



**Improving tourism  
in regional Victoria**

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**Response to Tourism Victoria's  
Draft Regional Tourism Action Plan**

**By Tourism Alliance Victoria**

**September 2008**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

As noted in the Draft Regional Tourism Action Plan (Draft RTAP), regional tourism in Victoria faces many challenges: a slowing economy which is limiting discretionary income; increases in fuel prices which has driven up air fares and petrol prices, therefore adversely impacting both international and domestic markets; skills shortages; and natural crises such as drought and bushfires.

Tourism Alliance Victoria (TAV) welcomes the recognition by Tourism Victoria of the need for a strategy to address the problems facing regional tourism. However, there are deficiencies in the strategies proposed, as well as key issues which have not been addressed in the Draft RTAP. These are detailed in this report.

SECTION A will examine the four proposed strategies, outline areas requiring clarification or improvement, and make recommendations for each strategy.

SECTION B will raise issues not covered in the Draft RTAP and make recommendations for their consideration.

## SECTION A – INITIATIVES PROPOSED IN THE DRAFT RTAP

### 1. Improve regional industry structures

As mentioned in the Executive Summary of the Draft RTAP, state tourism industry structures are fragmented. TAV research has found that there is a lack of recognition at local government level of the importance of tourism as an economic driver, and even less understanding of how tourism should be managed in order to gain the maximum benefits from it. Commitment of resources, both financial and human, is often limited, regarding destinational tourism development. This resource poor environment is not conducive to building of human capacity, hence the necessity of regional tourism to rely to a significant degree on volunteerism.

While recognising the many personal, operational and community benefits of engaging volunteer labour, many functions vital to healthy tourism - Visitor Information Centres (VICs), local tourism associations (LTAs) and regional tourism organisations (RTOs) survive on volunteer good-will. Over-reliance on volunteers can result in inconsistent levels of service, participation and information delivery, as well as short-term organisational commitment. There is evidence that staff training resources are being directed away from tourism within some local government organisations, having been considered unwarranted because the staff are volunteers.

Actions	Timing
<b>Industry Structures</b>	
Develop a <i>Tourism Leadership Program</i> . This program will assist with the evolution of industry structures and will include appointing a professional executive to administer the new tourism board in priority regions (similar to the Gippsland approach).	2008-11
Identify priority region(s) to assist with the introduction of a peak regional tourism board and monitor implementation.	2008 -11
Provide further assistance to support new industry structures in Gippsland and the Grampians.	2008

**Table 1 - Actions for improving regional industry structures (Draft Regional Tourism Action Plan, p. 9)**

The strategy to create a new Peak Regional Tourism Board (PRTB) raises a number of concerns. Firstly, it introduces yet another level of bureaucracy into an already crowded industry structure, risking the duplication of functions and stretching already limited funds and resources. It is proposed that the PRTB “will be made up of a management board of suitably skilled members”; however, as mentioned above, TAV has already identified a significant lack of tourism-oriented, tourism qualified human capital in regional areas.



**Figure 1 - Proposed new model for regional tourism industry structures, (Draft RTAP, p. 9)**

Secondly, the Draft RTAP does not detail how the functions of the RTOs, local governments and LTAs, which would sit below the PRTB, differ from the PRTB itself. Clarification of the functions of the four bodies should be provided to ensure there are no duplications of function and to ensure that all bodies are working to the same strategy and agenda. The RTAP acknowledges that “the roles and responsibilities of some regional structures are unclear or duplicated” but the proposal does not appear to eliminate any existing tourism bodies from the structure, even as it introduces another one.

Feedback received from the Beechworth & District Chamber of Commerce & Industry Inc. expressed similar concerns:

*“We don’t necessarily see that a single peak regional tourism board will reflect the diversity of tourism activities undertaken in our region...The plan focuses on increasing bureaucracy causing further drain on limited resources, not generating more customers. We are concerned with the ability of the proposed structure to be proactive in a timely manner.”*

Thirdly, the proposed PRTB would further remove Tourism Victoria from regional tourism bodies, which will be required to “influence Tourism Victoria’s agenda by working through the peak body” (Draft RTAP, p. 9). This may further alienate regional tourism bodies that, according to TAV research, already feel neglected by and disconnected from Tourism Victoria.

