

# CORRECTED VERSION

## RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into rural and regional tourism

Melbourne — 4 June 2007

#### Members

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#### Witness

Mr J. Kennedy, director, Murrindindi Regional Tourism Authority.

**The CHAIR** — Are there any comments from the floor before we adjourn the meeting? You are welcome to come to the microphone.

**Mr KENNEDY** — Can I just introduce myself? My name is John Kennedy. I am a journalist who lives in Melbourne but who is a weekend farmer in the Murrindindi shire — which, in case you do not know where the Murrindindi shire is, is anything north of the Great Divide or north of the Black Spur. It takes in Alexandra, Yea, Marysville, Lake Eildon, Lake Mountain et cetera.

**The CHAIR** — John, bear with me for a second as there are a few formalities I need to cover. I advise all present at these hearings that all evidence taken by the committee is, under the provisions of the Constitution Act 1975, protected by parliamentary privilege. I also wish to advise witnesses that any comments made by them outside the committee hearing may not be protected by parliamentary privilege. The committee is an all-party parliamentary committee and is hearing evidence today on the inquiry into tourism in rural and regional Victoria. You have already stated your name, your interest and your address; we are now ready to hear your evidence.

**Mr KENNEDY** — A month ago I was appointed to the regional tourist association board, and I am on a learning curve. They prompted me to come along today to hear what was said about the tourism issues because Murrindindi shire has a sort of vested interest in nature-based tourism because we have got it all. I just wanted to respond to the comment by the last speaker who said that Victoria is the no. 1 state for touring by car.

The Murrindindi region has four main access roads. One is the Goulburn Valley Highway, off the Hume Highway at Seymour. The other three are the Whittlesea, Flowerdale to Yea road, the Melba Highway beyond Yarra Glen and the Black Spur beyond Healesville. All of those roads follow 1930 alignments, and they go through forested areas. They are very poor transport routes.

I specifically want to refer to the Black Spur because it is also a 1930 access route. It has a number of blind corners, it has poor grades and it has been closed a number of times recently due to land slippages and repairs. Whilst it is our major tourist access road, it also has major competition from the bikies at weekends who have a great tourist route that goes up the Warburton Highway across to the Cumberland Junction back down through Marysville. I drive across it every weekend, probably twice, and you contend with squadrons of 1000-cc Kawasaki motorbikes sitting on 100 kilometres per hour on blind corners. You compete with all the four-wheel drives towing boats, the tourist buses, and more recently you compete with B-double semitrailers carting softwoods or mountain ash to the woodchipping plant at Geelong.

I am also fascinated by the number of people who attempt to stop on the side of the Black Spur to take photographs of the eucalyptus trees. There are probably two points where there are pull-off areas about the size of a car length, and at weekends you see people stopping there just to take a photograph of the stands of mountain ash. At very little cost that road could be improved just to improve the transport access and the delight of driving through the forest into our area.

Large parts of it are managed by Parks Victoria, and Parks Victoria seems to be doing nothing else but taking costs out of that area. There is a lovely picnic area called Fernshaw, which used to be managed by the former board of works. The board of works might have been like the former SEC — safe, easy and comfortable — but the moment Parks Victoria assumed responsibility for it, it removed the visitor facilities, and when the septic tank for the public toilets there failed, Parks Victoria endeavoured to close it down. It has now reduced the size of the parking lot there so much that you would be lucky to park 5 or 10 vehicles.

A bit further on is a little well on the side of the road, called Saint Ronans Well, which is a spring on the side of the road. The rock-retaining wall was broken, and it was only my complaints and letters in the local paper that — Parks Victoria did not respond; we went and fixed it ourselves. People stop there because they like to throw a coin in the water. It is tourist attraction. We are a tourist area.

I just want to raise the issue. I suggest you go and have a look at the Black Spur for a start. It is very poorly maintained. We certainly do not want a double-lane highway, but some fairly basic facilities just to improve the tourist experience would make a difference to us.

**The CHAIR** — Thanks very much, John, we will take that on board.

**Committee adjourned.**

