PREAMBLE:
Our Nation was transformed with the gold rushes of the 19th century which made a radical change in the economic and social fabric of the nation, and the lives of those who worked the goldfields – the diggers – are etched in our folklore. Victoria contributed more than one third of the world’s gold output in the 1850’s and just two years the population had grown from 77,000 to 540,000. Today, Australia is the third largest producer of gold, iron ore and manganese ore.

The Central Victorian mid-1853 gold discovery at Waranga Park Station or Run at places that soon after were named Rushworth and Whroo was the catalyst that would transform the Goulburn Valley’s pastoral landscape forever. From this time onwards, the ensuing 154 years has seen regional development of mammoth proportions, with growth and development of regional cities and towns, provision of vital infrastructure and supporting services, agricultural and horticultural development, commerce and industry, as well as, enormous population growth which embraces a multicultural society.

At what was initially referred to from 1853 to 1858 as the “Goulburn Diggings” growth of towns and places occurred at Rushworth, Murchison, Whroo, Waranga Village, Moora, White Hills, Fontainbleau, Nine Mile Creek Diggings, Thompson’s Diggings, Mary Taylor’s Diggings, Scrubby Diggings, Buffalo Diggings, Coy’s Diggings and Cherry Tree Flat Diggings, Baillieston, Redcastle and Graytown, (named after Wilson Gray (1813 – 1875), State Representative for Rodney, who became the dedicated leader of the popular ‘unlock the lands’ campaign, and defended the legality of occupation licences as a prelude to a real ‘people’s land bill’.)

In 1858, the “Goulburn Diggings” was gazetted Waranga Division of the Sandhurst Mining District. Subsequent re-arrangement of division boundaries led to titles of Waranga North & Waranga South, but, in 1886, Waranga North was re-gazetted as Rushworth Goldfields. Despite all the name changes, Rushworth Goldfields was a rich and productive goldfield until its final decline in the mid 1900’s.
The regions’ economic productivity continued with timber industry and surrounding agriculture supported by the 1890 introduction of the railway to Rushworth, with later extensions made Colbinabbin, Stanhope & Girgarre; as well, the 1902 construction of Waranga Basin commenced, and its network of channels installed to provide stock & domestic water across the northern part of the State – at the time, the largest development of its type.

The ‘death knoll’ for the timber industry came with the Box Ironbark legislation in 2000-2001, and the regions’ economic productivity was severely reduced.

While many of the afore-mentioned goldfields/timber places no longer exist as settlement areas, importantly, all of those towns and places in the ‘Goulburn Diggings’ are intrinsically linked and share the same closely intertwined gold mining and timber history and heritage, which is a uniquely rich and diverse cultural heritage landscape, resulting from in excess of 150 years of social, human and economic capital investment into State and regional development.

Recent research (2005-2007) by Goulburn Diggings Research Inc., a small group of community volunteers, who, utilising primary sources of data and historic records, can demonstrate and substantiate the following: -

- Rushworth is Goulburn Valley's premier town – gazetted 3rd April 1854.
- Rushworth Goldfields – “Waranga's claim among Victoria's gold fields...It had the highest average yield of all the mining districts...” (Butler. G., Waranga Conservation Study, 1988),
- Rushworth Goldfields – i.e., the physical evidence is considerably more extensive than that which is reflected on current State mapping.
- Rushworth Goldfields currently are not recognised within the framework of the Victorian Goldfields.
- Rushworth was the seat of Local Government for Waranga Shire for 130 years, and from 1875, it was known as the “Victorian Colony's grain centre”. (Butler, 1988)
- Rushworth's High Street was declared by the National Trust Australia (Vic) as an "Urban Conservation Area of Special Significance" in 1982 and is the second of only two Victorian towns to receive this classification.
- The former Shire of Waranga sought declaration of the former Shire as a tourism precinct during the 1980's. Outcome unknown.

All the above statements can be substantiated.

Today, Rushworth remains as a living town, nestled within an extensive historic landscape setting of Box Ironbark State forest containing the physical evidence of original and authentic goldfields heritage assets, predominantly located on Crown Land, all of which is surrounded by highly productive agricultural land.