Fourthly, the proposed PRTB is based on the approach taken in Gippsland. Whilst this approach may have been successful in one region, it is no guarantee that the same approach will work in all other tourism regions of Victoria, which will each have slightly different tourism industry structures and different tourism priorities, strengths and needs. A one-size fits all approach for reforming industry structure is a poor solution, given that Victoria’s Jigsaw marketing campaign has always served to highlight the diversity of the State’s regions.

TAV member Strathbogie Shire Council has addressed the proposed formation of a PRTB. In correspondence from Catherine Macmillan, Manager, Economic Development and Tourism with the Council, to Tom Smith of Tourism Victoria, it is suggested that the new PRTB in their region comprise five councils – Strathbogie, Shepparton, Benalla, Murrindindi and Mitchell – under the banner “Goulburn River and Ranges”, which is the geographical thread common to all five Shires. Importantly, Ms Macmillan notes that the entity Goulburn River and Ranges already exists collaboratively. This is a good example of how the needs identified by members of a particular region can be integrated into the proposed PRTB. It also demonstrates the need for a more flexible approach to the formation of the PRTBs.

TAV welcomes the creation of a Tourism Leadership Program (TLP). However, rather than focus on serving and assisting the evolution of the PRTB (Draft RTAP, p. 9), the program should aim more broadly to develop industry leaders and capability at all levels, and to provide the industry with depth of talent.

**TOURISM ALLIANCE VICTORIA IS SEEKING:**

- ❖ Resources to increase local government tourism literacy
- ❖ Clarification of the proposed new regional tourism industry structure incorporating the proposed Peak Regional Tourism Board.
- ❖ Details regarding the specific functions and roles of each level of the new regional tourism industry structure.
- ❖ Clarification of the Tourism Leadership Program, its objectives and how it will feed into the new regional tourism industry structure.
- ❖ Development of a resource strategy to staff and fund Visitor Information Centres across Victoria, which includes training of both paid staff and volunteers.

## 2. Improving the supply and quality of tourism experiences

Actions	Timing
<b>Investment Attraction</b>	
Develop the new <i>Tourism Investment Guidelines</i> and communicate to stakeholders.	2008
Facilitate a whole-of-Government approach to realise regional specific priorities through vehicles such as the Tourism Task Group (TTG).	2008-11
Undertake an evidence based assessment of the impact that the planning system is having on investment activity in regional Victoria, with a view to advocating for changes that will provide for greater alignment with investment objectives.	2008-09
Implement key recommendations contained in <i>Victoria's Nature-based Tourism Strategy 2008-2012</i> , particularly in relation to the leasing terms for Crown land.	2008-09
<b>Infrastructure</b>	
Ensure tourism issues are considered in Government infrastructure planning.	2008-09
Complete an analysis of regional airports to determine their logistical and commercial capacity for high volume tourism and business traffic.	2008-09
<b>Signing</b>	
Progress the implementation of the 'New Tourism Signing Project: An Integrated Approach to Signing Victoria's Geographic Tourism Destinations of National and International Significance'.	2008-11
Develop industry guidelines for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A tourism signing policy template for adoption by Local Government, based on the signing guidelines.</li> <li>• Establishing and managing a regional/local tourism signing committee, including case studies of best practice models (e.g. Mornington Peninsula).</li> </ul>	2008

**Table 2 - Actions for improving the supply and quality of tourism experiences (Draft RTAP, p. 11)**

Improvements to planning and regulatory processes in order to better attract and facilitate regional tourism investment are welcomed, as is a whole-of-Government approach to facilitating key tourism projects. Establishing a sound and professional basic tourism infrastructure is vital if larger attractions are to be properly supported in the future.

The actions for this initiative seem to focus on the process for attracting investment but do not detail the types of investment sought in order to benefit regional tourism. A gap analysis or similar review is suggested to ensure that investments are planned and made according to the needs to the different regions.

Feedback from Beechworth & District Chamber of Commerce & Industry Inc. welcomed "*Tourism Victoria's stated intention to build investment and infrastructure priorities around Victoria's natural asset base provided that it is developed in line with authenticity of experience*". However, the Chamber also noted "*There is little consideration to the short term urgent need for more customers for regional tourism businesses specifically within Beechworth and Indigo Shire.*"

Following on from the proposed gap analysis, these comments suggest a further need to differentiate between and identify short- and long-term projects to stimulate regional tourism.

