Cardinia Shire Council

submission to

Parliament of Victoria

Inquiry into Rural and Regional Tourism

Rural and Regional Committee

June 2007
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Executive Summary

Tourism is one of a number of industry sectors that Council supports through actions such as building infrastructure (eg., roads) and approving housing estates (thereby facilitating population growth and increasing the potential pool of visitors for local tourist operators). Specifically, Council’s Economic Development Unit provides a range of services to attract and assist business (including tourist operators) in the Shire including:

- Providing access to small Council grants for groups of tourist operators (Cardinia Business Partnership Program);
- Supporting local tourist groups and acting as liaison between the groups and Council;
- Organising training events;
- Fostering business to business relationships through quarterly business breakfasts and by promoting and maintaining the on-line Cardinia Business Register;
- Recognising and celebrating business achievements through the Cardinia Shire Business Awards and the quarterly business newsletter “Business Connections”;
- Providing information about business support services offered by state & federal agencies
- and
- Providing tourist brochures to tourist operators who have chosen to set up their own information services.

Cardinia is not a tourist destination when compared to its regional and urban neighbours:

The Shire’s location, on the fringe of Melbourne, means that most visitors are day trippers.

Cardinia is an interface Council and in a recognised growth corridor (please see Attachment One for information on the implications of being a designated growth corridor council).
Given the above, we expect that future tourist growth to be population driven with large number of new visitors coming from the Casey Cardinia urban growth corridor for day trips. In particular, Cardinia’s population is forecasted to increase by 47% in 13 years to 117,596 by 2020. By 2030, 96,000 residents (74% of Cardinia’s population) will be living in the urban growth boundary of the municipality (Pakenham, Officer and Beaconsfield).

Given our topography, Cardinia is in an excellent position to take advantage of natural assets to develop recreational based tourist facilities for current and new residents. An example is the development of the aqua duct trail north of Pakenham.

We further envisage that population growth will encourage our local tourist operators to expand their activities. For example our current collection of boutique wineries could expand their business operations to include dining, accommodation and special events similar to the Yarra Valley Grape Grazing Festival.

Council is working towards establishing vibrant local communities and flourishing businesses, particularly in the urban growth corridor, so residents have discretionary income and time to spend on local tourist attractions. Council’s Economic development Unit (EDU) is also arranging a networking forum at the end of July for all business groups, including tourism groups, in the Shire. The aim is to assist these groups package their activities, on a Shire basis, and take advantage of economies of scale.

The following is the draft response to the Parliament of Victoria Inquiry into Rural and Regional Tourism. Councillors were invited in the Council Information Bulletin (1 June, 2007) to provide feedback to this submission. Local tourist groups and operators were also consulted.
1. **The Economic Benefits of Tourism in Cardinia, including the Flow-on Benefits**

1.1 **Employment Opportunities**

Tourism is a labour intensive industry and operates 24 hours a day, seven days per week. There are many opportunities for employment, on both a full and part time basis and for skilled and unskilled workers.

It is estimated that, currently, tourism accounts for approximately 700 local jobs (source: Shire of Cardinia Economic Development Strategy Economic profile 2006).

1.2 **New Business Opportunities**

As tourism increases there are also more opportunities for small businesses to develop. A thriving tourism industry supports growth in other sectors such as transport, construction, agriculture and retailing.

1.3 **Increased Council Revenue and Commercial and Residential Development**

Tourism development often results in increased revenue through rates. Visitors may decide they want to live in an area increasing demand for housing and other services and therefore increasing overall land values, increased development and investment. Tourism businesses too pay rates.
2. Potential Impediments to the Sustained Growth of Tourism in Cardinia

2.1 Cardinia is Not a Destination

Cardinia features two of the busier tourist routes in the State – the Princes and South Gippsland Highways. The large number of tourists travelling these routes are mostly on the way to somewhere else.

2.2 Lack of Image and “Jigsaw” linkages

Cardinia is not well recognised for tourism. The Shire does not formally sit in any of Tourism Victoria’s successful Jigsaw campaigns. As a result, we are removed from Tourism Victoria’s regional development initiatives and thus must undertake our own promotion.