Despite the Burra Charter, the Heritage Act, 1995, and studies (Jacobs, Lewis, Vines, 1979; Butler, 1988; Bannear, 1993; Lennon, J. 1997) over the past twenty seven years recommending conservation/protection of major elements of these historic goldfields, most of these recommendations have not been heeded or implemented, and this regions' history and heritage has been largely ignored, compounding the perception that the Rushworth Goldfields per se, and its heritage legacy is: -

- Undervalued or overlooked;
- Preservation of community values are ignored;
- Not recognised for its contribution made to the State’s evolution;
- Devoid of recognition of their role within the framework of Victoria's goldfields;
- Devoid of comprehensive cultural heritage studies;
Not afforded the same level of protection as other historic goldfields within the State of Victoria;
With the resultant effect that Rushworth Goldfields are subjected to irresponsible degradation, despite current heritage legislation.

These are crucial issues which illustrate a need that is common among small rural towns which have long been dependent upon traditional agricultural and timber industries for economic stability and sustainability, and demonstrates that, despite the surrounding sustainable agricultural base, coupled with the Colbinabbin Ranges burgeoning viticulture industry, and with the absence of other major local industry, Rushworth township’s sustainability is severely threatened, and its potential opportunities for heritage and nature-based tourism is severely threatened.

“Places of cultural significance enrich people’s lives, often providing a deep and inspirational sense of connection to community and landscape, to the past and lived experiences. They are historical records that are important as tangible expressions of Australian identity and experience. Places of cultural significance reflect the diversity of our communities telling us about who we are and the past that formed us and the Australian landscape. They are irreplaceable and precious. These places of cultural significance must be conserved for present and future generations.”

“The conservation of Australia’s historic heritage places can generate a number of benefits. These range from commercial benefits (such as those provided by tourism) to more tangible community benefits, (including a sense of history, belonging to a community, educational and research values and spiritual values). Conservation activities are also to benefit future generations.”

Tourism could be considered as “capitalisation of the attributes of a place or region, with the aim of increasing visitation to that place or region for the purpose of economic sustainability.” (Personal perception).
RESPONSE TO TERMS OF REFERENCE:

Heritage places are acknowledged as a resource for rural and regional development in many parts of the world and Victoria is no exception. For visitors they provide three-dimensional experiences and acquisition of knowledge with a sense of discovery. But for people who live nearby, they can provide employment, prosperity and increased sense of place and pride, and many opportunities for voluntary participation in community projects.

Tourism provides a valuable source of income, promotion and other positive outcomes for rural and regional communities, and benefits communities economically through income generation, education, promotion and employment.

Additionally, tourism has a positive impact socially and culturally, providing opportunities for people to meet and work together, helping to create a sense of belonging and social cohesion. This helps to strengthen pride in a community and provides opportunities for new experiences, learning and employment.

TOR (1) THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF TOURISM IN REGIONAL AREAS, INCLUDING THE FLOW-ON BENEFITS THROUGH OTHER REGIONAL BUSINESSES AND INDUSTRIES:

Economic Benefits:

(a) Expenditure is incurred before, during and after a trip, and where a trip is paid for by employers;
(b) Expenditure on capital goods can be considered as expenditure on tourism e.g. Motor vehicles/Caravans/trailers/tents & equipment and etc.
(c) Transport costs e.g. Airline, Coach, Rail, Bus or Taxi Fares or any other local fares; Vehicle hire costs; Fuel;
(d) Accommodation;

Flow-on benefits:

(a) Take-away and restaurant meals, groceries for self-catering, alcohol, drinks, newspaper’s, magazines, shopping, gifts, souvenirs, entertainment, museums, movies, horse-racing, gambling, Conference fees & Conference venue hire & meals, education course fees/venue hire fees/meals, repairs, medical expenses, dry cleaning etc.

