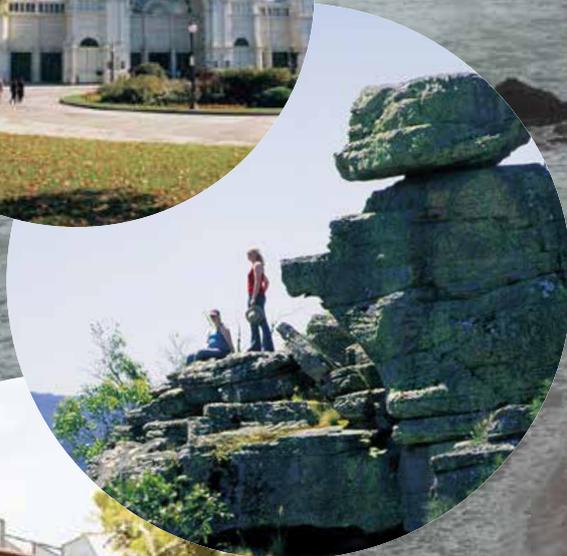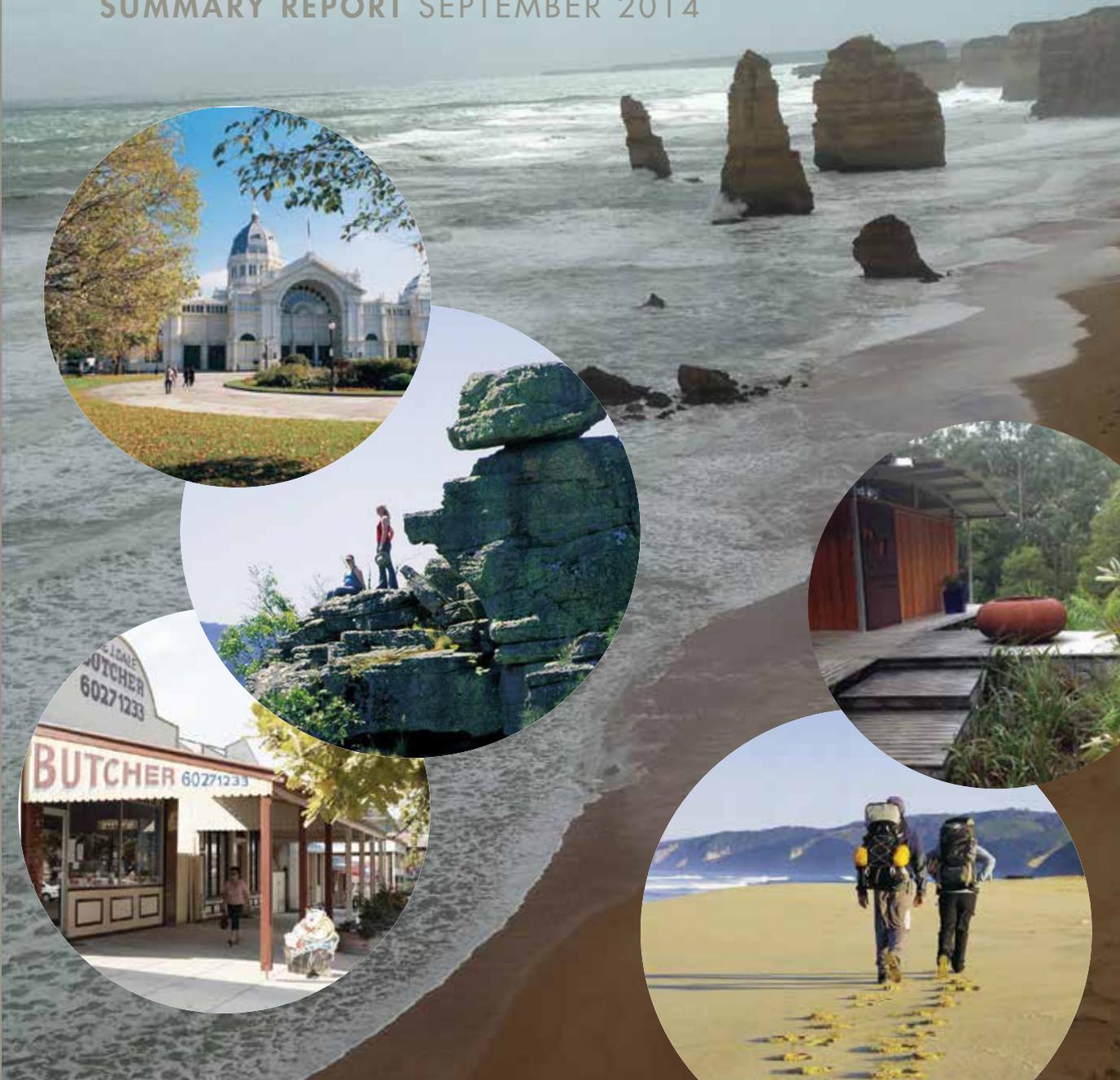ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO HERITAGE TOURISM AND ECOTOURISM IN VICTORIA

SUMMARY REPORT SEPTEMBER 2014

This booklet represents a Summary Report of the Environment and Natural Resources Inquiry into Heritage Tourism and Ecotourism in Victoria. The full Report can be accessed on the Committee's website at www.parliament.vic.gov.au/enrc/article/1951.