Also, whilst many Cardinia tourist operators align themselves with Gippsland and the Yarra Valley, often these regions do not see Cardinia as belonging and our operators are often not included in tourism publications. These publications are fundamental marketing vehicles for the industry.

2.3 Geographical Dispersion of Operators.

There are three distinct geographical tourist zones in Cardinia (as per below map) with no natural strong links in the public and industry’s mind:

- Hills area – Emerald, Cockatoo, Gembrook
- Central/Princes Hwy – Pakenham, Nar Nar Goon, Tynong, Bunyip
- South Gippsland Highway – Calermeade, Koo Wee Rup, Lang Lang
2.4  Fragmented Tourism Associations

Split by the Princes Highway and the Hills area, the sector is represented by local tourism groups including:

- Puffing Billy Country Accommodation Group
- Toomuc Valley Tourism Group
- Cardinia Tourism
- Gembrook Business Group*

* One of Gembrook Business Group’s primary focuses is promoting Gembrook as a tourist destination.

Each group strives to represent the collective interests of their members, address local area tourism issues and undertake local area marketing. (Please see Attachment Two for copies of the promotional brochures for Toomuc Valley Tourism Group, Cardinia Tourism and Gembrook Business Group). These groups of necessity are preoccupied with micro issues and do not at times recognise or appreciate strategic opportunities and big picture aspects of the regional tourism industry. Cooperative marketing is lacking.

2.5  Classification of Cardinia as Metropolitan

A significant barrier is the classification of Cardinia as a metropolitan Council by Federal and State Governments. In reality we are at the rural urban interface; we are not metropolitan nor are we completely rural. This dual role is not recognised under the provisions of a number of important grants programs, such as the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF), which classify Cardinia singularly as a metropolitan Council. As such, Cardinia is not eligible to apply for support for capital works that are urgently needed to improve tourism facilities.

Further, the Council has limited commercial and industrial properties and a heavy reliance on residential rates to deliver infrastructure. Further, currently tourist operators do not pay a levy, so apart from small Council grant assistance there is little money available for the development of tourism.
Case Study: Emerald Lake Park

Emerald Lake Park is a case in point. The Park is located in Emerald, in the Dandenong Ranges, approximately 45kms South East of Melbourne. The Park has much to offer both local and visiting tourists. It is not only of significance to the local Emerald community (population: 7,670) and to the people of Cardinia Shire (population: 62,088) but also for Victorians and visitors from interstate and overseas. 68% of all visitors to the Park come from Greater Melbourne, 15% come from other places in Victoria, 9% come from interstate and 8% come from overseas. The Park also provides mutual support to Puffing Billy railway. Puffing Billy is the main reason 40% of people visit the Park. (Source: Cardinia Shire Council Emerald Lake Park Strategic Plan 2006)

(Please see Attachment Three for a copy of the information brochure “Emerald Lake Park-Park for all Seasons!” and landscape photograph of Park.

Emerald Lake Park was established over 65 years ago. The Park has had little in the way of capital investment and is in great need of revitalisation. A range of activities are proposed to lift the profile of the Park, to reach new target markets, lift group activities and attract new operators to the Park, thereby increasing local employment opportunities. Regrettably, there are limited opportunities available for external funding to improve the Park.

2.6 Weak Public Transport Links

The Council is geographically large, with a relatively small population and rate base creating pressure to meet community needs and expectations in the delivery of programs and infrastructure. Cardinia Shire comprises more than 30 townships and localities. The Shire is the same size as the three municipalities of Casey, Frankston and Greater Dandenong combined but with one seventh of their population. We are geographically large with a small scattered population living in many townships.
Lack of access to facilities through inadequate public transport and poor roads is a major issue within Cardinia. Until recently, there was only one bus route in Pakenham. This has now been increased to four, which take in the new estates such as Lakeside. Another bus route links Emerald to Beaconsfield. However, there are no bus routes linking small, outlying towns such as Koo Wee Rup and Lang Lang to Pakenham. Likewise, there is no hills route or circuit route around the Shire.

