**Review of Regional Services Delivery Model and Strategic Directions for Policy**

# Ideas and comments submitted by the Victorian Goldfields Tourism Executive in response to the Minister's Invitation

The Victorian Goldfields Tourism Executive Inc (VGTE) is the independent peak tourism body for the Goldfields Region. The Region works in partnership with Ballarat Regional Tourism and Bendigo Regional Tourism and the Goldfields campaign region incorporates the local Government areas of the City of Ballarat, the City of Greater Bendigo, Central Goldfields Shire Council, Loddon Shire Council and Mount Alexander Shire Council.

The VGTE welcomes the invitation by the Minister to provide ideas which can be considered within the Review and has considered this at its recent meeting. The following ideas and comments are provided within this context:

**1. Review of Regional Tourism Boards and Destination Management Plans (RTB/DMP) (2014) -** The recommendations of this review have not been considered in detail given the change of Government since the review and the establishment of new priorities. There are however some important conclusions and recommendations which need further consideration and should not be lost. A number of key recommendations are discussed within this note.

1. **The establishment of an overarching strategic regional management vision and approach** -A wide range of regional plans exist compiled by a range of authorities and agencies. Local government authorities also have their own plans. There is a need for better agreement and clarity about overarching issues, priorities and opportunities for individual regions which can be accepted by Government and then inform various regional plans and enable local Councils to consider key regional issues in establishing their own plans. This would assist the achievement of medium to long term goals and objectives.
2. **The establishment of a whole-of -government approach to identify and support regionally significant projects** - if overarching strategic regional vision and approach is set and agreed by Government, a further priority is to identify key regionally significant projects and ensure whole­ of-government leadership and delivery of them allowing for the role of lead agencies as appropriate. A case study is the Goldfields -Australia's Premier Heritage Region project which is a tourism led medium to long term regional development project capitalising on the significant heritage of the Goldfields region. The project is well supported in a range of strategic plans at the Statewide, regional and local government level and is making fair progress. It has been very difficult to get whole-of-government agreement on support and resource strategies for the project and this has hampered the speed of implementation and delivery.
3. **Creation of a strategic connection between tourism and local government** -this is a real priority within the tourism sector to drive better strategic outcomes in tourism and ensure more effective and efficient resource allocation and avoid potential duplication of effort. This also impacts RDV funding which on occasions has been used to fund local government tourism priorities such as the development of a local events development strategy but outside the key regional framework which should align, inform and support it.
4. **The importance of a tiered approach to regional tourism structures allowing more effective representation and recognition of the role of the three key regional cities (Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo) -** the VGTE believes this is key opportunity to strengthen tourism and drive the visitor economy within Victoria. Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo are each key destination centres within their own right. Within the VGTE Regional Strategic Plan 2013-2016 there is recognition that Ballarat and Bendigo are key to driving visitation within the region. Through effective and creative hub and spoke approaches we can drive added dispersal and yield. These cities contribute individually up to ten times the amount the Tourism Victoria contributes to each region to develop their respective cities as key destination centres. It is important and just makes good sense that these three key cities are represented in their own right in key Government forums and receive appropriate contributory funding from the State Government for tourism development to leverage from the substantial income they are generating locally.
5. **Performance monitoring of regional tourism management -**there is a need to strengthen this within the tourism sector. It is also important this takes place in the context of overall review of the achievement of whole-of-government objectives and priorities for individual regions. This will enable continued alignment between tourism and other regional priorities.
6. **Develop further efficiencies through shared administrative tasks across regions -**there is an opportunity for continued focus on more cost-effective sharing of administrative tasks within regions. A priority within the VGTE Strategic Plan has been working with local councils to implement better computerised and information systems enabling a more effective Visitor Information Centre model. The 2014 Tourism Victoria review of Regional Tourism Boards recommended the development of a program between Tourism Victoria and the MAV to identify and implement opportunities. The development of the region's tourism online presence through integrated digital platforms is a Goldfields region priority in Victoria's Regional Tourism Strategy 2013-2016.
7. **Establish a funding system that supports a viable tourism industry across regional Victoria -** This is an essential priority to support the development of both regional tourism and major events. In essence Tourism Victoria funding is a small component of a much bigger RDV funding source and integrated funding decisions which support regional tourism need to be taken. Tourism Victoria funding cannot proceed in isolation.
8. **Establish an annual strategic planning process -** consistent with the recommendations above focussed on forward planning, there should be good alignment and shared understanding of annual plans and priorities so there can be a more consistent approach to resource allocation and delivery.
9. **Create stronger relationship management -**this recommendation was proposed in the 2014 Regional Tourism Board (RTB) review to strengthen relationship management between Tourism Victoria and RTBs. Within the context of the present Review, there is significant opportunity to better align and connect the regional functions of RDAs, RDV and RTBs. Tourism Victoria regions reflect the consumer market and differ from RDV boundaries. This need not be an issue but there is a need for more systemic connection between planning, resource allocation, service delivery and information sharing. Many of these issues have individually been discussed above.

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