The Summary Report contains an overview of key issues that emerged during the inquiry and the Committee's responses. The Summary Report also includes all of the Committee's recommendations.

Contents

ORDERED TO BE PRINTED

Terms of Reference

Received from the Legislative Assembly on 28 August 2012

That, under s33 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, an inquiry into matters relating to heritage tourism and ecotourism in Victoria be referred to the Environment and Natural Resources Committee for consideration and report no later than 29 August 2014, with particular reference to:

(1) examining the current scope of ecotourism and heritage tourism in Victoria, including the extent to which the current arrangements maximise the benefits to the local industry;

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

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

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

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

Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of Victoria No. 88 — Tuesday 28 August 2012

Members & Staff

Members

Mr David Koch MLC
Member for Western Victoria (Chair)

Hon John Pandazopoulos MP
Member for Dandenong (Deputy Chair)

Ms Joanne Duncan MP
Member for Macedon

Ms Lorraine Wreford MP
Member for Mordialloc

Mr Danny O'Brien MLC
*Member for Eastern Victoria
(joined April 2014)*

Hon Tim Bull MP
*Member for Gippsland East
(member until March 2014)*

Staff

Dr Gregory Gardiner, *Executive Officer*
Dr Kelly Butler, *Research Officer*
Ms Karen Taylor, *Administration Officer*
Mr Justin Elder, *Administration Officer*

Chairman's Foreword

The Environment and Natural Resources Committee (ENRC) received a reference for consideration and report on matters relating to heritage tourism and ecotourism in Victoria, on 28 August 2012. The Committee was tasked with examining the current scope of ecotourism and heritage tourism, the potential for the development of ecotourism and heritage tourism, and determining whether the local industry was sufficiently advanced to manage increased tourism. The Committee was also required to examine best practice in ecotourism and heritage tourism, and the environmental and heritage issues associated with large scale tourism.

In total, the inquiry received 92 submissions. The inquiry was conducted with public hearings and site inspections undertaken around the state. In Victoria, public hearings were held in Ballarat, Port Campbell, Lakes Entrance, Halls Gap, and Mansfield, while three days of public hearings took place in Melbourne. Site inspections were conducted in the Goldfields region, the Great Ocean Road, East Gippsland, Mansfield and the High Country, the Grampians region, and Point Nepean. The Committee also visited Tasmania, where it undertook site inspections at Cradle Mountain, the heritage town of Oatlands, in Hobart, and at Port Arthur. The Committee also travelled overseas. The study tour of North America was invaluable for the Committee in understanding global best practice in ecotourism and heritage tourism, and the Committee met with leaders in the field in each of its destinations, and conducted site inspections.

I would like to thank all those who made submissions to the inquiry, or attended public hearings as witnesses, particularly those who travelled from interstate. I also wish to sincerely thank those local agencies, departmental officials, industry and community groups that hosted the Committee on its Victorian site inspections. I thank the Parks and Wildlife Service of Tasmania for so successfully hosting the Committee's short but valuable visit. I also extend my thanks to Mr Michael Kapel, Victorian Commissioner to the Americas, and Ms Libby Ferguson from the Victorian Government Business Office, for their assistance with planning and organising the North American study tour schedule. As this report of the Committee demonstrates, ecotourism and heritage tourism are both key and growing sectors of the tourism market and have the potential to significantly contribute to the Victorian economy. Victoria has outstanding natural and heritage assets, upon which the state can build a sustainable tourism industry, and provide opportunities for local employment. There are currently infrastructure shortfalls and work skills and training capacity issues across the state that need to be addressed. However, with a modern integrated approach to the management of key destinations, including the use of digital technologies, and an understanding of the demands of contemporary eco and heritage tourism, Victoria can become a leader in these sectors.

I wish to acknowledge and thank my parliamentary colleagues on the Committee for their fine work throughout the inquiry process: Deputy Chair, Hon John Pandazopoulos MP, Mr Tim Bull MP (until 17 March 2014), Ms Joanne Duncan MP, Ms Lorraine Wreford MP, and Mr Danny O'Brien MLC (from 2 April 2014).

