Grampians Marketing Inc (GMI) is the regional campaign committee of Tourism Victoria’s Grampians product region. Geographically, the region includes the towns of Stawell, Ararat, Horsham & Hamilton, and the villages of Halls Gap, Dunkeld, Pomonal, Wartook Valley & Great Western, surrounding the Grampians National Park (GNP). The committee is skills based, with representation from:

- Northern Grampians Shire Council
- Southern Grampians Shire Council
- Ararat Rural City Council
- Horsham Rural City Council
- Parks Victoria
- Industry representatives from accommodation, dining, winery/cellar door sectors

The primary focus of GMI is to secure the Grampians region as Victoria’s premier nature based tourism destination. Extensive national and international marketing activities are undertaken by GMI, along with other activities that include: advocating for private sector tourism and its needs to governments, industry and product development and providing specialist advice to all levels of government.

GMI is funded by contributions from Tourism Victoria’s Regional Partnership Program, local governments and industry.

Additionally, GMI is responsible for the implementation of the Grampians Region Tourism Recovery Plan which began immediately following the major 2006 bushfires that affected 47% of the Grampians National Park. A budget of $1.475 million was allocated from the Victorian Government Fire Recovery Task Force to expend on tourism recovery initiatives. This provided the opportunity to develop and deliver major marketing campaigns, public relations, industry development, and product development to regain and improve the market position for the Grampians region.
Areas of the Inquiry that GMI would like to comment on include;

1) The economic benefits of tourism in regional areas, including flow-on benefits to other regional businesses and industry

The economic benefits of tourism to the Grampians region are very substantial, compared only to industries such as agriculture and viticulture. Importantly for the local community and the surrounding region, Grampians National Park is the core attraction within the Grampians tourism product region and provides the major focus for a diverse and active tourism industry. It generates visitor expenditure of more than $211 million per year in the region (Tourism Victoria 2004 figures), with a substantial net economic product for Victoria, estimated at $65 million per year (Price Waterhouse Coopers 2003). Latest annual visitation figures show there were more than 1.5 million visits to the Park, making it Victoria’s third most visited National Park and one of Australia’s most important nature based and cultural tourism destinations.

The tourism industry faces the challenge of promoting the importance of the industry and its flow-on effects in a regional context.

GMI supports the development of a regional tourism organization that has a focus on all issues related to the industry, rather than just marketing.

An opportunity exists for the development of stronger links between tourism and other industries. For example, GMI has identified the opportunity to focus on niche marketing of agricultural products, particularly cellar door and farm gate sales of food and wine and related dining. Product development involving a collaborative approach between tourism and agriculture is required.

Regional tourism can contribute to the economic health of regions through leadership in environmental sustainability. Future growth and investment in the industry should be based on being carbon neutral, efficient in its use of natural resources and contributing to the health and well being of visitors.

Further support is required in the development, implementation and evaluation of regional events. The opportunity exists for the development of a co-ordinated regional events management plan. Currently fragmentation exists because many local events are coordinated by volunteer groups with a specific interest in their small geographical area, rather than a more regional approach.
2) Potential impediments to the sustained growth of regional tourism, economic activity and jobs

Lack of industry leadership as there are no programs to identify, engage and nurture industry leaders. Currently there are too few contributors to continually contribute and support the industry.

Low barriers relating to personnel entry into tourism operations results in a lack of management skills and marketing knowledge, that can lead to failure of delivery of the marketing promise.

Lack of infrastructure maintenance & development, including roads, transportation links, National & State Park works, broadband network coverage outside of main centres.

Lack of private investment is a major impediment to sustained growth this is influenced by a lack of consistent local government interpretation of planning overlay, meaning it is difficult to attract new investment. Personnel involved in the management of local government planning need further development.

The lack of recognition of tourism and hospitality as dedicated career paths, has resulted in difficulties in attracting & retaining skilled hospitality staff. Also reflected in lack of regional training centres able to offer specialist training opportunities.

Lack of event coordination on a regional basis contributes events to not achieving peak outcomes and volunteer overload

Lack of easily accessible quality research findings, as raw data should be accompanied by insightful interpretation to be of value. Following on, the channels for communication of research findings should be improved.

Reliance on volunteers in staffing attractions & providing visitor services (as well as events see point above) can sometimes result in low delivery of visitor expectation.

