

8th October 2007

The Director
Victorian Environmental Assessment Council
Level 6/ 8 Nicholson Street
East Melbourne VIC 3004

Dear Sir or Madam,

River Red Gum Forests Investigation

In providing a submission to the Draft Proposals Paper, Tourism Alliance Victoria wishes to reiterate:

- the critical role tourism plays in the Victorian economy generally and to the study region specifically;
- tourism's importance to regional Victoria and its part in conserving Victoria's unique natural and heritage environment;
- tourism's capacity to support community goals through cultural and heritage preservation, services and infrastructure improvements and community engagement.

Tourism Alliance Victoria's position has not changed since providing a submission to the Discussion Paper in December 2006. As such, we have attached the comprehensive submission for further consideration.

In essence, Tourism Alliance Victoria urges VEAC to incorporate the following issues into the Final Proposals Paper:

- Positive, best practice, sustainable tourism examples
- Proactive, appropriate public land management practices
- A coordinated education and communication program to encourage responsible use by all users
- A 'whole of government' approach and effective partnerships
- Support balanced, multiple use & access for proposed National Parks
- Support for 10-year public land licensing and enforcement
- The capacity to capitalize on nature-based tourism
- The potential for a community capacity building project



Specific responses to the Draft Proposals Paper include:

- Encouragement to quantify many tourism statements as a reference point for ongoing management. For example, “the number of visitors and therefore the severity and extent of this problem continue to steadily increase” (p.70) needs to be backed by data.
- Re-consideration of not permitting overnight camping with horses to allow accredited licensed tour operators running horse-based activities to offer overnight experiences.

In light of the Draft recommendations, Tourism Alliance Victoria would like to highlight the importance of community capacity building. We have first hand knowledge and experience in working with business and tourism community groups in the Otways Hinterland, as part of the New Future for the Otways project.

The inclusion of a capacity building program as one of the eight strategies of the Initiative has allowed the Colac Otway Shire tourism community, in particular those located within the Otway hinterland, to feel connected and included in the development of their region. The Otway Hinterland Capacity Building Project has provided the link between the tourism community and the other soft and hard infrastructure projects being delivered; provided avenues for the tourism industry to have their say about the future of their region as well as the other seven strategies; and has strengthened the tourism industry’s ability to utilise and incorporate the new infrastructure into the experience they are selling to visitors to the region.

Tourism Alliance Victoria, with the assistance and direction from key stakeholders including DSE, Parks Victoria, Colac Otway Shire, Otways Tourism, Geelong Otway Tourism and the local tourism community delivered a three year capacity building program to develop skills, expand experience and strengthen the tourism industry within the Colac Otway Shire to ensure a more competitive and sustainable tourism industry in the long term.

The initiatives delivered through the Otway Hinterland Capacity Building Project were output focused, practical and at a grass roots level. They can be categorized by the four most common forms of capacity building: networking, training, mentoring and coaching and business stimulus. Over 40 per cent of the Colac Otway Shire tourism industry was directly engaged in one or more of these initiatives.

The success of the Capacity Building Project was due to the following: the length of time allocated to the project promoting the building of trust, respect and strong foundations; the flexibility given to Tourism Alliance Victoria to remain flexible and change direction and focus throughout the

process; and most importantly, the input and participation of the Colac Otway Shire tourism community.

The capacity of the tourism community has been enhanced, connectivity between industry, community and government has improved and although there is still more work to be done, the Colac Otway Shire tourism community is in a healthy position to deliver on their future aspirations.

Tourism Alliance Victoria believes that a similar project would be of great benefit to the River Red Gums Forests Investigation area. We would be interested in sharing our learnings from the Otways project and are open to discussions regarding future community capacity building projects.

Please feel free to contact me on (03) 9650 8399 should you wish to discuss any of these issues further.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony McIntosh'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'A' and 'M'.

Anthony McIntosh
Chief Executive Officer