
ALBURY WODONGA REGIONAL TOURISM FORUM INC

AGRICULTURE AND NATURE (ECO) TOURISM – NEW EMPLOYMENT PARTNERS FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

Developing tourism opportunities in North East Victoria and Southern NSW



On behalf of

ALBURY WODONGA AREA CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

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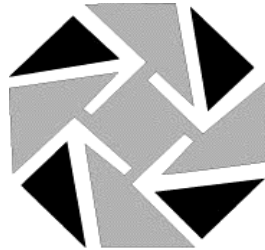
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of this project was to undertake an audit of current agritourism (agriculture tourism) and nature (eco) tourism initiatives in the Albury Wodonga region and by research and consultation identify opportunities for the growth of these tourism products. The Department of Transport and Regional Services, under the Dairy Regional Assistance Programme, funded the project. It was auspiced by Albury Wodonga Area Consultative Committee (AWACC), and undertaken in 2001 by the Albury Wodonga Regional Tourism Forum Inc. with Christine Stewart from Ruralbiz Pty Ltd contracted to manage the project.

Albury Wodonga has historically been the centre of a productive and diverse agricultural economy with traditional broadacre farming a major source of income in the north and an increasing diversity of intensive agribusiness pursuits generating income in the south. Picturesque scenery in the region, its proximity to the alpine region of Victoria and NSW and a strategic position on Sydney Melbourne road and rail route and air facilities has generated a substantial tourism industry. The growth of a tourism industry based on the bounty of natural resources and agriculture is increasingly seen as an opportunity of some magnitude. These emerging tourism products are potentially of great importance to rural and regional communities as they create a new income stream. Agritourism is not affected by the income fluctuations that occur with agricultural commodity income. It is conducted on farm using what people and assets are already in place. It creates employment for the farming family and is ideal for farm partners and/or children to be involved with. Furthermore, the wide variety of natural attractions in the region provide rural people with many options including conducting flora and fauna tours.

Agritourism includes having people pay to visit and/or stay on farms to experience rural life and or learn about different farming activities. It involves a host of different rural experiences from a passive experience such as watching animals graze to active participation such as mustering and handling livestock. Technical study visits to farms are of increasing interest. Currently there is a shortage of all-inclusive farm stays for overseas visitors who want to meet the local people and have a real Australian experience. Domestic travellers who prefer rural holidays with their families are seeking out self-contained facilities on farm.

There is an estimated 1,300 farm stays in Australia, each generating between \$5,000 and \$50,000 per year (or an estimated 20-40% of total on-farm income), with larger group host properties earning up to \$1.5 million. International inbound agritourism has increased by 300% since 1990 with international tourists comprising an estimated 40-45% of all agritourism visitors. In 1999 the Australian Tourist Commission launched a new three-year \$150 million, worldwide television advertising campaign. Of the 12 advertisements, 8 featured farmstay and outback station adventures. It is estimated that agritourism is worth \$1.5 billion annually to the Australian economy. In the AWACC region there are 39 operators who actively promote their agritourism business to the public at large.

Nature based tourism is about a range of experiences that take place in a natural area and meet the standards of environmental sustainability. It involves a variety of activities for example, bush walking, bird watching and visiting national parks.

In the 1980's the term ecotourism came into being and much debate and discussion has taken place on its definition. Today, a broad set of principles have been agreed upon. Ecotourism is nature based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable. It includes the natural environment, local history and culture. Eco-tourism is labour and knowledge intensive. Whilst there are people providing nature tourism experiences in the region there is no accredited product (tours, attractions and accommodation) under the National Ecotourism Accreditation Program. There are no certified EcoGuides who are part of the EcoGuide Program in the region. Nature based tourism operators in the project region at this point of time totals 7.

The economic value of nature based tourism is significant. In 1995, of the 3.4 million visitors to Australia approximately 50% visited at least one national park during their stay, generating more than \$850 million during their visit (Bureau of Tourism Research Occasional Paper 1998). Of the most popular activities for domestic visitors to Victoria (BTR National Visitor Survey 1998) was to visit national parks (15%). This equates to 2.8 million overnight and 2.9 million day trip visitors visiting national parks. A study conducted in 1999 suggested that there were about 4,000 nature-based and ecotourism operators in Australia. However, the study did not consider the sustainability of their practices or their operational philosophy. A conservative estimate of the annual turnover for ecotourism in Australia is \$250 million. A World Resources Institute Study found that nature travel is growing at between 10 and 30% per year, more research is needed on this tourism product.

As a result of extensive research and consultation with operators in the region and with relevant government and non-government agencies, nine recommendations have been developed to guide the growth of sustainable employment by establishing nature (eco) tourism and agritourism.

These recommendations highlight the need for a strategic regional marketing plan, raising industry awareness and the need to adopt best practice guidelines. Consultation demonstrated the opportunities for productive partnerships to facilitate industry growth, both at a government or organization level and at local level through mentoring arrangements. Opportunity was identified in the conference market.

The tourism industry is very different from many other industries, no training or qualifications are required to be a tourism operator. There are some committed operators who provide excellent service and on the other hand some operators who should not be in the marketplace. The way tourism is promoted and supported by Local and State Governments varies substantially in the AWACC region. The recent 'challenges' as a result of the 11 September 2001 USA disaster, the collapse of Ansett Airlines and the increase in insurance premiums particularly for adventure tourism businesses highlight the vulnerability of the industry. This further supports the need for developing strategic marketing plans.

This study provides a colourful insight into what is currently happening in nature (eco) and agritourism at a grassroots level in the region. It is an invaluable resource for interested individuals, government and organizations. The challenge to the region will be the implementation of these nine recommendations. An appropriately resourced organisation is needed to co-ordinate activities so that these new tourism products and any future products can be established across the region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Below is a summary of the nine recommendations, more detailed information follows:

1. Produce a five-year strategic tourism plan incorporating agriculture and nature (eco) tourism for the region.
2. Raise awareness in the regional community of opportunities for entering the tourism industry and develop resources for training, education and promotion.
3. Encourage 'best practice' for both new and existing tourism operators.
4. Partnerships should be encouraged between tourism associations and others who wish to be involved with agri and nature (eco) tourism.
5. There is a need to fast track agri and nature (eco) tourism products to the market to demonstrate to regional communities the potential benefits of these products.
6. Produce a tourism marketing plan that includes cost effective marketing campaigns so that new operators have every chance of success.
7. Promote the region as the leader in environmental management through having programs in place that highlight the sustainable activities being undertaken in the region.
8. Create awareness of the opportunities for the establishment of 'purpose built' or 'enhanced' natural attractions which can become a tourism draw card.
9. Work closely with conference organisers to increase the level of agricultural and nature/environment based conferences to the region.

1. Produce a five-year strategic tourism plan incorporating agriculture and nature (eco) tourism for the region.

Currently there is no plan in place in the AWACC region for several reasons. One being two different State Government Tourism Departments with different priorities/campaigns operate in the region. This coupled with local shire councils, economic development boards and tourism associations who have a different set of priorities make it difficult to get a commitment for planning tourism. Therefore, any proposed plan should include widespread consultation with local stakeholders because at the end of the day they will need to be responsible for the industry and its development in the region. Funding to undertake the planning process will need to be sourced.

A regional approach to tourism planning is essential and consultation would suggest that these tourism products could grow and survive in a cross border and greater region environment by further diversification of tourism product on offer. This diversity being enhanced by having a year round program of agriculture and nature (eco) tourism activities.

2. Raise awareness in the regional community of opportunities for entering the industry and develop resources for training, education and promotion.

There is a need to promote the industry in a variety of ways and to build resources for training for entry of new operators, education and promotion of tourism products. This could include the production of information brochures for the community, local and state government authorities, tourism officers and tourism associations. Examples of how others have used the natural environment and agriculture to create new opportunities would need to be included.

In consultation and in partnership with industry stakeholders and training providers there is a need to design agriculture and nature tourism courses as entry points into the industry. Educational resource material should be produced which appeals to a wide tourism audience. This will increase the value of the tourism experience for the visitor and also increase financial returns for tourism operators. One agritourism operator has produced a workbook that meets curriculum guidelines and as a result has many paying school groups visit. These groups pay more for the visit as it is educational and the cost of the book is added into the fee charged.

Small rural communities need to be provided with information kits, data, back up support and encouragement to implement these new tourism products. Particular attention needs to be given to rural apprenticeships and traineeships for farm partners, on farm children and youth in small communities. Included in the information package needs to be details of local employment services/agencies and the benefits they can provide ie payroll administration services, secure attractive government subsidies etc.

Leadership training is also required in the AWACC region where there is a constant turnover of tourism officers and of people heading up some local tourism associations. This does not create a stable environment in which to grow and nurture new tourism products.

Research needs to be conducted on what can be done to address this issue and perhaps encourage Shire Councils to develop leadership training and support for those who want to actively lead the industry.

3. Encourage 'best practice' for both new and existing tourism operators.

Accreditation of eco product (accommodation, tours and attractions) can be achieved through the National Ecotourism Accreditation Program. Currently, no operators in the project region are accredited under this Program. There are no certified EcoGuides under the EcoGuide Program. The Program is a voluntary, industry driven and run certification program for nature and ecotour guides. It provides an industry 'qualification' that rewards guides that achieve specified competencies and standards. Both of these Programs are through the Ecotourism Association of Australia. Charles Sturt University has offered to facilitate the process and work with local operators to become accredited with their product or become certified guides.

There is currently no accreditation program for agritourism operators. Members of the Albury Wodonga Regional Tourism Forum Inc are interested in establishing a regional accreditation program. Discussions need to be held between the operators and people experienced in designing and implementing tourism accreditation programs. From these discussions a model program needs to be put in place that meets the needs and is acceptable to the local agritourism industry.

4. Partnerships should be encouraged between tourism associations and others who wish to be involved with agri and nature (eco) tourism.

The new tourism products will require support from government and non-government organisations to be successful. There are many partnership opportunities. For example: If an individual wants to conduct tours in State parks they are required to be licensed by the appropriate government departments. These partnerships could include but are not limited to the following; In NSW – National Parks & Wildlife Service NSW, Department of Land & Water Conservation, NSW State Forests and NSW Agriculture. In Victoria – Parks Victoria, Department of Natural Resources & Environment, Agriculture Victoria. Water Catchment Authorities and Landcare groups. State, Local Tourism Departments and Shire Councils, Training Institutions – Universities, TAFE's, Adult Education Centres and other training providers.

5. There is a need to fast track agri and nature (eco) tourism products to the market to demonstrate to regional communities the potential benefits of these products.

The production of a coach brochure delivered by the Albury Wodonga Regional Tourism Forum Inc (AWRTF) is an example of a regional tourism campaign that will deliver new income and employment to local businesses. A cost effective marketing campaign commenced in mid December 2001 where over 50 existing and new operators are marketed through this brochure, entitled "Four Good Seasons To Visit The Albury Wodonga Region". This brochure consists of 15 x 1-day tour itineraries where coach groups pay to visit businesses throughout the Albury Wodonga region. These groups will be visiting some farms and natural attractions, which until now were not open to the public. Relationships have been established, many for the first time, with regional moteliere who are being provided with the brochure and a price and contact list to package and market to their existing coach clients. This co-operation brings the tourism industry closer together in the region. A substantial coach database has been used by the AWRTF to promote the brochure externally.