Competing marketing campaigns in interstate markets, especially important as domestic visitation declining.

Lack of resources given to natural attractions, not included in Grampians National Park boundary eg Mt Napier State Park, Mt Eccles National Park, Byaduk Caves & Black Range National Park resulting in difficulties to create dispersal from the GNP

Due to massive increases in property values, and the nature of an incremental application of Land Tax, many tourism operators are finding this extra financial burden extremely restrictive. This tax has a detrimental effect on the much accommodation sector such as caravan parks and boutique accommodation located on prime real estate.
3) The effectiveness of current programs to promote and enhance tourism in regional Victoria

GMI is a key stakeholder and active supporter of the Great Southern Touring Route (GSTR). GSTR is a marketing program promoting a self drive loop taking in some of Victoria’s most highly visited sites, designed for the international market but has developed domestically also. This program has been effective in the following areas:

- Increases in visitation since the inception of GSTR
- The development of a Melbourne – Adelaide spur route
- Expansion into some newly identified markets eg Japan & China.
- By aiming for an international standard of product along GSTR, domestic trade had benefited from this increase in quality

The State Government responsiveness to the emergency caused by a natural disaster, was very effective. An example is the recovery campaign undertaken by GMI titled ‘Grampians On Sale’. The campaign borrowed from a retail message to encourage visitation at a unique time, post bushfires.

- 11% increase in Domestic Overnight Visitors compared with 2005 - highest growth of all Victorian regions (However a 2.7% decrease in Domestic Visitor nights)
- 5.3% increase in interstate overnight visitors - (However a 26% decrease in nights)
- 13.3% increase in intrastate overnight visitors & 13% increase in intrastate nights
- 6.3% increase in Domestic daytrip visitors - highest growth of any Victorian region for that period

Other programs that could be enhanced include:
- ‘Inter-regional’ co-operative marketing to negate parochialism and having to compete for funding dollars from same source
- Other Cross-state border partnerships could be further developed
- GMI would appreciate the opportunity to participate in a co-ordinated Victorian approach to interstate marketing program
- Tourism Accreditation – lack of recognition of the ‘tick’ by consumers
4) Initiatives to increase international and domestic visitors to regional Victoria

A coordinated interstate marketing program should be implemented, rather than the current, region by region approach. Regions with like interstate target markets should be given opportunities to form partnerships and increase their ‘buying power’ when marketing interstate.

A tourism industry and hire car industry partnership could work to resolve current restrictions placed on hire cars when used in regional areas, while increasing visitation, hence car hire usage.

Improved signage, including directional and interpretive, could be developed by encouraging partnerships between bodies such as roads infrastructure authorities, land management authorities and tourism marketing bodies.

More sophisticated marketing opportunities for example, creating imagery featuring other nationalities in natural attractions would be beneficial.

5) The effectiveness of measures to address the short and long term effects of natural events such as bushfires, floods and drought on regional tourism

Lack of a RTA in our region has meant GMI had to take on much of the recovery process for the tourism industry, rather than tourism marketing. State Gov Recovery Funding enabled a number of marketing programs to be developed & implemented.

As a nature based destination, the return of the infrastructure of the Grampians National Park (walking tracks, camp sites, lookouts etc) to a better than pre-fire state is of utmost importance. To date, some 18 months after the bushfires, a large proportion of works remain incomplete due to lack of funding.

Therefore, although the tourism sector showed an understanding of the importance of extra funding to assist the regions marketing activities, the body managing our natural assets were and are unable to provide the funds to return the National park into an asset able to be promoted as ‘better than ever’.
6) Opportunities to increase private and commercial investment in regional tourism infrastructure and ecotourism

Development of a single state based regional infrastructure project group that could linking tourism bodies with other government bodies in the region in a strategic planning context. Focus should be to develop environmentally sustainable product within natural product, eg projects such as the Grampians Long Distance Walk which relies on partnerships between private investors and the national park management.

Development of a RTO to plan and co-ordinate, to provide single common direction for the region. A key role of the RTO would be to audit product weaknesses, strengths and opportunities, and provide a sound basis for strategic tourism planning for the region.

The Grampians Region is well placed to benefit from a growing focus on environmental sustainability within the tourism industry. The development of this strength will well place the region for attracting industry investment in this emerging issue. Possibilities exist for a ‘world’s best practice’ scheme to be developed in the region.