The economic and flow-on benefits are the main contributing factor to sustainability of small towns, where - every tourism dollar that is spent changes hands within the town at least six times - which is critically important, in the absence of any other substantial supporting industry or commerce.
TOR (2) POTENTIAL IMPEDIMENTS TO THE SUSTAINED GROWTH OF REGIONAL TOURISM, ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AND JOBS:

PREAMBLE:
Tourism Victoria’s current “jigsaw” region’s is to date considered by some to be successful in Victoria, particularly where Tourism Victoria and other instrumentalities recognise that a place is considered worthwhile as a Tourism Destination. This appears to occur on the basis of Strategic Plans, Regional Marketing Plans and Concept Proposals from which has flowed financial resources into Infrastructure Development and Marketing.

1. Lack of inclusion into the Strategic Plans or Concept Proposals is a major impediment to any sort sustainable growth. The resultant effect is that these non-recognised places or region’s are ‘crying out’ for recognition and assistance, with a desperate need for financial investment into Infrastructure development and marketing.

Effectively, this region (Rushworth & surrounding region), despite its wealth of tourism product, in terms of the “big picture” is perceived as a ‘no-man’s land’ in terms of tourism.

To demonstrate this situation:

(a). The ‘Goulburn Murray Waters’ Regional Development Plan of 1996, makes absolutely no reference to Rushworth, its surrounding Goldfields including Whroo or any other places in this Central Victorian region.

(b). The ‘Goulburn Murray Waters’ Regional Tourism Development Plan of 1998 – same document as above – but two years after the preliminary document, a Campaign Committee is now involved, BUT, included in the document is: -
   - Appendix F, headed – “Department of Natural Resources and Environment and Parks Victoria, Input to Goulburn Murray Waters Regional Tourism Development Plan” – Section 1 – Public Land Inventory – which includes the following: -
     - Page F - 6 “Cultural Heritage – Whroo Historic Area (gold mining)”
     - Page F - 7 “Issues – Heritage is part of the regional attraction…”
     - Page F – 8 “Rushworth State Forest is the largest area of forest in the region at 26,000 ha, but has limited tourism appeal”
     - Page F – 9 “Historic areas – Whroo Historic Park (490 ha) is the only historic area within the region, and has limited tourism appeal.”

This document states that “Heritage is part of the regional attraction…” yet, it omits any reference to the physical evidence of heritage goldfields assets on Crown Land which are located on at least 7,500 hectares within the Rushworth State Forest … “but has limited tourism appeal” (Again, who made this inappropriate determination?)

Currently, the Goulburn Diggings Research project, (recording the physical evidence of Rushworth Goldfields heritage assets) has determined a study area of 530 sq. kilometres (53,000 ha) based on historic Waranga Goldfields gazetted boundaries, of which the aforesaid 7,500 ha. has been subjected to field archaeology, survey, mapping and recording – the documentary database, includes in excess of 4,000 photographs and all data can be demonstrated.
Same page – “Lakes and Reserves – There are several lakes within the region most notably Lake Eppalock, Waranga Reservoir (managed by GMW_ and Lake Nagambie. These are important power boating areas.”

“…important power boating areas…” Lake Nagambie is noted for rowing and has an “Olympic standard” rowing course. Lake Waranga has a substantial Caravan Park and a Holiday Camp facility that accommodates up to 62 people etc. & Lake Waranga is a mecca for all water sports, including as stated above.

The Public Land Inventory omits other places worthy of recognition – e.g., Lake Cooper (home of the Victorian Water Ski Association & its privately-owned infrastructure), Wallenjoe Wetlands (identified as a Significant Australian Wetland), and there are a host of other places.

(c). The ‘Gold Heritage Product Report ~ Goldfields Tourism Region Victoria” A report prepared for the Department of Infrastructure Northern and Western Regions, Robert J Kaufman, LRGM Services, 31 July 2000 includes a reference to this region thus “Rushworth is relatively isolated…” but, no recognition of its significance for tourism purposes.

The perception is that all three reports have been compiled with a complete absence of knowledge of the region or its attributes.

Effectively – A Tourism Product Audit for the Goulburn Murray Waters Region has never been done (and, is this the case with other parts of the State?).

