# Submission from Friends of Agnes Falls Inc

Regarding Regional Development Victoria

On behalf of the "Friends of Agnes Falls Inc" I would like to tell you know how much RDV is valued in the Corner Inlet District of the South Gippsland Shire.

As the Agnes Falls picnic grounds had become somewhat neglected, and the existing toilet block was in need of being upgraded, our "Friends of Agnes Falls" Community Group was formed about three years ago, under the auspices of Parks Victoria, to help care for, maintain, improve, and promote the Agnes Falls as a worthy tourist attraction.

Having been told that Parks Victoria (Foster) was not in a position to do more work at the Agnes Falls Scenic Reserve - their main emphases being Wilsons Promontory and Cape Liptrap Coastal Park - our group asked the South Gippsland Shire to install a road counter at the Reserve, to ascertain the actual popularity of the Agnes Falls as a tourist destination. To the surprise of all concerned around 3000 vehicles visited the falls between 23 December 2011 to 4 February 2012, so our group began lobbying for more improvements.

(Another traffic count was undertaken over the same period in 2014/15, showing an increase of around 600 vehicles above the previous figure!)

Through her interest in the Reserve, following a visit by members of RDV and the Committee of Gippsland, Mary Aldred facilitated a new Partnership Agreement, between the Office of Corrections and Parks Victoria, and this was announced, in May 2014, by then Minister Edward O'Donohue, resulting in ongoing maintenance work and mowing in the Reserve, on a monthly basis, by the low-security offenders at Wulgunggo Ngalu Learning Centre at Won Wron. This has made a huge difference to the look of, and visitation to the Reserve, with many visitors now once again picnicking there, particularly on Long Weekends and Holiday periods, such as Christmas/Summer, School Holidays and Easter. This arrangement has also been of great assistance to our local Parks Victoria personnel. (Recently a family reunion was held there, as well as a local wedding. See photos on the “Friends of Agnes Falls” Facebook page).

Thankfully, through the Regional Growth Fund, then Minister for the Environment, Ryan Smith, announced that the amount of $180,000 would be provided to Parks Victoria, via the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, for the construction of a new toilet block beside the Agnes Falls Scenic Reserve carpark, the installation of new picnic tables, and the erection of a large picnic shelter in the bushland picnic grounds, there never having had one before. These new facilities were duly constructed, and officially opened early October 2014 by then Deputy Premier and Minister for Gippsland South, Peter Ryan.

Along with these new visitor facilities an investigation was made regarding the economic benefits, and physical viability of the construction of a cantilever viewing platform, out from the gorge lookout at the Agnes Falls, resulting in the presentation of a design concept to the South Gippsland Shire Council, the Friends group, and Parks Victoria, which would enable the falls to be seen in their entirety (difficult at present), as well as give visitors an appreciation of the 59 metre drop, and an exhilarating experience.

In recent years, when there have been fires or floods at Wilsons Prom, many potential visitors did not come into the area, as they thought only the Prom was worthy of a visit, with the resulting loss of income to many accommodation providers and food outlets across South Gippsland, particularly in the Corner Inlet District.

The South Gippsland Shire has recognised the enormous potential that the construction of a cantilever viewing platform would make at the Agnes Falls, for the many tourists that visit the area from overseas and interstate, as well as from Melbourne and other parts of Gippsland, and especially if the Prom has been booked out, is closed for whatever reason, or the weather has been suitable for a beach day. Waterfalls are at their most spectacular in the wetter months, so this would provide another reason to visit the area at those other times of year when tourists often stay at home, thus providing an economic boost to the smaller nearby towns across the district.

To this end, the South Gippsland Shire has already put aside $100,000 towards the $400,000 cost of the proposed cantilever, and had already put in a submission to RDV for the balance of the $300,000 funding for this project.

Prior to the November 2014 Election we had received positive feedback from RDV regarding this funding application, so we hope that the new Guidelines will provide certainty for the funding of the cantilever viewing platform at the Agnes Falls.

Being located approximately 10 kms north of Toora and Welshpool, off the South Gippsland Highway, the Agnes Falls are regarded as one of the highest single-span falls in Victoria, and one of the most accessible waterfalls in the State.

The “Friends of Agnes Falls” would like to commend this project for your further consideration and approval.

Yours sincerely,

Kathy Whelan, Secretary, Friends of Agnes Falls Inc. A0068676P

Facebook.com/FriendsOfAgnesFalls

Attached :

Photographs of the Agnes Falls, new visitor facilities, and concept design for the proposed cantilever