Mr David Koch, MLC
Chair

Summary

Importance of tourism to the Victorian economy

Current data suggests that tourism is a growing sector of the Victorian economy and that the state has a number of internationally recognised 'iconic' attractions drawing robust visitor numbers. The most recent data available from Tourism Victoria demonstrates that:

- Total overnight visitation (domestic and international) to Victoria in the year ending March 2014 was over 21 million visitors, a rise of over three million since 2010;

- Total expenditure by overnight international visitors and domestic visitors (overnight and daytrip) in Victoria to the year ending March 2014 was almost $20 billion, a rise of over three and a quarter billion dollars since 2010; and,

- Chinese visitors are the number one overseas visitor group to Victoria, and Melbourne is the state's leading destination.

In July 2013 the Victorian Government released *Victoria's 2020 Tourism Strategy* a long-term framework and 'whole-of-government' document designed to guide the development of the tourism industry. The *2020 Tourism Strategy* is supported by *Victoria's Regional Tourism Strategy 2013-2016*, *Victoria's China Tourism Strategy*, *Victoria's Aboriginal Tourism Strategy 2013-2023* and *Victoria's Trails Strategy 2014-24*.

Tourism policy and visitation data are discussed in Chapter One of the full Report.

"Tourism Victoria has done an exceptionally good job in pursuing its marketing campaign since the Jigsaw strategy was first invoked and built on by successive governments."

Mr Jeremy Johnson, Sovereign Hill

Ecotourism and heritage tourism in Victoria

Drawing on the state's distinctive natural and cultural assets, ecotourism and heritage operators currently offer visitors a variety of high-quality, engaging tourism experiences. Victoria is home to a unique range of natural landscapes — from the sandstone cliffs of the Great Ocean Road, to the Indigenous rock art of the Grampians, to the alpine flora of the High Country. Victoria's heritage themes are also diverse, encompassing Indigenous cultures, pioneering settlements, the gold rush, experiences of migration, maritime artefacts, and military histories. While Victoria possesses outstanding natural and heritage assets, it is not currently maximising their potential to attract higher levels of visitation, particularly in the regions. However, through increased cooperation between key government agencies, industry stakeholders and the support of the state's Regional Tourism Boards (RTBs), Victoria has the potential to become a leader in the areas of ecotourism and heritage tourism. Heritage tourism is managed by Victorian Government policy as part of the wider cultural tourism sector. Despite this, the majority of the Committee's stakeholders understand heritage tourism as relating to historic places, objects and buildings, rather than to artistic displays or cultural performances. Throughout the report the Committee used 'heritage tourism' to refer primarily to tourism attractions relating to the interpretation of historic places and stories.

Ecotourism is covered by Tourism Victoria's broad nature-based tourism policy. However, the Committee found that there are a growing number of accredited eco businesses that prioritise a sustainable, triple-bottom-line approach to tourism, and consider themselves to be part of a distinct sub-sector of the nature-based tourism industry. The Committee used the term 'ecotourism' throughout the report to describe this sub-sector of the nature-based tourism industry. At the same time, the Committee observed an increased interest in issues of sustainability across the broad nature-based tourism sector and was interested in how the nature-based tourism sector can be best supported as a whole. The Committee's report recommends that Tourism Victoria's nature-based and cultural tourism policies are renewed with a more particular focus on the needs of the ecotourism and heritage tourism sectors.

Best practice in ecotourism is the focus of the full Report's Chapter Four, while Chapter Five examines best practice in heritage tourism. Chapter Seven makes recommendations about inter-agency cooperation.

"This new visitor's expectations are very high. They are well researched, they are well travelled and we must deliver an exceptional experience to meet their demands".

Ms Sara Quon,
Tourism North East

Improving infrastructure

The ecotourism and heritage tourism industries are both constrained by inadequate infrastructure. Tourism infrastructure includes accommodation, signage, trails, tracks, information and interpretation centres. The tourism sector also relies on more indirect or supporting infrastructure, such as road access, ports, airfields, and telecommunications services. The standards of ecotourism and heritage infrastructure across the state vary significantly, with some tourist destinations lacking basic infrastructure and visitor facilities, while other destinations have ageing and poorly maintained amenities. Heritage tourism sites are also impacted by ongoing issues of maintenance and restoration. For ecotourism, there is a lack at key destinations of high-end, high-yield sustainable eco-accommodation that is attractive to both international and national tourists.

A lack of infrastructure impinges on economic performance. Key iconic destinations, such as the Twelve Apostles-Shipwreck Coast, simply do not possess the infrastructure (or services) that are needed to support and engage current levels of visitation, let alone the projected levels of growth for in-bound international tourists. Numerous ecotourism and heritage tourism sites also suffer from a lack of appropriate signage, which is an important barrier in engaging the interest of visitors. Modern interpretative signage – which links to digital information through QR (quick response) codes or apps – plays an important role in meeting the desire of ecotourists and heritage tourists for in-depth and authentic experiences. The newly established Regional Tourism Boards will play an important role in working with local industry stakeholders and land managers to identify infrastructure gaps and define future priorities through a destination planning process.

