30 August 2013

Executive Officer
Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Mr Koch

Re: Parliamentary Inquiry into Heritage Tourism and Ecotourism in Victoria

Thank you for your invitation to make a submission regarding heritage tourism and ecotourism in Victoria.

Tourism has been identified as having a high level of significance in the economic, cultural and social development of Corangamite Shire and is recognised as one of the key pillars in the broader Great South Coast Regional Strategic Plan. Nature based tourism already attracts large numbers to the area; particularly to Port Campbell National Park and receives detailed attention in a number of plans and strategies.

Key priorities of council in relation to heritage and ecotourism are:

- To deliver the Council Plan commitments. Particularly relevant commitments are Positioning for Economic Growth and Sustaining our Natural Assets.
- To attract additional investment in the provision of accommodation, including accommodation associated with nature based tourism.
- To participate in the Parks Victoria Shipwreck Coast Master Plan project, and to advocate future funding for the implementation of the Master Plan.
- To achieve the 12 Apostles trail which will provide a link from the hinterland to coast (via Camperdown and Timboon to Port Campbell) and then to Princetown via Loch Ard and the 12 Apostles. The trail is of importance in changing behaviour of tourists; how tourists move between key destinations and providing a more immersive experience.
To implement a planning scheme amendment that will introduce ten heritage precincts across townships within the shire. This is the outcome of the Stage 2 Corangamite Heritage Study, which also recognises a further 76 individual places.

Corangamite contains a well preserved legacy of heritage streetscapes, buildings, gardens and the largest dry stone wall network outside of Europe. Significant additional heritage assets in a tourism sense include Aboriginal Cultural Heritage, Shipwreck Heritage, and the Great Ocean Road.

This submission will respond to the terms of reference for ecotourism and heritage tourism separately.

Yours sincerely

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Director Sustainable Development
Submission Corangamite Shire
Parliamentary Inquiry into Heritage Tourism and Ecotourism in Victoria

Ecotourism

(1) Examining the current scope of ecotourism and heritage tourism in Victoria;

A number of studies have been completed at the local, state and federal level showing the importance of the Great Ocean Road and the Twelve Apostles to tourism in Victoria. In the 2001/02 financial year Port Campbell National Park contributed $190.4 million to Victoria’s economy (Parks Victoria, 2005).

Despite enviable volume the pattern of visitation to Corangamite Shire and the western end of the Great Ocean Road is high volume and low yield. A high percentage of Corangamite’s 2.6 million annual visitors spend very little time experiencing its unique natural assets and surprisingly very few stay overnight.

For many, the experience of one of Australia’s most marketable and iconic natural experiences, Port Campbell National Park, is a compromised rushed and crowded mid-afternoon photo opportunity. There is a need to develop options that encourage longer stays, wider travel and facilitate a more aspirational, immersive natural experience.

The Corangamite Shire Tourism Opportunities Study 2010 identified existing accommodation stock, activity options and visitor facilities as not meeting the expectation of all visitors. A strong case presents that investment in infrastructure is required to present a broader experience and accommodation pallet to improve yield and meet current and projected demand.

The Corangamite Tourism Opportunities Study led to a planning scheme amendment (C30) in 2012. This amendment rezoned land and applied development plan overlays, increasing the opportunities for investment in the provision of accommodation and other tourist facilities.

Additional natural attractions within the Corangamite Shire include the coastal hinterland’s remnant forests and the volcanic lakes and volcanic geology to the north of the Shire.

(2) Examining best practice in ecotourism and heritage tourism;

A sound vision for ecotourism in the Corangamite Shire demands developments that integrate into the landscape and do not compromise natural aesthetics or natural systems. Best practice in eco-tourism provides accessible opportunities for visitors to interact with, enjoy and understand the natural environment without leaving an impact.
Good examples of accommodation following this principal include the Wilderness Lodge at Arthur’s Pass in New Zealand and the Bay of Fires lodges in Tasmania. In Port Campbell National Park the focus should be on providing ecologically sensitive accommodation adjacent to and within the National Park.

The Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump World Heritage Site and the Cliffs of Moher provide good examples of interpretive centres constructed to integrate with the significant surrounding landscape.

In a Port Campbell National Park setting best practice will require the servicing of high volume short stay visitation without compromising the opportunity for more immersive (longer stay) experiences.

*(3) Examining the potential for the development of ecotourism and heritage tourism in Victoria;*

Nature Based Tourism has been outlined in the Great South Coast Regional Strategic Plan 2010 as an opportunity for further economic growth. Port Campbell has been identified as a “key nature based tourism centre,” with the volcanic plains and lakes identified as having “promontable natural system strengths of the region.”