This campaign has the potential to generate up to \$91,875 a day. This is based on the 15 tours operating each day with an average of 35 people per coach, costing approximately \$175 per person/day (including their accommodation, activities, travel, food, insurance etc).

A second initiative of strategic importance for these new tourism products is the highly successful Regional Tourism Guide produced by AWRTF. This Guide will be reprinted in 2002 (60,000 copies) with distribution being both in the region as well as externally. Newly created Parks, new operators and other attractions will be in the revamped Guide. This will be the third reprint of the Guide with funding provided by the AWACC to print the first Guide three years ago.

Over 85,000 copies of the Guide have been distributed through visitor information centres, service stations and tourism operators businesses.

6. Produce a tourism marketing plan that includes cost effective marketing campaigns so that new operators have every chance of success.

Existing government tourism campaigns are expensive, not only for existing operators but particularly for new operators. Research amongst operators shows that there has been little or no return from investing in these campaigns.

However, there are opportunities for co-operative marketing so that advertising expenses are spread across a number of operators, for example through membership of the Albury Wodonga Regional Tourism Forum Inc. Their Regional Tourism Guide involves a small cost which is spread across the 100 operators listed in the Guide. Sponsorship and in-kind support underwrites the printing and distribution costs further. A local radio station promotes the Guide and attraction businesses on it throughout the year. This radio in-kind support is worth \$30,000 a year. A website is also maintained and operators have a presence on it, including text and photographs. The cost of participating in the coach promotion campaign is minimal because of sponsorship and in-kind support from members. All of the above is covered in the \$99 (includes \$9 GST) annual subscription fee to be a member of the AWRTF.

Another component of the marketing plan would be to strengthen and encourage existing operators to value-add their business by having a second tourism product on offer such as agriculture and nature (eco) tourism. For example one regional agritourism operator has a large wetland on their property suitable and accessible for people to visit. An existing farmstay operator has significant bush land abundant with flora and fauna with over 140 species of birds identified. Coach groups will be encouraged to visit these attractions.

There is a need to develop special interest group packages linking tourism operators with accommodation. This creates further employment opportunities. Packaged tours encourage people to stay longer which means more income for the operators and the region as a whole. For example: a nature tourism operator who takes 6 people away on 4WD tours of the Australian Alps uses a local B&B operator to provide accommodation and meals the night before the tour leaves and the night the tour returns. This provides an income for the B&B operator and for the people who host the guests during the Alps tour. This type of nature tourism is ideal for small communities to be involved with as no large-scale accommodation or infrastructure is needed to make it happen.

Agritourism and nature (eco) tourism trails should be developed throughout the region. Rail trails are being established and they attract both walkers and bicycle riders. In North East Victoria the Murray to the Mountains Rail Trail is becoming very popular. A section of the High Country Rail Trail will be open to the public in the near future. The Hume & Hovell Walking Track comes through the AWACC region; it attracts both local and international tourists. There are opportunities to establish 'self drive' nature, environment and 'birding' trails for regional visitors.

7. Promote the region as the leader in environmental management through having programs in place that highlight the sustainable activities being undertaken in the region.

An example of a sustainable environmental tourism feature is the Wonga Wetlands, which utilises water recycled from Albury's new, advanced, wastewater treatment plant and is creating a natural wonderland. The Wetlands are now home to more than 130 species of native birds. Environmental research being carried out at the Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Institute generates much interest. The National Environment Centre at Thurgoona and its facilities demonstrate best practice in energy efficiency, waste minimisation and waste reuse. The rammed earth structures with climate control features make it a building for the future. The neighbouring Johnstone Centre at the Charles Sturt University campus has become an icon campus harvesting and re-using resources rather than taking and wasting them.

8. Create awareness of the opportunities for the establishment of 'purpose built' or 'enhanced' natural attractions which can become a tourism draw card.

Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre at Burrumbuttock in NSW was originally a four-hectare stock reserve with a large dam. The area has now been 'enhanced' or transformed into wetlands, bush and landscaped areas linked by walking tracks. In 2000, Wirraminna took out the National Landcare Award for Education. Small rural communities have an opportunity of following Burrumbuttock's example and establishing such things as interpretative bush walks in their town or a bird observatory or 'Learnsapes'. Not only does it seed projects but employment opportunities (guiding, catering, engaging flora and fauna specialists, fencing-earth moving-tree planting contractors, Landcare co-ordinators, nurseries, park rangers, Green Corps teams etc). There is also the opportunity to link in with other attractions in the region and create special interest tourism trails. It is worth noting that Wirraminna will be promoted with a visit to Table Top Mountain in the coach promotion campaign that the Albury Wodonga Regional Tourism Forum Inc launched in December 2001.

9. Work closely with conference organisers to increase the level of agriculture and nature / environment based conferences to the region.

The first step in growing an agri and nature (eco) tourism conference market would be to establish a database of agricultural and nature based industries, businesses and groups in the region and provide them with information on the advantages of holding a conference in the area. Included in this would be discounted accommodation and airfares and other incentives to give the region a competitive advantage. There is support available but it is a matter of accessing it.

Encourage conference organisers to promote visits to farms and natural attractions either as part of the conference program or as a before or after conference activity. This gives regional operators a chance to promote their activity and also encourages conference delegates to stay longer in the area.

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND THE REGION

This study has been undertaken to collate the necessary information and data required to resource potential growth in the Albury Wodonga region of two facets of tourism – agriculture (agri) and nature (eco) tourism.

The Albury Wodonga Regional Tourism Forum Inc has within its membership successful farm and nature tourism operators whose businesses are expanding. These members would like to encourage others to enter the industry and they are prepared to share information, markets and act as mentors for new operators. It was felt necessary to see what is currently occurring within the AWACC region and identify opportunities which will lead to employment of people in these two new tourism products.

The project region encompasses eleven Local Government Areas (LGA); nine rural LGA's and the City of Wodonga and City of Albury. The LGA's included are the shires of Culcairn, Hume, Corowa, Tumbarumba, Tumut, Albury, Holbrook and Urana in NSW and Shires of Wodonga, Towong and Indigo in North East Victoria. Shires are located on Attachment 10.5 - map of the AWACC region. Tumut was brought in as an extra Shire as it is located at the top of the AWACC region and is on the main travel route for tourists who wish to travel along the edge of the Australian Alps. Tumut's natural attractions and agricultural activities compliment and strengthen the proposed introduction of agritourism and nature (eco) tourism. Another strong advantage Tumut has over other nearby rural towns is a large accommodation base that can handle coach groups. There are many advantages to be gained by working in with Tumut on this project.

The region is part of the Murray-Darling Basin which is Australia's largest and most developed river system. The Murray-Darling Basin is also a major contributor to our economy through agricultural production. The rivers and groundwater systems are an important source of fresh water for domestic consumption, agricultural production and industry. Throughout this system communities are using Natural Heritage Trust funding to combat the region's severe environmental problems. Changing patterns of land use have had groundwater impacts, which are felt thousands of kilometres downstream. Extensive clearing of natural vegetation in the region has resulted in rises in underground water tables and in some areas serious salinity problems. Land clearing has also interfered with the habitat of native animals. However, it is the significant work done to preserve the environment that is creating opportunities for those who wish to promote the processes they have gone through to revegetate, create wildlife corridors etc.

The Albury-Wodonga region has an attractive and diverse natural and cultural heritage including rare flora and fauna. National and State Parks, Forests and Reserves, Rivers (head waters of the Murray and Mitta Mitta), valleys and high country make up a large part of the region. The rest consists of broadacre areas that can provide a different type of nature (eco) tourism experience. A range of tourism opportunities exist as the environmental pre-requisites are in place.

There is also a significant agriculture base in the region with both new and emerging, as well as traditional farming being practiced.

In the southern Riverina there is also a strong farm host program being operated by the Australian Farmhost Holidays. Last year, this company brought two hundred coach groups to the region. It needs to be noted that in Australia agritourism was established by private companies and today it continues to be operated by them.

The Albury Wodonga region has a rapidly growing population base, which is not receiving an adequate share of the tourist dollar. This inadequate share is due to and not limited by; conflicting tourism campaigns, State border issues, lack of priority given to tourism, lack of number or diversity of tourism product that is suitable for the region.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 PUBLIC MEETINGS

2.2 STRATEGY PLANNING WORKSHOP

2.3 TOUR GUIDE TRAINING

2.4 COACH PROMOTION BROCHURE

2.5 SKILLS AUDIT

2.6 CONSULTATION

2.7 EMPLOYMENT

A project manager was appointed to research, develop and promote the agricultural and nature (eco) tourism opportunities in the region. A Steering Committee was appointed to oversee the project.

The following activities were carried out by the project manager.

2.1 PUBLIC MEETINGS

Originally 3 public meetings were going to be held but there was a high level of interest and the project manager spoke to interested groups throughout the project. The meetings were to gauge the level of interest and knowledge on agri and nature (eco) tourism. Details were given on successful local tourism operators as well as activities in other parts of Australia. Discussions were held on what the attendees felt was needed to establish these new tourism products.

Two meetings were held in Victoria; at Eskdale (Mitta Mitta), Tintalra (near Corryong) and a third one at Culcairn in NSW. As there was strong interest in other areas, further meetings were held in NSW at Holbrook and Rosewood (near Tumbarumba). The Project Manager spoke at the following meetings; Henty Chamber of Commerce, Co-ordinators of Visitor Information Centres meeting in Wodonga, Yackandandah Tourism Association Inc, Regional Business Development Network Inc and the Uniting Church tourism group.

2.2 PLANNING A REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR NATURE & ECO TOURISM WORKSHOP

10 August 2001

A one-day public workshop was held in August in association with Charles Sturt University. Over 75 people interested in being involved in Ecotourism attended. Outcomes of this workshop appear as Attachment 10.1 at the end of this report. One of the outcomes being the need for Tour Guide Training – see below.

2.3 TOUR GUIDE TRAINING

1 September 2001

The Tourism Forum combined with the Chiltern Rutherglen Continuing Education group to put on a one-day workshop for those who are interested in tour guiding. Ten participants were given an overview on the following subjects: Interpretation – What is it, the Benefits, Critical Elements. How to Organise Enjoyable Tours; Permits; Licences; Insurance; OH&S; Ethics; Interpretive Activity Planner; Planning a Program; Source of Knowledge; Professional Development & Training; Props and Demonstrations; Creative Scripting; Methods of Promotion; Producing a Brochure; Pricing; Business Planning and Assessment. The workshop tutor was Christine Stewart, the project manager. Three of the participants will be paid as tour guides when groups visit their properties as a result of being in the coach promotion campaign run by the AWRTF.

Some of workshop participants are now interested in doing a full tour guide course and the Project Manager is currently working on this. There is interest to conduct further one-day workshops in the AWACC region.

2.4 COACH PROMOTION BROCHURE LAUNCH

11 December 2001

In December 2001 a six-page A4 size Coach Promotion Brochure was launched to create employment for both agritourism and nature (eco) tourism operators. Fifteen one-day itineraries are featured in the brochure being promoted to the coach market. New tourism operators are part of this brochure and will be mentored by members of the Albury Wodonga Regional Tourism Forum Inc. Three people who attended the Tour Guide Workshop will be guiding groups when they visit their properties. Arrangements have been made for a further 8 guides to be employed to take groups on guided walks to natural and environmental attractions. A Committee established within the AWRTF will be responsible for the brochure and its marketing, distribution and will monitor its success. A voluntary team effort was involved in the production of the brochure. The Commercial Club in Albury provided funding for the printing of the brochure.