Infrastructure is discussed in-depth in Chapter Three of the full Report.

"We cannot spread investments like Vegemite across the state; it is a matter of picking winners".

Mr Brett Cheatley,
Consultant

"The signage that is in place along these sites has not been maintained over the years. It is like the traditional trails where they get the sign put up and someone puts a bullet through it, and over time those things degrade or a truck runs through it".

Mr Peter Abbott,
Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village

Increasing regional dispersal

A range of inquiry stakeholders expressed concern about the need to improve the quality of the products and experiences available in Victoria. Distance is not in and of itself an impediment to success in the tourism industry. Indeed, many of the state's most unique and popular destinations are located within regional Victoria – such as the Great Ocean Road, the Grampians' Indigenous rock art sites, and Gippsland's lakes and coastal walks. The Committee is confident that visitors will travel to experience well-developed products in unique destinations; Tasmania's Cradle Mountain is remote and difficult to access yet is a well-visited and internationally renowned nature experience. For many the key issue impeding regional dispersal is the lack of appropriate accommodation and tourism infrastructure outside of Melbourne. Improving accommodation options has the potential to convert daytrips to overnight stays and to expand the length of time visitors spend in the regions.

Regional dispersal is a focus of the full Report's Chapter Two.

"With regional Victoria, there is a lot of great product there. Do the consumers in Melbourne know about it?."

Ms Carole Reid,
Shipwreck Coast Tourism

Expectations of international tourists

Ecotourism tourism and heritage tourism are viewed as important elements in attracting international visitors to Victoria, and ensuring that visitors have relevant and engaging experiences. Marketing and promotional activities – including via social media – are seen as increasingly important in engaging with international visitors. Cultural awareness training and online marketing in Asian languages are also important steps in encouraging international visitation. Research demonstrates that one of the main desires for Chinese visitors to Australia is to have a nature-based experience, and the quality of this experience is crucial to overall satisfaction with their holiday. Victoria is poised to meet the desire for nature-based experiences and capitalise on increased visitation from China, as well as emerging markets from India and South-East Asia. The concept of 'China readiness' is important to the inquiry's stakeholders, and Tourism Victoria is involved in a range of programs that provide tourism operators with knowledge about the expectations of Chinese tourists and basic language skills.

Chapter Two of the full Report explores issues relating to the needs of international visitors.

"In recent years the rapid growth of electronic information provision has resulted in a normal customer expectation that there is an "app""

Wellington Shire Council

Ecotourism operators and accreditation schemes

Ecotourism is a growing sector that focuses on providing nature-based experiences and activities in a sustainable manner. When properly managed, eco ventures have minimal environmental impacts, and entail relatively low numbers of visitors to a given destination. At the same time, ecotourism ventures generate income for, and lift the profile of, national parks, and provide access to national parks to groups who would not normally have such access. Ecotourism has other positive effects: it has high educational values, generates local employment and the use of local products, increases regional dispersal, and increases awareness of environmental sustainability.

There are currently 350 licensed tour operators (LTOs) in Victoria's parks system providing a variety of activities including bushwalking; coach and bus tours; bird watching; coastal walking; canoeing, kayaking and mountain biking; motorised boat tours; four wheel drive tours; rock-climbing; horse riding; and, abseiling. Parks Victoria grants longer leases to operators that undertake accreditation. Currently, 47 operators in Victoria are accredited through Ecotourism Australia. While there is widespread support from key agencies, ecotourism providers, industry representatives, and community groups for the accreditation of LTOs and businesses engaged in delivering nature-based and ecotourism products and operating on public lands, some operators remain unsure of the benefits – both commercial and environmental – of accreditation. There is a role for government in facilitating the uptake of eco-accreditation amongst nature-based and ecotourism operators and businesses in Victoria. The ecotourism industry also faces significant challenges in attracting, developing and maintaining a talented workforce, with the seasonality of the industry a key current constraint.

Chapter Four of the full Report includes recommendations relating to eco accreditation schemes.

"I see eco-accreditation as a really important separator in the marketplace"

Mr Will Flamsteed,
Grampians Tourism.

Value of sustainable development

Recent legislative changes in Victoria are designed to encourage increased commercial investment in the state's national parks, including the provision of eco hut accommodation. Small-scale, environmentally sustainable, commercial accommodation can be developed within national parks settings where appropriate. The examples provided by Tasmania's Overland Track, Western Australia's Ningaloo retreats, and New Zealand's Routeburn and Milford Tracks, demonstrate high levels of sustainability, with positive environmental, social and economic outcomes. Victoria lags behind other Australian jurisdictions in developing sustainable commercial development on public land, particularly in the area of hutted accommodation on iconic walks. Expenditure has already been devoted to the development of the Great Ocean Walk, and the Grampians Peaks Trail, and proposed for the Coastal Wilderness Walk. Victoria lacks the necessary small-scale (private and public) accommodation along these and other walks for them to reach their full potential. The Committee believes that the Victorian Government should take a proactive role in identifying and preparing sites in national parks settings that can be developed sustainably and appropriately by private investors that are accountable to clear environmental guidelines.

