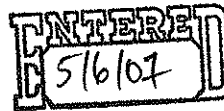


Wartook Gardens

Grampians - Bed & Breakfast

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Submission no.66

SUBMISSION TO VICTORIAN PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

INTO REGIONAL TOURISM

My wife and I have run Wartook Gardens Grampians Bed & Breakfast, on the western side of the Grampians, for the past 13 years. Approximately 60% of our guests are International. In that time I have spent some years as a member of Grampians Marketing Inc., Horsham Regional Tourism Board, and as Secretary/Treasurer of the Wartook Promotion Group.

I am also Secretary of Friends Of Zumsteins and work closely with staff of the Grampians National Park.

In making this submission I am directing comments to local regional issues, but they also apply to other areas across the State.

Summary of Main Issues

1. Lack of infrastructure vital to the continued growth of tourism.
2. Continued confusion in the minds of the tourist re "Grampians Region" for Tourism Administration, and the "Grampians" as a tourist destination.
- 3 Total lack of cohesion in the way in which the Grampians Region is being promoted.
4. The use of the internet for promoting the "Grampians", is poorly planned and disjointed.
5. The website "Visitvictoria" is incredibly slow, poorly designed, difficult to navigate, and there is no ability for visitors to book accommodation or tours.
6. There is a need for the state-wide linking of information centres on the internet, and for visitors to have the ability to book accommodation across the state on line.

1. Lack of infrastructure vital to the continued growth of tourism.

(i) Lack of access to Mobile phone coverage and Broadband

After the Grampians fire in 2006, I was very disappointed that so much money was spent on promotion and so little on infrastructure. Tourist's expectations of facilities, infrastructure, signage and information have increased greatly in recent years, particularly those from overseas.

All tourists now have expectations of being able to book on line, and be able to get rapid responses to all queries.

Many of our international guests regularly ask "Why is mobile phone coverage so poor?" and "Why is the internet so slow and expensive in this country?"

We operate on the edge of the National Park in a busy tourist area, but we have no mobile phone coverage and no access to Broadband. We have tried Satellite Broadband only to find that it is slower than Dial-up and as a community we are trying to have something done but nobody wants to listen. We are not a backward region or state, yet there are vast areas of this small state where there is no mobile coverage and no access to broadband. It is a disgrace. We spent two months in Canada in 2005 and even remote B&B's had Broadband and all had mobile phone coverage.

(ii) Lack of Sealed Roads within the Grampians national Park

Despite the enormous growth in tourism over the last 30 years here in the Grampians there has been only one road sealed in that time – the Roses Gap Road. This is not only frustrating but disgraceful. We are being left behind the other major tourist areas in the state because most of them have a number of sealed road alternatives

It is well known that Hire Cars are excluded from gravel roads, and more and more city people are reluctant to travel on our gravel roads. All popular tourist sites wherever they are should have sealed road access.

Those who hire cars now have to take out extra insurance if they wish to drive at night.

There is a desperate need for looped sealed roads to enable visitors to get out and see the diversity of the National Park. At present with the Silverband Falls Road still closed there is not one loop within the National Park that visitors can take on a sealed road all the way.

The lack of sealed road access means that most of the National Park does not get seen. We have an internationally recognised National Park, yet we only allow International visitors a small glimpse. We deny them the best wildflower displays, the best examples of aboriginal art sites, and much of the best scenery.

(iii) Signage

We are missing a wonderful opportunity to educate the public as they view many of our tourism spots.

I would like to see more site specific information which, if in natural areas, would include the geology of the area, the flora and fauna, aboriginal history and significance, European history and significance as well as detailed maps of the walk etc. If along the coast it could also include the fish and other creatures that dwell in the area.

2. Continued confusion in the minds of the tourist re "Grampians Region" for Tourism Administration, and the "Grampians" as a tourist destination.

Most tourists who want to go to the "Grampians" are referring to visiting the Grampians National Park. Many are surprised that the Region is a totally different entity.

As a result, the promotion of the area has to be spread thinly across the whole area and much of what there is to see and do in many parts of the Grampians National Park does not receive emphasis, as promotion invariably focuses on the major attractions of the Grampians National Park, and the major towns and wineries of the whole region.

Few people get to some of the areas of the National Park "off the beaten track" or see the best of the wildflower displays.

