



The Committee for Gippsland Inc

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Hon Daniel Andrews, MP
Premier of Victoria
1 Treasury Place
Melbourne VIC 3000
Via email: daniel.andrews@parliament.vic.gov.au

Submission to Victorian Visitor Economy Review

Dear Premier

The Committee for Gippsland welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Victorian Government's *Victorian Visitor Economy Review*. Acknowledging that it is the first review of its kind in nearly two decades, the Committee for Gippsland is pleased to note the inclusion of regional Victoria in the terms of reference. Regional Victoria, and in particular Gippsland, are significant contributors to both Victoria's major events program and international visitor attractions. There are opportunities where this can be further enhanced, to the reputational and economic advantage of Victoria, which the Committee for Gippsland looks forward to expanding upon in this submission.



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Overview of the Gippsland Region

Gippsland is a diverse and resource driven region. It is 4.2 million hectares in size, with a population of nearly 260,000 people. By 2026, this is forecast to grow to over 300,000. With an average travel time of around 90 minutes from Melbourne, Gippsland is serviced by freeway and express V/Line rail. It is one of Victoria's eight key regional growth areas.

The region's top five industry sectors include manufacturing, construction, mining, agriculture, forestry and fishing, and electricity, gas and water supply. Combined, these sectors represent approximately \$16.67 billion, or 58.8 per cent of total regional output. They also generate approximately \$9.46 billion, or 88.3 per cent of total regional exports, which is estimated at \$10.71 billion.¹ Milk production alone comprises about half the total value of Gippsland's agricultural commodities and earns an estimated farm gate value of \$624 million. The gross value of forestry and timber products in Gippsland is \$1.2 billion.

Tourism and Major Events in Gippsland

The Gippsland region possesses a vibrant tourism economy, from small bed and breakfasts and wineries, to the largest inland lakes system in the Southern Hemisphere. It also includes Phillip Island and the Phillip Island Nature Park, which are not only a national icon, but an international draw card attracting millions of international visitors to Victoria each year.

There are a number of major events that Gippsland continues to successfully host. These include the Victorian State Life Saving Championship event hosted by Lakes Entrance Surf Life Saving Club, which has been commended for its level of excellence and professionalism. The Tour of Gippsland is a major cycling event, which is incorporated into the National Road Racing Series, auspiced by Cycling Australia. This event is televised, and tours many iconic parts of the region, which are creatively incorporated into the event, such as hosting a criterion on the Phillip Island race track. These events, along with others, are critical to showcasing Gippsland as a region to national and international audiences, and attracting thousands of competitors and spectators that contribute millions of dollars to the regional economy, for the duration of the event, and via return visitation.

¹ *Gippsland Regional Plan, 2010:*

http://gign.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4&Itemid=4

Phillip Island Nature Park

Phillip Island Nature Park (the Nature Parks) is seeking to secure full support for its Summerland Infrastructure and Procurement Master Plan project and specifically, Stage 1a Penguin Parade facility. The project seeks to establish a creative and innovative redirection for the Nature Parks' facilities and the Summerland Peninsula setting, which is capable of providing a clear and compelling narrative to underpin the visitor experience.

The Master Plan is not just a design exercise; it is concerned with defining the nature of the Summerland Peninsula as a 'destination' and establishing a planning and design philosophy that recognises inherent values, and building those unique qualities into the visitor experience. The project also seeks to create a precinct wide vision that encapsulates the potential of the site for more diverse and layered eco-tourism and recreation experiences, and better integrates environmental management, education and research within the visitor experience.

Phillip Island Nature Parks is an award-winning, not for profit organisation that manages an area of over 1,805 hectares that is home to unique wildlife and spectacular coastal scenery, which includes the Summerland Peninsula. These are key State Government ecotourism assets delivering over 1.2 million visitors annually (58 per cent being international).

In the 2013/ 2014 financial year, the Nature Parks delivered a significant annual economic contribution to the State of Victoria and the Bass Coast Shire, which included:

- \$93.8 million in direct contribution to the Bass Coast Shire economy and a further \$46.3 million in indirect economic activity (Total \$140.1 million)
- \$151.8 million in direct contribution to the Victorian economy and a further \$250.7 million in indirect economic activity (Total \$402.5 million)
- 1,753 Victorian jobs (full-time, part-time and casual) from the economic activity created by the Nature Parks.