In some circumstances it will be more appropriate for development to occur outside, or adjacent to a national park. Large-scale accommodation, along the lines of commercial lodges such as Peppers Lodge at Cradle Mountain, should be sited outside parks. In addition, where a current infrastructure footprint exists within a national park, that footprint can be the site for re-development or the adaptive re-use of existing heritage structures, provided that a stringent environmentally sustainable framework forms the basis for that development.

Sustainable development in national parks is discussed in Chapter Four of the full Report.

"To sit on our hands and wait to assess the applications from the private sector is not, in our opinion, proactive enough if we want to create the iconic product"

Ms Judy Dixon,,
Mansfield Shire Council.

Interpretation and digital technologies

Heritage tourism is a broad sector that includes a range of operators, sites and activities, such as historic house museums, community museums, historical societies and preservationist groups, heritage railways, walking tours, historical ruins, and heritage sites within national parks. Heritage tourism operators are united by a shared focus on using quality storytelling to engage tourists with aspects of the past. As such, high-quality and engaging interpretation is the cornerstone of heritage tourism. Heritage can be interpreted in a range of ways: through signage or exhibitions; storytelling by tour guides; as part of live performances; using audio guided tours; and creative sound and light shows. Increasingly, best practice in heritage tourism is distinguished by the use of new digital technologies.

One of the advantages of new technology is the ability to communicate the 'layered' history of a heritage place. Rather than relying solely on physical signage, an app or a QR code can lead visitors to text and audio-visual material that provides multiple stories and narratives about a particular site. Increasingly apps have interactive functions that allow users to contribute their own experiences about a place, and are often linked with Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, allowing users to share their experiences with others. Best practice use of these technologies is to augment rather than replace the interpretation offered by standard physical signage and tour guides. The quality of tour guides is also important for best practice, as guides are a vehicle for delivering engaging heritage stories to visitors. In the heritage sector the workforce is largely volunteer dominated, and would benefit from further training to develop skills in conservation, site management and visitor engagement.

Interpretation and digital technologies are discussed in both the full Report's Chapters Five and Seven.

"A sanitised heritage presenting a safe interpretation of history and culture holds little appeal and will not generate interest amongst tourists".

National Trust of Australia (Victoria).

"I think the challenge with heritage tourism is that it is about how you interpret it and how you use technology in the way you do it so that it brings the experience alive".

Mr David Leathem,
Mount Alexander Shire Council.

Adaptive reuse for heritage tourism

Victoria's heritage architecture and buildings — especially in rural towns — are important historical assets that serve as key attractions for visitors. The adaptive re-use of heritage buildings, for tourism, residential or other commercial purposes, is widely acknowledged to represent international best practice; the development of Werribee Mansion represents best practice in the Victorian context. In addition the preservation of heritage buildings and streetscapes is essential to boosting the appeal of Victoria's regions. Heritage tourism businesses often face challenges associated with operating in historic buildings that require significant maintenance and preservation. There is a role for both state and local government in encouraging the preservation and adaptive re-use of heritage buildings for the purposes of heritage tourism through incentives such as grant programs.

Adaptive re-use is considered in Chapter Five of the full Report, in the context of best practice in heritage tourism.

Opportunities for Aboriginal tourism

While Victoria currently has very few Aboriginal tourism ventures, there is enormous potential to grow the sector and develop engaging and 'authentic' Indigenous tourism experiences. Research indicates that international visitors to Australia seek engagement with Aboriginal heritage and culture, and that Victoria is well-placed to capitalise on this desire. Aboriginal tourism typically combines aspects of ecotourism and heritage tourism, as it often focuses on the historical and cultural relationship of Indigenous peoples to the land. The major Indigenous tourism products in Victoria — such Brambuk Cultural Centre and the Tower Hill Wildlife Reserve — illustrate this integration between nature-based and heritage tourism, and are founded on partnerships between Parks Victoria as a land manager and local Aboriginal communities. Victoria's newly established Registered Aboriginal Parties are also becoming involved in cultural heritage tourism, such at the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape in Victoria's south-west. Aboriginal tourism ventures require support to develop into sustainable businesses that offer quality tourism experiences. In particular, workforce skills training and organisational capacity building is important in supporting the development of Aboriginal tourism ventures, especially for Registered Aboriginal Parties. The Committee believes that the development of a showcase Aboriginal tourism destination in regional Victoria should be investigated.

The full Report's Chapter Six covers Aboriginal tourism and makes recommendations designed to grow the sector.

"Aboriginal culture is a key competitive advantage that Australia enjoys over other destinations, and Victoria is rich with Indigenous culture."