Effectively, Rushworth Goldfields History & Heritage was never recognised and lacks inclusion in the “Goldfields of Victoria” which in turn, completely inhibits its growth potential into tourism markets, and severely limits access to Marketing support of a significant Goldfields region, and severely compromises and threatens the town and regions’ tourism participation and sustainability. In the presence of lack of recognition, its future potential to develop Nature-based tourism is likewise affected.

Despite updated Regional Marketing Plans, Rushworth is identified as a Village Destination in the Murray Region (suggest that this has occurred by virtue of municipal boundaries – yet this does not occur in the Goldfields Region, which demonstrates inclusiveness with involvement of various municipalities.)

2. Impediment - current “Regions of Victoria ~ Victoria’s Tourism Marketing Zones.”

(a) Lack of appropriate recognition within a region

(b) It certainly is interesting to note the variation of regions when the Tourism Victoria website shows defined region’s which differ to that contained on the Australian Bureau of Statistics website that shows another set of defined regions. One can only wonder just which region’s are the correct ones! And how does one reliably depend upon any statistical information, when identified region’s lack consistency?

(b) Branding is yet another anomaly associated with Marketing Regions. In the current arrangement, Rushworth and surrounding region is located within the Murray (River) Region, which seems apparent because of Municipal boundaries.

Clearly, Rushworth Goldfields (Central Victorian goldfields region) does not have an affinity with the Murray Region, either with its History & Heritage, nor it Nature-based Tourism potential.
Rushworth and surrounding region would be more appropriately included in the Goldfields of Victoria region, by virtue of its Tourism Product - History & Heritage associated with Victoria’s Goldfields and the potential for Nature-based Tourism.

As well, its appeal to other markets (as per Tourism Australia classifications – ‘Culture & Heritage; Nature Based; Caravan or Camping; Bed & Breakfast; Mature Age; Food & Wine; Backpacker Accommodation;)
Yet again, suggest this region is more appropriately addressed if included in the Goldfields of Victoria Region.

This raises another salient point – the inconsistency between Tourism Australia and Tourism Victoria marketing destinations and flow-on statistics.

Effectively, a newly created region would more appropriately address the current deficiency.

The above are the most profound current and potential impediments associated with sustained growth of regional tourism, economic activity and jobs, and, how can this occur in the presence of either no branding at all, or, inappropriate or ineffective branding?

3. Lack of recognition of Regional Tourism Product at Local, State & Federal Government level – severely inhibits any Tourism growth. Previous comments already stated respond to this.

(4) Lack of Financial Resources towards Infrastructure development;
E.g. The Rushworth Nagambie Road has long been sought as a southern corridor from Melbourne to Whroo & Rushworth – in fact, in excess of 30 years. All requests have been ignored by all levels of Government.
E.g., a detailed letter & supporting information was handed by a community member to the current Premier some years ago when Cabinet met in Echuca. This letter and its supporting information did not receive written acknowledgement, nor, was a written response provided.

(a) Local Government’s are taking great pains to address Asset Management, Infrastructure ‘Gap’ Renewal, Roads & etc., etc., in the presence of increasing costs, community expectations, increasing standards and legislation, etc., in the presence of “cost-shifting”.
Why should Local Government bear all the costs towards Infrastructure development?

(b) In the presence of what is perceived as “Melbourne-centricity” and the massive expenditure incurred with its infrastructure development for tourism markets, (and one could argue that this development has multiple benefits) yet on a State-wide basis, Rural and Regional places are severely limited with their ability to raise the similar levels of financial resources to support infrastructure development for tourism.

(c) The other argument is that Tourism as an industry should be financed or led by the “operator’s”. But, in Rural and Regional areas where the burden of a 10 year drought still remains, and with bushfires that have ravaged various areas of the State for the past three summer seasons, and with small towns already struggling with these issues, who is going to “wave a magic wand” and find the “operator’s” to fund infrastructure development in small towns?
(5) **Lack of Public Transport** – despite the region being a mere two hours from Melbourne, the region is acknowledged as rural, isolated and within an Exceptional Circumstances declared area. This certainly compromises the normal activities, let alone the tourism potential for this region.

