

TRANSCRIPT

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into heritage tourism and ecotourism in Victoria

Port Campbell — 25 October 2013

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Ms L. Chalmers.

The CHAIR — Hi, Lex. Thank you very much for making the time available today. I am, and I think my colleagues are also, aware that you assisted with the Portland Historic Buildings Restoration submission, but today you are actually speaking to your own submission, I understand.

Ms CHALMERS — Yes.

The CHAIR — In saying that, I just say that all the evidence taken at the hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the Constitution Act 1975 and is further subject to the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003. Any comments you make outside the hearing may not be afforded such privilege. All evidence is being recorded, and as a witness you will be provided with a proof version of that transcript, hopefully within a couple of weeks. Having said that, we very much look forward to your presentation, our last presentation for our public hearing here today.

Ms CHALMERS — Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity to meet this committee. My focus is coastal, and I have a far south-west point of view. I am addressing the terms of reference about examining best practice, the potential for the development of ecotourism and heritage tourism in Victoria, and the environmental and heritage issues associated with large-scale tourism.

To me, it comes down to stewardship and sustainability. A lot of my interest is in communities. Communities often initiate protection of their heritage and environment, then persuade governments to sustain them for future generations. Examples abound. In my main submission I advocated that governments support statutory bodies working to maintain environmental assets. I consider that ongoing work of the Victorian Coastal Council and regional coastal boards are essential. They develop strategic plans, such as the Victorian Coastal Strategy and regional coastal action plans, and prepare research and studies to guide multiple agencies in their work.

The VCC economic study *Assessing the Value of Coastal Resources in Victoria July 2013*— conclusions in the appendix — values coastal commercial activities at \$9.8 billion a year, of which \$3 billion comes from tourism and depends on environmental quality and coastal town character. It also states:

The value of non-market ecosystem services of the Victorian coast was estimated at \$8.4 billion per annum ...

Within this amount the study values estuary services at \$2.5 billion per annum. The Western Coastal Board's Estuary CAPs, now managed by Corangamite and the Glenelg Hopkins CMA, have contributed greatly to estuary health in the region. The study further notes:

... it has not been possible to value all ecosystem services provided by all habitat types, therefore ... the estimate for non-commercial value of ecosystem services is likely to be conservative.

In the light of coastal pressures identified in the VCS 2008, continued strategic oversight and planned coordinated action will be more necessary to maintain coastal environments and the character of coastal settlements. However, it appears that Western Coastal Board funding through DEPI was recently reduced. This is already affecting stakeholder engagement, with cancellation last week of the Portland consultation on the draft VCS 2013. Please consider recommending increased funding for the VCC and RCBs so that they can continue their essential coordination of agency strategic action on the coast, contribution to research and project development, and engagement of stakeholders and community in these endeavours.

On testing coastal proposals and the use of the Victorian coastal strategy, the VCS hierarchy of principles for coastal development is the benchmark against which governments, municipalities, tourism bodies and agencies should test proposals. The principles are: to provide for the protection of significant cultural and environmental values; to undertake integrated planning and provide clear direction for the future; to ensure the sustainable use of natural coastal resources; and to ensure suitable development on the coast. As an example, I consider that the Draft Shipwreck Coast Master Plan 2013 (SCMP) is impractical when measured against the VCS principles. It acknowledges that this linear, fragile and vulnerable landscape will be difficult to manage.

On integrated planning, the Great Ocean Road tourism region is from Geelong to the South Australian border. The SCMP's 28 kilometres are only integrated with the road from Melbourne and a short section on either side. Sustainable use in the proposed SCMP area is uncertain. Are the proposals suitable? Do they take into account planning scheme requirements? Would not dispersal of travellers to the underutilised far south-west region cost the state less, be more sustainable, spread economic tourism rewards and offer a different experience to travellers?

As well, the title's appropriation of the name 'Shipwreck Coast' for such a small area is a worry, as the entire south-west coastline can claim it, and there is a tourism association of the same name — although I have just heard it is being wound up.

Consultation closes soon, and I urge that the proponents of the SCMP draft listen to the locals concerned for the character of their settlements and their fragile environment and that this inquiry considers the benefits of encouraging travel to the south-west via roads other than the Great Ocean Road. Direct routes to Hamilton, Warrnambool and beyond lead to more robust and underutilised quality coastal, environmental and cultural heritage assets in the Glenelg shire and Southern Grampians than the SCMP area. Certainly the roads need investment.

Tourism Victoria issues — has the Jigsaw marketing campaign reached the end of its usefulness? I think that today the Tourism Victoria lens homogenises the regions, that its Jigsaw-branded regional publications are very uneven and that its staff should get out more to become familiar with differing regions. I am not sure that the Great Ocean Road is still the attraction in the south-west of Victoria. Other assumptions include that distance from Melbourne is a prohibitive factor for travellers, that all places in the south-west must be approached via the Great Ocean Road and that the further from Melbourne, the greater the cultural desert.