A fundamental part of any tourism experience is the people involved in that experience. This initiative focuses solely on building infrastructure and investment in Victoria's regions, but, notwithstanding the proposed initiatives in the 'Improving Skills and Service Standards' section, does not

address the recruitment and training of the staff necessary to operate these attractions and facilities. TAV believes there is a separate series of initiatives required to meet the very specific human capital requirements to develop infrastructure and attract investment over and above the broader directions articulated later in this paper. Nor does it give consideration to how Victoria's regions, currently experiencing severe skills and labour shortages, might adapt their business operations with the increased visitation that increased investment and infrastructure build might drive.

Whilst the skills shortage is addressed under a separate initiative in the Draft RTAP, there must be recognition that a skilled, high-quality labour force underpins every aspect of tourism and is vital to successful tourism outcomes.

**TOURISM ALLIANCE VICTORIA IS SEEKING:**

- ❖ A framework for the identification of infrastructure investment needs (both short- and long-term) in each region.
- ❖ Clarification of how the infrastructure investments in each region will be selected.
- ❖ Clarification of how the strategies for infrastructure investment and improving service skills and standards will be integrated to complement each other and maximise the end benefits.

### 3. Increasing consumer demand for regional tourism experiences

Actions	Timing
<b>Destination Marketing</b>	
Introduce the revised <i>Regional Marketing Program</i> as part of the <i>Regional Tourism Development Program</i> and establish guidelines for industry. Key components will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction of new regional brand guidelines online to ensure greater consistency in marketing communications.</li> <li>• Greater flexibility in the delivery of marketing campaigns – in the future pure brand campaigns will not be mandated.</li> <li>• Development of a range of new cost effective e-marketing opportunities for regional operators.</li> <li>• Assistance for the regions to invest further in international marketing activities (the short-term focus will be on the regions close to Melbourne which offer the best immediate opportunities for international dispersal).</li> </ul>	2009-10
Develop a major interstate campaign to raise consumer awareness, highlighting one regional destination (destination selection will be based on extensive research). The campaign will focus on the key experiences in the destination and will support the positioning of Victoria as a whole.	2009
<b>E-Marketing</b>	
Enhance the capabilities of visitvictoria.com by integrating online booking on the website.	2008
Develop a new online booking training and education program for regional operators.	2008
Enhance the regional content on visitvictoria.com and visitmelbourne.com by working cooperatively with regional campaign committees and regional operators.	2008-09
Encourage regional operators to take up online distribution opportunities (e.g. through channels such as Australia Travel Market – a destination content rich search engine).	2009
Encourage regional operators to participate in the Australian Tourism Exchange (ATE) to maximise the international distribution of Victorian product online (ATE participants can buy-in to a national online booking system administered through the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse. This system provides international consumers with a comprehensive accommodation booking facility).	2008
<b>Touring/Alliance Marketing</b>	
Develop priority touring routes such as the Sydney-Melbourne Touring Route and the Great Southern Touring Route. Review existing alliances such as the Melbourne Surrounds Alliance.	2008-11
<b>Events</b>	
Implement the <i>Country Victoria Events Program</i> and work with regional event organisers and Local Government to improve the quality of regional events and associated marketing activities.	2008-09

**Table 3 - Actions for increasing consumer demand for regional tourism experiences (Draft RTAP, p. 15)**

#### 3.1. Destination Marketing (The Jigsaw campaign)

Despite positive results in some areas of the long-running Jigsaw campaign, the Draft RTAP highlights industry concerns regarding the Regional Marketing Program (refer p. 12 of the Plan). In particular, the market research quoted in Part B of the Draft RTAP reveals that five of the ten Jigsaw regions (Grampians, Mornington Peninsula, Murray, Phillip Island and Victoria's High Country) had "no one clear identified attribute for the region", indicating a lack of brand strength and effective product development in these regions.

TAV research has found that several shires consider themselves to be in "the wrong piece" of the Jigsaw. For example, Pyrenees Shire is nominally located in the "Goldfields" region; however it does not have any 'gold-based' attractions. Similarly, Shepparton is located in the Murray Region, but is not located on the river at all; and Mitchell Shire is positioned in the Daylesford and Macedon Ranges region, an area identified with spas, mineral springs and health treatments, even though there are no spas in Mitchell. In previously mentioned correspondence, Strathbogie Shire Council also questions the relevance of the High Country campaign committee in their area. The PRTB suggested by Strathbogie Shire Council

would seem to reflect a more appropriate campaign region for the shires involved.