The Great Ocean Road Destination Management Plan 2012 has listed a state of the art Loch Ard Interpretive Centre as its number one development priority. The premise of a Loch Ard Interpretive Centre is of a development that will spread peak load, improve visitor experience and serve as a hub to promote the broader local and regional tourism offering.

The Loch Ard precinct hosts around 7km of walking trails, 3 separate car parks and 11 scenic lookouts. Currently it provides no shelter, has no toilet facility and offers limited interpretation despite its offering of internationally significant geological features, aboriginal cultural sites, wildlife experiences and a nationally significant Shipwreck story.

The Shipwreck Coast Master Plan is currently being developed by Parks Victoria in partnership with the Corangamite Shire, Moyne Shire and Tourism Victoria and is in the early stages of community consultation. The project recognises the significance of tourism to the area and the need to strategically guide the protection of the coast, improve the visitor opportunities and infrastructure and strengthen the interface between the existing towns and National Parks. It is critical that future funding of the implementation of the Master Plan is given priority by Government.

The Great Ocean Walk requires further development of supportive infrastructure and trail development/realignment in order to transform the walk into one of international status. Accessibility and usability of the Great Ocean Walk will be improved by its physical connection to the proposed Twelve Apostles Trail.
The Twelve Apostles Trail presents as a logical build on existing trail infrastructure to provide cycle, walking and wheelchair connectivity between townships and into the National Park. It also presents as an opportunity to further improve the experience for visitors arriving in the region without a private vehicle and visitor markets that are unlikely to self-drive in Australia. The Trail is proposed to be 67 km, linking five townships and will allow visitors to travel independently to and throughout the region without a private vehicle.

The Corangamite Tourism Opportunities Study identifies a lack of organised nature-based activities within the Shire with gaps including sea and estuary kayaking; stand up paddle boarding, jet-ski, cycling, segway, SCUBA, penguin and adventure boat tours.

The community view articulated in the Port Campbell Community Planning process 2013 highlights the need for promoting longer stays and developing a range of experiences based around local assets.

North of the coast, the Great Ocean Road Destination Management Plan 2012 identifies opportunities for improved visitor infrastructure around the lakes and volcanoes near Camperdown. Priority investment projects identified include improvements to water access and foreshore reserves, fishing jetties and a visitor and interpretive centre at Mt Elephant.

(4) Determining the environmental and heritage issues associated with large scale tourism; and

High volume visitation in a high conservation value setting requires world best practice planning, design and project management. Large scale tourism in Corangamite Shire is likely to remain concentrated in Port Campbell National Park. It is essential that as visitor volume increases infrastructure is put in place that minimises environmental impact, complements visual aesthetics and integrates with local communities.

Port Campbell National Park contains species and systems of National significance and has Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation and Flora and Fauna Guarantee listed fauna and flora.

(5) Determining whether the local industry is sufficiently advanced to manage increased tourism and any obstacles to this.

The Tourism Opportunities Study identifies shortcomings in the local industry in regards to developing sites for tourist accommodation, in particular development constraints and lack of available land within Port Campbell and development constraints in Farming Zones. As a result of this study, a planning scheme amendment rezoned land in strategic places around the Shire to better support the development of tourism.
The Study identifies that towns in the north of the Shire have the capacity to support tourism development opportunities within the towns, however there is currently a limited range of accommodation and other tourism services.

The Great South Coast Regional Strategic Plan 2010 has identified limitations in developing and protecting nature based and Indigenous heritage tourism assets. These include “under valuing of our natural capital; the inability to incorporate nature based and Indigenous heritage tourism products into mainstream regional, national and international marketing systems; lack of medium to high capacity high quality accommodation options both in Apollo Bay and in proximity to the Twelve Apostles; and the lack of coordination within our tourism sector, across government departments and between local government jurisdictions.”

Recreational fishing, Aboriginal cultural heritage, volcanic landscapes, coastal walks, surfing locations are among the tourism attractions that have been listed in the Plan as underutilised and under marketed.

