

# CORRECTED VERSION

## RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into rural and regional tourism

Daylesford — 28 June 2007

#### Members

Ms. K. Darveniza

Mr D. Drum

Mr J. Eren

Ms W. Lovell

Mr R. Northe

Ms G. Tierney

Chair: Mr D. Drum

Deputy Chair: Ms G. Tierney

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms L. Topic

Research Officer: Dr C. Hercus

#### Witness

Mr R. Kirby.

**The CHAIR** — We expect there are going to be some comments from the floor, so we would like to firstly ask if Rod Kirby is here? If you would like to step forward, I will just read out a few formalities and then let you know the lay of the land.

We need to advise that at these hearings all evidence taken by the committee is under the provisions of parliamentary privilege. Any statements made outside of this hall will not be afforded such privilege. This Rural and Regional Committee is inquiring into rural and regional tourism, but there are some specific aspects to hearing evidence from the floor that differs from the normal area. Again, you will need to state your name and address before making your remarks. We need to probably limit your remarks to about 3 or 4 minutes.

**Mr KIRBY** — Three minutes?

**The CHAIR** — It is not normal for us to get into a question and answer scenario like you have witnessed with the other witnesses. It is an opportunity for you to speak your mind.

**Mr KIRBY** — Any chance that I can get a little more than 3 minutes? I am a local here. I am one of the few, 3 or 4 locals here who may have input into this process.

**The CHAIR** — We are prepared to listen to you. If you could just state your name and your address, we are happy to listen.

**Mr KIRBY** — My name is Rod Kirby. I am a fifth generation local in this district. I have actually witnessed the birth of the tourism industry in this town. I am 50 years of age. For the first 25 years of my life I lived in a town which had a locally self-sufficient, self-reliant agricultural industry that sustained the community and the society. In the last 25 years I have lived under what I refer to as the tourism regime, which I believe is causing some very intricate and massive problems.

I would like to read off these things paragraph by paragraph, if I could.

**The CHAIR** — Sure.

**Mr KIRBY** — I am a little bit concerned that this inquiry is not giving due voice to the original local community — the people who have lived in this town for many years or generations — and I believe rather than just advertise, because these people are so downtrodden now because of tourism and what's happened, I believe they do not respond to media advertising. I believe those people need to be actively approached for their views and their opinions and their concerns as to what is happening.

Over the past 25 years I have experienced what I regard as the destruction of our local community through the impact of tourism and economic development. Tourism has acted as a catalyst for what I believe has now become unsustainable growth in our society as a whole. Local families who have lived in this area for generations have witnessed their local jobs, their local land and their local resources all wrested from their grasp by the masses of people who have flocked to this area following the tourism boom of the 1980s, and the subsequent restructuring that has taken place since 1999.

My concern is that tourism and related growth is totally unsustainable mainly due to a lack of water to sustain that growth. Also tourism has contributed to the tree change phenomenon which has seen massive numbers of people relocated from Melbourne and beyond into this area. I am very concerned that that is creating too much congestion, and too much angst amongst locals. Many of the people who relocate are affluent business people and high-income earners from Melbourne and even internationally.

I am concerned that this fact is leading to what we refer to locally here as gentrification. That is a process which is causing property values to increase in the area. That in turn is forcing up the rates

for the local community and the local people who have lived in this area for many generations. It is forcing many of the local people from their homes. I believe this is a problem in particular for the elderly locals who cannot afford to relocate. I believe it is a very harsh, cruel process.

Through the same process — that is, tourism, growth and rural development — many of our local family farmers have been driven from their farms. This has led to a gross imbalance between tourism and family farming. The demise of the family farm has also opened the way for corporate farming and international agribusiness. Tourism-related agribusiness activities such as wineries, olives, cottage industries and so on have replaced our locally self-sufficient family farm base which sustained our community for the first 25 years of my life. I believe that this has created a dangerous and unsustainable imbalance which needs to be addressed.

If there is a crash in the global economy, which I believe is almost imminent (from global sources), can we rely on tourism to feed our society? If we see a global calamity and we have no robust family farms and locally self-sufficient agricultural base, how can we feed our communities if we can no longer rely on imports as we currently do? I believe there is a crucial need to limit the overpowering growth that has been brought about by the expansion of tourism industry.

This growth is leading to the destruction of rural Victoria as I have always known it, and as most rural farmers and people have always known it. I believe there is a pressing need to protect and encourage our small local family agricultural base and to address the imbalance between tourism and the local agriculture base. Also a particular concern of mine, as a local, is the increasing trend towards international tourism. As tourism has been the catalyst for out-of-control growth at the domestic level, I am concerned that a shift to a more international tourism base will create an unsustainable influx of international citizens.

In the words of the famous Roman philosopher Tertullian, 'Woe unto him that lay house to house and field to field until no man can stand alone in the midst of the earth'. Sustainability is the issue, and if we go beyond the point of sustainability, rural Victoria may well be facing an Armageddon. What we need is less promotion of the tourism industry — not more.

**Witness withdrew.**