Similar feedback was submitted to Tourism Alliance Victoria by the Beechworth & District Chamber of Commerce & Industry Inc.:

*"We have difficulty in responding to the plan because Beechworth and our geographical location is not identified anywhere in the document. We do not fit into any of the regions identified despite the fact that our economic activity is clearly identified by local, state and federal bodies as being very strongly influenced by tourism activity."*

If the Jigsaw campaign is to continue, there needs to be a focus on identity strengthening and product development in the five regions lacking clearly identifiable attributes. There should also be consideration given to the positioning of the Jigsaw's borders, so that shires are logically positioned within the appropriate region. Only then can each shire play to its tourism strengths and make the most of the marketing campaign for their region.

The proposal to develop a major interstate campaign that highlights only one regional destination is of concern as this effectively excludes nine of the state's ten regions. Whilst this proposed new campaign claims to support regional Victoria as a whole, after a long term strategy that has emphasised the diversity of "every piece" of Victoria, to single out one region and use this to position the state as a whole would appear to send a mixed message to the market.

### **3.2. E-marketing**

In this initiative there is a great emphasis on e-marketing and encouraging the use of the Internet by tourism operators and organisations. This assumes the availability of Internet broadband access to these people as well as their ability to use and pay for the Internet. The Internet (broadband) infrastructure in regional Victoria needs to be secured and made financially viable for tourism operators before an education program can be implemented. Government support is essential to achieve an accessible, reliable and affordable online environment for regional users. It is TAV's view that Government can play a greater hand in the regulatory environment to prevent operationally unstable communications companies compromising communications delivery to regional areas.

From a user's perspective, the Tourism Victoria Events Online system needs to be streamlined for easier use. The current system is onerous and time-consuming, both strong deterrents to both current and potential users.

### **3.3. Events - regional conferencing**

The Regional Victorian Conference Group (RVCG) has emphasised the need to grow the regional business event market, inclusive of developing quality business event infrastructure an increasing industry capacity to successfully compete, attract and retain business events. The development of appropriate infrastructure, inclusive of well-matched support facilities such as accommodation, catering and transport services is essential. Pre- and post-conference leisure activities are vital for attracting both domestic and international conferencing business.

RTAP states that \$13.8m has been earmarked for business events out of the current budget. With the imminent opening of the new Melbourne plenary facility, understandably, attracting events to Melbourne is, and should remain the main focus. The industry is of the opinion that regional tourism does not benefit from Melbourne-hosted business events. Currently, none of the funding is being directed to driving regional business events. This must change. Resources required to develop the regional business event sector will require a fraction of the budget allocation.

There are vast opportunities to create better linkages between large metro-based business events with broader regional tourism product.

### **3.4. Touring routes**

Development of priority touring routes such as the Sydney-Melbourne Touring Route and the Great Southern Touring Route is admirable but needs to be considered in the context of rising fuel prices which are affecting the feasibility of families to undertake traditional driving holidays. Planning should ensure the availability of suitable and affordable accommodation on these routes. The development of touring routes should also be considered in the action under the second initiative regarding signage.

#### **TOURISM ALLIANCE VICTORIA IS SEEKING:**

- ❖ Clarification of the future of the Jigsaw marketing campaign.
- ❖ Re-assessment of the borders of the Jigsaw, so that shires are logically located in regions whose marketing campaigns align with the regions' tourism assets.
- ❖ A stronger government involvement in provision of reliable broadband Internet access to regions that currently do not have access.
- ❖ Details on how conferencing and related events will be integrated into the RTAP.
- ❖ Funding out of the earmarked \$13.8m to build capacity within the regional business events sector
- ❖ Details on how signage will be incorporated into the development of touring routes to maximise the benefits of both.

#### 4. Improving skills and service standards

The actions outlined in this initiative fail to provide details of the “practical solutions for regional Victoria to address the skills and staff shortages issues” included in the Workforce Development Plan (Draft RTAP, p. 16,). More information on these solutions is required before a response can be made.