Cultural Tourism Victoria.

Advantages of World Heritage sites

The evidence suggests that World Heritage Listing is a driver of increased tourism, particularly in terms of international visitors who often look for UNESCO status as an indicator of quality ecotourism and heritage tourism experiences. However, it is widely acknowledged that such sites must already be well-managed and possess appropriate supporting infrastructure, such as an interpretation centre, prior to listing; listing on its own does not create a meaningful or engaging experience for visitors. Currently Victoria has only one site: Melbourne's Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens. Significant work has been undertaken on preparing the ground for World Heritage applications for the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park and the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape. Successful listings for further sites would be a boon to tourism in regional Victoria and would increase the profile of the state as an ecotourism and heritage tourism destination.

The benefits of World Heritage Listing are discussed in the full Report's Chapter Seven.

"World heritage does lead to increased visitation — there is no doubt about that. There is no doubt that people literally go around the world to tick off, "I have been to this world heritage site".

Mr Brett Cheatley, Consultant.

Inter-agency cooperation and industry leadership

In order to become a leader in ecotourism and heritage tourism in Australia and internationally, Victoria will need, over time, to develop a sophisticated strategic approach, one that can successfully combine ecotourism and heritage tourism products in new ways, without in any way diminishing their unique characteristics. One of the keys to successfully combining ecotourism and heritage tourism offerings is interpretation that emphasises the multi-layered histories of Victoria's natural and built environments. Such an approach would not avoid discussing 'difficult' elements of Victoria's heritage – particularly in relation to colonial history. While there does appear to be wide recognition that Victoria's heritage includes natural and cultural aspects — and that heritage in its most holistic sense is attractive to visitors — this is not well articulated in a tourism context. It is the view of the Committee that a stronger focus on storytelling that integrates Victoria's natural and cultural heritage will be important to growing the number of engaging tourism experiences across the state.

As the principal public land manager in the state, Parks Victoria clearly has a lead role to play, as does the lead tourism agency, Tourism Victoria. Ecotourism and heritage tourism have enormous potential for sustainable growth in Victoria, building upon the advantages of the state's natural and cultural assets. Indeed, the Committee believes that with the right strategic framework, and the collaboration of key agencies and stakeholders, Victoria can be a leader in ecotourism and heritage tourism.

The importance of inter-agency cooperation is discussed in Chapter Seven of the full Report, in the context of supporting Victoria to become a leader in ecotourism and heritage tourism.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Victorian Government commit to providing recurrent operational funding to support Regional Tourism Boards sufficient for them to carry out their expanded functions as recommended by this Committee. In addition, Tourism Victoria will monitor the performance of the new Regional Tourism Boards, with a view to ensuring that the organisations are fulfilling their responsibilities and are appropriately resourced.

page 38

Recommendation 2

Tourism Victoria, in consultation with the Regional Tourism Boards, regularly updates the content of the Jigsaw campaign to effectively highlight and promote Victoria's ecotourism and heritage tourism attractions.

page 41

Recommendation 3

Tourism Victoria in concert with the Department of State Development Business and Innovation and the Victoria Tourism Industry Council work with Regional Tourism Boards to ensure that all Victorian tourism operators have the knowledge and skills — such as through the Tourism Excellence Program — to effectively use social media platforms to promote their ecotourism and heritage products, and engage with visitors..

page 43

Recommendation 4

Tourism Victoria work with Regional Tourism Boards, the Victoria Tourism Industry Council and local tourism operators to identify market-ready ecotourism and heritage products within Victoria's regions, and develop regional promotional materials that showcase these attractions.

page 46

Recommendation 5

Tourism Victoria specifically develops promotional materials for international markets that highlight Victoria as a leading destination for ecotourism and heritage experiences.

page 50

Recommendation 6

Tourism Victoria works with Regional Tourism Boards to ensure that local tourism operators are aware of international visitor satisfaction research, and the demand from Chinese visitors for nature-based experiences. Tourism Victoria will also continue to offer China readiness programs to assist operators to tailor their products to meet the expectations of this growing sector.

page 50

Recommendation 7

Tourism Victoria works with Regional Tourism Boards to engage tourism-dependent businesses to provide welcoming and culturally appropriate services to international visitors. Tourism Victoria will offer their China readiness programs to operators in the hospitality, accommodation and retail sectors.

page 51

Recommendation 8

Regional Tourism Boards collaborate with local heritage and ecotourism operators, Parks Victoria, Tourism Victoria, relevant Victorian Government departments, local government, the Victoria Tourism Industry Council, and other stakeholders to identify infrastructure priorities that will enhance the development and sustainable growth of ecotourism and heritage tourism in their regions.

- Once identified, these infrastructure priorities will become part of each region's destination management plan.

page 60

Recommendation 9

The Victorian Government assist in the funding and/or facilitation of regionally identified infrastructure priorities that will enhance the development and sustainable growth of ecotourism and heritage tourism across the state.