This brochure provides a very cost effective, powerful tool to create new employment and income for people based in rural communities. Moteliers, coach companies, airline, rail services and local retail and food businesses will also benefit from the income flowing from this type of promotion.

2.5 SKILLS AUDIT OF EXISTING AGRICULTURE AND ECOTOURISM OPERATORS

A skills audit (see Attachment 10.2 – Skills Questionnaire) was conducted on existing agriculture and ecotourism operators in the project region. The skills questionnaire took into account questions raised during consultations and at public meetings.

The overall outcome of the audit for agritourism operators being:

- Industry Development - learning more about the existing agritourism industry received the strongest response. Also the request for information on ecotourism by agritourism operators demonstrates the need to learn more about other tourism products that can be conducted on farm.
- Selling and Advertising, Pricing Your Product and Food Handling all ranked highly.
- Other learning priorities were: The Tourism Industry: Ecotourism Training, Tour Guide Training: Using the Email and Internet and Public Speaking.
- Mornings and evenings are the most preferred time to attend training
- Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and the weekend were all ranked equally as the most suitable days for training.
- Attending Classes/Field Days/Workshops followed by computer based training were the preferred way of having training delivered.
- One day or less was the amount of time that operators were prepared to attend a course.
- An approved/accredited course is not a priority.
- None of those interviewed have formal qualifications in tourism. There is no local training available in agritourism.

AGRICULTURE TOURISM OPERATORS

A total of 33 agriculture farm tourism operators were surveyed with the Skills Questionnaire being either posted or faxed out to the operators. In the project region 39 operators were identified. Only one operator classed themselves as being full time, the others part time with their main income stream coming from farming activities and/or off farm work.

What was encouraging was the operators want more business and are prepared to work towards it by working more co-operatively with others and share contacts, markets etc.

The following is the response to the questions asked in the Questionnaire.

1	PREFERRED TIME OF DAY FOR ATTENDING TRAINING	RESPONSES
	Morning	13
	Evening	12
	Afternoon	8
	Weekends	4

2.	PREFERRED DAY FOR TRAINING
	Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and the Weekend were all ranked equally

3.	TYPE AND LENGTH OF TRAINING PREFERRED	RESPONSES
	Attending Classes/Field Days/Workshops	19
	Computer Based	12
	One on One Tutoring	6
	Correspondence	2
	LENGTH OF TRAINING	
	Three hours	7
	One day	7
	Combination of day and weekend	5
	IS AN APPROVED/ACCREDITED COURSE IMPORTANT OR NOT	
	No	13
	Yes	3

4.	BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT TRAINING	RESPONSES
	Selling and Advertising	11
	Pricing your Product	10
	Financial and Budget Planning	7

4. BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT TRAINING	RESPONSES
Promotional Material	7
Accounting- Record Keeping	6
Marketing Plan	5
Cooperative Marketing	5
Business Planning / Finance for Business / Taxation- GST. Same number of responses	4
TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT TRAINING	
Using Email and the Internet	8
Basic Computer Skills	7
Advanced Computer Skills	7
Website for Business	5
HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT TRAINING	
Public Speaking	8
Customer Relation Skills	6
Time Management	6
Dealing with Difficult People	5
Negotiation Skills / Leadership / Cultural Consideration. Same number of responses	4
WORKPLACE TRAINING	
Food Handling	10
First Aid	6
OH&S	5
Insurance- Public Liability	4
INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT	
Agritourism Information	14
Nature & Eco Tourism Information	11
Tourism Industry	9
Eco Tourism Training	9
Tour Guide Training	9

NATURE TOURISM OPERATORS

A total of four out of 7 nature tourism operators were surveyed in the region – three 4WD drive operators and one professional fisherman. These operators actively promote themselves, are licensed and promote the natural environment. None of the operators is employed full time due to the seasonal aspects of their activities. It is worth noting that 7 of the agritourism operators surveyed felt they were also nature tourism operators.

In the AWACC region there are people doing adventure activities such as horse riding trail rides, whitewater rafting, abseiling, rock climbing, canoeing and there is one jet ski operator taking visitors along the Murray River for a 'nature experience'. State tourism departments have also started to create different tourism product categories for some of the activities eg. Fishing and adventure tourism being separated from nature tourism.

There are bush walking, bird watching, bush user, fishing, 4WD, canoeing and naturalists groups in the region but no one is running these as a commercial business.

Some would argue that some of these activities harm the natural environment and the ecosystems within them. It is worth noting that 2 horse riding trail businesses have closed due to increased insurance premiums and that the 4WD businesses may not survive either, time will tell.

There are nature tourism operators in the Australian Alps area that adjoins the project region. Discussions with these operators show that the insurance premiums are a big issue for them. The operators who have been trading successfully for a long period will probably survive as they are just receiving sufficient income to keep trading.

The overall outcome of the audit for nature (eco) tourism operators being:

- Industry Development and learning more about the existing ecotourism industry.
- Selling and Advertising: Promotional Material: Basic Computer Skills: Using the Email and Internet: Business Letters and Cultural Considerations were the learning priorities.
- Evenings are the best time for training with no preference on what weekday it is held on.
- Correspondence and attending Classes/Field Days/Workshops are the preferred way to have training delivered.
- An approved/accredited course is not a priority.

There are also tourism operators that are not based in the region who sometimes bring groups to visit Forests, State and National Parks. Further research into this activity would be a great benefit, particularly the number of overseas groups/people visiting the Parks in the region. Another area of research would be how many groups are visiting Parks and do not hold the necessary permits or insurances to do so.

2.6 CONSULTATION

Consultation and contact was made with a wide variety of organisations and individuals, this was necessary as the tourism products are different, have different target markets, different regulations and compliance attached to them. Furthermore, the traditional domain of tourism and its development is changing where other State, Federal and Local Government departments are playing a key role. This change was apparent time and time again throughout the project, there is the 'formal' or recognised department or contact but the reality in the community was an individual or another department who had the commitment, knowledge and expertise. There are also a wide variety of programs that can be tapped into for people to do tourism related activities.

State Government Tourism Plans are put together several years in advance. It is fortunate that the Tourism NSW Regional Tourism – Action Plan 2000-2003 has one action that is to 'foster further development of product through a Nature Plan'. In March 2002 the Nature Plan for NSW will be released. During the project constant communication was maintained between the project manager and Colin Bransgrove, Director of the Industry Development Group for Tourism NSW. The Riverina Regional

Tourism organisation based in Wagga Wagga is currently conducting a special interest agritourism study that includes part of the AWACC region. Discussions have been held with the organisation and it has been agreed to work co-operatively together.

Tourism Victoria provides support through their regional Campaign Committees; in North East of Victoria it is The Legends, Wine & High Country Committee. This Committee is responsible for regional marketing plans. In the Committee's Business Plan – July 2001-June 2002 the Committees vision for the region is:

Legends, Wine and High Country will be the preferred inland Australian destination for nature based activity and adventure, combining quality hospitality with grand vistas, outdoor action and big nature. It will be an internationally competitive visitor experience. Its heritage towns and sense of history, its natural environment, snowfields, waterways and scenic beauty enrich the touring experience

What is most encouraging is the release of Tourism Victoria's Nature Based Tourism - Summary of Directions and Opportunities for Victoria 2000-2003 brochure. Throughout the project discussions were held with Bill Fox, Manager Regional Marketing for Tourism Victoria, with Mr.Fox saying that agritourism may be explored in a forthcoming strategic plan.

Widespread consultation occurred during the project and a database of over 200 people has been established.

These regional stakeholders represent a variety of interest areas, the common thread being they have a role to play in the future development of agriculture and nature (eco) tourism in the region.

It is worth noting that the AWACC region is a different 'fit' on how other regions are put together by other departments, agencies etc. For example, three designated tourism regions cover the AWACC region and three different NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service offices and two different NSW State Forest offices cover the South West Riverina part of the AWACC region. Landcare groups cover different geographic areas again to any of the above. It is worth noting that there are 33 Landcare groups in the 3 project Shires in North East Victoria alone. This produces many challenges and difficulties whether it is for securing funding to put together a tourism trail that crosses the region or wanting to become a licensed nature tourism operator using Forests, State and National Parks on either side of the State border (different rules, permits, charges apply etc).

Below is a cross section of consultations.

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, STATUTORY AUTHORITIES AND ORGANISATIONS THAT WERE CONSULTED.

NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service, NSW State Parks, North East Catchment Management Authority, Murray Catchment Management Board, Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Board, Green Corps, Australian Trust For Conservation Volunteers, Greening Australia, Parklands Albury Wodonga, Department of Agriculture in Victoria and NSW, Department of Natural Resources & Environment, Department of Land & Water Conservation (both Wagga Wagga and Albury offices), Parks Victoria, Murray Darling Basin Association, Trust for Nature and Regional Landcare Co-ordinators, Shire Councils in the project region to name just a few.

TOURISM DEPARTMENTS, INDUSTRY GROUPS AND OTHERS INCLUDING

Moteliars throughout the project region, Environmental Interpretations, Eco Adventures, Ecotourism Association of Australia, NSW Farm & Country Holidays, Victorian Farm & Country Tourism Association, Australian Farmhost Holidays, Birding Australia, Country Victoria Tourism Council, NSW Minister for Tourism, Tourism Victoria Victorian Tourism Operators Association, Investment Albury Wodonga, Magic In The Mountains, Morgan Country Tourism, Riverina Regional Tourism, Man From Snowy River Tourism Association, Uniting Church tourism group. Shire tourism officers and visitor information centre co-ordinators etc.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Charles Sturt University, La Trobe University, Wodonga Institute of TAFE, Riverina Institute of TAFE, University of Western Sydney, University of Wollongong, University of Canberra, Southern Cross University, Adult Continuing Education Centres in the region, Business Enterprise Centres and private training providers.

AGRITOURISM AND NATURE TOURISM OPERATOR CONSULTATION

Throughout the project constant communication was held with those involved in agriculture and nature tourism. The communication was through telephone discussions, meeting attendance or personal one on one discussion.

As the existing industry is going to 'mentor' new operators it has been necessary to network people together. This has been very successful with a high level of co-operation.

This type of co-operation will continue as new business and its challenges evolve through the new coach marketing campaign. Other special interest tours are also being worked on which again will require co-operation from all involved.

2.7 EMPLOYMENT AGRITOURISM

Throughout the project period there was strong co-operation between existing agritourism operators who are members of the Albury Wodonga Regional Tourism Forum Inc. (AWRTF). The co-operation involved a variety of activities including: referring/sharing farm stay clients through to including other agritourism operators on tours to farms by school, general interest and overseas groups. This networking increased the income level for the operators.

The launch of the coach promotion brochure in December 2001 heralds a new era in creating new income and employment for both agritourism and nature (eco) tourism operators. Featured in the brochure are 16 existing agritourism operators and 2 new ones established during the project period. A further 15 people based on farms are interested in becoming agritourism operators. Of the 15, 10 would be open throughout the year and 5 during harvest time only.