Actions	Timing
<b>Skills and Service Standards</b>	
Complete the <i>Workforce Development Plan</i> in consultation with other Government agencies.	2008
Expand the <i>Tourism Excellence Program</i> as part of the <i>Regional Tourism Development Program</i> . This will incorporate a range of initiatives in regional Victoria including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills development using tools such as accreditation, mentoring and the Victorian Tourism Awards.</li> <li>• Industry education through a range of workshops, forums and training programs.</li> <li>• An expanded International Mentoring Program to enable a greater number of operators to participate.</li> <li>• Product innovation and development support.</li> </ul>	2008-11
<b>Sustainability</b>	
Prepare a <i>Sustainable Tourism Partnership Strategy</i> based on three key themes: sustainable destinations, sustainable enterprises and sustainable visitors.	2008
Implement actions arising from the national cross government and industry plan on climate change.	2008
Develop new sustainability content for Tourism Victoria's corporate and consumer websites including information on climate change issues, visitor environmental guidelines and information on green tourism businesses.	2008-09
Update the <i>Crisis Communications Handbook</i> for tourism businesses to help plan for, respond to, and recover from crises.	2008-09

**Table 4 - Actions for improving skills and service standards (Draft RTAP, p. 17)**

Skills and staffing issues not addressed in the Draft RTAP but which require attention include:

- Difficulties in attracting appropriately qualified graduates and workers to work in regional tourism, given the seasonality, distance and accommodation problems highlighted on p. 16.
  - What actions are proposed for dealing with seasonality, distance and lack of accommodation in regional areas, in order to make these areas more appealing to employees?
- Difficulties in attracting students into the tourism industry, particularly when other industries offer greater financial reward.
  - What does the tourism staffing pipeline look like?
- Shortage of tourism professionals and tourism-oriented managers at local government level and lack of recognition of the importance of tourism as a driver of economic development.
- Lack of education program to develop cross-cultural communication skills, in anticipation of international markets such as China and India. Particularly lacking in regional areas are multilingual signage and marketing collateral to cater for international markets. This should be addressed in regional visitor information centres, attractions and local governments.

- Wage increases: how will the soon to be implemented wage increase for award wage earners impact small businesses?
- What impact is the WHM program having on service industries, in particular within tourism? Is it actually beneficial or disruptive? Is it a cheap short-term solution that detracts from developing a long-term solution to staff shortages?

**TOURISM ALLIANCE VICTORIA IS SEEKING:**

- ❖ Provision of the Workforce Development Plan in order to assess its relevance to the tourism industry.
- ❖ Strategies that address the issues raised above and offer practical solutions that will provide lasting benefits to the acute workforce problems in regional tourism.

## **SECTION B – BROADER ISSUES NOT ADDRESSED IN THE DRAFT RTAP**

There are a number of important issues which have not been directly addressed in the Draft RTAP under dedicated initiatives. These are issues are detailed below.

### **1. Increasing fuel prices**

This is perhaps the most pressing issue for the tourism industry from both an operator/supplier perspective and from a visitor/market perspective. On the one hand, high fuel prices add to the cost of operating a tourism business, especially if it is one that relies on fuel for basic operation such as bus tours and boat tours. On the other hand, consumers are being forced to re-consider what once were considered to be budget holidays, such as driving holidays. Airfares are also increasing with fuel prices, whilst some domestic airlines have cut services altogether as operating costs become prohibitive.

Nevertheless, this difficult situation can be made positive through campaigns which focus on holidays closer to home and promote the quality destinations nearby. Regional towns could certainly benefit from locals discovering attractions in their own or neighbouring regions. Further benefit could be derived from the development and upgrading of the public transport network in regional Victoria. A strategy such as the Draft RTAP that seeks to entice international visitors beyond Melbourne and surrounds must be supported by appropriate public transport infrastructure. Accessibility to regional areas of Victoria via public transport is poor. Unless you can drive, are of age to hire a car and can afford to so, and can safely drive on the left side of the road, and assuming you do not wish to join an organised bus tour, visiting regional Victoria is at best a logistical challenge and at worst, simply not feasible.

