



## **Sustainable Tourism - Northern Region Sustainable Water Strategy**

**Submission to the  
Northern Region Sustainable Water Strategy  
Department of Sustainability and Environment  
By Tourism Alliance Victoria  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

In providing a submission to the Northern Region Sustainable Water Strategy, Tourism Alliance Victoria seeks to highlight:

- the critical role tourism plays in the Victorian economy generally and to the northern region specifically;
- tourism's importance to regional Victoria and its part in conserving Victoria's unique natural and heritage environment;
- a complete approach with government partnerships as well as ensuring communities, industry, business, local government, environment and other key stakeholder groups are part of the consultative process;
- that we strongly support the principle of sustainable water management.

## **TOURISM ALLIANCE VICTORIA**

Why are we interested in responding?

Tourism Alliance Victoria is the peak industry body advocating for and supporting the development of a professional and sustainable tourism industry across Victoria. The organisation represents the interests of our 900 strong member network which is made up of tourism attractions, tour operators, adventure and nature based tourism businesses, local and regional tourism organisations and visitor information centres.

Tourism Alliance Victoria work actively with our industry partners- Accommodation Getaways Victoria, Regional Victorian Conference Group, Cultural Tourism Industry Group, Outdoor Recreation Centre and the Young Tourism Network. Combined we reach over 3000 Victorian businesses.

In working directly with businesses Tourism Alliance seeks to ensure businesses linked to nature and adventure based activities are working co-operatively with land managers to support the experience and products on offer as well as communicate and educate visitors on the cultural, heritage and environmental aspects of specific areas.

Whilst Tourism Alliance Victoria has a broad membership the following activities identify where the organisation has been active in areas which are related to tourism and public land management. Items of note include:

- Supporting the development of business operating standards and the development of the adventure activity standards to support business systems and processes.
- Drawing government attention to the issues in relation to public land tour operator and activity provider licensing reforms.

- Direct input into the Nature based tourism strategy and other government projects such as Sustainability Victoria.
- Involvement in the Northern Region Sustainable Water Strategy Working Group.

## **VALUE OF TOURISM TO THE NORTHERN REGION OF VICTORIA**

Tourism's value to communities is often understated as tourism is more a system than a production point of industry. As a system, new money brought into an area flows through many points based on the purchase of goods and services by visitors. In addition the services purchased or infrastructure enjoyed by the visitor can equally be of value to the host community.

Tourism means many elements to a small town in regional Victoria. For example, a fishing charter business may offer diverse activities such as bushwalking; 4WD tours; horse riding; fly fishing; camping; nature walks; and wildlife photography. Visitors experience these activities as well as making purchases at the pub; the bakery; the service station; the fishing shop and a B&B. Hence, the 'system' of tourism.

Tourism in Victoria is a \$10.9 billion dollar industry.<sup>1</sup> The use of public land contributes at least \$3.5 billion annually to the Victorian economy.<sup>2</sup> Tourism is valuable to the Northern Region and must be seen as one industry that can provide both economic and conservation benefits.

Tourism heightens the appreciation and need for conservation of Victoria's natural environments. The Northern Region incorporates a number of sites offering nature and adventure based tourism experiences. 77% of all international visitors to the State participate in nature based activities while 39% participate in adventure based activities.<sup>3</sup>

The Northern Region incorporates the Murray Tourism Region, Victoria's High Country and parts of the Goldfields Region. The Murray Tourism and Victoria's High Country alone generate \$1.4 billion in total visitor expenditure.<sup>4</sup>

Tourism employs 159,000 Victorians. Tourism in regional Victoria generates 61,000 jobs with 9899 people employed in the tourism industry within the Murray Tourism Region and Victoria's High Country<sup>5</sup>

## **SUSTAINABLE TOURISM**

Economic indicators are the most common form of evaluating the benefits of tourism. However more and more government agencies and communities are exploring the diversity of benefits and challenges tourism brings through exploring measures other than visitor nights, visitor spend and employment.

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<sup>1</sup> Tourism Victoria, The 10 Year Tourism and Events Industry Strategy, October 2006

<sup>2</sup> Department of Sustainability and the Environment, Our Environment Our Future, April 2005

<sup>3</sup> Tourism Victoria, Adventure Tourism and Nature Based Tourism Market Profiles, Year Ending Dec 2005

<sup>4</sup> Victorian Environmental Assessment Council; River Red Gum Forest Investigation Discussion Paper, Carlton; Blue Star Print; 2006; pp180

<sup>5</sup> Tourism Task Force, Victorian Tourism Employment Statistics, 2005

Tourism sustainability is dependent on the effective integration of three aspects: economic, environmental and social. Often referred to as the triple bottom line, quality tourism businesses have a distinct focus on these three aspects within their day to day operations<sup>6</sup>.

Tourism Alliance Victoria urges DSE to consider highlighting good practice or appropriate use of water with respect to tourism and outdoor recreation across a range of activity types within the Draft Proposals Paper to be released in mid 2008.

In areas of environmental significance, for sustainable tourism to flourish it is crucial that natural assets are protected, usage and impacts are managed, individuals are educated and informed and that strong partnerships exist between land management agencies, tourism businesses and the community.

The Great Barrier Reef has numerous examples where commercially successful tourism activity is contributing significantly to the conservation goals of the reef.

For communities a vibrant tourism industry brings employment and the capacity to spread the benefit through the community.

