

Via web portal: www.engage.vic.gov.au/regional-tourism-review

30 August 2019

Mary Anne Thomas MP
Cabinet Secretary and Special Adviser
Regional Tourism Review
Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions
1 Spring St
Melbourne Vic 3000

Dear Ms Thomas

Regional Tourism Review

We are responding to the request for submissions following the release of the Victorian Government Regional Tourism Review Discussion Paper in July 2019.

Western Melbourne Tourism Inc (WMT) is an association incorporated for the purposes of promoting and developing the tourism sector across Melbourne's western metropolitan region. WMT operates on a membership model primarily funded by the cities of Hobsons Bay, Wyndham, Maribyrnong, Moonee Valley, Brimbank, and Melton. It is overseen by an independent board with representation from these six western metropolitan councils, as well as Parks Victoria and Victoria University and representatives from the region's tourism industry.

While WMT is primarily interested in the profile and development of a stronger visitor economy for Melbourne's west, the board is also committed to support the increased recognition of the visitor economy to Melbourne and Victoria.

We understand the focus of the Regional Tourism Review is about finding new ways to support tourism in regional Victoria to enhance private investment and create more regional jobs. It is understood the review will seek input about how to better leverage local strengths, support communities and increase visitation. This will address questions about strengthening the tourism product offering, how to best leverage marketing expenditure, how to support industry and facilitate investment, how to enhance regional tourism organisations and how to best coordinate strategy and planning.

We are making a submission on the basis that the scope of the review should be expanded to embrace the Greater Melbourne region. We believe the questions and issues challenging regional Victoria also apply equally to the Greater Melbourne region.

The expansion of the review is particularly required because of the gap in governance left by the recent closure of Destination Melbourne and the subsequent loss of a peak tourism body representing the interests of Greater Melbourne.

The closure of Destination Melbourne presents an opportunity for reform and restructure. We believe the timing of this regional review provides the opportunity for more holistic and integrated strategic review of overall governance of *all* Victorian tourism regions. This will assist in ensuring better integration with regional Victoria and strengthened dispersal of visitors.

Melbourne is the gateway to regional Victoria, so why has the Melbourne region been excluded from this review?

Melbourne is the primary gateway for all visitors to Victoria and requires specific focus and management. With more than 30 million visitors each year, Melbourne is also a major destination in its own right, requiring strategic oversight, coordinated research and planned development. Approximately 15 million visitors are dispersing beyond the inner city across the Greater Melbourne region. We would like to see this substantial sector of Victoria's visitor market addressed by this review and given improved strategic focus.

We also note there are no consultation workshops for the review being offered in Melbourne and this is disappointing.

Melbourne's west as a tourism region

Melbourne's West is poised for major growth in the visitor economy. The region receives over four million visitors each year, with the most recent research showing Melbourne's West will be the fastest growing tourism sub-region in metropolitan Melbourne over the next decade.

The value of the local visitor economy is substantial. For Melbourne's west the visitor economy contributes to around 12,000 jobs (Source REMPLAN 2018) being 4.5% of the region's employment. The value of the visitor economy is estimated to be \$1.45 billion GRP (2017 Satellite Accounts). Melbourne's west as a subregion of Melbourne provides an economic contribution which is easily the equivalent of the most prominent tourism regions outside of Melbourne, at similar levels to Geelong and Bellarine, Gippsland and Goldfields.

There are substantial developments in the pipeline including the Melbourne Airport Rail Link, the development of Avalon Airport as a second international air terminal, the Werribee Open Range Zoo Masterplan, Scienceworks Museum of the Future and the proposed new Western United A-League soccer Stadium at Tarneit. These developments will further add to the economic value of the visitor economy.

As a regional board WMT is cognisant of the growth opportunities and the need to prepare for them. Our organisation offers a partnership between Councils, universities, tourism operators and local businesses with a dedicated focus on the visitor economy. We endeavor to work proactively with industry bodies including the Victoria Tourism Industry Council and Visit Victoria to build awareness around the substantial opportunities for our region.