Alternative modes of travel such as cycling, already growing in popularity, should also be encouraged through investment in regional cycling trails and product development of cycling tours. Jodie Willmer, CEO of Travellers' Aid Society, a TAV member, made the following comments in relation to the Draft RTAP:

*"There is no mention about the vital and important role and promotion of active transport (such as walking, bike riding) and co-ordinated metro/regional public transport to address sustainability challenges. [The report] 'Meeting Our Transport Challenges' (MOTC) was released in May 2006 and committed significant funding for public transport as well as outlining a framework for Victoria's transport system until 2025.*

*"In the two years since MOTC's release:*

- *Petrol prices have risen from around \$1.35 (on 17 May 2006) to as high as \$1.70 per litre – an increase of 26 per cent;*

- *Public transport patronage has continued to grow rapidly leading to increased congestion across the public transport network; and*
- *The need to address climate change has become increasingly urgent and the reality of future carbon pricing will add to transport costs.*

*These trends, combined with the congestion issues on public transport services, require an urgent response to increase the coverage and capacity of public transport in Victoria." Source: Victorian Council on Social Services, August 2008."*

**TOURISM ALLIANCE VICTORIA IS SEEKING:**

- ❖ A strategy that addresses fuel price increases from both a tourism operator and tourist / visitor perspective.
- ❖ Development of alternative transport strategies that can be incorporated into the RTAP.

**2. Lack of dedicated initiative on sustainable regional tourism**

The Sustainable Tourism Partnership Strategy is listed as an action under the initiative "*Improving skills and service standards*". Sustainability is an important and complex issue affecting all aspects of tourism and should therefore be addressed separately. Again, details of the Sustainable Tourism Partnership Strategy need to be provided in order for an informed response to be given.

Also lacking from the Draft RTAP is a specific environmental initiative, which is surprising given that eco-friendly activities and environmentally sound practices are an important part of regional tourism. As noted by Jodie Willmer,

*"The tourism industry also needs to commit to addressing climate change in their business operations and practices (including car sharing, scheduling meetings at locations that have good public transport infrastructure, offsetting carbon emissions, etc.)"*

In particular the soon to be released Garnaut Final Report, along with the recently release "Supplementary Report: Targets and Trajectories" should provide the basis for recommendations to the industry regarding the management of climate change issues.

On this note, careful consideration and explanation of any proposed Emissions Trading Scheme needs to be provided in the context of the tourism industry, with details about how such a Scheme would affect tourism operators and organisations.

**TOURISM ALLIANCE VICTORIA IS SEEKING:**

- ❖ A separate, dedicated sustainable tourism initiative that provides tourism operators with guidance and practical solutions to enable

them to operate in a more sustainable and environmentally friendly manner.

- ❖ Details of the Sustainable Tourism Partnership Strategy
- ❖ Development of tourism industry standards with regard to proposed carbon reduction schemes that reflect the operating conditions within the tourism industry.

### **3. Accessibility and travel-related emergency issues**

Jodie Willmer also made the following comments and recommendations regarding the topics of crisis management and visitor accessibility, which are at the core of the Travellers' Aid business:

*"The current crisis communications handbook and wallet information does not incorporate the material aid, crisis accommodation and transportation needs of consumers.*

*Travellers' Aid would like the Regional Tourism Action Plan to be expanded to include:*

- *Development of new resources to assist regional tourism businesses , not for profit organisations such as Travellers Aid, and relevant stakeholders to more effectively prepare and respond to crises*
- *Research into the needs of consumers who experience transport and travel disadvantage, who need to travel in emergency situations and have special needs, and process mapping of their referral pathways*
- *Working with Travellers' Aid to consult with agencies and relevant stakeholders to quantify unmet needs, funds and resources used currently on the provision of travel related emergency relief, and anticipated future demands for travel related emergency relief"*

#### **TOURISM ALLIANCE VICTORIA IS SEEKING:**

- ❖ The development of strategies that address the issues of accessibility, crisis management and travel-related emergencies in the context of regional tourism.

### **4. Comments regarding timing:**

The RTAP is dated 2008 – 2011. Realistically, it should be dated 2009 – 2012 (if it is to remain a 3-year plan) and actions should be planned accordingly. Even if the Plan is approved by the end of 2008, implementation is unlikely to commence until 2009. It is also noted that many of the action items are listed under 2008, implying that they are already underway. If this is the case, then requesting industry feedback and input would appear to do nothing more than pay lip service.

It is also noted that the release of the Draft RTAP coincided with the release of the Final Report of the Inquiry into Rural and Regional Tourism, headed by Damian Drum MLC. This timing raises concerns that the Plan is more of a political exercise, rather than being a genuine effort to assist and improve an area of the tourism industry that faces an uncertain future and mounting challenges.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Tourism Alliance Victoria wishes to acknowledge the valuable input received from the following members:

- Advance Tourism
- Beechworth & District Chamber of Commerce & Industry Inc.
- Strathbogie Shire Council
- Travellers' Aid Society

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