A successful outcome of the project has been the establishment of the Henty Farm & Rural Experience business by John Ebsworth. John will be establishing agritourism in the Henty district. He has worked with over 30 farmers, accommodation and food providers and put together 5 itineraries x 5 day-stay packages that will be promoted to the coach industry from April 2002. Ongoing support and mentoring will be provided to John by members of AWRTF.

NATURE (ECO) TOURISM

The project provided the platform to link together 8 natural/environmental attractions and include them in itineraries in the coach brochure. When groups visit these attractions paid guides will be conducting the tour. This is the first time that these businesses and government institutions have been part of a co-operative coach marketing campaign.

During the project a further 31 people expressed a strong interest in being involved in ecotourism activities. Throughout the project these people attended meetings, provided ideas and support and demonstrated a positive attitude to move forward once the project has been completed.

Areas of interest and future employment of the 31 people are:

- 13 want to become nature (eco) tour guides (6 being farm people).
- 15 qualified professionals in flora, fauna, vegetation and/or environment management, tourism development wish to be employed and or play an active role in the establishment of nature (eco) tourism in the region.
- 3 others want to build eco friendly accommodation for visitors on their farms.

Over the next twelve months many of the above will become 'tourism ready'. Much thought, consideration and planning needs to be done – see Attachment 10.4 Model for new tourism operators. It is not just a matter of throwing the gates open for tourism to happen.

Sub-committees within the Albury Wodonga Regional Tourism Forum Inc are carrying forward the ongoing marketing and other activities for establishing agriculture of nature (eco) tourism in the project region. At present the committee responsible for promotion of the campaign have distributed the brochure and the price list to over 400 coach/travel companies, regional organisations and clubs. The response has been substantial so much so that 4 members of the committee have offered to be responsible for the inquiries that they have the most knowledge of. For example one member knows the agritourism operators and can provide sufficient information to put together a tour package. Another member knows about the different accommodation available in the region.

It is fortunate that The Tourism Forum has the key tourism operators in the region who are prepared to assist and mentor others into these new tourism products.

3.0 ISSUES RAISED- WORKSHOPS AND CONSULTATIONS

**3.1 POTENTIAL FOR INCOME AND
EMPLOYMENT GENERATION
THROUGH FARMHOSTING,
GUIDING, COACHES AND OTHER
OPPORTUNITIES**

3.2 INSURANCE

3.3 PUBLIC AMENITIES

3.4 FOOD HANDLING LAWS

**3.5 AGRITOURISM AND ECOTOURISM
INFORMATION.**

At public meetings potential operators asked a variety of questions, the main ones being how much money could they make; how much will the insurance premium be if involved with tourists; what public amenities are required and what are the food handling laws. Therefore, risk of litigation, capital outlay and achievable income are all issues. More information on agri and ecotourism is required before people proceed further

3.1 POTENTIAL FOR INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT GENERATION.

Questions were asked about the income potential for being either an agri and/or ecotourism operator. This type of information providing potential tourism opportunities with an indication of what the going rates are and whether it is worth pursuing further or not.

FARMHOSTING

Through a regional farmhost tour company, farm people are receiving approximately between \$95 and \$125 per person per day. During their stay the visitor is shown at least one farm activity. The amount received for the visit depends on the level of accommodation being provided ie the bedroom having an ensuite or not etc.

Some of the guests came through organised coach tours whilst others are independent overseas travellers with their own transport who have booked through the tour company. There are people who provide \$20 a night backpacker style accommodation and others four and a half star accommodation.

During the project several farmhost operators were identified who do not advertise or promote themselves to the public at large. It suits these operators to be part of the privately owned and operated Australian Farmhost Holiday company that had until recently, its head office based at Culcairn. The farming families who are part of this business have to meet certain criteria and they enjoy the experience and interaction they have particularly with overseas guests. To be part of the program they pay a set advertising fee each year to the company who do all their marketing for them. This works very well for farm people who do not have the marketing expertise, necessary travel licence, time and contacts to do it themselves.

TOUR GUIDING

During the project constant questions were asked about the income tour guiding could produce. The income varies a great deal depending on what type of guiding is being provided. For example a guide who is part of a coach group package tour is paid differently from a highly skilled and certified ecotourism guide. Other guides charge a set minimum fee that is not negotiable. Fifteen requests were made from individuals and organisations for further information.

They were provided with details on what guides were paid both within the region and externally.

Differences in income between certified and non-certified guides were provided including promotional material and comments from guides in the Otways, Healesville, Canberra and Tumut. Many certified guides believe that they should be paid \$600 per day given their qualifications, knowledge and the experience they offer the visitor.

Unfortunately, the reality is different and therefore anyone wishing to do this type of work really needs to do his or her own homework.

One problem in the AWACC region is that some individuals/volunteers in small communities love to act as guides for occasional visitors. They receive little or no payment as they love doing the work and have another income stream supporting 'their hobby'. This then causes problems for people who wish to charge and make a living from guiding. They have expenses to cover including public liability that unfortunately some 'hobby guides' do not have, therefore leaving themselves very vulnerable to litigation.

Another issue is that the public can have access to areas such as National Parks and do their own walks as individuals. They therefore will not or do not want to pay someone to take them. This is why it is important that potential ecotourism guides do market research before going into guiding. Section 5 of this report covers other points for consideration by potential operators. It is worth noting that if the natural attraction or place to be visited is in private ownership or there is some 'exclusive' arrangement in place then there is a good chance that a living can be made by the person who has access to it. This means that the public has to pay what the operator wants if they want to visit. Other key components in being a successful guide are good interpretive skills and great personality.

One outcome of this project work is an offer from Charles Sturt University to provide eco tourism students to work with people who want to become involved in the industry. The student is able to provide expertise that they have acquired during their eco training with the proposed ecoguide providing their knowledge, on-ground experience and ideas to the student. This ends up being a win-win situation for everyone and there is much to be gained by this process. This demonstrates the need for an ongoing structure and strategy to move project outcomes forward.

The project proponent, the Albury Wodonga Regional Tourism Forum Inc will continue to support this initiative once the project is completed. The Tourism Forum has started working with Charles Sturt University in staging activities during 2002 being the International Year of Ecotourism. One planned activity is a major workshop that will be held from 27-30 September 2002. The program will cover topics and issues raised at the 10 August 2001 workshop. Funding is currently being sought to hold the workshop. Further meetings and discussion with the University were held in December 2001. This is a good partnership between a local university and the largest regional tourism operator group.

GROUP VISITS

During the consultation process the opportunities available through having coach groups visit farms and natural attractions were discussed. Many farm tourism operators in the region have benefited from coach visits.

What people are paid for hosting coach groups varies depending on what activities, and/or if food is included in the visit, the duration and whether it is pitched at senior citizens/general public/school or special interest groups. Some operators set a minimum visit fee of \$100 a group whilst other operators will not accept this. Others charge a minimum of \$8 a person for a two hour visit which includes a talk and morning tea with the minimum group size to be 15 people. Some operators have gift shops and sell souvenirs as part of their business, which increases the level of income.

In the AWACC region there are community groups who host coach visits on a regular basis. They charge a minimal amount to cover food costs and the activity and do not build in labour costs. More often than not they have small overheads as their organisation does not have a paid officer, has the insurance cover which is paid for by annual subscriptions or some other means. Furthermore, the activity is conducted in a community venue/public area where the overheads including rates, electricity, repairs are shared with other groups or subsidised in some way. Naturally, there are coach groups/brokers who enjoy doing business with these organisations as they can 'mark up' the price of tour packages for themselves.

The launch of the Albury Wodonga Regional Tourism Forum Inc coach promotion brochure on 11 December represents a new era for both existing and new tourism operators. Over 50 businesses have come together to produce 15 one day coach itineraries with a heavy emphasis on visits to farms and natural attractions.

OTHER EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME OPPORTUNITIES

During the project it became apparent that there have been significant on ground Landcare activities occurring across the AWACC region that are attracting visitors. As a result several farm people wish to become trainers and/or eco certified guides. This has great potential for earning new on-farm income and will be followed through over the next 12 month period. Already there have been several coach loads of visitors from both Australia and overseas who have visited properties so that they can learn from farmers how things are done. The activities include: re-vegetation, creating biodiversity on farm, restoring the ecology, dealing with salinity, improving soil health and attracting birds to the properties to address tree dieback.

Some people have significant flora and fauna on their properties and want to learn how they can create employment for themselves by becoming ecotourism operators.

3.2 INSURANCE

Insurance is one of the biggest problems facing both agriculture and ecotourism operators. The recent collapse of some insurance companies has created many difficulties for operators. The main difficulty is that some companies no longer wish to provide certain types of tourism businesses – such as adventure activities, horse riding, 4WD businesses etc with insurance cover. The companies that are providing insurance have increased insurance premiums substantially – as much as 600%. Insurance premiums vary depending not only on the activity but how often, and where it is carried out etc. Several agritourism operators are paying premiums in excess of \$3,000 pa. Therefore, becoming cost prohibitive for people to enter the agritourism industry.

Meetings are being held to see if a New Zealand insurance scheme can be introduced in Australia, although this Accident and Compensation Scheme is not without its problems.

3.3 PUBLIC AMENITIES

Toilets are a local government responsibility and potential agritourism operators need to check with their own councils to see what the regulations are. In some cases it may

be necessary to have toilets built and the expense of doing this on some farms could be prohibitive. Disabled access to toilets is also another consideration.

Some properties do not have suitable wet weather shelter ie a building/room that can comfortably seat 45 people. If one is to be built a planning permit will be required by the shire council.

3.4 FOOD HANDLING LAWS

Food scares in recent years have promoted governments to respond. The previous Victorian government brought in strict guidelines, which many businesses found to be prohibitive, and it became an election issue. Many businesses in rural communities closed because they could not comply with the new laws. Different regulations have been brought in that are fairer than what was first proposed; it depends on what food handling is actually done.

Courses have been provided throughout the region, and from January 2002 in Victoria food plans have to be submitted by people involved in providing food to the public. An example of the registration cost and annual fee for an agritourism operator based in Indigo Shire in North East Victoria is \$257.50 for a Class B2 registration. This Class covers 'a food premises or food vehicle employing 19 or fewer full time equivalent employees and selling unpacked potentially hazardous foods which are not intended to be consumed or cooked or otherwise treated immediately prior to consumption'. The Food Premises Code covers a variety of subjects from the premises and the fittings, appliances and equipment used for personal hygiene and everything associated with the food itself (its preparation, storage, transportation etc). NSW does not have the same laws as Victoria but could follow a similar path in the future.

3.5 INFORMATION ON AGRITOURISM AND NATURE (ECO) TOURISM

At public meetings and consultations there was a constant request for more information on these two new tourism products. There has been no organised promotional campaign on agritourism and nature (eco) tourism in the AWACC region. It has not been a priority of State Government tourism departments and therefore much work needs to be done to raise the profile and benefits of agri and nature (eco) tourism. The attendance of 75 people at the 10 August workshop showed the level of interest there is in establishing strategies to implement nature (eco) tourism in the region.

The skills questionnaire sent back by current tourism operators also showed that they wanted more information on the tourism products that they are currently involved with, much work needs to be done in this area.

