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SUBMISSION TO THE RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE PARLIAMENT  
OF VICTORIA REGARDING THE INQUIRY INTO RURAL AND REGIONAL TOURISM  
IN VICTORIA.

Buchan Business and Tourist Association Inc. ( BBTA ) is a community group representing the businesses and tourism interests of the people of the Buchan district in Far East Gippsland.

Over the past several years Far East Gippsland has suffered several major setbacks which have affected the population as a whole, closure of timber mills, curtailment of the logging industry, prolonged drought and two episodes of severe bush fire activity. The result of these disasters has been the loss of young families from the district who have moved away to find work. Old established farming families finding their farms are no longer viable. Older people remaining in the district finding life difficult as there are few support services for the disabled or the elderly in many rural areas.

Tourism is seen by many as an economic benefit to the district. Tourist operators being key stakeholders, are working hard to attract visitors. In Buchan and district there is much to offer. The amazing Buchan Caves set in the beautiful reserve, the Alpine and Snowy River National Parks offering a tremendous experience of the beauty of East Gippsland's natural wonders, rafting and canoeing the Snowy river, horse riding and camping tours, bush walking, bird watching, tours of historic sites around the district, the opportunity to explore some of the many wild caves situated within the district. The ability to travel to the beach within an hours drive time or to the ski fields within two hours is seen by many as a plus for tourists.

Accommodation to suit most visitors, ranging from camping, backpacker lodge, motel, self contained log cabins and cottages are on offer close to the town facilities and further up the mountain in W Tree and Gelantipy.

Flow on benefits of the tourist industry include employment for tradespersons in the building and maintenance of holiday accommodation, gardening services, a courier and bus service for delivery of goods from larger towns and transport of residents to and from towns for necessary services. The hire of the bus to transport tourists around the historical sites is also a flow on benefit to the operator. Little benefit flows through to other regional business and industry in the Buchan and district area.

Potential impediments to the sustained growth of regional tourism, economic activity and jobs are seen to be the distance from larger towns, the unsealed state of many roads which means that tourists using hired cars are unable to traverse through the area and therefore miss much of the East Gippsland experience of the fauna and flora. Many of the tourist oriented businesses are run

mainly by family members and are very seasonal, Christmas, Easter and occasional school holidays. To employ workers other than on a casual basis is very difficult. The commercial businesses in the area such as cafes, the hotel, the roadhouse and store also have difficulty because of the seasonality of trading. With the current economic climate many families who do visit bring in their food and other necessary items with them and rarely buy from the local stores except on an emergency basis. Facilities are available in camping grounds and in self contained accommodation for food to be prepared and cooked economically, this means the cafes and hotel do not attract many families to eat. The flow on from this is fewer jobs in hospitality.

To date the effectiveness of current programs at National and State level to promote and enhance tourism in this area specifically has not been seen to be effective. Most of the advertising is directed towards the recognition of the coastal and lake areas of East Gippsland which although beautiful and a gem in the crown of the East Gippsland Shire do nothing to encourage tourists to enjoy the hinterland of East Gippsland. Much more effort could be directed towards correcting this anomaly by promoters of tourism programmes at both National and State level. Locally run promotions have varying degrees of success, the recent Centenary Celebration of the discovery of the Fairy Cave at Buchan was a very well attended event, Parks Victoria Buchan Caves staff with help from local people ran the event which had a historical theme. Hundreds of people attended, but it was just for the day so there was not much of a flow on for business in the district. On the other hand however the Australasian Caves and Karst annual conference was held in Buchan in May 2007, it is estimated by the Caves staff that \$60,000 was spent in the district by the delegates and their companions during the week of the conference. It can be noted here that by matching people with their interests or hobbies much value can be generated to both the participants of such programmes and to the host communities.

Many of the grants for tourism activities coming from State government departments are only available on a dollar for dollar basis. In the Buchan district this is not an option, after the disastrous events mentioned previously people do not have the cash to expend on such projects, it is enough in many cases to just keep the family fed.

In Buchan we have no large commercial business to promote or sponsor tourist activities or give out large donations to either sports or tourism.

Initiatives to increase both international and domestic tourism in regional Victoria will mainly be through advertising and packaging of tourist services. Success will probably be seen by operators living along the Sydney to Melbourne Coastal route, The Great Alpine Way and the Great Ocean Road route from Melbourne to Adelaide. Wineries are a great attraction for many, as are gourmet foods, these can be found in abundance along the aforementioned routes.

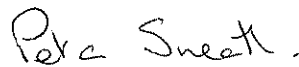
Efforts have been made at National, State and local levels to address the impact of disastrous natural events on regional tourism. Much money has been made available to run education programmes for those effected by these events. For businesses affected by the disasters it is often not practical to attend the programmes because of the problems of leaving a family run business, or a single person business, for sometimes several days to attend. Cost of a replacement worker if one is available and the travel and accommodation makes the whole process uneconomic for the operator of a small business in a remote area. Tourism Awards and promotional speakers are very entertaining but do not help with long term economic recovery in a devastated remote village, or help a farmer recover mentally from the loss of crops and stock and often home.

Within the East Gippsland hinterland there exist opportunities for private investors to promote ecotourism and the beauty of the district, however many problems lay in wait for the investor, much of East Gippsland is National Park which raises difficulty of access for groups and vehicles. The area is very sparsely populated, roads and tracks in many of the sites are difficult and dangerous, open to 4wd vehicles only. Insurance for operators is very expensive and hard to obtain. People previously employed in logging and bush skills who have the knowledge and skills to be guides have mainly left the area to seek work elsewhere.

Rules and regulations for the tourist operators have become very restrictive and time consuming. Operators have expressed their need for workshops to help them understand and short circuit the red tape. Building a business under such conditions is fraught with danger of failure and loss of capital. Generally speaking people with money to invest choose safer ways to grow their wealth than the very unreliable way of tourism in a remote rural area.

This submission has been prepared on behalf of the BBTA using the terms of reference of the Inquiry into Rural and Regional Tourism of the Parliament of Victoria. Using the area of Buchan and district as the topic for discussion the BBTA hopes the submission will be of value to the Inquiry and help members to understand some of the problems of tourism in the Far East Gippsland.

Peta Sneath,



Secretary  
Buchan Business and Tourist Assn. Inc.