For the businesses a professional and sustainable approach founded on quality experiences and the principles of ecotourism will ensure the sustainability of the experience and the business through increased visitor expenditure and increased business profitability.

For this investigation public land and public land management can be the catalyst to supporting tourism and recreation opportunities through combining appropriate proactive land management with responsible use.

As such, Tourism Alliance Victoria advocates for the two prong approach of effective and efficient business practices as well as visitor education in water usage.

## **WATER AND TOURISM**

Tourism Alliance Victoria urges DSE to consider the importance of water to tourism as concluded in the Inquiry into the Allocation of Water Resources Report tabled in the Victorian Parliament on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2001 (Sections 3.104 to 3.121). An excerpt under the 'Recreation, Tourism and Social Uses' extrapolates this:

"The importance of extensive wetlands, river systems and associated riparian areas in the landscape was noted in the report *Managing Australia's Inland Waters* and in several submissions.<sup>103</sup> Boating, fishing, water sports, sightseeing and nature study are only some of the recreational opportunities offered by Victoria's waterways and wetlands.<sup>104</sup> Paddle-steamers are major drawcards to the Murray River

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<sup>6</sup> Tourism Queensland, Queensland Tourism Strategy, November 2006

and Lake Eildon.<sup>105</sup> Such attractions are the foundation of tourist industries that are of considerable importance to rural Victoria.<sup>106</sup>

### **Finding 3.7**

Water-based recreation and tourism are important for the social wellbeing of local communities and contribute significantly to their economies.”

Yet, the Discussion Paper prioritises irrigation over the environment and other industries. Water is crucial to tourism in water based activities; water enhanced activities as well as the wider landscape. There is little or no consideration of the tourism, recreational and social aspects of water use in allocation of water in Victoria. The Draft Proposals Paper needs to acknowledge tourism and employ the appropriate management strategies to deal with these considerations.

Tourism Alliance Victoria supports projects of state significance such as rebuilding irrigation systems to minimise evaporation, thereby increasing efficiency and sustainability. This ensures there is more water in the river systems to support tourism.

We understand that water management infrastructure such as lochs and dams were created for the purpose of irrigation but as a result of this infrastructure, tourism and hospitality activity has built up around these areas and flourished over the years. As such, it is imperative that tourism and hospitality needs and demands are considered on equal footing to irrigation.

Member consultation has indicated a significant level of support for prescribing minimum and maximum water levels which then determine the excess amount of saleable water. In sum, our members have called for responsible water management encompassing consideration of all users.

### **SUSTAINABLE ADVENTURE TOURISM - FLOW ON EFFECTS**

There is recreational demand for utilizing the flows from hydropower dams in the Northern Region. Furthermore, environmental flows already exist on several Victorian rivers from which recreational flows can be created by altering flow. Often no extra water is required, so it is resource and cost neutral.

This provides sustainability for outdoor adventure tour operators, adventure race organisers, recreational paddlers and associated tourism organisations, as well as calendared events for regional areas.

The natural assets of Victoria could be used more effectively for recreational and tourism opportunities. The experiences of both New Zealand and North America demonstrate the economic and tourism value of this approach.

### **New Zealand**

⊕ Water releases from hydro-electric dams are provided in

- ⊕ compensation for loss of natural recreational resource
- ⊕ Scheduled releases on 9 different rivers on both North and South Islands with about 68 river days per year
- ⊕ In excess of 100 river users during release days

## **USA**

- ⊕ Scheduled releases on 51 rivers as part of the Federal approach to resource usage licensing with over 100 million visitor days for recreation spent at hydropower projects nationwide
- ⊕ Significant demonstrated economic benefit, whitewater recreation on the South Fork American River in El Dorado County is estimated to generate up to \$33million pa by attracting up to 150,000 commercial and whitewater boaters annually.
- ⊕ Schedule release days generate upwards of \$400,000 revenue a day for the surrounding area of the Gauley River in West Virginia

Tourism Alliance Victoria seeks State Government support for the protection of recreational opportunities in resource usage licensing decisions, allowing access to Victorian rivers for all, by ensuring that hydro-electric power companies and catchment management authorities offer scheduled recreational flows on some rivers for a certain number of days a year.

## **EDUCATION AND CONSERVATION PROGRAM**

A comprehensive and wide-reaching education program is needed to inform the public on how to use Northern Region responsibly. The focus of the program requires the transfer of knowledge and skills regarding sustainable practices and behaviours.

The key message is responsible use by all communicated by signage, codes of conduct, fact sheets and interpretive talks among many options. Critical to achieving these goals is the role of licensed tour operators. Through such programs, tourism becomes a genuine contributor to conservation and education. Success of such programs is reliant on building strong partnerships between all stakeholders in the Northern Region.

## **OTHER ISSUES**

From an administrative point of view, some Tourism Alliance Victoria members feel that the Discussion Paper is not easy to read and digest in a way that enables succinct and reasonable grasp of all the issues, considerations and desired outcomes.

From a consultative point of view, associations require a long lead time for feedback in order to reach different groups; enable their sectors to meet, discuss and collate feedback for submission. When the Draft proposals Paper is released for further comment, it would be helpful to allow up to eight weeks for a properly considered industry response to be prepared and submitted.

Tourism Alliance Victoria asserts that any Sustainable Water Strategy needs to be consistent with other Government policies such as the Nature-based Tourism Strategy; the 10 year Tourism and Events Strategy and the River Red Gum Forest Proposals.