

Name: Chris Buckingham

Organisation: General Manager, Gippsland Tourism and Chairperson Destination Gippsland

Phone: 0429 869 638

Address: Gippsland Tourism, C/o Wellington Shire, 70 Foster Street, Sale, Vic 3850

Email: chrisb@wellington.vic.gov.au

Comments:

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

Tourism is of great importance to Gippsland Economy - 4,500 jobs and over \$600 million direct spend (Tourism Research Australia, 2004)

With decline in Forestry, Fishing and other traditional industries, there is growing expectation from Rural and Regional areas, seeking to ensure the social and economic future of their communities.

The overwhelming majority of tourism businesses in Gippsland are family owned and operated micro-businesses. The owners of the businesses live and work in the same community.

With the recent Great Divide Bushfires many rural and regional communities became painfully aware of the significance of tourism.

Tourism in Rural and Regional Victoria has been traditionally regarded as a political football rather than a significant economic development opportunity.

Tourism is of high social and economic important to communities in Gippsland.

2. Potential impediments to the sustained growth of regional tourism, economic activity and jobs;

Supporting the development of the tourism industry requires a different approach to those of other sectors.

Industry must work collectively in order to grow the market. They need more direct support in areas such as industry and product development.

Successful destinations invariably have good industry leadership and supportive local government. It is important that proactive LGAs and Regional Tourism Associations are supported by State Government.

It is time to lift direct support for regions and destinations that are getting on with the job of building tourism in a positive way.

Banks don't lend money to businesses that are complaining, or failing. Why should Government propagate a welfare culture in one of the most significant industry sectors within our economy?

Other key points

Disjointed and politically pragmatic marketing activities that are not consumer focused

Unsustainable development of tourism infrastructure.

Lack of consideration for the needs and interests of community in the development of the industry

Under funding of Regional and State Tourism Organisation

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

Tourism Victoria's Regional Marketing Program is a good start. We now need to look at addressing shortfalls in funding industry development and destination development/ planning.

While State Government has adopted a whole of Government approach to development of tourism - we need to encourage greater integration of programs particularly between Regional Development Victoria, Tourism Victoria, Parks Victoria and Department Sustainability and Environment.

Greater integration is needed between National, State, Regional and Local activities, to reduce duplication of effort, improve role clarity and build on the good work done in the last 12 -18 months

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

More investment by business and government 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 as bushfires, floods and drought - and effective measures to drive long term economic recovery; and

In the recent bushfires, Tourism Sector in Gippsland staged a remarkable recovery. This was due in large part to the commitment by business, community and government to work together in a positive and united way.

We need to develop an effective methodology by which we can measure the impact of natural disasters on tourism sector. The losses felt by the sector during the 2006 - 7 Great Divide Fires were very hard to quantify despite numerous surveys.

The inability of Government (at all levels) to provide short term support to assist operators with cash flow was probably the most disappointing aspect of the campaign.

It was recognised that the way the land managers, emergency services and tourism sector worked together was a significant improvement on previous campaigns. There is a need to examine how we can achieve greater structural integration in public relations activities.

In nearly all other respects the combined efforts were a resounding success.

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

It is critical that we create an environment that supports increased sustainable investment.

Public Land Managers need more flexibility in offering longer leases on Crown Land.

The process for investment in rural and regional areas must be streamlined. We need to regulate investment, in a way that supports sustainable development.

At the same time we need to ensure that our key product strength - Nature Based Tourism is not undermined by weak planning processes or unsustainable development.

Formal: Formal