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Submission:

Inquiry Into Rural & Regional Tourism
By: George Flack CFP, FPNA, AFAIM, RFC(USA).

To: Mr Damian Drum MLC Chair Rural & Regional Committee,

Dear Mr Drum,

I write making this submission on my own behalf drawing on my extensive experiences gained through being a member of the Bendigo Tourism Board of Management Inc for the past 6 years, my extensive International travel experiences since 1993 through my profession as a Financial Planner (including twice the Australian Financial Planner of the Year in 1996 and 2004), as a qualified Accountant, Fellow of the National Institute of Accountants, Associate Fellow of the Australian Institute of Management and my past 40 years experience as an amateur and professional athlete including my past 4 years on the peak professional athletics body – The Victorian Athletic League (VAL) – as current State President and Chair over the past 3 years and my past memberships of the Athletics Bendigo Board and the Bendigo International Madison Board.

My submission does NOT represent any of the views of any of the bodies I am or have been associated with in the present or past – they are my own views, observations and comments.

This submission is specifically directed at the Rural and Regional Committee's item (4) – Initiatives to increase both International and domestic visitor nights in Regional Victoria.

1). Increasing Visitor Stay: Private Sponsorship – Additional Events “created” and Staged.

I personally funded by way of \$5,500 per each of the past 4 years the staging of an additional event at the Bendigo International Madison cycling/athletics carnival to extend visitor overnight stays – namely the RetireInvest Criterium staged around the Bendigo CBD on the Friday evening of the Labour Day weekend. This also created additional spend at various sidewalk café's, restaurants and hotels in the CBD as well as increasing the length of stay for visitors to encourage them to stay on the Friday evening – creating additional spend across the broad spectrum of small business in Bendigo including hospitality and accommodation industries.

I am most proud to add that Kathryn MacKenzie's Visitor Information Centre Staff have assisted in distributing flyers and leaflets at each of the 4 events staged thus far on the Friday evening's. Co-operation between the CBD traders and the City of Greater Bendigo has been paramount to the successes in attracting additional entries and visitors. Two of the events were held on the same evening as an AFL Tynan/Eyre football fundraiser was being staged at the QEO.

2). Establishment of a new Financial Planning Association in Australia headquartered in Bendigo.

Having been a member of the International Association of Registered Financial Consultants (IARFC-USA) for the past 9 years it came as no surprise in May 2006 to be approached whilst in Middletown Ohio to establish both the Australian and New Zealand IARFC associations.

The Australian IARFC was launched on 21 Feb 2007 and is headquartered in my Eaglehawk office. We are currently recruiting members and have plans to stage our first International Conference in Bendigo involving all Asian and Pacific countries. This is planned to occur in August/September 2009. Later in February 2007 we travelled to NZ and established the NZ IARFC in Wellington.

I believe the increased International visitation to Bendigo and Regional Victoria as a direct result of this new Financial Planning association will provide significant longer term benefits to the Region from a higher yielding visitor. I would expect co-operation and assistance from the local councils and tourism bodies with high quality brochures, attractive packages, 5 star accommodation and conference facilities. Indeed Bendigo Tourism's "Conference and Events" book released late last year greatly assisted me in convincing the American IARFC Board to stage the August/September 2009 International Conference in Bendigo.

3. Establishment of Professional Athletics into New Zealand in Feb 2008.

The Victorian Athletic League – the peak professional athletic body in Australia has successfully franchised Professional Athletics into NZ by way of the staging of the first professional athletics meeting in Wanganui (the home of the smashing of the sub 4 minute mile record by Peter Snell in 1962) when an agreement was signed on 12 April 2007 by the Cooks Garden Trust Board in Wanganui NZ. One professional athletic track meeting will be conducted in NZ each summer and NZ athletes will be encouraged to enter and participate in the other 25 professional athletic track meetings staged in Victoria. Some of the most notable of these include the Maryborough Highland New Years Day carnival, Bendigo International Madison and Stawell Easter Carnival. The VAL is currently attempting to woo either Qantas or Air NZ as a preferred airline partner to ferry athletes, coaches, administrators and supporters across the Tasman in either direction for these events. Already 5 NZ athletes and a coach and manager came to the Bendigo International Madison carnival in March 2007 to participate. It is envisaged that a Development Squad of

15 NZ athletes and cyclists will again travel to Bendigo in March 2008 as well as other venues such as Stawell in Easter 2008.

4. BRIC Study Tours 2007-2010.

I am one of 15 selected Australian financial planners, fund managers and research analysts selected to conduct a 4 year study of the BRIC countries – namely Brazil, Russia, India and China. In 2007 I visited China and in April 2007 I visited India. In September 2008 I will visit Russia with a visit to Brazil occurring in February 2010. These countries are envisaged to majorly influence International Business, Financial, Investment, Population, Infrastructure, Economics and politics over the next 20-50 years.

I quickly recognised the major benefits of establishing good personal relationships with the Chinese whilst in Shanghai during October 2006 as well as the Australian Trade Commission over there. I came back to Bendigo and attempted to convince Bendigo Tourism to fund a trip to Bendigo of one of the tour guides I had met in Shanghai to come to Bendigo during Easter 2007. Funding of the trip had not been placed into the 06/07 Tourism Budget and thus the suggestion was rejected. In late April 2007 Kathryn MacKenzie did visit China and has met this same University-qualified Tour Guide in Shanghai. There are significant longer term benefits in improving the relationships we have with these Chinese as they influence International visitation to our shores and our Regional areas. It is also imperative that the correct Chinese dialect (Mandarin and NOT Cantonese) is used in bilingual brochures, books and other publications to assist us in gaining an increased visitation from these areas.

Conclusion:

This submission is neither designed to be lengthy nor purports to make specific recommendations. It has been prepared to highlight FOUR initiatives made by ONE individual Victorian citizen who has the drive, passion and past experiences to assist in increasing International and domestic visitor nights in Regional Victoria going forward.

It would be an absolute delight if various bodies within the State would assist in picking up on these small initiatives to ensure they create even greater impacts on our visitor numbers into the future.

Yours Faithfully,

GEORGE FLACK CFP, FPNA, AFAIM, RFC(USA).