4.0 CITY AND SHIRE COUNCILS

4.1 VICTORIAN COUNCILS
CITY OF WODONGA
INDIGO SHIRE
TOWONG SHIRE

4.2 NSW COUNCILS
CITY OF ALBURY
HUME SHIRE
CULCAIRN SHIRE
HOLBROOK SHIRE
COROWA SHIRE
URANA SHIRE
TUMBARUMBA SHIRE
TUMUT SHIRE

Encouraging interest is being shown by regional shires in developing their tourism activities. However, major strategies are needed both within Shires plus an overriding regional tourism strategy to make it become a reality. All the 'natural attractions' are in place as well as the farming properties for agritourism activities. A co-coordinated regional approach will bring great benefits to the AWACC area Councils were consulted on what they believed were their 'assets' in relation to the new tourism products, the text below demonstrates the potential to work together and combine the 'assets' for the greater good of the region.

4.1 VICTORIAN SHIRE COUNCILS

THE CITY OF WODONGA

The City of Wodonga is located along the Hume Highway and on the south bank of the Murray River. Wodonga is one of rural Victoria's fastest growing regional areas, based on demographic data. It includes a rural sector as well as an established urban and retail sector. The vision of the City Council is 'to be a leading growth centre providing a quality lifestyle for our Community'.

There are over 45 km of bike/walking paths that provide an opportunity to meander by the river or enjoy one of the scenic routes that link the City. Picturesque parks and gardens are dotted throughout the community. Parklands Albury Wodonga Inc is playing an increasing role in preserving and enhancing park and bushland areas in the Shire. The High Country Rail Trail project is underway and will be a popular attraction for people wishing to walk or ride their bikes along the old railway line. The Hume & Hovell Walking Track passes through the municipality.

In recent times the City Council has been working towards developing attractions on Gateway Island. The Council funds the Gateway Island Visitor Information Centre, which is the key tourism information centre in the region. An average of 400 visitors per day come to the Centre. A proof of concept study has been completed which explores the possibility of establishing a National Rivers Discovery Centre on the Island. Plans are underway to establish interpretive walking tracks along the Murray River.

Wodonga has a total area of agricultural holdings of 25,000 hectares. Beef cattle generate the most agricultural income followed by milk production, wool, sheep meat, nursery industry and hay.

A large meat processing abattoir is located in the City and so is the Uncle Ben's factory – both of which employ large numbers of people. The Wodonga saleyards and exhibition centre are also a significant asset to the City, with regular sales and events being held – it has become a draw card in its own right.

The City Council has opportunities to develop a strong ecotourism business on Gateway Island. The area involved is substantial and the location on the Hume Highway and the Murray River provides easy access for visitors.

INDIGO SHIRE COUNCIL

Situated in North East Victoria, Indigo Shire is made up of the historic towns of Beechworth, Yackandandah, Chiltern, Rutherglen and Wahgunyah. This Shire has many advantages given not only its geographic location but also an active tourism industry. There are many natural and cultural attractions and the most diverse agricultural base of all the Shires in the project. Therefore the Shire is well placed to become a key player in agritourism and nature (eco) tourism.

Natural attractions include: Woolshed Falls, Beechworth Historic Park that consists of rugged granite outcrops and a diverse range of flora and fauna; Stanley State Forest and Plateau; Murrungee Lookout; Clark Corner; Bates Dam; Great views from the summit of Mt. Pilot and the Aboriginal rock art site Yeddonba. Chiltern Box-Ironbark National Park has become a draw card for bush lovers and bird watchers – endangered regent honey-eater lives there. The Shire also has part of the beautiful Kiewa Valley in its boundaries. Many different types of agricultural pursuits are practiced in the Shire from berries to snow peas in the high country to broadacre prime lamb farming around the Rutherglen wine area. The Murray River forms one of the Shire boundaries and there are numerous creeks that have walking tracks along them.

Of particular note is the Chiltern Box-Ironbark National Park that surrounds Chiltern. Box-ironbark country is almost a 'forgotten forest'. Once widespread throughout Victoria it is now confined to isolated pockets across the State. Proclaimed in 1997 the National Park protects several historic sites associated with early mining practices as well as significant flora and fauna. Another draw card for people to this area are the wildflowers and those seeking out rare plants. The Park is accessed easily and quickly from town and there is a network of mostly all-weather gravel roads once in the park.

This Park is the habitat of several rare or threatened species – the Regent Honeyeater, Swift Parrot, Turquoise Parrot, Peregrine Falcon, the Brush-tailed Phascogale and Squirrel Glider. The best time to see birds is in winter and spring when the ironbarks are in bloom. More than 220 bird species have been recorded in the area. Eastern Grey Kangaroos, Feathertail and Sugar Gliders, Brushtail and Ringtail Possums live in the Park. Shortly, a guide to birdwatching in Chiltern will be released.

Efforts are being made to combine the Chiltern Park with the Mt. Pilot Multi-purpose Park and create the Chiltern-Pilot National Park. This will greatly increase the opportunities for nature and eco tourism activities for Indigo Shire.

The Shire has a Tourism Marketing Plan with its goal being:

'Market Indigo Shire as the premier tourist destination of Victoria's North East to increase tourism yield and visitation to Indigo Shire.'

Included in the plan is Ecotourism and on completion of this project a meeting will be held to discuss this further.

The Shire's corporate plan has a section headed

"Strategically Plan in an Environmentally Sustainable Manner"

Major Strategies being:

1. Ensure ecologically sustainable development through integrated land use planning.
2. Protect the heritage features of the historic towns – built and natural

3. Ensure waste management systems are ecologically and financially sustainable and comply with State Government Waste Minimization Policy.
4. Ensure protection of the Shires physical environment.
5. Promote community awareness of the need for environmental sustainability

This Shire celebrates throughout the year through having festivals and events program. The Rutherglen Wine Makers have a comprehensive event program that attracts wine lovers from near and far. The annual Beechworth Harvest Festival showcases regional food and wine and attracts more than 15,000 people. The Chiltern community celebrates each year with their Ironbark festival, which includes interpretive walks and talks in the National Park that surrounds the town. The Shire has part of the Murray to the Mountains Rail Trail within its boundaries, which provides further opportunities for walkers and cyclists to enjoy the natural attractions along the way.

Indigo Shire has a rich and diverse agricultural base. It has an innovative culture operating in the new and emerging agricultural industries based in the Shire. Apples, chestnuts and a range of berry fruits are grown; there is a new olive industry underway. The three largest agricultural industries are milk production, processed timber and beef cattle. Pig meat is also important along with the production of prime lambs, pasture hay and wool.

The natural, agriculture, heritage and cultural assets of this Shire are significant along with a very active 'green movement'. Indigo Shire has the potential of being a major regional player in the development of agritourism and nature (eco) tourism.

TOWONG SHIRE COUNCIL

Towong Shire is located in North East Victoria and is large – 6,500 sq km and encompasses some of Australia's most pristine environment. Over 66% of the Shire is made up of State and National Parks. Council has developed a marketing strategy to promote the shire's clean and green image. A "PURE attraction" campaign has been developed that will enable tourism, agribusiness and community sectors to unite, strengthen and be promoted by using a generic brand, optimising future marketing potential. All signage and promotional material will also incorporate the PURE identity.

The Shire contains a network of State and National Park Parks including Burrowa-Pine Mountain National Park, Pine Mountain that is a granite monolith one and a half times the size of Uluru. The Shire also includes extensive fertile valleys, the Murray and Mitta Mitta Rivers, Lake Hume and Dartmouth Dams.

It's a fisherman's and nature lover's paradise that is spread across the Shire. There are hidden treasures like the Cudgewa Bluff Falls, and the Kosciusko National Park provides a powerful back drop for the Shire

The Pure Attractions campaign of Towong Shire includes; Pure Adventure, Pure Lakes, Rivers and Streams, Pure Wilderness, Pure History, Pure Cultural Indulgence and Pure Country Hospitality. This new campaign is attracting a lot of attention and assisting with the tourism and economic development of the Shire.

There are three main agriculture industries in the Shire, these being: timber, beef and milk. There is a growing interest in horticultural crops, small peppermint industry and some aquaculture is being undertaken. Seed and vegetable production is also being

trialed. The establishment of a successful organic milk processing plant at Corryong is further enhancing the clean and green image that the Shire is becoming renowned for.

There are many opportunities for Towong Shire to become actively involved in agri and ecotourism. It has a mixture of both traditional agriculture and some new and emerging industries. The Shire has many 'natural attractions' including State and National Parks, significant rivers and streams as well as dams and lakes. All of which provide the necessary ingredients to have a strong nature and eco tourism business in the Shire.

4.2 NSW SHIRE COUNCILS

THE CITY OF ALBURY

The City of Albury is situated on the New South Wales/Victorian border. The City is a business, cultural and residential hub located on the banks of the magnificent Murray River.

Albury is also a leading environmentally conscious community. The City Council's award winning regional phosphorus campaign is recognised as one of Australia's most successful and influential environmental campaigns.

Albury's state-of-the-art Waterview Wastewater Treatment facility is widely recognised as one of the most significant environmental and engineering projects undertaken in Australia in recent years, attracting national and international attention.

The significance of Waterview is the re-use of the reclaimed urban wastewater.

During the warmer months, the water is used to irrigate commercial woodlots, while in the wetter months it is redirected to the Wonga Wetlands.

The Wetlands incorporates seven lagoons covering a surface area of about 80 ha on the Murray River floodplain. Since the creation of Wonga Wetlands, more than 130 bird species have been recorded there, several of which have never been seen in the region before. Even the rare Japanese Snipe has dropped in at Wonga on its northwards migration from Australia to Japan. Other rare species to visit include sea eagles, Eurasian coots, Caspian terns and pink eared ducks.

The City Council has invested \$30 million into the Waterview Wastewater Reclamation Facility. This is a state-of-the-art treatment facility which combines technically advanced purification with a philosophy of beneficially re-using reclaimed water. A laboratory forms part of this facility and provides a quality sampling and chemical testing service to clients in the Murray Valley.

The Council has an agreement with NSW State Forests to jointly develop tree plantations at both Waterview and on the floodplain adjacent to the Wonga Wetlands.

Albury also boasts a number of other environmental initiatives. They include the National Environment Centre (Riverina Institute of TAFE campus), which demonstrates best practice in energy efficiency, waste minimisation and waste reuse.

The new Johnstone Centre at Charles Sturt University campus in Thurgoona has become an icon campus that harvests and re-uses resources rather than taking and wasting them. Located in the same area is the Murray Darling Freshwater Research Centre, which undertakes significant environmental research work.

Other natural and cultural attractions include the Albury Botanic Gardens, Nail Can Hill and the work that Parklands Albury Wodonga Inc is carrying out across the City. Mungabareena Reserve is a significant cultural heritage reserve located on the eastern side of the City. The Reserve is a meeting place for the Aboriginal community. The Hume & Hovell Walking Track is another attraction in the City.

The City Council supports and promotes the Ettamogah Wildlife Sanctuary located on the Hume Highway, 12 km's north of Albury. This sanctuary has a variety of wildlife including koalas, echidnas, wombats, dingoes, possums, gliders and penguins. It is open to the public and visitors can hand feed kangaroos and wallabies. It is also home to some endangered and threatened species.

Part of the City area includes a very small rural area of agricultural holdings (total area of 1,350 ha). Small quantities of triticale is grown, stone fruit produced, beef cattle, some dairy production, pasture hay, flowers and turf, wool and honey. Clearly the City of Albury is not a producer of agricultural commodities, although employment and the flow on effects from agriculture in the project region contribute to the local economy.