I present *Victoria's Cultural Guide*, produced by Cultural Tourism Victoria, supported by Tourism Victoria. The problems are that the Jigsaw region extends to the South Australian border, not just to Warrnambool; that the Great Ocean Road region map on page 2 shows only Warrnambool, Lorne and Geelong; and that Geelong is the only place that has paid to advertise its peak cultural venues. I believe that Geelong has just seceded from Great Ocean Road Marketing, taking charge of its own promotion. That may or may not be right in view of what Carole just said about a new organisation. The guide states:

From Geelong to Warrnambool, the Great Ocean Road region unfurls an extraordinary cultural pilgrimage.

But there are no ads for the real Great Ocean Road tourism region; Surf Coast, Lorne, Warrnambool, Port Fairy and Portland all have thriving arts communities, and the whole region has a remarkable cultural heritage, but it appears from this guide that the rest of the Great Ocean Road really is a cultural desert.

In contrast, I have a copy of the South West Tourism Victoria 1993 brochure, *Victoria's Great South West*. The Victorian government then provided promotional funds to all regions. SWTV covered seven municipalities and also a historic and continuing functional local economy. Regional brochures were uneven in quality, but they had conviction and heart and knew their subjects. We produced and distributed 80 000 copies of the brochure, emphasising the region's connected environment and cultural heritage. Even community organisations could afford to advertise.

Since 1993 tourism product in the south-west has burgeoned, including in Glenelg — better accommodation, whales returning, bachelor and spinster gannets establishing Australia's only mainland rookery, charter boats and nature tours multiplying. But it is still difficult for operators in the Great South Coast region, sponsored by Regional Development Victoria, to get their message across when they have little control over publications which are mediated by costly Great Ocean Road and Grampians marketing bodies.

But perhaps brochures are already superseded. I consider that Tourism Victoria's centralised approach to marketing must lose out to independent regional webpages and avenues such as Glenelg's Whalemile service. Recommendations from this committee for community group technical support, education and NBN use would help them to self-promote and communicate better with the Free Independent Traveller Market. Coordination of marketing by the region, perhaps through the new RDV body, would be more economical and benefit both the region and travellers.

The Great South Coast region — is this the new 'functional local economy', a phrase used in the LEDI report? The Great South Coast Group comprises Glenelg, Southern Grampians, Moyne, Warrnambool and Corangamite. Its Regional Growth Plan will encourage municipalities to address regional issues more effectively. The draft plan identified tourism to natural attractions as an important economic area. I hope that the final plan being prepared will include heritage in its assessment of the region's attributes.

Federal government tourism research shows that tourism's output multiplier for 2011–12 is valued at 1.88, which means for every \$1 tourism earns directly in the Australian economy, it adds an additional 88 cents to other parts of the economy. At 1.88 tourism's multiplier is larger than mining, retail trade and education and

training. If the south-west can get its tourism offering right through better tourism management, better municipal planning and the continued support of statutory authorities and Regional Development Victoria, its economy will benefit from export of its tourism attributes. I am talking here not necessarily international export but export to the domestic market.

The CHAIR — Intrastate.

Ms CHALMERS — The recent remarkable increase in whale sightings inshore at Portland is perhaps the game changer that makes it once again a hero destination. Whale viewing between April and September would give better seasonal visitor distribution and benefit the whole region. Glenelg's environment has tangibly influenced cultural heritage. It could enhance its product with good interpretation. Watching the whales, people would better understand maritime history, pre and post-contact issues, whaling and settlement. As a start, Heritage Victoria has gazetted 7 hectares at the Convincing Ground, site of the earliest whaling stations — also Victoria's earliest massacre site, with high AAV recognition for its Indigenous significance. We just have to bring the Glenelg Shire around to completing part 2(b) of its heritage study and implementing heritage overlays for all of the heritage significance areas then identified.

In conclusion, I consider that the main challenges for tourism in the south-west are environmental threats to natural assets and biodiversity; possible reduction in capacity of statutory bodies supporting environments, such as the Western Coastal Board; the need for government spending on the environment as global warming stresses are becoming more apparent, and not just on fuel reduction; risk of degradation of assets through tardy and/or poor municipal planning and lack of adequate planning protection overlays; identifying necessary changes to tourism structures and making them; improving information flows to visitors; and managing the new media. I urge the committee to address these issues in its recommendations.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much, Lex. We will now move to questions.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — Thanks for the submission. A lot of interesting thought was put into your submission there. As a former tourism minister I agree that we underdo heritage tourism compared to other countries around the world with similar settlement histories — indigenous populations and then colonialism and settlement. Just to focus on your views a little bit more about — in a strategic sense, what are we missing around that heritage focus? We have heard from some other submitters that heritage seems to be getting forgotten when we talk about the environment. Heritage is a part of that. Heritage seems to get forgotten in other areas of government. What are your own comments about that? We hear that there is a lack of funding for all sorts of heritage projects and that there are very few, narrow and dedicated funding streams for heritage projects, for example.