(6) **Impediment - Increasing Fuel Prices**;

(7) **Impediment - Lack of Financial support towards Promotion/Marketing**;

(8) **Impediment - Lack of interest, listening and support to volunteer community organisations**:

(9) **Impediment - Lack of awareness and appropriate recognition and adherence to controls in State and Local Planning Policies**;

(10) **Impediment - There is a perception that Tourism as an Industry is "controlled." Question: Why should such a potentially productive State-wide industry be controlled?**

(11) **Impediment - Lack of support programs for community volunteers/not-for-profit organisations such as Visitor Information Centres/Historical Societies in Small Towns who provide a service to visitors to their towns** – Programs of interest/educational value/ & etc., are conducted at regional places, but are too expensive for community volunteers to participate in due to high conference or participation costs, high fuel costs, as well as, time and distance factors – especially, if a program is a two-day event, accommodation is a vital cost component. Otherwise they are conducted in Melbourne, and this has the same aforementioned anomalies for those wishing to participate from small rural towns. Other high cost-associated anomalies: -
- **Membership to professional organisations**
- **Insurance - Public/Personal Liability**
- **Website development & associated Domains Name registration etc.**

(12) **“Sophistication”** It would appear that Tourism Victoria wishes to project a ‘sophisticated’ image as per the Tourism Victoria website. However, it needs to be remembered that not all tourists wish to visit ‘sophisticated’ places ~ some prefer to see naturally authentic original places ~ i.e. natural, raw product without the ‘sophistication’.

(13) **Having to apply for funding towards a tourism event or program** – is overly time-consuming and onerous for small town communities, and there is no guarantee that the funding will eventuate. How can sustainable tourism growth, economic activity and jobs be assured when these activities are constantly dependent upon receipt of funding applications?

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TOR 3. THE EFFECTIVENESS, AT A NATIONAL, STATE AND LOCAL LEVEL OF CURRENT PROGRAMS TO PROMOTE AND ENHANCE TOURISM IN REGIONAL VICTORIA:

Current programs, whether National, State or local is SELECTIVE basis. If an area/place/destination is not RECOGNISED for its tourism value, or identified in a Regional Marketing Plan, or not supported elsewhere, then it stands every possibility of missing out – Bad Luck!

There is a profound need for the State to be considered as a whole and recognise that there are new places of discovery to be experienced by visitors.

Whatever happened to the State Government's commitment to: -
"Growth for the whole of Victoria".

TOR 4. INITIATIVE'S TO INCREASE BOTH INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC VISITOR NIGHTS IN REGIONAL VICTORIA.

1(a) Recognition of a region’s tourism product, assets & attributes;
(b) Correct Branding of a region;
(c) Investment into new experiences – B&B’s; Farm stays assisted financially by State Government – surely, one cannot expect the Primary Producer to find the financial resources to develop quality product facilities in a drought situation.

2. Currently, for this to occur, a destination has to be “Internationally READY”. One asks Ready for WHAT? Please see next point.

3. Marketing! Marketing! Marketing! Not just the ‘sophistication’ of Melbourne, but the ‘warmth and welcome of small town hospitality’, how this country evolved & what makes it the way it is” – ‘gaze at the stars in rural Victoria’ – something one does not see in Melbourne.

Recently, Japanese visitors were home-hosted in this region – all they wanted to experience was the wide open spaces, look at sheep, and look at the stars – and they marvelled at the lot.

TOR 5. THE EFFICACY OF EXISTING MECHANISMS AT A NATIONAL, STATE AND LOCAL LEVEL TO ADDRESS THE IMPACT OF REGIONAL TOURISM OF NATURAL EVENTS SUCH AS BUSHFIRES, FLOODS AND DROUGHT, AND EFFECTIVE MEASURES TO DRIVE LONG TERM ECONOMIC RECOVERY;

These are all natural disasters – PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE!
It would appear that the mechanisms to address these issues are provided on an “as needs” basis. This mechanism lacks strategic planning in emergency management, and if preventative measures were undertaken annually, this would lessen the damage and reduce the impact of these natural disasters to some degree, thereby reducing the financial rehabilitation impact at the same time, these measures would preserve the natural environment for everyone to enjoy and derive benefit from – not just tourists or visitors.
(a) Bushfires ~ the preceding three summers of 2006/07, 2005/06 and 2004/05 saw the State of Victoria experience the worst bushfire devastation that to some degree, could have been prevented.