There are great opportunities for Albury to showcase its extensive environmental pursuits not only to the general public but to special interests groups as well. Already many groups visit the city's attractions and the development of a nature and eco tourism strategy will increase visitation further.

HUME SHIRE COUNCIL

Hume Shire comprises the NSW region that surrounds the City of Albury. It takes its name from the early explorer, Hamilton Hume, who, together with William Hovell made the first recorded crossing of the Murray River in 1824.

Natural tourism assets in the Shire include the Murray River, Lake Hume, Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre at Burrumbuttock and Table Top Mountain. The Hume & Hovell Walking Track, which traverses the Shire, picnic and reserve areas at Table Top and Bowna add to the attractiveness of this area. The Murray River also forms a significant boundary along the southern edge of the Shire. The West Hume Landcare Group plays an active role in the Shire and, along with others, has contributed to the establishment of Wirraminna at Burrumbuttock.

There are 162,000 ha of agricultural holdings in the Shire. The agricultural industries in the Shire include cereal production for grain. Grains grown include wheat, triticale, oats and barley. Hay legumes and pasture seed are also grown, followed by beef cattle, pig meat processing and wool production. Smaller industries exist including stone fruit (nectarines and peaches), cut flowers and cultivated turf.

The Shire has a growing tourism industry, farm hosting is being practiced and several farming families have opened up their properties for agritourism activities. Several people/organizations are actively working towards the introduction of nature and eco tourism in Hume Shire.

Hobby farming is becoming a feature of this Shire and given its closeness to Albury Wodonga this trend will continue. Different areas in the Shire are being sub-divided into smaller holdings. The Shire's slogan "The Rural Living Alternative" is very appropriate. It is geographically well placed to expand its agriculture and ecotourism activities.

CULCAIRN SHIRE COUNCIL

The Shire of Culcairn has a rich and famous history through two different associations. One is for having the notorious bushranger Dan (Mad Dog) Morgan use a 'natural attraction' - Morgan's Lookout to his advantage. This Lookout is a spectacular white granite formation, which Morgan would use as a hideout and could see anyone who was coming his way. The other association being its fame in agriculture for producing the Headlie Taylor Header – the header created a revolution in agriculture and is regarded as the greatest single contribution to the grain industry worldwide.

It is worth noting that the town of Henty hosts the annual Henty Machinery Field Days that run for three days and attracts more than 50,000 visitors. In modern times Henty has become known as a progressive country town that established the first community bank in the region.

Broadacre farming is practiced with cereals for grain being the major crop and largest industry. Wool is the second largest industry followed by beef cattle. Smaller industries include sheep meat; pasture hay, legumes, pig meat and canola.

The longest creek in the southern hemisphere, Billabong Creek, runs through the Shire. Culcairn was once known as the oasis of the Riverina because of its unlimited underground water supply.

One significant natural feature in the Shire is the Walla Walla Swamp (also known as Gum Swamp). This swamp is classified as a Nationally Important Wetland and covers a 200ha area.

No other wetland, except for The Doodle Comer Swamp at Henty, within 150 km is classified.

The Walla Walla Swamp area is Crown Land and the Culcairn Shire is currently in the process of negotiating trusteeship of the area with the Department of Land & Water Conservation. Fauna that has been identified include 128 species of birds. Plans are underway to form a management committee as it is felt that there are good opportunities to establish a bird observatory and provide passive recreation. Council is seeking assistance to develop projects for the swamp.

Farm hosting is also popular in the Shire and there is interest from many farm people to establish a larger agritourism business in the area. The vision for the Shire is "to continue to develop the Culcairn Shire Council as a desirable rural urban area, capitalising on the unique opportunities available". The Shire is carrying out its vision.

HOLBROOK SHIRE COUNCIL

Located along the Hume Highway north of Albury, Holbrook has much to offer. It is close to the Upper Murray region and the Kosciusko National Park. It has a rich

combination of plains and tall peaks, the Murray River and the new Woomargama National Park, which will create tourism opportunities. This coupled with the Ian Geddes Bush Walk and the Hume & Hovell Walking Track adds to the Shire's tourism assets. Another draw card is the HMAS Otway, which is an Otway class submarine – 400 km from the nearest port and now located on the Hume Highway in the main street of Holbrook.

Holbrook is the centre of a richly diverse rural economy. The district is regarded as the beef capital of the south and other agricultural enterprises include production of fine wool and meat from both sheep and goats, cropping, pasture seed production, tree nurseries, timber plantations as well as a growing wine industry. Timber is playing an ever increasing role with the recently established Austral Softwoods processing plant becoming a major regional employer.

This Shire is home to the Holbrook Landcare Group which is becoming one of the most significant and successful Landcare groups in Australia. Last year alone ten funding applications were successful with grants being received through the Federal Government's Natural Heritage Trust and the NSW State Government totalling \$995,000.

Holbrook Landcare is also playing a major role in a two-State landuse research project called "Heartlands", a joint venture between CSIRO and the Murray Darling Basin Commission. The project is looking at the effects of current land uses and land use changes. The NSW component is centred on the Eastern Billabong Creek Catchment, which includes the Holbrook Landcare area.

As a key part of the drive to reduce salinity impacts, it will study what is needed to make farm forestry viable in lower rainfall areas. Since the Heartlands launch, a number of other major research projects have also chosen to focus on Billabong Creek, making the area more important still.

Other significant Landcare projects being undertaken include "Rebirding the Holbrook landscape" which aims to revegetate and enhance 2,000 hectares of bush. There are 85 properties already committed to the project.

Funding support is available for fencing and planting trees and shrubs. Other funding has been secured to better manage nine local wetlands.

Holbrook has significant opportunities to develop a strong ecotourism and agri- tourism business. The on ground commitment to Landcare by farmers and the local community and the rich agricultural base provide the necessary ingredients to move forward.

COROWA SHIRE COUNCIL

Corowa is located downstream from Albury Wodonga with the township located on the Murray River. The town's slogan is 'Corowa – Heart of the Majestic Murray'.

The Corowa and District Tourism Association Inc are responsible for promotion and development of tourism in the Corowa region. They have a marketing plan and see opportunities for agriculture tourism. Some of the Shire's agriculture captured the attention of famous artist Tom Roberts who was inspired to paint "Shearing of the Rams & The Breakaway" at Killeneen, a local property.

Natural attractions include an existing wetland opposite the Ball Park Caravan Park on Bridge Street, in Corowa. Three new wetlands are currently being developed to treat drainage before it enters the Murray River. Corowa Ponds Bird Sanctuary located off Spring Drive, Corowa has some 100 species of wetland birds, including rare freckled ducks. Visitors in spring enjoy the wonderful flora in the Redlands Hill Reserve display.

The Murray River provides many opportunities for visitors and there are two sand bank swimming pools located in the area. Downstream from Corowa is the township of Mulwala with Lake Mulwala being the aquatic playground of the region.

Corowa is a wealthy Shire in terms of its agriculture. There are over 250 operating agricultural establishments on farm units that range in size from around 100 hectares to over 1000 hectares. Major products of the Shire Council area include wheat, barley, maize, canola, wool and livestock (sheep, cattle and pigs).

The main industry is pig meat processing which generates more than 50% of total agricultural income to the local economy. The second largest industry is the grain industry, which includes wheat, barley, maize and canola and oats. There are also poultry, sheep and beef meats, vegetables, pasture for hay, oil seed and legumes for grain industries located in the Shire.

Agritourism and ecotourism are not strong features of the Shire at the moment but with commitment and support they hold great potential.

There are opportunities in the Shire to showcase broadacre farming activities and to promote the Murray River and its associated wetlands and birdlife.

URANA SHIRE COUNCIL

The Urana Shire Council is located in the heart of the Riverina approximately 110 kms from the major regional centres of Albury and Wagga Wagga. The Shire is 3,361 sq. kms in area with a population of 1,600.

The Shire is a place of rolling foothills that merge with spreading plains. In the last Ice Age a huge river flowed through the Shire. This is why today the Shire has so many creeks and billabongs, with gentle undulations in some places. The Shire is renowned for its flatness.

Some of the natural and cultural features in the Shire include Lakes Urana, Cullivel and Uranagong. Creeks – Urana, Colombo, Cocketgedong, Billabong, Nowranie, Coonong and Yanco. Aboriginal sites are at Lake Urana and at the Aboriginal Caves. As Urana has a permanent water supply it was a popular camping place for the local Wiradjiri tribe. State Forests: Cullivel, Widgiewa and Morundah. Nature Reserves: Urana Dam, Lake Urana, Uranagong and Coonong Reserve. This makes the Shire ideal for camping, fishing, yabbing and water sports. There are numerous places to camp within the Shire and some property owners allow camping on their property.

The Shire is trustee of a 100 hectare remnant of almost untouched Grey Box woodland. A local committee has been formed to help manage the area. This site has provided local residents with an appreciation of the bush, native shrub and ground layer plants and the presence of rare woodland birds.

One of the impressive features of the Shire is Lake Urana covering an area of over 40 square kms. This huge lake surrounded on three sides by lunar dunes is an impressive sight on what otherwise is a fairly barren landscape.

Rich pastoral history is located equal distance between the Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers. Urana became a place where 'bullock drivers and teamsters carrying goods to and from the station properties to North and South, to East and West found an excellent camping place beside a creek and lake nearly always containing some water...a site most suitable'.

Visits can be made to the historic Coonong Station where the early irrigation attempts by Sir Samuel McCaughey can be seen.

Today the main agriculture is dry grain/sheep farming with main crops being wheat, barley, oats, clover and triticali. Life in the Shire revolves around the agricultural seasons and nearly everyone in the Shire is dependent upon agriculture in one way or another.

As this Shire is very different from other parts of the AWACC region there are opportunities to develop both agriculture and ecotourism.

The sheer size of the farming properties and their broadacre farming activities appeal not only to the general public but to special interest groups.

Furthermore, the interesting lake, creek, billabong, state forest and nature reserve system in the Shire supports flora and fauna that is not found in other parts of the region. A more comprehensive study of the Shire and its tourism potential would reveal much.

TUMBARUMBA SHIRE COUNCIL

Tumbarumba Shire is located in NSW on the western side of the Australian Alps. It is made up of a powerful combination of snow-capped mountains in winter, forested slopes and gorges and rolling green pastures. From Mt. Kosciusko to the Tumbarumba foothills the terrain is rich with forests, bushland, wildlife, vines and orchards, grazing pastures, river flats, valleys and hills.

NSW Parks & Wildlife Service and State Forests manage over 60% of the Shire. The mountain wilderness produces many rivers and streams including the upper reaches of the Murray, the Swampy Plain, the Geehi, the Tooma and Paddy's River. There are numerous walking tracks including the Hume and Hovell Walking Track.

The small town of Khancoban is located in the southern part of Tumbarumba Shire along the Alpine Way. It is an important gateway/exit into North East Victoria from Kosciusko and the snowfields. There are opportunities to develop the Strzlecki trek from Khancoban to Kosciusko. The Mighty Murray River is nearby as well as the Khancoban Pondage and the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Authority – Power Station. There are many opportunities for fishing, bushwalking, outdoor activities such as canoeing and white water rafting. The town has great tourism potential because of its location in the Australian Alps area.

