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30 May 2007

The Hon Damian Drum MLC
Chair
Rural and Regional Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
MELBOURNE 3002

Dear Mr Drum

Horsham Rural City Council Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into Rural and Regional Tourism

I refer to your letter dated 19 April 2007 advising of the above and enclose for your committees information a submission from the Horsham Rural City Council on this matter.

Council also wishes to advise that we would appreciate the opportunity to personally present our submission to the Rural and Regional Committee when it holds public hearings throughout Victoria in 2007/early 2008.

Council offers the use of its Reception Room for such a hearing if this venue is considered appropriate.

Council reserves the right to add further information to its submission at the public hearing.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me on telephone 03 53829728 or mobile 0407 340997.

Yours faithfully

ROBIN N NEILSON (Mr)
General Manager
Planning and Promotion Services

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PARLIAMENT INQUIRY INTO RURAL AND REGIONAL TOURISM

Rural And Regional Committee Parliamentary Committees Act 2005

Submission from the Horsham Rural City Council.

The Terms of Reference are as follows:

That the Rural and Regional Committee to inquire into, consider and report to Parliament on:

- 1. The economic benefits of tourism in regional areas, including tracking the flow-on benefits through other regional business and industry.**

RESPONSE:

The current available data is supplied by Tourism Victoria and is provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. This data is collated quarterly and combines the Horsham Rural City Council, West Wimmera Shire and the Southern Grampians Shire.

The Horsham Rural City believes that this is not meeting the needs of Council. Council requires statistics that cover the Municipality which would allow Council to do the following:

- Make more informed decisions.
 - Undertake targeted marketing.
 - Provide accurate data of the current situation to allow for immediate responses.
 - Assist Council to assess the flow on benefits of visitation.
 - Target investment and product development opportunities.
- 2. Potential impediments to the sustained growth of regional tourism, economic activity and jobs.**

RESPONSE:

- Hospitality / tourism training in rural areas is currently lacking and this leads to a deficiency of skilled tourism and hospitality employees.

- Traditionally there has not been sufficient funding for tourism Infrastructure development across our Region.
- Tourism Development funding for new walking tracks and visitor services is not adequate especially in the northern part of the Grampians National Park, Mt Arapiles and Black Range State Park.
- The strength of the Australian dollar allows for further domestic overseas travel to the detriment of travelling to Regional Victoria.
- There is an immediate need to substantially upgrade and/or provide technologies that improve communication especially to some of the Region's more remote locations such as the Wartook Valley area of the Northern Grampians. Mobile phone coverage and internet speeds are severally deficient. This has an impact on business investment, bush fire communication plus search and rescue.

3. The effectiveness, at a National, State and Local level, of current programs to promote and enhance tourism in regional Victoria.

RESPONSE:

- The current marketing activities, by Tourism Victoria, are principally concentrated on Melbourne, including the immediate surrounds and are primarily focussed on National and State icons.
- There is a large part of Western Victoria, including the Wimmera, that is not covered by current Tourism Victoria marketing activities.
- Visitors come to our Region from overseas and all other States of Australia. Tourism Victoria's marketing activities are generally not targeted interstate with the exception of New South Wales.
- Much of the State programs tend to concentrate on the traditional holiday maker. However the trend is for the domestic visitor to take fewer holidays and to spend less time on these holidays. Maybe the understanding of the traditional holiday needs to be reviewed and that specific targeting of the hobbies and activities of the potential visitor could see that visitors undertake their hobby as a holiday.

4. Initiative to increase both international and domestic visitor nights in regional Victoria.

RESPONSE:

- The existing Great Southern Touring Route is a valuable tool for visitors especially Internationals, however there is an opportunity to further enhance visitation by extending this route towards Adelaide. This would take in some of the other natural attractions of Victoria and South Australia..
- Whilst it is understood why National and State bodies have a reluctance to include new touring routes, maybe the visitor doesn't want to just follow the red line on the touring map. Maybe they would be interested in themed touring routes that could encourage dispersal and new reasons to visit or revisit.
- These themed routes could be part of existing "icon" touring routes, but act as side roads to those special attractions or products.
- The Grampians National Park has very limited sealed road infrastructure. International visitors especially with hire cars are not permitted to travel on gravel roads. Without a good sealed road network, dispersal is prohibitive. More funding to create a better sealed road network is therefore required.

5. The efficacy of existing mechanisms at a National, State and local level to address the impact on regional tourism of natural events such a bushfires, floods and drought, and effective measures to drive long term economic recovery.

RESPONSE:

- Whilst our region has been affected by drought for 10 years and bushfires in the past year, the bushfire recovery package response has been immediate and the region is still awaiting an effective drought recovery response targeted for tourism.
- Whilst the immediate bushfire recovery funding was substantial this funding has now finished with still over 50% of the Grampians National Park walking tracks and visitor infrastructure requiring maintenance and repair with many still closed or not operational.

- There is no date for the recovery programs to recommence. Recovery works have been undertaken to the detriment of maintaining or upgrading other visitor infrastructure, especially in non fire effected areas of the Grampians National Park ie Wartook Valley as well as other National and State parks of the Region.

6. Opportunities to leverage private investment and commercial activity in regional tourism infrastructure, including ecotourism.

RESPONSE:

- In this Region, Mt Arapiles is a well known destination for rock climbers from around the world.

However it is recognised as supporting a low yield accommodation sector. The only facilities available tend to attract those low yielding visitors.

The potential could be for a high yield development if the appropriate detailed research is undertaken. Mt Arapiles scoping study is being undertaken but funding for a more detailed feasibility study is required.

- Greater partnerships between the private and public sector, including with Parks Victoria, would assist with development opportunities in semi remote areas.

There is a need for infrastructure upgrade funding especially as many opportunities occur in semi remote areas, especially relating to eco-friendly developments.

- Accurate and local visitor statistics would allow a potential investor the confidence to consider private investment opportunities, especially in areas of 5 star large capacity accommodation facilities, a convention centre or domestic air travel.

Mr. Robin Neilson
General Manager
Planning and Promotion Services

30 May 2007