3. Total lack of cohesion in the way in which the Grampians Region is being promoted

While we have so many separate organisations all trying to promote their part of the Grampians, no one organisation does it well.

Many of our guests comment that our website www.grampiansnationalpark.com promotes the Grampians National Park better than any of the official websites.

While each of the Shires around the Grampians National Park do their own thing it has been very difficult to get overall coordination and all pulling in the one direction. Promotion therefore becomes dominated by the skills or lack of skills of the promotion officers in the various Shires. These Shires also have marked differences in how they see the priorities in the Tourism area.

We desperately need a promotional body independent of individual shires and their officers, with a much greater representation of tourism operators who need to be given a much greater say.

The Jigsaw Campaign booklet and promotion was great when it first was initiated. For us it worked well in the first 3-4 years, and then we were receiving no benefit and in recent years we have not been part of that campaign. There needs to be a better way to get many more of the smaller operators included in the promotional programs, as they cannot afford the currently asked costs to take part.

After 12 years of having long discussions with our guests and hearing their comments about areas and places they have visited, a general theme that they

seem to regularly mention is "What is wrong with the Promotion of the Grampians - The Great Ocean Road leaves you for dead in terms of Promotion, yet there is far more to see in the Grampians than on the Great Ocean Road" Making much more efficient use of the internet may be a great opportunity to get many more operators involved to the benefit of all.

4. The use of the internet for promoting the "Grampians", is poorly planned and disjointed.

With so many separate Shires and organisations with their own websites, promoting "their Grampians", and all asking fees for operators to have a page or link to their website, the visitor to these websites merely gets a glimpse of what the Grampians may offer.

Any operator, particularly the smaller ones, therefore only ever appears on one or two of the many sites that promote the Grampians.

As a result no one knows which website is supposed to be the "official website" or if indeed there is one.

We have visitgrampians, visithallsgap, visithorsham, visitwartookvalley, etc etc. all promoting a slice of the area, with little or no coordination and no one site promoting the "cake."

This was a quote that I received from a New Zealander recently-

"Why is there SO much information / promotion regarding the Halls Gap area of the Grampians? Or why doesn't Halls Gap include the "other sides" of the Grampians as well, but encourage people to use Halls Gap as a main base? They just seem to want to keep everything for themselves... a bit disappointing."

Even the Promotion of the Great Southern Touring Route recommends one night in Hall's Gap, with apparently no real effort or thought of trying to get these visitors to look at what the Park and its diversity has to offer.

We need one comprehensive site that promotes everyone, and shows all potential visitors how much there is to see and do in the whole of the area.

5. The website "Visitvictoria" is incredibly slow, poorly designed, difficult to navigate, and there is no ability for visitors to book accommodation or tours.

We have had many guests who are appalled at how difficult it is to navigate around and through the "visitvictoria" website, and if they can find what they are looking for the information is not comprehensive. Most have ended up going to private websites to find information on Victoria.

The site is poorly constructed with huge amounts of unnecessary code, resulting in a site that takes much longer than it should to load up.

I know Victoria well, but I cannot believe how difficult the website designers have made it to get information on particular areas, and often one ends up going in circles and not getting the information you wanted at all.

We have had compliments from all over the world on our own website.

Web visitors today, need to be able to book accommodation on line when they see something they like. It is a huge disappointment that the "visitvictoria" website does not have the capability of accepting bookings, when so many other sites in Australia do.

We are in competition with these other sites, and if it is easier for visitors to book a holiday elsewhere, we will lose out.

6. There is a need for the state-wide linking of information centres on the internet, and for visitors to have the ability to book accommodation across the state on line.

Recently we spent two months in Canada and were gratified at how easy it was to book accommodation in that country. In each state all the Visitor Information Centres are linked on the one system, and from any centre you could book anywhere on line.

It gave us tremendous confidence traveling around, and it meant that we didn't have to book well in advance. It also meant that if we were in an area, and there was more to see than we had anticipated, it was relatively easy to extend our stay.

I am disappointed that there are so many different systems in operation here in Victoria, many of which are incompatible.

This coupled with the lack of broadband in country areas means that there are still many operators that do not have websites, or even feel that they need a website. As a result, these operators still have to rely on telephone calls, while most of their visitors are well accustomed to using the internet.

There is a great need for all tourism bodies to become much smarter in using and developing the internet.
However we desperately need the infrastructure to do it well.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission.

Royce Raleigh May 31st 2007