Consistent with Gippsland's broader eco-tourism market, Phillip Island Nature Parks seeks to design a world class eco-tourism asset, with strong links to China (the Nature Parks is the largest ticketed attraction in Victoria for the China market) and an alignment with state government policy and strategy that will have flow on benefits for the broader Gippsland region. To be able to maintain its place as a major economic contributor and tourism drawcard for Victoria, funding is needed to provide this critical upgrade of infrastructure.

Recommendation 1:

That the Victorian Government commit to fully funding the Summerland Infrastructure and Procurement Master Plan project.

Mount Baw Baw Alpine Resort

Mount Baw Baw Alpine Resort comprises 335 hectares of land adjacent to the Baw Baw National Park. At an altitude of 1500m, and located 2.5 hours by car from Melbourne, it is the closest major snowfield to Melbourne, the Mornington Peninsula, Latrobe Valley and Gippsland. Mount Baw Baw is renowned as Victoria's affordable, close to Melbourne, family friendly 'learn to ski' destination.

While the white season visitation over the last thirty years has fluctuated according to the quality of the snow season; the overall growth trend has been flat. Since the opening of the South Face Road to Mount Baw Baw in 2007, green season visitation has almost trebled from 16,500 to 47,000 in 2009-10, for activities as diverse as mountain biking, hiking and weddings. A major part of increasing visitation to Mount Baw Baw centres on the sealing of South Face Road.

It has created a safer and more efficient route which better connects the resort to the Gippsland region. Capitalising on the opportunities presented by this road will significantly improve visitor access and allow the promotion of a major new gateway to Mount Baw Baw. The Committee for Gippsland strongly urges funding of this significant Gippsland priority. South Face Road is currently unsealed, but is the most expedient and better driving road. However, because it is unsealed, many tourist coaches are not able to travel on it.

Recommendation 2:

That the Victorian Government provide funding in the 2015 – 2016 Victorian State Budget to seal the South Face Road to Mount Baw Baw.

National Surf Life Saving Championships

The potential to host the National Surf Life Saving Championships for the first time in Victoria represents a major tourism and economic opportunity. The Committee for Gippsland has been working with East Gippsland Shire, East Gippsland Marketing and the Lakes Entrance Surf Life Saving Club since 2011 to advocate for Lakes Entrance, in East Gippsland to host the event. Lakes Entrance Surf Life Saving Club has already proven its ability to host a highly successful Victorian State Surf Life Saving Championship event.

The Australian Surf Life Saving Championships are a truly iconic national sporting carnival.

They are held in March each year, and traditionally have only been hosted in New South Wales and Queensland. That has changed in recent years, with other interstate venues such as Busselton in Western Australia, and Glenelg in South Australia being selected as successful bids to host the event. The potential to host the event at Lakes Entrance presents an enormous opportunity for Victoria to secure one of the most prestigious national sporting events to our shores. The event attracts nearly 8,000 competitors from Australia's 310 surf life saving clubs, as well as tens of thousands of spectators, and has televised coverage of the event spanning the week long event.

The 2007 event in Western Australia generated nearly \$24 million for the state's economy, which was an over \$13 million return for every one dollar invested. The aim of the event is to help showcase the best of surf life saving – skills that save lives, encouraging sport and recreation, and the opportunity to showcase the most exquisite beaches in Australia.

Extensive work has already been invested in preparing a bid for Lakes Entrance to host a National Surf Life Saving Championship event. Surf Life Saving Australia has conducted several site visits to Lakes Entrance, a comprehensive study by AECOM has been undertaken, and East Gippsland Shire, East Gippsland Marketing, Lakes Entrance Surf Life Saving Club and the Committee for Gippsland have met several times with the Victorian Major Events Company.

The National Surf Live Saving Championships represent a proven and major opportunity to enhance Victoria's major events portfolio, attract tens of thousands of visitors to regional Victoria, secure millions of dollars into the Victorian economy, and promote Victoria's iconic beaches and regional destinations throughout Gippsland.

Recommendation 3:

That the Victorian Government direct the Victorian Major Events Company to prepare a bid tender for the next available National Surf Life Saving Championships.

The Committee for Gippsland is pleased to have the opportunity to provide input and formal recommendations on opportunities to revitalise and strengthen Victoria's ability to attract and retain tourism and major events to our state. Regional Victoria has a major role to play in this, in particular Gippsland. The Committee for Gippsland commends the focus on regional Victoria in the review's terms of reference, and looks forward to its outcomes.

Yours sincerely



Mary Aldred
Chief Executive Officer