The Plan also identified the following as the main issues in the Great South Coast:

- Significant barriers to private investment in nature based tourism
- Undervaluing of our nature based tourism assets
- Lack of high end tourism products and supporting infrastructure
- Poorly coordinated tourism sector

Additional existing obstacles to the development of the tourism industry in Corangamite Shire include:

- Seasonal nature of the tourism industry
- Investment in infrastructure
- Limited operating hours of existing businesses
- Signage catering for a non-English speaking market
- Struggling to emerge as a destination rather than a stop on a touring route.
- Experiences a pattern of visitation that is high volume, short stay and requires a private vehicle for independent travel.
- Uncertainty surrounding private development within National Parks.
- Lack of support for Committees of Management in charge of significant natural tourism assets (e.g.: Lake Bullen Merri and Mt Leura and Sugarloaf Committees of management, Camperdown Timboon Rail Trail Committee).
Heritage Tourism

(1) Examining the current scope of ecotourism and heritage tourism in Victoria;

The Draft Regional Growth Plan for the Great South Coast has acknowledged the significant heritage assets in the region including Aboriginal cultural heritage and historic heritage, the Great Ocean Road and the Shipwreck Coast. The Plan also states that there is the “potential to grow heritage tourism significantly.”

The Corangamite Shire Economic Development Strategy 2011 identified heritage as an area for tourism consideration, including the development of a “heritage villages trail.” The Great Ocean Road also has recognised heritage value as it has recently been listed on the State and National Heritage Registers.

The Corangamite Heritage Study has demonstrated that the Shire contains significant post-settlement heritage places. This study is well underway and has identified 10 precincts and 75 individual sites as having historical significance. Council will be seeking an amendment to the planning scheme in order to apply Heritage Overlays to these sites in the near future. Once these sites, in particular the precincts, are formalised in the planning scheme there will be an opportunity to promote tourism trails linking the precincts. Some identified individually significant sites may also provide opportunities for heritage tourism, such as historic homesteads.

Sites of significant Indigenous heritage are not widely known within the Corangamite Shire and there is an opportunity for communicating these sites and providing interpretive material in the future.

(2) Examining best practice in ecotourism and heritage tourism;

Examples of regional towns that have been successful in heritage tourism include Castlemaine, Maldon and Kyneton.

(3) Examining the potential for the development of ecotourism and heritage tourism in Victoria;

Corangamite Shire’s Economic Development Strategy 2011-2016 recommends developing history and heritage themes for the north of the Corangamite Shire. This could build on the sites identified in the Corangamite Heritage Study, providing a link from Camperdown to Ballarat.

Restoration of heritage places, particularly within commercial precincts along main roads and railway lines will promote the area for its heritage significance as travellers pass through. However there is currently a lack of funding, particularly for the restoration of privately owned buildings that make up a significant portion of these precincts.
The Great Ocean Road Destination Management Plan 2012 outlines history and heritage experience opportunities in the region that relate to “surfing culture and history, maritime history, military history and the history of the Great Ocean Road.” There is an opportunity to better communicate the richness of southern mainland Aboriginal cultural heritage to visitors and residents. Currently cultural experiences offered at Cape Otway Lightstation and Worn Gundidg in Warnambool require support experiences to build a story and better connect visitors to aboriginal culture and country.

A proposal for the internationally significant Lake Condah “Budj Bim lava flow” will require support experiences and interpretation that engage visitors with aboriginal culture and country.

The requirements for Cultural Heritage Management Plans introduce a level of uncertainty in regards to development. Improved identification and communication of sites of cultural heritage and improved processes around Cultural Heritage Management Plans are required.

Despite visitor perception of a “Shipwreck Coast” local Shipwreck History is not presented to visitors in an engaging manner at the sites of the key wrecks. Currently there is a large experience gap between Cape Otway Lightstation and Flagstaff Hill in Warnambool and a missed opportunity to connect visitors to stories where the stories unfolded. There are opportunities to provide this information to visitors at a Loch Ard Interpretive Centre and to refurbish the Historic Shipwrecks Trail. There is also the potential to facilitate linkages between regional heritage and ecotourism routes.

(4) Determining the environmental and heritage issues associated with large scale tourism; and

In contrast to the ecotourism drawcards in the Corangamite Shire, much of the post-settlement heritage is based within the townships. As this is not currently drawing large scale tourists, this is a critical time to set up infrastructure to support tourism increase in the future ensuring that built heritage is retained and not compromised by future development demands.

(5) Determining whether the local industry is sufficiently advanced to manage increased tourism and any obstacles to this.

Within the Shire an in-depth strategic study on opportunities for heritage tourism has not been undertaken. Therefore Council does not have an identified direction in regards to supporting heritage tourism.

A strategy is required for the restoration and maintenance of the heritage precincts that identifies a way forward for providing assistance to owners of heritage places that contribute to a precinct.
Resources


Parks Victoria, 2005, The Value of Parks. The economic value of three of Victoria’s national parks – Port Campbell, Grampians, Wilsons Promontory

