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30th May 2007

The Rural and Regional Committee
Inquiry into Rural and Regional Tourism
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Formal Submission to the Inquiry into Rural and Regional Tourism

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a Formal Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Rural and Regional Tourism.

(1) the economical benefits of tourism in regional areas.

In the Surf Coast Shire, which is generally considered a rural Shire, tourism provides more than twice as much rate revenue as farming.
Tourism provides the largest sector for employment within the Shire. For example, over 90% of employment in Lorne is related directly to tourism. Millions of dollars per year flows from Lorne and the coast in the form of Government taxes, and into regional cities, especially Geelong on items such as insurance, fuel, motor vehicles, supplies etc.
Tourism in regional areas often provides an assured economic benefit when other sectors, for example farming, is more susceptible to climate and market fluctuations.

(2) potential impediments to the sustainable growth of regional tourism, economic activity and jobs.

The lack of suitably zoned land and further conditions placed on development imposed by the State Government and Councils in a broad brush approach which is inhibiting quality appropriate tourist development of land.

The greatest impact I believe is the implementation of the new Rural Zones, which have clearly failed to provide appropriate and adequate land suitable for tourist development.

The new zones have been poorly applied in haste, do not reflect existing land use, and are so restrictive that even quality appropriate development is stopped or discouraged.

I believe rural zones should provide more flexibility, with however the developers requested to provide evidence as to how they will address key issues such as fire risk,

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environmental considerations and infrastructure requirements. Currently innovative developments cannot even be "tested"

Victoria, in my opinion, is closing the door on innovative development in many areas of the farming zones in the expectation that they are protecting productive rural farmland from tourist and residential development. Many areas are ruled out for appropriate development by farming zones, which protect non-existing farming use on the site, or even in the vicinity.

The CFA has accepted the responsibility of assessing fire risk and imposing development guidelines for tourist development and other development in Victoria, particularly in Wildfire Management Overlays. This responsibility was abused I believe by officers of the CFA who, when assessing fire risk for potential development in Lorne's fringe and immediate hinterland, recommended that no development take place. It is not the purpose of Wildfire Management Overlays to prohibit development, only to provide for proper guidance by the CFA and others which is required to protect lives and property from loss of fire.

The CFA was requested by Council planners to consider a report by the Shire's consultants in regard to development potential of 36 individual properties on Lorne's fringe and its hinterland. The two CFA officers claimed to have properly inspected the 36 properties in one day, yet some landowners who were present at their sites, myself included, did not see the officers on the day. By any standard their inspection must have been cursory and not of a standard on which to recommend land to be used for development, including tourist development. Further, the CFA officers had no knowledge of the proposed developments which they effectively refused.

I wrote to the CFA and challenged this assessment, and in a subsequent report to Council they withdrew their prohibition on development on the proviso that they would have input into the fire safety issues involved. However, the damage was done.

The current zoning of land which has tourism potential around Lorne's fringe and hinterland is Rural Conservation. Lorne has been identified as an activity node and is of course a major tourist town. The Rural Conservation Zone discourages, and in some cases, prohibits appropriate tourist development. It allows for an 80 room hotel, on the other hand, restricts dwellings to 6 only. An Art Gallery, a spa centre, a camping ground, and a backpackers are prohibited within this zone.

If tourism is to prosper in Victoria, provision must be made for developments and attractions, which provide year round appeal to tourists and by consequence provides year round employment and less strain on resources such as car parking, power and water.

The State Government's admirable initiative in creating and funding the Great Otway National Park is to be commended, however, the full potential of its use including "off-peak" use will depend on the provision of suitable affordable accommodation near the Park. The Park's own report recommended the provision of accommodation outside the Park.

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A major future impediment to the strength of tourism development in Victoria, and in particular, coastal and inland tourist towns, is the affordability of permanent and seasonal housing and accommodation which is having an adverse effect on the

availability of suitable and sufficient tourism workers.

In Lorne for example, many tourism industry workers travel from Colac and Geelong, which is unsustainable in the long term, both in economic and environmental terms. There is of course no provision for suitable public transport, nor is there even any likelihood of such a service. Affordability of land, particularly within the township, is the major constraint to providing required housing. The State Government has provided funding for affordable housing, but I am not aware of any being provided or proposed to be provided in areas such as Lorne.

My own application to the Council to provide affordable housing was unfortunately not supported by Council planners, however I am still keen to see some affordable housing for Lorne, either privately developed or by Government. The lack of provision for affordable housing not only affects our tourism potential but also the viability of our community.

In the Surf Coast Shire the lack of both personnel and financial resources is often a hindrance to tourism development. Long delays in reviewing and implementing planning scheme reviews provides unnecessary uncertainty to future tourist development. In Lorne's case for example, the Lorne Strategy 1991 is currently being reviewed, and would not be expected to be implemented until 2008. The five years plus taken for the review process, is I believe very hard on landowners wishing to do tourist development. Renewing the Strategy every 17 years cannot hope to keep up with changing circumstances.

These problems are most likely not restricted to the surf coast.

(4) initiatives to increase both international and domestic visitor nights in regional Victoria.

Increasing visitor nights in regional Victoria depends to a large extent on what experiences are available and how good that experience is. Experiences include accommodation, food, activities, and of course people. Visitors stay longer if their experience is positive.

Positive experiences produces positive word of mouth, the most cost effective form of advertising.

Provision of attractions such as the Great Otway Walk and the Otway Fly must be expanded. The proposed Trans Otway Walk which for years has lacked Government support, but has strong support from the tourist industry, must be implemented.

The provision of high quality tourism developments must be supported by suitable Planning provisions.

