19 July 2007

Mr Damian Drum MLC
Committee Chair
Rural and Regional Committee
of the Victorian Parliament
Parliament House
Spring Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Mr Drum

INQUIRY INTO REGIONAL AND RURAL TOURISM

Your Inquiry into rural and regional tourism has recently been brought to my attention.

The Heritage Council believes that the conservation of Victoria's cultural heritage plays a significant role in the promotion and development of tourism in rural and regional Victoria and would like to draw your attention to some of the initiatives pursued by the Heritage Council and Heritage Victoria in support of rural and regional tourism.

The Heritage Council of Victoria is the Government's principal historic (non-Indigenous) cultural heritage body. It is supported by Heritage Victoria, a division of the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

The Heritage Council is established under the provisions of the Heritage Act 1995 and maintains the Victorian Heritage Register. The Victorian Heritage Register includes not only grand public buildings, but also modest houses, gardens, industrial places, historic archaeological sites, shipwrecks, cemeteries, gardens, objects and collections. As at 1 June 2007, the Register included 1057 rural and regional heritage places and objects.

Victoria's cultural heritage is one of its competitive strengths, generating significant economic benefits to the State and local communities. As a consequence the presentation of Victoria's cultural heritage is an important component of Victoria's tourism industry, and investment in heritage represents a significant component in regional economies. Be it through the provision of attractions such as museums or the use of places for accommodation or hospitality. For example, it is estimated that cultural heritage tourism contributes to over 2 million visitors to Ballarat each year, with a total visitor expenditure of over $300 million to the City of Ballarat alone (Productivity Commission 2006 Conservation of Australia's Historic Heritage Places: Productivity Commission Inquiry Report No 37, Canberra).

Towns like Maldon, Castlemaine, Beechworth, Queenscliff, Daylesford and Port Fairy have attracted new populations in search of unique heritage environments and opportunities to invest in economic ventures and a different lifestyle. This in turn has lead to a substantial investment in protection and conservation of heritage places in those towns. The Heritage Council and Heritage Victoria offer assistance to local government to provide professional and technical advice, funding for studies and funding for conservation of places.
Advice and assistance

Many managers of heritage places and objects in rural and regional Victoria are poorly equipped to appropriately conserve and interpret their places and objects. In Victoria, the heritage advisor program managed by Heritage Victoria enables local government to draw on professional heritage expertise and make that expertise available to building owners and members of the community.

Heritage conservation projects have sometimes been delayed due to the difficulty in obtaining skilled tradespeople, particularly in the rural areas of the state.

The Institute of Specialist Skills which is sponsored by the Victorian Government, provides local trades and craft professionals with opportunities to develop traditional craft skills through its overseas fellowships, as well as offering local professionals access to international experts with educational seminars and lectures.

Victorian Heritage Strategy

In 2006 the Victorian Government launched a new heritage strategy for Victoria (Victorian Government 2006, Victoria’s Heritage: strengthening our communities, Melbourne.) (copy enclosed). Amongst other outcomes the Strategy focuses on the need to support the adaptive reuse of heritage places for tourism. Programs and initiatives identified in the Strategy promote rural and regional tourism through initiating partnership projects and assisting communities, owners, managers, businesses, and local and State Government

One of the programs is Heritagecare, a joint initiative of Heritage Victoria and Conservation Volunteers Australia (see enclosed brochure). Heritagecare provides practical support to heritage place owners and managers, enables volunteers to work on heritage places and enables communities to take responsibility for their own historic heritage. In 2006-07 24 projects were undertaken in this program.

The Community Stewardship projects enable volunteers to participate two days a week, to make a significant contribution to the conservation of their local heritage. Since its inception in 2006, over 90% of the Community Stewardship projects have taken place in rural or regional Victoria.

Awards and Recognition

The Heritage Council presented its inaugural Victorian Heritage Award in 2005 to the Friends of Mt Alexander Diggings. This tourist initiative, run by a volunteer group in Castlemaine, provides a unique cultural heritage tourism experience in the region.

