveness of those policies, and therefore the likelihood of their success, is greatly diminished.

Post Script

BATA was successful in attracting one of Australia's biggest mountain bike events to Anglesea, the Kona 24 Hour. This would see over 1,000 riders and an estimated 2,000-3,000 family, friends and spectators coming to Anglesea with the majority spending 2-3 nights. The event receives national coverage in the leading mountain bike media.

An event such as this provides enormous marketing exposure and gives great credibility to the host venue.

Unfortunately, due in part to the negativity expressed by Parks Victoria, the organisers have decided to host this event elsewhere. The cost of losing this event for Anglesea can be measured in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

If we cannot implement our strategy then the cost to Anglesea will be many more times this. This is something Anglesea cannot afford.

There is also a belief that the development of mountain biking in Anglesea and other areas along the coast is actively being discouraged such that it does not create competition with the newly developed mountain bike trails in Forrest approximately an hour's drive from Anglesea and 30 minutes inland from Apollo Bay. Development of further mountain biking centres in our region will have a greater benefit for all. Not developing other areas will have the opposite effect on Forrest and deny Anglesea and

other towns wishing to pursue a similar strategy a huge economic, social and environmental opportunity.

BATA trusts you will address our concerns as a matter of urgency and use this inquiry's influence to hasten changes needed in Parks Victoria in dealing with local communities as recommended by our association.

If you wish to discuss this matter please feel free to contact me during business hours on (03) 5263 3251

Yours Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ari Lingam', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ari Lingam
President
Business & Tourism Anglesea (BATA) Inc.