27th May 2007

The Hon Damien Drum MLC
Chairman
Rural and Regional Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
MELBOURNE VICTORIA 3002

Dear Sir

Re: Parliamentary Inquiry into Rural and Regional Tourism

I refer to your letter dated the 24th April 2007 regarding the Parliamentary Inquiry into Rural and Regional Tourism and submit this letter in response on behalf of Avalon Airport Australia Pty Ltd (AAA).

Avalon Airport was established by the Commonwealth of Australia in 1952. During the mid 1990s, the Commonwealth deemed it surplus to requirements and in February 1997 it was sold to the Linfox Group.

Since that time, under private ownership, Avalon Airport has met with considerable success. In 1997 there were less than 150 people employed on the site, today there are over 1,000, with hundreds more employed in down-stream industries supporting Avalon's activities.

Today, Avalon Airport holds the 4th largest airshow in the world, operates as a B747 aircraft maintenance base for Qantas, undertakes international airfreight, and conducts domestic passenger flight services to Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth.

On the 1st June 2004, Avalon Airport commenced these domestic passenger flight services. Since that time, nearly two million passengers have used Avalon Airport en-route to or from Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth. In a short space of time, Avalon has become the fastest growing airport in Australia, and has potential to soon become one of Australia's top ten airports.
Our surveys have indicated that one in ten people using Avalon have flown on an aircraft for the first time. The provision of services at Avalon has provided flight activity to a demographic that has not been well serviced in the past – it has also provided new and significant tourism activity to Geelong, the Region and South Western Victoria.

In fact, we believe our surveys indicate that at least 220,000 new tourists have visited Geelong, the Great Ocean Road, and South Western Victoria as a result of the commencement of these services. I suspect that at least $100 million of new regional tourism economic activity has been generated as a result of Avalon Airport. This has created significant tourism and economic benefits, especially for the many small and family owned business that operate in these areas - however, it is my belief that regional tourism opportunities are being missed due to one particular, and rather simple issue:

During the period January – June 2004, prior to the commencement of new flight services from Avalon Airport, the Victorian Government and Vic Roads supported a road signage program to assist Melbourne and Geelong Bound Travellers to find Avalon Airport. Many new directional road signs were placed on the Melbourne – Geelong Freeway, and the Western Ring Road, directing travellers to Avalon Airport. This has met with considerable success, however, it has highlighted a very large problem.

There is minimal, if any, road signage, identifying Avalon Airport, for tourists travelling to Western Victoria, including (and especially) Ballarat and Bendigo and Western Victoria. We have had many complaints from Victorians and interstate tourists who have become hopelessly lost driving to or from Avalon Airport to these regional cities. These traffic flows often do not use the Princess Freeway, or the Western Ring Road; for example, they access Avalon Airport via Bacchus Marsh and Gisborne, then Little River and Lara. It is a complicated and difficult route, especially for interstate travellers, devoid of road signs.

You will understand that many short stay interstate tourists using Avalon Airport are impulse travellers. In other words, they will see a road sign and take that path. However, there are no clear road signs from Avalon to Ballarat, Bendigo or other regional cities, and few, if any, signs from those locations to Avalon Airport.

Over the past three years, I have spoken to many interstate travellers, who have expressed hardship in driving to these locations. I therefore feel that a simple Road Sign Program to lead tourists from Avalon to Ballarat, Bendigo and other Western Victorian regional cities would be tremendously effective.

In summary, I strongly believe that the lack of adequate road signs to and from Avalon Airport from Victoria’s regional cities, and especially Western Victoria, is a major impediment to tourism in this State.

I believe a program to address this matter will return excellent tourism and economic benefits to Victoria.
I trust this advice assists your Committee’s deliberations regarding this matter and would also be pleased to speak at any public hearings regarding this matter.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Tim Anderson
General Manager