1. The economic benefits of tourism in regional areas, including tracking the flow-on benefits through other regional businesses and industry.

1.1. While this would be very useful to know, there is a lack of resources at the local level to collect and analyse data and no State Government support for this type of work.

1.2. In our instance Council’s limited resources are directed to the operation of the Shire’s two Visitor Information Centres and Tourism Services.

1.3. While the benefits of tourism to local economies is generally accepted, its specific impact in our local economy would very good to know for a range of social and economic reasons.

1.4. Current research such as the National Visitor Survey (Tourism Research Australia) includes Mount Alexander Shire within the Bendigo Loddon sub-region. The sample size for this area is too small to supply meaningful data.

1.5. Lack of data impacts investment in regional tourism, and in all likelihood other business investment.

2. Potential impediments to the sustained growth of regional tourism, economic activity and jobs.

2.1. Climate change (including water supply) and petrol prices may impact on economic activity in this area. For example, current water policy favouring agriculture has resulted in Lake Cairn Curran no longer being available for recreational uses such as fishing or boating. This reduction in visitor numbers to the lake has had a profound effect on tourism trade in Maldon, the closest town.

2.2. There is currently a strong reliance on local government planning/funding for regional infrastructure development.
2.3. Tourism Victoria favours funding of marketing programs over strategic infrastructure planning in regional areas.

2.4. As a result, Federal funding for the Old Castlemaine Gaol is currently being sought via the Australian Tourism Development Program as no State funding is available.

3. The effectiveness, at a National, State and local level, of current programs to promote and enhance tourism in regional Victoria.

3.1. Tourism Victoria programs currently focus on marketing with vital product and industry development left to local government or industry groups to manage.

3.2. Economic development initiatives by Regional Development Victoria specifically exclude tourism activity.

3.3. Increasingly, local government in partnership with local industry groups have had to develop local or regional programs to distribute products to target markets due to the lack of state coordinated channels. This is evident in the high number of local tourism websites which have been developed to offer online booking facilities for accommodation, tours and packages.

4. Initiatives to increase both international and domestic visitor nights in regional Victoria.

4.1. Tourism Victoria’s Regional Marketing Program seeks buy-in from local government and industry yet the majority of planned marketing activities for 2007/08 fall outside the RMP criteria and therefore require MASC or industry funding, including:

4.1.1. Events (logistics)
4.1.2. Domestic consumer shows
4.1.3. Website development
4.1.4. Operating and overhead expenses
4.1.5. Industry development.
4.1.6. Product development
4.1.7. Local area marketing initiatives
4.2. Due to a lack of relevant data, Mount Alexander Shire Council is unable to accurately assess whether Tourism Victoria's brand marketing initiatives have directly influenced visitor nights in Mount Alexander Shire.

5. The efficacy of existing mechanisms at a National, State and local level to address the impact on regional tourism of natural events such as bushfires, floods and drought and effective measures to drive long term economic recovery.

5.1. The Goldfields Region has been in drought for nine years and this has impacted on local tourism operators. There appears to be more support for areas that have had catastrophic events like bushfires.

5.2. Small Council's like MASC have a limited or no capacity to assist in the development of marketing and promotional activities to help overcome these problems so there is a role for other levels of government.

5.3. Support should extend beyond campaigns and marketing to industry support and development programs that are funded at the state level and delivered locally.

5.4. Without adequate research data, it is difficult to measure the impact on businesses either directly or indirectly related to tourism and thus determine an appropriate response to aid recovery.

5.5. Round 5 of the Australian Tourism Development Program for Exceptional Circumstances Declared Areas has provided an opportunity to fund initiatives to aid drought effected businesses. Mount Alexander Shire Council is currently working with the City of Greater Bendigo to prepare a submission for Category 2 of the program: integrated tourism development projects.
6. Opportunities to leverage private investment and commercial activity in regional tourism infrastructure, including ecotourism.

6.1. Located just over an hour from Tullamarine Airport and a hour and a half by train from Southern Cross Station, Mount Alexander Shire is well located to service the 4-5 star conference/meeting market, but lacks the infrastructure to support this service.

6.2. The Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park, Old Castlemaine Gaol and Victorian Goldfields Railway to name a few would all benefit from increased focus on infrastructure needs, opportunities and investment.

Presented by
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on behalf of
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