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(6) opportunities to leverage private investment and commercial activities in regional tourism infrastructure, including ecotourism.

I believe Government could better support regional tourism by providing some financial help in the way of loans, and by promoting a better understanding of the needs of the

tourism industry with Councils, State planners and our communities.

Unless the provision of suitably zoned land is forthcoming, potential tourism developers will continue to invest either in other sectors other than tourism, or they will look interstate where not only are the returns often better, but the reception to tourist development is a more positive one.

In concluding it is apparent that there is strong community support for tourism development. The Surf Coast Shire says it supports tourism, the State Government says it supports tourism, however, try and develop ecotourism accommodation, attractions or affordable houses for tourism workers in the Surf Coast Shire and you will not expect to get any encouragement. Previous developments which received strong support from both the community, Council and visitors are no longer permitted. I have been a resident in the Shire for 30 years (including being a Councillor for 12 years), and I have noted a continuing decline in the support for tourism development in Lorne and its environs.

StJohn Sutton
Lorne

**Addendum to Submission to the Inquiry into Rural and Regional Tourism from
StJohn Sutton Lorne**

**Rural Land Use Strategy - Key questions from R M Consulting Group to Surf
Coast Tourism Board**

R M Consulting Group who has been engaged by the Shire to undertake a review of the 1997 Rural Use Strategy it recognises that "Tourism is a significant industry within the municipality." If as they recommend, "a key strategy for the Shire is to balance increasing tourist demand and opportunities while protecting these environmental and landscape values and agricultural businesses" why is the representation on the Strategy Reference Group so unbalanced? The inclusion of the rural (farming) sector and environmental representatives, yet excluding the economic, residential and tourist sectors is clearly unbalanced and will not achieve a fair and workable outcome. Economic, residential and tourism sector representatives who recognise the potential and place for development in rural areas should be included on the steering committee.

Now for the questions you ask:

Question 1. What attracts tourists to rural areas of the Shire?

Answer-

- Great Ocean Road
- Great Otway National Park
- Otway Forest Park
- Erskine Falls and Art Galleries
- Restaurants and Wineries
- Unique Tourist Accommodation
- Natural Beauty of the Area, Wildlife and Fishing
- Festivals including Falls Festival in Erskine Falls Road, High Tide Festival
- Bells Beach Easter Surfing Competition
- Lorne Mountain to Surf Run
- Great Ocean Road Marathon
- Bushwalking and Waterfalls within the Shire
- Anaconda Event
- Horse Riding
- Bike Riding

Question 2. Are there adequate tourism facilities in rural areas of the shire?

Answer-

No. The surf Coast Shire is lacking in variety and good quality attractions and activities for their tourists compared to other parts of Australia.

The rural areas of the Shire provide the best opportunity to provide tourist attractions, which are, not weather dependent and are less seasonal than coastal attractions and will provide a significant support for tourism within the Shire.

The Surf Coast Council has adopted a resolution supporting the promotion of Lorne's hinterland as a year round tourist destination.

Tourism Victoria research has identified a lack of eco style resorts, caravan and camping grounds, and affordable housing for tourism workers as being a major constraint to further tourism growth in this region. The rural areas of the Shire provide the best opportunity to meet these demands.

Question 3. Do the current rural land planning controls eg Farming Zone, Rural

Conservation Zone, impact on tourism development in the Surf Coast Shire?

How?

Answer-

Yes, in that they are currently inappropriately restrictive of tourism developments. In all but the Rural Living Zone, tourist accommodation or a restaurant development must be carried out in conjunction with agriculture, a rural industry or a winery and accommodation is limited to a max of 6 dwellings which actually is making it increasingly unsustainable- uneconomic as a viable business. In the Rural Conservation Zone leisure and recreation [other than informal outdoor recreation] is even a prohibited use and so too are animal boarding kennels which are frequently used by the tourists and are a necessary facility to attract people to visit and stay in our shire.

Farming and Rural Conservation Zones cover almost all the available private land within the Shire including a large area of land on the fringes of many of our townships. Some of this land has some potential for tourist or low-density living but is severely constrained by the zoning, which discourages such development. Developments such as restaurants, art galleries, eco resorts, camping etc. are discouraged.

The Coastal Strategy which quite rightly restricts development on the Shire's coastline combined with the current lack of land zoned Rural Activity or Rural Residential is a major constraint for future sustainable tourist development in the Surf Coast Shire.

Tourist development, which could strongly support Surf Coast communities, has already been rejected by Council Planners due to zoning restraints.

Question 4. What aspect of the rural land planning controls would you like to see changed and why?

Land planning controls should not be applied in a blanket fashion such as has happened with the change from Environmental Rural Zone to Rural Conservation Zone in the Surf Coast Shire. Zones applied to land should reflect the land's current use and future potential for development. Issues such as preservation of valuable farmland, retention of landscape and environmental values, economical benefits and communities, sustainability and wellbeing should all be fully considered. No one is disputing that high quality agricultural land should be protected for farming purposes, but the direct translation of these new rural zones for tourism operators, particularly in the Lorne hinterland is having and will have a negative economic consequences, and a reduction in development rights for their properties, and the possibility of reduced rates for the shire.

Shire landowners and community views are not taken into proper account by Council or the State Government. Economic development other than farming is not given enough priority. There are very few viable farms left in the Shire as most depend on off farm income including working in the tourism industry.

Tourist development in rural areas can be complementary to farming, National Park and residential use.

The State Government requires that local government will act in the best interests of their respective communities, however there is some evidence that this is not the case in the Surf Coast Shire.