The dominant agricultural industry in the Shire is timber generating over 80% of total agricultural income. The traditional industries such as beef and dairy are the second and third largest industries. There is a well organised pome fruit industry, which runs along the ridges between Tumbarumba and Tumut. This industry generates significant flow-on effects to the local economy though the benefit of employment in harvesting, packing, distribution and transport of the fruit.

The Shire is quickly establishing itself as one of Australia's premium cool-climate wine growing regions. Currently there exist 30 vineyards, many producing under their own labels. Despite the number of people growing grapes there is currently no cellar door opportunities. Other industries in the Shire are wool production, pasture seed, cut flowers, cultivated turf and pasture hay. There is also a growing blue berry industry that is exporting product across the world.

This Shire has great potential for both agriculture and ecotourism. It has all the 'natural attractions' and the diverse agriculture base required to develop these new tourism products. Support and commitment along with a good marketing plan would reap substantial tourism benefits for Tumbarumba Shire.

TUMUT SHIRE COUNCIL

Tumut is located on the Snowy Mountains Highway, 20 minutes east of the Hume Highway from Gundagai. It is situated directly north of Tumbarumba Shire. From its agricultural beginnings, the Tumut area has seen a great deal of economic investment linked to a wide diversification of activity.

The establishment of significant pine plantations over the years has been the base for major investment in many of the forest and forest products activities from plantation management, through timber processing to wood pulp and paper manufacture. The newly established Visy Pulp and Paper Mill represents an investment of \$400 million.

It is also a fine example of modern day thinking by having 'environmentally' friendly processing techniques.

Although Tumut Shire is not in the AWACC region, it was decided that it be included in this project for the following reasons. It is the northern gateway into the region and has many complimentary agriculture and nature (eco) attractions. It is part of the Australian Alps traveling route for visitors who wish to enjoy natural attractions. Furthermore, the township of Tumut is blessed with a strong accommodation base which few regional towns have; therefore it is ideal for the group travel being processed in this project.

The newly formed Tumut Region Tourist Association is undertaking research to develop a tourism strategy for the Shire. This strategy will help identify the directions and developments that the Tumut Region requires.

Key points being looked at in the tourism strategy include working co-operatively with other regional tourism bodies, developing co-operative arrangements for marketing products and establishing group and private tours within the agricultural sector. This could include but is not limited to cattle, sheep, horticultural properties and the timber industry. There are a range of agricultural pursuits in the Shire including - sown pastures, grains and oilseed crops, millet, vegetables, pigs, goats, alpacas, venison, fruit (mainly apples and stone fruit), flower cultivation, harvesting base botanical

ingredients for the pharmaceutical industry, bee keeping, honey production, cool climate grape production, aquaculture and horse training and breeding.

Other initiatives that Tumut Shire will be involved with include; Promotion of the Kosciusko National Park and State Forests, eco tours, hiking, abseiling, caving, white water rafting, fishing and guided fishing tours, horse riding; NPWS Discovery program (Ranger guided tours and activities within National Park), camping, mountain biking and ski tours.

Develop aqua-culture, tours and fishing at fish hatcheries; development of 4WD tag-a-long tours and self guided; promotion of the hydro power, tours of dams, power stations and other facilities will also be investigated.

The natural assets of Tumut are numerous, the town is situated on the Tumut River, there are many established walking tracks including the Hume & Hovell Walking Track. It is also one of the region's best fishing areas. Significant natural attractions in the Shire include; Yarrangobilly Caves located 77 km from Tumut, Thermal Pool, Coleman Plain/Blue Water Holes and Cave Creek

5.0 NATURE AND ECOTOURISM

**5.1 KEY ISSUES FOR
CONSIDERATION**

5.2 KEY OBJECTIVES

**5.3 ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
AND MANAGEMENT**

**5.4 ECOTOURISM INDUSTRY
DEVELOPMENT**

**5.5 INFRASTRUCTURE
DEVELOPMENT**

5.6 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Nature tourism can be a range of experiences which take place in a natural area and meet the standards of environmental sustainability. Ecotourism encompasses many things including having certified guides take people on flora and fauna walks and learning about Aboriginal cultural heritage.

The ecotourism definition used by the National Ecotourism Strategy (Commonwealth Department of Tourism) is:

Ecotourism is nature-based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable.

Ecotourism is tourism that focuses on natural and cultural products while striving to achieve sustainability. It is a relationship between tourism, the natural environment and the local community. Eco-tourism is labour and knowledge intensive. It encourages dispersion of income directly to regional areas rather than to larger urban areas. Ecotourism is an unobtrusive development reflecting environmental values and provides the opportunity for economic growth across other community based service providers.

Queensland and Western Australia have embraced ecotourism with outstanding results. There is much to be gained from learning from their experience. The following is representative of the issues they have considered and the key objectives they work with. All of which can be followed in the AWACC region planning for the introduction of ecotourism.

Attachment 10.3 in this report is a sample of considerations for Ecotourism Planning.

5.1 KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION WHEN INTRODUCING ECOTOURISM INTO THE AWACC REGION

1. The conservation of the natural environment is essential for ecotourism and its development.

Ecotourism operators rely on the natural environment which they present to visitors. There is a large landcare and green movement in the region who understand and appreciate the natural environment and conservation.

2. The natural resources of North East Victoria and the South West Riverina of NSW are of exceptional quality and diversity providing the platform to develop a variety of ecotourism experiences.

There is a rich tapestry of high country and broadacre areas in the region where the soils, vegetation, climate, flora and fauna vary substantially.

3. There is a growing demand for experiences that go beyond traditional 'sightseeing' and nature-based tourism -ecotourism meets this demand.

An example of this being; touring across the Australian Alps and taking in the beauty (nature based experience) versus having a certified guide explaining and interpreting the ecology and geology of the Alps (ecotourism experience). This eco activity provides a more intense and interactive experience with the natural environment leading to a better understanding of and relationship with nature.

4. Ecotourism should be integrated into and become part of the local tourism industry.

Ecotourism has the potential of being an active participant and contributor to the tourism product range being offered in the AWACC region. It can complement existing tourism products and link in with accommodation, transport and other tourism related activities and service providers, for example including a one-day ecotourism experience into a 5-day stay package offered by local motels.

Eco-tourism has the potential to contribute significantly to the local, state and regional economies.

5. Ecotourism can be a model for other forms of tourism

Ecotourism is a new industry. It can be a model for other forms of tourism to follow. It provides environmentally responsible planning, design, management and operation practices that the mainstream tourism industry is starting to act upon. Ideally, ecotourism uses best environmental practice and demonstrates environmentally responsible tourism. Ecotourism enhances awareness and appreciation of the natural environment and encourages values that benefit the environment. Ecotourism is about being ecologically sustainable and influencing communities and visitors. It is also about influencing the tourism industry's behaviour in ways that minimise environmental impacts, protect the environment and contribute to conservation.

PRINCIPLES OF ECOTOURISM

- **The setting.** Ecotourism involves natural areas in general, protected areas, and/or places with special biological, ecological or cultural interest.
- **Conservation benefits.** Ecotourism must benefit conservation. Tourism that does not have some form of conservation benefit is not, we would suggest, ecotourism. The benefit can of course be considered as net benefit and include: changed community norms through education and consequently political and social priorities; generating income, which can be used for management as well as influencing political and social priorities. Of necessity ecotourism must be low impact or at least well-managed.
- **Benefits to local people.** Ecotourism should generate economic, cultural and social benefits for local people. This may be in the form of increased employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, or equally it may be by way of strengthening specific cultural traits or values. At the very least, ecotourism should have net benefit on local social and economic development.
- **The tourism experience.** Ecotourism should include components of education and interpretation of the natural and cultural aspects of a place. Visitors should learn about and develop a respect for the culture of the places they visit, and develop an understanding of nature and natural processes for that place, and through this process, for other places and conservation in general.

5.2 KEY OBJECTIVES

There are four key objectives for implementing ecotourism into an area.

These objectives are:

- β Environmental Protection and Management;
- β Ecotourism Industry Development;

- β Infrastructure Development and
- β Community Development.

If the AWACC region is going to become an ecotourism destination then a framework needs to be established from which to work. The following is a start to producing a model to work from.

5.3 ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT

STRATEGY 1 - IDENTIFICATION OF AREAS WITH HIGH NATURAL AND CULTURAL VALUES

A methodology must be developed to allow agencies to assess natural and associated cultural values consistently. Effective protection and management require a sound understanding of the natural environment and human impact.

Compile a database and inventory of areas with ecotourism potential

Each area of the region should be assessed for its ecotourism potential. Many different organisations collect and hold ecotourism related data. The fragmentation hampers planning and causes unnecessary duplication. A central area for information is needed, especially in the AWACC region, as two states are part of it. However, some culturally sensitive information would need to be held by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities.

STRATEGY 2 – MANAGEMENT PLANNING

Consistent, State-wide management planning guidelines

Environmental protection is achieved through the use of sophisticated methods, including management planning, zoning and permitting. To maximise their effectiveness and reduce the regulatory burden, these systems should be consistent and complementary. By developing consistent guidelines for ecotourism, and processes that include the industry and the community, planning processes can be made more consistent, efficient, simple to negotiate and less expensive. A common approach and an associated reduction in the number of permits required would streamline the planning and management process.

Potential ecotourism operators, local, state and federal government officers and other interested parties need to link in with the Ecotourism Association of Australia and other appropriate groups to work towards consistent guidelines.

Planning in State forest, National parks and other protected areas.

Management plans have been or are being prepared for many protected areas under government control and managers of private lands will be encouraged to develop similar plans.

These plans will identify areas of natural and associated cultural significance and provide for ecotourism activities and infrastructure development.

The integrated decision making processes will determine the location, size and type of ecotourism activities permitted in protected areas or selected to occur in other natural areas. These decisions will be made within the framework of management plans, zoning plans and systems for issuing permits. Management strategies will be fine-

tuned to ensure the environment is protected. Due to natural or cultural sensitivities, some areas will not be available for visitation. When developed in consultation with all interested parties, including representatives of the tourism industry and community groups, management plans are more likely to gain community support and commitment.

In the AWACC region there has been strong support from the relevant State and Federal government departments towards operators who use park/forest areas.

Guidelines on allowable activities and sustainable use levels

National parks are a natural focus for ecotourism. Commercial tour operators can obtain permits for activities such as bushwalking, boating, camping, bird and other wildlife watching and ecological or cultural educational tours. Consistent, State-wide guidelines on allowable activities and sustainable levels of use need to be prepared to help guide the development of ecotourism services. An extensive consultative process needs to occur between business, government and the community to establish the guidelines. It would be most beneficial if the same guidelines apply to both sides of the Victorian and New South Wales border.

Integrated systems of permits and fees

Revenue from camping fees and commercial permit fees contribute to covering the cost of managing parks and maintaining infrastructure.

Current permit systems and applications vary between agencies. In relation to ecotourism, as with other land-use decisions, the criteria for decision making should be consistent and made on sound planning and environmental criteria, regardless of the agency responsible.

Impact monitoring

In order to protect the environment on which ecotourism relies, basic monitoring guidelines will be needed to allow the impact of ecotourism to be assessed. A committee or organisation needs to be in place that can provide this assessment.