Clearly, whilst council is doing what it can to address issues of access and public transport, they limit the opportunity for Cardinia residents to access tourist facilities.

2.7 Lack of Visitor Information Services

There are no Visitor Information Service centres in Cardinia. Currently, tourist operators informally set up their own information services by installing brochure racks. Some operators ask Council for tourist brochures which Council provides. As these people have a real stake in informing tourists about what the region has to offer, they could be assisted with the provision of brochure stands and brochures.

3. Effective local programs to promote and enhance tourism in Cardinia

3.1 Emerald Lake Park

Following the adoption of the Emerald Lake Park Strategic Plan 2006, Council Officers have been discussing with a number of partners opportunities to improve the Park’s infrastructure and to actively promote the Park and increase visitation.

3.2 Tom Quilty Cup

Council has recently committed to supporting the Victorian Endurance Riders Association in staging the Tom Quilty Gold Cup, scheduled to be held in Tonimbuk in October 2008. The national equestrian event for endurance riders will see over 300 horses and riders competing to complete a 160 km course in less than 24 hours. Over
3000 people including competitors, support crews, officials and volunteers from overseas and interstate are expected to visit Cardinia for the event.

3.3 Cardinia Ranges Farmers Market

In 2002 Cardinia Shire’s Economic Development Unit established the Cardinia Ranges Farmers’ Market. The Farmers’ Market is a food only market with the exception of some plants (predominantly food producing plants). All stallholders are farmers and producers and priority is given to local Cardinia Shire residents.

Council has supported the development of the Cardinia Ranges Farmers’ Market to provide the community access to fresh, nutritious foods and helps reduce unnecessary food miles.

When the local community shops at the market they are given the opportunity to interact with local farmers and be educated about what is grown around them. This has proven to be an excellent vehicle in bridging the social urban / rural divide within the community.

The farmers’ market has also become an important outlet for many local farmers. By selling direct they are able to maximize their profits and receive valuable direct feedback from customers.
Council sees the farmers’ market as an important business incubator for the local community.

3.4 Food & Wine Development

On the back of the success of the Cardinia Ranges Farmers’ Market, Council has developed several other food and wine development projects. The projects have been run in partnership with Baw Baw Shire Council and include:

- Production of the Regional Produce Directory which showcases local food and wine producers (see Attachment Four for copy of Directory). The Directory is now in its second edition.
- Staging Signature Dish Competition: where local chefs are invited to create a “signature” dish using local produce. Each year the popularity of this competition grows not only in entries from local chefs, but also attendances at the final 'Cook Off' - which this year attracted a crowd of approximately 400 people
- Gippsland West Wine Trade Show, and media familiarisation tour, to promote local wineries to media, as well as to local and metropolitan hospitality businesses
- Staging ‘Celebrate Asparagus’ Festival

4. Initiatives to Increase International and Domestic Visitor Nights in Cardinia

Cardinia’s efforts to attract overnight visitors is impeded by the fact that there is a shortage of accommodation options in the Shire. The accommodation sector is currently dominated by boutique style operations and there is very little more affordable accommodation suited to the general market. For instance, there is no large scale accommodation to take a coach load of people. This hampers operators and Council in developing international, interstate and regional tourist markets. Council is working towards to attract a major accommodation provider to the region.
5. **The Efficacy of Existing Mechanisms to Address the Impact on Cardinia Tourism of Natural Events and Effective Measures to Drive Long Term Economic Recovery.**

Municipal councils are required by the Emergency Management Act (1986) to prepare a Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMP). Council’s MEMP addresses the impact on the Shire’s residents, communities, economy, environment and buildings in the event of a natural disaster or emergency. The Plan includes helping drive the long term economic recovery of our tourist industry and associated industries (small business, agribusinesses, primary producers and food and wine manufacturers).

Cardinia’s MEMP details the management of recovery activities to ensure people and communities affected by emergencies can properly function again as soon as possible. Under the MEMP, Council is responsible for providing and maintaining physical services relevant to disaster recovery. Council also has the capability and willingness to provide a range of human and community services to individuals and the community.