Ms CHALMERS — That is correct. Heritage Victoria, for example, has identified a number of areas around the northern Portland Bay coast for archaeological investigation, but they do not have the funds to do it. Heritage Victoria has had applications for registration of the government buildings block area in Portland and Cape Bridgewater from I think about 10 years ago but simply does not have the resources to pursue that. National heritage listing of those places could well be pursued, but for me in the Glenelg shire, as an example, it really comes down to the fact that it has backed off its heritage overlays for seven years and then instituted only a very tiny part — 87 buildings — and left out 600 buildings under potential precincts. It has split the amendment into the precincts, put them over there and abandoned them. That kind of approach limits the possibility of all those communities that had precinct citations lined up ready to go. They cannot express their pride in their places and in their precincts, and to me it starts from the community.

If we could get Glenelg Shire Council acknowledgement of the importance of the whole regional area, then the interpretation could follow, which would inform visitors. The heritage studies have not been completed. Part 2(a) has been done; part 2(b) was going to be an investigation of the precinct nominations for individual citations. The council is behaving as if the whole of part 2 of the heritage study has been completed. There is not the ability for the community, which is very proud of its heritage and environment, to pursue funding, if it does not have that backing, for example, to do an interpretive trail along the foreshore at Portland, between Portland, the north shore and the Convincing Ground.

All of that is very interesting. There are shipwrecks all along it, there are three or four whaling stations and there is a jetty where boats were built in the 1860s and 1870s. I visited Portland recently and there were a couple of

whales in the bay and at every point along the north shore there were people sitting in their cars with their binoculars. Some had come down from Mount Gambier and some had bought houses in the district, having come from Wodonga. They love the environment. I told them a little bit of the history of the whaling stations and they were thrilled. It could be made much more accessible and it could be so engaging that people would stay for two or three nights and come back.

Ms DUNCAN — I notice that in your submission the emphasis has been a lot on the actual physical environment and preserving the natural environment. Do you see the impediments to where you want to get to as a lack of funding to preserve the historical buildings and other things and council planning schemes that would protect them?

Ms CHALMERS — You cannot blame lack of funding. The council has had \$95 000 from Heritage Victoria to do its heritage overlays.

The CHAIR — So it is will?

Ms DUNCAN — And has done only bits?

Ms CHALMERS — DSE did the Coastal Species Landscape Assessment Studies (CSLAS) — I have copies there — in 2006 and prepared an implementation, the council prepared its amendments but for only the ends of the capes, leaving out the bays in between, whereas they had had very high state significance recommendations. There were 12 positive submitters and 1 objection. A number of submitters asked that the significant landscape overlays be extended. That was advertised to the landowners and on the basis of three objections — or four objections, possibly, if you count the member for South-West Coast's letter on behalf of a constituent. The council abandoned those extensions. They had split it into part 2 and they abandoned those extensions. There is actually another problem. The part 1, the original parent amendment for SLO's, which was approved by the council, went to the Planning Minister in February 2012 and still has not been gazetted and nobody knows why. I have asked.

If I could just finish. It is not a lack of money. The council has cited lack of funds to implement the heritage overlays and the significant landscape overlays. However, I understand from other people involved in planning that that is not necessarily the case. It does not necessarily cost a whole lot to administer these overlays.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for your presentation. We hear pretty clearly your frustration in that lots of this work, although it has been funded, has not been undertaken by your local municipality. We take on board your comments. We thank you very much again for making your presentation and bringing that to our attention further. We also appreciate your assisting with the other submission that you have forwarded to us. In saying that, on behalf of the committee, thank you very much for journeying here today and giving of your time. I am sure that my colleagues, like myself, have heard pretty clearly the frustration you bring to the table.

Ms CHALMERS — Thank you.

The CHAIR — In saying that, that is our last witness for this morning's public hearing. We thank all those who have participated, both at the table and in the gallery. Before closing, I would like to thank not only Hansard and our professional staff but also my colleagues who have now put three days of this week into site visits and public hearings. This is a very important reference, and we see it as the most important reference of this Parliament. We will be continuing to make site visits and conduct public hearings statewide over the next four or five months. I thank everyone for attending. It is much appreciated.

Committee adjourned.