Through 2017 and 2018 the WMT board has led the development of a subregional destination visitor plan for Melbourne's west as part of the larger Greater Melbourne Destination Management Visitor Plan project. The plan for Melbourne's West

provides a framework for increasing the size and contribution of the visitor economy and articulating the opportunities our region offers visitors now and into the future. A copy of the Executive summary and the Melbourne's West Destination Management Plan document are available to download at the Western Melbourne Tourism website <https://melbourneswest.com.au/resources/destination-management-plan/>

WMT has operated to fill what is a perceived gap in the structural management of tourism to provide greater profile and support for the visitor economy in a metropolitan sub-region.

Airport Rail Link and Avalon Airport

The development of the new Melbourne Airport Rail Link will create a new hub and locus for visitors. The new rail link proposes direct links with Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo, providing a hub transfer point at Sunshine to link to the Melbourne Airport (as well as the CBD.) Sunshine will become a new 'western locus' of distribution for visitors. Sunshine will become a significant regional visitor hub and future regional architecture and planning must reflect this.

In a similar vein, Avalon Airport as Melbourne and Victoria's second international airport will provide a significant source of visitors into Melbourne's west. This is already occurring following the introduction of Air Asia X and visitor traffic will grow substantially as additional carriers use Avalon Airport as a gateway.

Many visitors will not venture beyond Melbourne

Not all visitors to Victoria are seeking experiences beyond Melbourne. Results of the Deloitte Access Economics Survey on Regional Victoria (2018) highlighted the differences in travel preferences.

For a significant proportion of both domestic and international visitors there is an active preference for capital cities and visitors who make a choice to remain in Melbourne. This is particularly the case for a proportion of the Chinese market. For other visitors there are those who don't have enough time, or for cost or accessibility reasons do not want to venture beyond Melbourne. Our point is that if we are genuinely seeking to service *all* visitors to Victoria, we need to be reviewing all opportunities to better manage all aspects of that visitor experience, not simply focus on regional Victoria in isolation.

A different approach to defining regions

The current architecture of tourism structure and promotion does not provide adequate recognition and support to Greater Melbourne. We believe there are dimensions of Greater Melbourne that should be afforded greater focus in promotional effort.

Greater Melbourne is so diverse there is value in reviewing how it can be promoted in smaller strategic units, rather than as a 'single Melbourne' region.

We also believe consideration should be given to tourism regions without fixed geographic boundaries. The concept of 'Melbourne and Surrounds' was used in the

past with the focus on what can be experienced 'one hour out' as opposed to a fixed line defining the edges of Melbourne. In this way, areas of Greater Melbourne can be embraced as experiences connected with regional Victoria. For example, the future rail hub at Sunshine provides an opportunity to reframe a visitor region that links Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo with Melbourne's west.

We would be pleased to have further input into this review, to elaborate on the opportunities we see from the perspective of Melbourne's west. We reiterate that there is currently a strategic gap in the management and oversight of tourism in Greater Melbourne. We are hopeful this gap could be considered as a next phase of this review process.

If you would like to contact us to elaborate further on these submissions we are available on 0417 545 141 or email richard@melbourneswest.com.au.

WMT appreciates the opportunity to provide input to this review process. We look forward to receiving further information as the review progresses.

Yours sincerely



Richard Ponsford
Executive Officer
Western Melbourne Tourism Inc



Jan Jacklin
Chair
Western Melbourne Tourism Inc

CC:

John Pandazopoulos - Chair, Visitor Economy Minister's Advisory Committee
Felicia Mariani- CEO, Victoria Tourism Industry Council
Martine Letts - CEO, Committee for Melbourne
Kerry Thompson - CEO, Municipal Association of Victoria
Jim Williamson - Chair, LeadWest
Western Region Council CEO's