Guides and Trails

Heritage Victoria has recently developed a range of interpretation leaflets, heritage trails and walking tours, details of which are available on the heritage website (www.heritage.vic.gov.au)

The promotion of places in traditional printed guidebooks such as the Lonely Planet series is a proven mechanism for attracting visitors. In 2006 the Heritage Council sponsored the publication of The Traveller’s Guide to the Goldfields, (Best Shot Publications Pty Ltd 2006) (copy enclosed).

The Heritage Council also produces information leaflets about heritage gardens and landscapes. In conjunction with the Open Garden Scheme leaflets are printed to provide details on the history and significance of the relevant garden and associated buildings (copies enclosed). Examples of places supported in this way include Alton at Mt Macedon, Bickleigh Vale in Mooroolbark and Claremont at Newtown. This has been a small but valuable partnership with the Open Gardens Scheme, itself an excellent example of using cultural resources for tourism in rural and regional Victoria.
Cultural heritage tourism is not just limited to places on land. The Victorian Heritage Register includes historic shipwrecks. In 1994 the Victorian Government produced two publications, *Shipwreck Coast Historic Trail Guide* and *Discovery Coast Historic Shipwreck Trail Guide*. More recently two more substantial publications, "Wrecks on the Reef: A guide to the historic Shipwrecks of Port Phillip Heads" and "Surf coast wrecks: Historic Shipwrecks between Point Lonsdale and Cape Otway 1853 – 1940" have been produced to assist tourists better understand the important maritime history of Victoria’s coast. Copies enclosed.

**Exhibitions**

The Heritage Council has also sponsored travelling exhibitions which have been very popular in rural and regional Victoria; exhibitions such as “A Golden Heritage” supported by an on-line version (www.heritage.vic.gov.au/exhibitions), and the “Lone Graves in Gippsland” exhibition (see enclosed catalogue).

**Conservation works**

Through the Victoria’s Heritage Grants (2006-2007), Heritage Victoria with the endorsement of the Heritage Council provided funding for the conservation and interpretation of 15 rural and regional places and objects, as well as funding heritage studies and training. Also approximately half of the places funded through the Department of Sustainability and Environment’s Creating Better Places program (2006-2007) were in rural and regional Victoria, with two thirds of those places involved in aspects of cultural heritage tourism.

Additional programs include the Heritage Victoria’s Collections Conservation Support Program, which recently provided $80,000 for a pilot program which will target the conservation of collections of rural and regional community museums.

In concluding I would like to point out that:

- rural and regional economies are increasingly dependent on tourism and cultural heritage places, collections and objects are crucial elements of the tourism experience in Victoria;
- cultural heritage places have the ability to enrich lives through informing visitors of a community’s past and contributing to a sense of identity;
- heritage conservation directly contributes to cultural tourism and consequent job creation;
- government support of heritage conservation has been shown to leverage significant additional funding, volunteer and community support and promote economic activity;
- the main potential impediments to the sustained growth of rural and regional heritage tourism is a drop in support for the protection, management, conservation and interpretation of heritage places, or a failure to embrace opportunities to develop new heritage tourism experiences;
- the *Strategy* has allowed the development of many highly effective programs which encourage partnerships with owners and managers, local and State Governments, private businesses and not for profit organisations, enabling Victorians to tell the stories of rural and regional communities;
- initiatives to increase international and domestic heritage tourism in rural and regional Victoria include improving the quality and availability of cultural heritage tourism opportunities;
- it is also necessary to incorporate heritage matters into business and strategic planning, developing new forms of interpretation, such as self-guided tours, podcasts and serial tours and trails, creating partnerships between community museums, local government and private businesses, and increasing the level of awareness and involvement of tourists; and
• opportunities to increase private and commercial investment in rural and regional tourism is encouraged by providing advice on conservation and interpretation for heritage places, funding programs, providing advice on marketing and promotion, coordinating partnerships and providing training to owners and managers of heritage places and objects to better conserve their place and tell their story.

I hope that these observations assist the considerations of your committee. Should you have any further queries or require further information please contact the Heritage Council through contact Ray Tonkin, Executive Director, Heritage Victoria (9637 9476).

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Chris Gallagher
Chair