The process involves cooperation between all levels of government, non-government organisations, community agencies, the private sector and the community. This coordination is especially important when an emergency affects more than one local government area.

Recovery activities address:

i. The revitalisation of the economy of the community

ii. The emotional, social, spiritual, financial and physical wellbeing of individuals and communities

iii. The restoration of essential and community infrastructure

iv. The rehabilitation of the environment

To provide recovery activities Council uses, and works with:

- Council owned or controlled assets
• Council employed or contracted personnel

• Local agencies that have agreed to participate in the formal emergency recovery arrangements (eg Salvation Army, Department of Human Services, Centre Link, Department of Primary Industry)

• Local community agencies that have a capacity to assist people affected by emergencies (eg Red Cross)

• Private businesses with a capacity to provide emergency recovery services or activities

Council’s Municipal recovery Manager (MRM) is responsible for the coordination of resources to be used in an emergency.

Council conducts exercises (both real life and table top/case studies) to assess the MEMP’s effectiveness. These exercises are undertaken at least twice a year and involve relevant agencies such as Red Cross, Department of Human Services, SES, CFA and utility companies. Changes to improve the MEMP are then made to address any shortfalls.

The MEMP is also audited by the SES every three years. Council’s MEMP passed the last audit. The next audit is due in 2008.

6. Opportunities to Leverage Private Investment and Commercial Activity in Cardinia’s Tourism Infrastructure.

6.1 “Connecting Cardinia” program

Council’s “Connecting Cardinia” road development program is a successful example of local government and the private sector working together to invest in infrastructure. In 2004, Council launched a $17 million project, “Connecting Cardinia”, to construct 50kms of the Shire's 13 most critical local arterial roads.

The Council decided to take the opportunity to work with the private sector because the unsealed road network in the Shire has come under increasing traffic demand as traffic
volumes have increased with the population growth (Cardinia is situated in the Urban growth Corridor with our population set to almost double in 13 years). The “Connecting Cardinia” road program will improve the road network and bring a whole range of benefits to everyone who visits, lives and works in Cardinia, including local tourist operators.

The $17 million project involved a long-term partnership with private company Works Infrastructure to seal over 50km of gravel roads and maintain 80km of road network over the next 15 years. The project has advanced Cardinia’s road development program that would not normally have been available for another 10 years.

The project’s benefits were also recently recognised when Cardinia Shire recently won the prestigious Local Government Professionals Award for Excellence, in the *Community Assets & Infrastructure Initiative over $250,000* category for “Connecting Cardinia”.

### 6.2 Future private investment sought

Cardinia is also actively pursuing a range of businesses to invest in the Shire including tourist based businesses. Council has recently adopted the Business Development & Attraction Plan which seeks to support local business to expand and to attract new business into the Shire while facilitating a vibrant, integrated economy. A healthy local tourist industry is an integral part of this approach.
CARDINIA’S URBAN GROWTH CORRIDOR

In the next 30 years, Melbourne will grow by one million people (620,000 new households). “Melbourne 2030” is the Victorian Government’s planning policy governing the growth of Melbourne over this period. The policy aims for a more compact city and better management of metropolitan growth. “Melbourne 2030” acknowledges that growth will occur in specific corridors at the urban fringe. Cardinia has been designated as one of these corridors.

Cardinia’s Urban Growth Corridor extends from Beaconsfield to Pakenham. It is almost 15km long and over 3km wide; accounting for 3.5% of the Shire’s entire land mass. Currently it accommodates over one third of the Shire’s population. This is set to grow to 75% by 2030. The growth corridor is zoned residential and business. It will be the largest employment corridor south east of Melbourne.
Attachment Two.

Copies of the promotional brochures for Toomuc Valley Tourism Group, Cardinia Tourism and Gembrook Business Group.
Attachment Three.

Copy of information brochure “Emerald Lake Park-Park for all Seasons!” and landscape photograph of Park.
Attachment Four.

Copy of Regional Produce Directory