- Large-scale infrastructure projects, such as interpretation centres at iconic destinations, should be appropriately maintained

page 61

Recommendation 10

Regional Tourism Boards (RTBs), working with local providers of heritage and ecotourism products, chambers of commerce, councils, Parks Victoria, and Tourism Victoria, the Victoria Tourism Industry Council, and other stakeholders, will identify accommodation gaps currently constraining the development and sustainable growth of ecotourism and heritage tourism in their regions.

- In their destination management plans RTBs will include the means by which such gaps could be redressed, including proposals for facilitating private investment

page 65

Recommendation 11

Regional Tourism Boards (RTBs) identify gaps in directional and interpretive signage within each tourism region, and coordinate improvements to signage. In doing so RTBs should take the advice of key agencies, such as VicRoads, Parks Victoria, Heritage Victoria and Tourism Victoria, and collaborate with local government, heritage and ecotourism operators, historical associations, and other relevant stakeholders to create a coherent themed approach to signage.

page 69

Recommendation 12

The Victorian Government work with the federal government, local governments, local industry representatives and telecommunications providers to improve the standard of telecommunications in Victoria's regions, with particular attention to eliminating the state's identified mobile black spots.

page 72

Recommendation 13

Regional Tourism Boards are best placed to identify the skills and training shortages in the regions, and should map their regions accordingly, in collaboration with local ecotourism and heritage tourism operators, the Victoria Tourism Industry Council, local councils and Tourism Victoria.

• Tourism Victoria should make training programs, such as the Tourism Excellence Program, and China-ready programs, accessible to regional operators, by delivering programs in regional centres, and online

page 76

Recommendation 14

In the short term, while ecotourism is an emerging industry, Parks Victoria be funded to maintain a dedicated subsidy program to support nature-based and ecotourism operators on public lands gain eco-accreditation.

page 92

Recommendation 15

Tourism Victoria should create a promotional and marketing rewards program for nature-based and ecotourism operators who achieve eco-certification. The program will provide such operators with a higher profile in campaigns and other materials.

page 92

Recommendation 16

In assessing licence applications from tour operators in national parks, and determining the length of such licences, Parks Victoria will continue to give preference to those operators who possess accreditation. In particular, in highly sensitive areas of national parks that are the focus of ecotourism, Parks Victoria will issue licences only to operators who are eco-accredited.

Regional Tourism Boards (RTBs) work with the Victoria Tourism Industry Council to promote the benefits of accreditation to nature-based and ecotourism operators and businesses in their regions. In addition, RTBs will provide information to operators and businesses on how to gain access to an accreditation subsidy program.

page 93

Recommendation 17

The Victorian Government should take a proactive role in identifying and preparing sites in national parks that can be developed sustainably and appropriately by private investors. Parks Victoria will take a lead role in this process, collaborating with the Department of Environment and Primary Industries, Tourism Victoria, Regional Tourism Boards, local government, and industry groups and operators.

• A priority area for commercial attraction should be the development of eco-accredited lodge accommodation to support the state's iconic walks

page 108

Recommendation 18

The Victorian Government refine the expression of interest (EOI) process for attracting commercial development in the state's national parks. Master plans for commercial developments within national parks will set out strict guidelines for proposals, based on a 'triple-bottom-line' of environmental, social and economic sustainability. All proposals for commercial development should be independently audited by environmental auditors prior to approval.

• Parks Victoria will ensure that all commercial developments in national parks are audited on a regular basis to ensure their compliance with lease and licence agreements.

page 108

Recommendation 19

In developing the state's iconic walks, the Victorian Government should give consideration to a 'two experience' model so that the broadest range of visitors can have access to, and enjoyment of these destinations.

• This model typically includes the provision of both public facilities such as huts and camping sites and privately owned and managed eco-lodge accommodation

page 109

Recommendation 20

Tourism Victoria, in conjunction with the Regional Tourism Boards and the Victoria Tourism Industry Council, develops an investment attraction initiative to support the ecotourism sector. The program will assist investors interested in financing ecotourism developments throughout Victoria and, where appropriate, guide investors towards Parks Victoria's expression of interest process for development in national parks.

page 111

Recommendation 21

The Victorian Government will ensure that the income derived from camping fees, parks, accommodation and commercial leases is hypothecated to the parks system.

