



Sustainable Tourism - Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy

Submission regarding the Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy Discussion Paper

By Tourism Alliance Victoria

September 2009

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INTRODUCTION

In providing comment on the Discussion Paper on the Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy, Tourism Alliance Victoria seeks to highlight:

- the critical role tourism plays in the Victorian economy generally and to the Gippsland region specifically;
- tourism's importance to the Gippsland region 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; and
- 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 1000 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 works actively with a range of industry associations, including Hotel Motel Association of Australia; Backpackers Operators Association of Victoria; Victorian Tourism Industry Council; Victorian Events Industry Council; Business Events Victoria, 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 cooperatively 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.
- Involvement and industry representation in the public land tour operator and activity provider licensing reforms.
- Industry representation on the Sustainable Tourism Partnerships Committee and Nature Based Tourism Project Control Board.

Within the context of the Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy, Tourism Alliance Victoria is seeking greater consideration and support for the region's tourism industry, which to an extent requires and depends on access to healthy waterways and lakes in the region, but also contributes significantly to the Gippsland regional economy.

The recent announcement by the State Government to extract 10 billion litres of water from the Thomson River is of great concern to the tourism industry. The Government has already conceded that the extraction will pose a significant threat to some fish breeds. Harming the River, the Lakes system and its wildlife will also harm the region's tourism industry and, in turn, the regional economy. Such a significant extraction contradicts the notion of a Sustainable Water Strategy for the Gippsland Region and must urgently be re-considered.

VALUE OF TOURISM IN GIPPSLAND

For the year ending December 2008 the Gippsland region received 4.5 million domestic visitor nights. The average length of stay was 3.1 nights. In the same period, there were 2.8 million domestic daytrip visitors to the Gippsland region, an increase of 9.3% from the previous year. The region had a 12% market share of all domestic daytrips to regional Victoria. The Gippsland region also received approximately 51,000 international overnight visitors for the year ending December 2008, holding a 16% market share of all international overnight visitors to regional Victoria¹.

Compared to all international visitors to regional Victoria, overnight visitors to Gippsland were more likely to go to the beach (31% cf 28%), to go bushwalking (22% cf 16%) and go fishing (6% cf 2%). Similarly, within the domestic market, compared to all domestic visitors to regional Victoria, overnight visitors to the Gippsland region were more likely to go on bush or rainforest walks (19% cf 12%), visit state or national parks (16% cf 10%), and to go fishing (15% cf 7%)². This reflects the strength and importance of the region's nature-based tourism offering and underlines the role that water plays in these tourism activities.

Tourism Research Australia has recently released reporting on regional tourism expenditure for 2008. The Gippsland and Lakes regions recorded 1.43 million domestic overnight visitors, spending an average of \$315 each, for a combined total of \$451m in domestic overnight visitor expenditure alone³. A further 2.7 million domestic day visitors visited the Gippsland and Lakes regions⁴.

¹ Tourism Victoria, <http://www.tourism.vic.gov.au/images/stories/Documents/FactsandFigures/gippsland-market-profile-2008.pdf>

² *ibid.*

³ Tourism Research Australia, http://www.tra.australia.com/content/documents/Regional/Regional%20Expenditure/2009/State/15_DomON_regions_FINAL.pdf

⁴ *ibid.*

Importantly, tourism spending is not limited to the tourist activity undertaken or the accommodation stayed in. Visitors and tourists to regional Victoria will also buy petrol from the local service station, eat at the local pub or cafe, and purchase souvenirs, thus spreading their economic benefit around a regional community. It is therefore vitally important that Gippsland's nature- and water-based tourism assets are well maintained so that they continue to be the regional drawcard that brings in tourists and visitors.

VICTORIA'S NATURE-BASED TOURISM STRATEGY 2008 - 2012

Tourism Victoria's Nature-Based Tourism Strategy (NBT Strategy) identifies a number of water-based natural assets in the Gippsland region, including the Gippsland Lakes, Wilson's Promontory, the Snowy River and the Mitta Mitta River, as well as water-based activities such as water-based adventure and fishing⁵.

It is clear that water is fundamental to many tourism-related activities in the Gippsland region and as such, greater consideration within the Sustainable Water Strategy must be given to the role of tourism. It should also be recognised that tourism can play a leading role in highlighting the value and importance of a region's natural assets and in educating the public on the importance of preserving these assets. Tourism businesses can also lead the way in environmentally sustainable business practices and in doing so can assist in changing visitor behaviours to be more conscious of the environment, and more conscientious about undertaking environmentally-friendly practices. Geelong Otway Tourism's "Green Steps" program provides a good example.

REGIONAL TOURISM ACTION PLAN - PRIORITIES FOR GIPPSLAND

Tourism Victoria's Regional Tourism Action Plan 2009 - 2012 (RTAP) has identified, amongst others, the following investment and infrastructure priorities for the Gippsland region:

- Blue water access at Bastion Point (subject to completion of the Environment Effects Study) and nature-based accommodation in identified sites in the region;
- Gippsland Lakes boating infrastructure – upgrading of boating facilities at selected locations on Victoria's largest inland waterway. Key initiatives would include further development of key sites and tie-up points, particularly towards the western end of the Lakes with appropriate supporting infrastructure, accommodation and services.⁶

⁵ Tourism Victoria, Nature-Based Tourism Strategy 2008 - 2012, p. 33

⁶Tourism Victoria, Regional Tourism Action Plan, p. 28

In both cases, healthy water systems are integral to the proposed investments, which again highlight water as a key tourism asset in the Gippsland region.

In this context, Tourism Alliance Victoria emphasises that the development of a Sustainable Water Strategy for the Gippsland region must be consistent with and complement, or at the very least take into consideration, the objectives of both the Nature-Based Tourism Strategy and the Regional Tourism Action Plan in relation to the Gippsland region.