The Department of Sustainability (Forestry) and Parks Victoria are grossly under-resourced financially and physically whereby management of the National Parks, all forests and other reserves within their realm of responsibility are NOT managed appropriately, nor in a timely manner in which to avoid the Bushfire risk.

Suggest the State Government annually, accurately and adequately budget for the physical and financial resources for each responsible department to manage the National Parks, Forests and other Reserves in order to minimise the Bush Fire Risk & associated risks, i.e., roads, tracks, signage etc., for the long term future benefit of all those reserves and those who visit them.

In this way, the cost burden will be lessened, the damage to the environment will be lessened (Greenhouse gas emissions, smoke hazes, loss of valuable native flora and fauna, and other valuable heritage places), and minimise the loss of human lives, stock and cattle, homes and tourism places and businesses that are dependent upon tourism.

Trees can grow again, cattle will breed, homes can be rebuilt and tourism businesses can rebuild, but, one cannot replace a human life.

(b) Floods ~ these will occur at the least expected time (as has happened this past few days). As we have not had a decent flood in Victoria for many years, one wonders what financial and physical contingencies are planned at Government level to address floods, and alleviate the environmental damage, if and when they do occur!

(c) Drought ~ existing mechanisms came a bit late, and in some places are inefficient. It is “not much good closing the gate after the horse has bolted.” While small towns and their small businesses in rural regions that support the surrounding agricultural base still have reduced levels of income (one third reduction, I am told). Tourism (if recognised), can be of enormously beneficial by offsetting the reduced levels of income caused by the Drought. But, here again, recognition of a tourism region at a State level is crucial to receiving such support.

TOR 6. OPPORTUNITIES TO LEVERAGE PRIVATE TOURISM INVESTMENT AND COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY IN REGIONAL TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE INCLUDING ECOTOURISM.

This is totally dependent upon yet again, RECOGNITION in State and Local Planning as well, with Tourism Victoria. If an area is not recognised, then it stands not to benefit.

Tourism, to say the least, is a highly competitive industry. If a place or region is not considered important by any variety of Boards, State Government bureaucrats, or at all levels of Government, then small places do not have a “hope in hell” of competing for those opportunities.

It can be demonstrated that this region has all the attributes for tourism development - Rushworth, its Goldfields History & heritage, its State Forest and closely associated National Park – Heathcote-Graytown NP – (incorrectly named), the region’s significant waterways – Waranga Basin & Caravan Park, Lake Cooper, Green’s Lake, significant Wallenjoe Wetlands, Colbinabbin Range – Heathcote Wine Region, all abound as tourism product, but all need recognition of its tourism assets and product.
While opportunities do exist to leverage private investment, tourism product and existing assets/infrastructure require recognition, and, and should not be totally reliant or dependent upon private investment or financial assistance.

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Graeme Butler in 1988 introduces the *Waranga Conservation Study* as follows: -
"Waranga Shire contains within its boundaries, most of the historical attributes possible for a rural municipality: the pastoral era…the Aboriginal Protectorate, the extensive…goldfields around Rushworth and Whroo, the…evidence of the early selection era, mammoth works associated with irrigation and the related connection with closer and soldier settlement. There were also the internment and prisoner-of-war camps. In an area where long distances and homogenous landscapes prevail, Waranga has all of these cultural themes and the surrounding native forest setting which was there at creation."
"Historians have noted that not many of these diverse themes have a great importance when considered individually on a State-wide basis but as an ensemble, the Shire's historical landscape is rich. In a relatively small area one can pursue the physical traces of some (then) 145 years of major historical forces at work in rural Victoria, among them the all-important gold era".

General comment:

This Inquiry is long over-due, and certainly most welcome. We wish to thank the committee for providing us with the opportunity to comment. I am amenable to discussion with any member of the Inquiry committee on the contact details provided below if so desired.

Yours sincerely,

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