• The Victorian Government explore the introduction of walkers' fees to fund the construction and maintenance of iconic walking tracks within the state's national parks. These fees will be hypothecated to fund individual tracks

page 113

Recommendation 22

The Victorian Government renew its approach to nature-based tourism by developing a long-term nature-based tourism strategy for Victoria that specifically addresses and emphasises the development of the state's ecotourism sector, underpinned by the principles of sustainability.

page 120

Recommendation 23

Tourism Victoria renews its cultural tourism policy, in conjunction with Heritage Victoria and Arts Victoria, and includes within it a dedicated focus on the heritage tourism sector. The policy will develop a framework for cooperation between Tourism Victoria and Heritage Victoria designed to support heritage operators to deliver world class tourism experiences.

page 125

Recommendation 24

Tourism Victoria and Heritage Victoria collaborate in developing guidelines to assist operators with the interpretation of Victoria's heritage in a tourism context, building on Victoria's Framework of Historical Themes.

• These guidelines should — in conjunction with the Department of State Development Business and Innovation — include advice on the appropriate use of digital technologies for heritage interpretation

page 133

Recommendation 25

The Victorian Government fund a grants program to expand the development of digital interpretation for heritage tourism.

• In addition, Heritage Victoria will work with Tourism Victoria to strengthen the tourism focus of the 'Vic Heritage' smartphone app to include more sites throughout the state

page 133

Recommendation 26

Tourism Victoria, Heritage Victoria, Regional Tourism Boards and the Victoria Tourism Industry Council work together to develop appropriate training modules for staff and volunteers working within the heritage tourism sector.

• Training modules should have a focus on developing skills in heritage interpretation and storytelling for tour guides. These could become part of the existing Tourism Excellence Program.

• The Victorian Government should provide funding to support heritage tourism staff and volunteers to participate in relevant training opportunities.

page 135

Recommendation 27

The Victorian Government draws on the Community Support Fund to support community organisations and local councils to fund heritage tourism projects. Funded projects will have a clear focus on supporting heritage tourism, not simply on conserving or restoring heritage buildings.

page 141

Recommendation 28

The Victorian Government works with Heritage Victoria, Tourism Victoria, and local government to develop incentives, or remove disincentives, for private owners to restore and maintain heritage buildings and structures for tourism use. Incentives can includes heritage awards programs, small grants and/or planning or taxation concessions.

page 142

Recommendation 29

Parks Victoria work with the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council and Registered Aboriginal Parties to develop a framework to guide the interpretation of Aboriginal heritage throughout Victoria's public lands reserve.

page 148

Recommendation 30

The Victorian Government should investigate establishing a showcase Aboriginal tourism destination in regional Victoria, including preparing an appropriate business case.

page 157

Recommendation 31

Tourism Victoria supports both long-established and newly developed Aboriginal tourism ventures to develop 'market ready' tourism experiences and to effectively promote their tourism products.

• Tourism Victoria should explore ways to further highlight Aboriginal tourism within the agency's online marketing materials, investigating the introduction of an Aboriginal tourism portal that supports the direct online booking of Aboriginal tourism experiences.

page 158

Recommendation 32

The Victorian Government funds Tourism Victoria to work with the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council and appointed Registered Aboriginal Parties to support the development of Aboriginal tourism products and experiences throughout the state.

• In supporting Aboriginal tourism businesses there should be a focus on capacity building and workforce training

page 158

Recommendation 33

Tourism Victoria works with the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council and appointed Registered Aboriginal Parties to increase awareness of Aboriginal heritage values within the tourism industry.

• Further, consideration should be given to the development of guidelines for the tourism industry to consult with Aboriginal people where Aboriginal heritage or stories are to be used in tourism products and ventures operated or delivered by non-Aboriginal people

page 160

Recommendation 34

The Victorian Government work with the Australian Government to pursue UNESCO World Heritage Listing for the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park and the Budj Bim National Heritage Landscape.

• In addition, Tourism Victoria in conjunction with both Parks Victoria and Heritage Victoria, will develop a strategy to guide the identification of, and application process for, potential World Heritage sites within the state

page 165

Recommendation 35

In developing best practice models of interpretation for iconic destinations and experiences, Tourism Victoria and Parks Victoria will collaborate with, and draw upon the expertise of, other key agencies and stakeholders, such as Heritage Victoria, Regional Tourism Boards, and the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council. Where appropriate, collaboration will extend to lease-holders, destination managers, and licensed tour operators.

• Such an interpretive approach will combine ecotourism and heritage tourism in an immersive experience, offering visitors an integrated understanding of a site's natural and cultural histories and values, including Indigenous heritage

page 168

Recommendation 36

The Victorian Government will ensure that the development of interpretation centre infrastructure at iconic destinations — such as at the Shipwreck Coast — occurs on the basis of world's best practice in interpretation and sustainability.

page 169

Recommendation 37

As part of an integrated thematic approach to interpreting and promoting natural and cultural heritage sites, Tourism Victoria will consider developing branding to include signposting for the state's 'must-see' iconic sites, in conjunction with the development of a suite of complimentary digital interpretative materials, such as a smartphone app.

page 169

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

PARLIAMENT HOUSE, SPRING ST, EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3000 **T** 613 8682 2803 **F** 613 8682 2803 www.parliament.vic.gov.au/enrc