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(Submission by email – rrc@parliament.vic.gov.au)

I wish to provide a submission to the Rural and Regional Committee Inquiry into Rural and Regional Tourism and in particular to address Terms of Reference Number 2 on the impediments to the sustained growth of regional tourism, economic activity and jobs.

One of the major impediments to a viable and vibrant long term tourism industry is the risk of climate change. Given that Australia's tourism reputation relies on our ability to sell the beauty of our natural landscape, how climate change will affect our tourism industry should be front of mind for policy makers and the industry itself. As David Morgan, CEO of Westpac said last year, "Climate change is a real risk for business. Business is a vital part of the solution - we need to act and we need to act early."

AUSTRALIAN IMPACTS

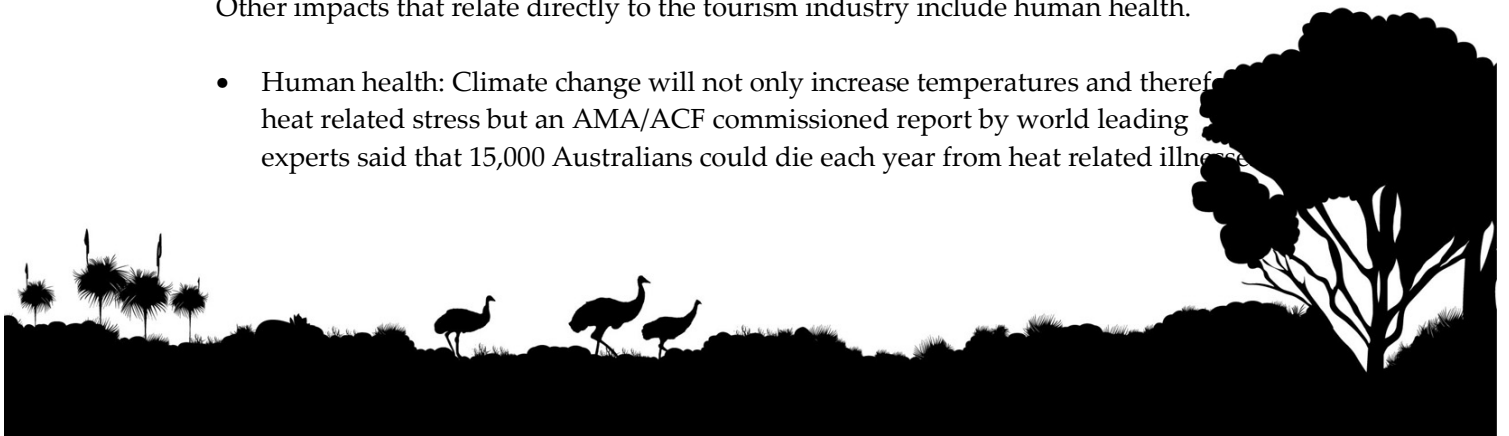
Australian ecosystems and regions that are predicted to be most vulnerable to climate change are also those places that have a high reliance on nature-based tourism. For example: our priority vulnerable systems and regions include:

- Alpine regions
- Reef systems (such as Ningaloo and the GBR)
- Tropical forest areas
- Heathlands of SW Western Australia
- Coastal mangroves and wetland systems (such as Kakadu), and
- Rangelands

The \$32 billion tourism industry is highly climate-dependent. For example, in the Australian Alps, a 2°C rise and 8% drop in rainfall could reduce snow cover area by 66%, putting about half of the \$550 million ski industry at risk.

Other impacts that relate directly to the tourism industry include human health.

- Human health: Climate change will not only increase temperatures and therefore heat related stress but an AMA/ACF commissioned report by world leading experts said that 15,000 Australians could die each year from heat related illnesses.



- Settlements and infrastructure impacts: With an increase in extreme weather events, this is likely to affect cities close to the coast in particular in the Northern parts of Australia.

TOURISM'S CONTRIBUTION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Not only is the tourism industry highly vulnerable to climate change, it also plays its part in being a contributor to the problem. The primary issues are transportation through road and air travel, and electricity consumption including in particular air conditioning might also play a significant role.

In Australia, transport makes up 13.5% of domestic emissions in 2004 and domestic air was 6.5% while road was 88% in 2004. Aviation represents about 12% of CO₂ emissions from transport when international flights are included (and about 1.6% of the world's GHG emissions in total). Emissions from international flights are more than half of overall air emissions. With increasing petrol prices and potential future carbon taxes on airlines, the cost of travelling to regional tourism centres is likely to become more expensive.

SOLUTIONS

Dangerous climate change is an absolute reality if we do not act now to dramatically cut pollution.

We have a global responsibility to make sure that we stabilise GHG emissions globally over the next 20 years and reduce emissions globally to something like 60% by 2050 (over 1990 levels). Therefore in Australia we need to reduce emissions in the order of 80–90% by 2050.

It's a mammoth task but it is affordable and achievable. The costs of not doing anything about climate change are serious – the Stern Review said it could cost between 5-20% of global GDP every year if we do not act now. We should start investing 1% of our global GDP every year into reducing emissions.

This means we need to put a price on pollution – at the moment it is free to pollute.

We also need to massively increase the amount of clean, safe renewable energy that we have in Australia. We could be global leaders in the solar industry if we really went for it but at the moment, we are losing our IP and industry to overseas countries such as China and California. These kinds of industries have huge potential for contributing to jobs in rural and regional centres and can become tourist attractions as well.

We need to be much smarter with the way we use our energy and to better design our buildings so that we don't need to rely on air conditioning. We can also be much more fuel efficient with our cars and other transport emissions.

The kinds of things the tourism industry can do for itself:

- Fully participate in policy development processes on climate change which include both the need for an adaptation strategy but also strong mitigation options
- Follow the lead of some of the other industry sectors, e.g., building and property sector, and look at how the tourism industry might reduce its emissions by 60-90% by 2050
- Get on the front foot to offer in-bound tourists a way for them to offset their carbon footprint when they visit Australia
- Encourage tour operators and the broader industry to get their own businesses in order with reducing their environmental and carbon footprint

CONCLUSION

Our tourists come to Australia because we have beautiful natural landscapes that they want to see. We have a clean green image to preserve. Our tourists are interested in how we maintain the stewardship of our land.

It is therefore our responsibility to ensure that the tourism industry is on the front foot promoting ecologically sustainable and climate friendly solutions.

Climate change is a business risk for the tourism industry.

The industry needs to better understand both the impacts and engage governments to develop appropriate policies to avoid dangerous climate change and also to assist with adaptation. I am happy to provide more detailed information on request.

Yours sincerely

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