Government/industry co-operation

The government and the ecotourism industry must work together to develop the industry while conserving natural areas. Areas of co-operation include marketing ecotourism in a way that protects the environment and furthers the industry, preparing guides on planning and approval processes and providing a networking service for the government, community and private sectors.

TOUR OPERATOR PERMITS

Below is the relevant information that relates to the area that the AWACC covers. Permits are required for people who wish to enter State, National Parks and Reserves.

There are different requirements and therefore it is essential that consultation occur with the appropriate government departments. Below is an overview of the requirements with contact details for people who wish to proceed further.

VICTORIA

PARKS VICTORIA AND DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT (DNRE)

Three year Tour Operator permits are acquired through the Parks Victoria/Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DNRE). Details are required on the location that the tours will be conducted from, the size of groups, number of vehicles, tour frequency, number of trips per year.

- Permit renewal fee; 1 year \$55, 3 year permit (Parks Victoria accepted accreditation), \$165.
- Public Land Use Fees and Entrance Fees: Tour Operators are required to pay a public land use fee of \$1.10 per person/per day for all tours. The public land use fee payable for school groups, led by a licensed tour operator, is 75 cents per person per day. The maximum amount in public use fees payable by a tour operator during the 2001/2002 year is \$5,500.
- Other Fees – Tour Operators must pay entrance fees, accommodation and camping fees where designated on public land areas.
- Public Liability Insurance of no less than \$10 million. An employer's liability and workers' compensation policy, which covers any damage, loss or liability, suffered or incurred by any person engaged by the permit holder.

Activities that attract permits and fees are: birdwatching, bushwalking, spotlight/nightwalks, caving, boat tours, canoeing, four wheel drive tours etc.

Further information contact:

Parks Victoria: www.parkweb.vic.gov.au Phone: 13 1963

Parks Victoria/DNRE currently recognises the following operator accredited programs (or equivalent); as at May 2001 which have been endorsed by the Australian Tourism Accreditation Authority: Better Business Program and Caravan Industry Australia.

Parks Victoria/DNRE also recognises the National Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP), as it is a national program that promotes environmentally sustainable tourism.

CONTACTS:

Ecotourism Association of Australia (EAA) and NEAP Program –

Phone: 07 3229 5550.

Website: www.ecotourism.org.au

Tourism Accreditation Board of Victoria Phone: 03 9654 5864

Australian Tourism Operators Network Phone: 1800 245 558

Victoria Tourism Operators Association Phone: 03 9614 8855.

Website: www.vtoa.asn.au

NSW

NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service is responsible for the issuing of licences to conduct commercial recreation activities on National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) lands.

The 8 NSW Shires covered in the AWACC project area are serviced from 3 different offices – see contacts below.

For people wishing to operate in State parks the following applies; Application fee is \$148.50 and the annual fee \$300, a \$10 million public liability cover is also required. The Service charges commercial operators \$4.95 per adult per day, \$2.20 per child per day and \$6.60 per person on a coach.

The Service has recently developed a Licensed Tour Operators Kit, which comprises two videos and an information manual. The manual provides information on Australia's unique biodiversity, on national parks and other protected areas, and on the role of ecotourism operations in national parks. This will assist the operator to produce a quality experience for their customers and help them meet licence conditions.

CONTACTS:

Khancoban area - Fiona Solomon - Jindabyne office.

Phone: 02 6450 5555

Part of South West Slopes of NSW – Rob Perry - Tumut office –

Phone: 02 6947 7000

Corowa, Urana and part of Culcairn Shires – Colin Killick – Griffith office –

Phone: 02 6966 8100

5.4 ECOTOURISM INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGY 1: PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Ecotourists have different needs depending on their knowledge of ecosystems, time and budgets, preferred methods of travel and experience. They travel as individuals, couples and families, in small and large groups and share a desire to learn about the natural environment. Some wish to pursue special interests such as geology, bird

watching, spotlighting and exploring wildlife in various habitats. There are many opportunities to offer a diverse range of ecotourism products in the project region.

Management, interpretation, safety and service skills training

Ecotourism operators and their employees require specialised training in areas such as ecology, environmental education, environmental and resource management, communication and business skills. Training should be competency based, tailored to the particular requirements of the industry and provided in a culturally-appropriate manner. It should not be self-regulated.

Best practice

NSW and Victorian governments/agencies and the industry should offer best practice in tourism operations, presentation, environmental management and safety. The process involved needs to be monitored to ensure choice is available, quality is maintained and reasonable visitor expectations are met.

The region's natural resources provide world-class opportunities for ecotourism. Adoption of the National Ecotourism Accreditation Program is a good start.

National Ecotourism Accreditation Program

The Ecotourism Association of Australia, the Australian Tourism Operators Association and the Tourism Council of Australia have developed the National Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP). Financial assistance has come from the office of National Tourism to develop the professionalism of ecotourism and to provide a discernable means of selecting genuine ecotourism products.

NEAP is also about establishing a minimum standard for providing ecotourism products and services.

Accreditation provides industry and consumers with an assurance that an accredited ecotourism product is backed by a commitment to best practice environmental management and to the provision of quality ecotourism experiences. Operators should be encouraged and assisted to become NEAP accredited.

There is an **EcoGuide Program** for nature and ecotour guides committed to providing quality experiences that are safe, culturally sensitive and environmentally sustainable.

Develop training on risk assessment and safety

There are hazards associated with tourism in natural settings and it is important the risks be identified and assessed. It is essential all ecotourism operators hold necessary insurances and public liability policies and meet all requirements for their operation.

Measure contribution of ecotourism to the economy

Measures should be developed to assess the contribution of ecotourism to the economy. Research needs to be encouraged and outcomes measured on the benefits and contributions that ecotourism makes to the economy. This will encourage the acceptable and update of people being involved in the ecotourism industry

STRATEGY 2 - MARKETING AND PROMOTION

Determine attributes that make North East Victoria and the South West Riverina of NSW ecotourism unique.

Special and unique ecotourism products should be identified and used to create a clearly defined market for our region.

Identification of ecotourism markets

There is a need to identify desired ecotourism experiences and target markets. The Market for special interest tourism is increasing. These visitors include bird watchers, geologists, palaeontologists, naturalists, bushwalkers and those with a particular interest in indigenous culture.

Packaging ecotourism

Ecotourism should be presented as part of a wider range of tourism opportunities as well as a specific niche market.

There is the potential to market ecotourism with other forms of special interest tourism, for example nature-based tourism, cultural tourism or rural tourism. It is important that ecotourism opportunities are identified at a regional level.

Marketing

Marketing can assist the management of natural areas. Heavy promotion of well known natural areas has resulted in some receiving potentially detrimental levels of visitation. Promoting areas before necessary infrastructure is available can degrade the resource and restrict future potential.

Marketing should be undertaken co-operatively with natural resource managers to ensure that the areas being promoted have the capacity to cope with the anticipated visitation. Alternative destinations should be marketed to spread visitation. Local communities, regions and different tourism types can market ecotourism co-operatively to attract target market segments and encourage longer stays. Marketing could be approached on a cyclical basis with attractions possibly given a rest for 12 months on a rotating basis.

Market research on expectations and level of satisfaction

It is important that the success and effectiveness of marketing and promotion efforts be monitored and assessed. Evaluation results can be used when preparing future marketing campaigns and in product development and operation.

5.5 INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGY 1 – INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Appropriate infrastructure and innovative technology

As ecotourism is an activity based on the natural environment, supporting infrastructure must be designed to minimise human impacts and be in harmony with the landscape. Examples of this infrastructure include facilities such as boardwalks, toilets, lookouts, interpretive displays and educational centres. Guidelines do exist, so it is important that approaches be made to the appropriate government departments to see what is or isn't in place. High visitation areas require much attention and other locations may require minimal infrastructure that is suitable for 'self reliant' or 'small group' ecotourism.

Ecotourism has a role to play in applying environmentally sensitive or 'alternative' technologies to real world situations. It offers the opportunity to trial specialised waste minimisation and energy efficient technologies that can have wider application both in and outside the tourism industry. A good example would be the City of Albury's attractions including the Waterview Wastewater Treatment facility and its re-use of the reclaimed urban wastewater.

Establishing a 'pure' ecotourism infrastructure product is expensive and not for the short term planners.

The roles of State and Federal agencies, community and private sectors in infrastructure provision should be defined.

Accommodation

Tourists seek varying types of accommodation from basic bush camping to built accommodation. Land tenure will decide style of accommodation. Freehold land can be used for a range of accommodation.

National Parks and State Forests and other natural areas under control will have Acts governing what is acceptable or not.

Support should be provided to landholders wishing to provide environmentally sustainable accommodation.

The support could include advice on technology and design and councils should also provide infrastructure and encourage the environmentally sustainable buildings and adoption of technologies.

Presentation facilities and services

Presentation facilities are needed to facilitate ecotourism's educational and interpretive components. Things such as self guided trails, interpretive brochures, interpretive walking tracks, information signs and displays and video displays.

Support the development of education displays, interpretation for public area infrastructure and provide assistance to private operators seeking to develop an interpretive aspect to their own product.

5.6 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGY 1 – LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Local communities should benefit from ecotourism:

Although all tourism has the potential to have both positive and negative effects. In order to maximise the benefits, local communities should be represented on decision-making and advisory forums, goods and services should be procured locally where possible and there should be job opportunities for local people. The impact of tourism can be minimised through consultation and sensitive design of tourism infrastructure and services.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in ecotourism and land management

The intimate association of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with the land is well recognised. As a nature-based activity, ecotourism offers opportunities for indigenous communities to benefit from this association. Individuals can be involved as operators, goods and services providers, employees, guides and trainers, or as participants in ecotourism planning, management and operation. Materials should be produced and support provided to foster Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in ecotourism.

Interaction with visitors

The local community's attitudes towards visitors are important to the visitor's experience and satisfaction and ultimately, to the image of the destination visited. Local communities should be able to determine their preferred form and level of interaction with visitors. Awareness needs to be raised at local community level of job opportunities offered by tourism development. The awareness should also cover the issues that will need to be faced.

Environmental and cultural education programs are needed to minimise environmental impact and raise environmental awareness. Ecotourism marketing should include environmental education and interpretation elements to help create realistic visitor expectations, satisfy ecotourists' desire to know about the natural environment, enable them to take action to minimise impacts and to understand the reasons for resource management decisions.

Codes of practice for visitors, operators and government

Codes of practice have the potential to foster ecologically sustainable tourism development and visitor activity. These codes of practice could become marketing tools and be incorporated into marketing campaigns. Research into existing codes could be developed for the local industry

Develop materials for non-English speaking people

Materials should be developed in a wide range of languages to present ecotourism services and environmental responsibilities to the widest audience possible.

6.0 AGRITOURISM

6.1 AGRITOURISM DEVELOPMENT

6.2 REQUIREMENTS FOR PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

6.3 MARKETING THE AGRITOURISM PRODUCT

Agritourism (agricultural tourism) includes having people pay to visit and/or stay on farms to experience rural life and or learn about different farming activities. It can and does include a host of different rural experiences where it can be a passive experience such as watching animals graze to active participation such as mustering and handling livestock.

Agritourism does offer a huge range of choice and experience for visitors of all ages. Technical study visits to farms are increasing, especially from inbound tour groups. These tours being organised by travel agents bringing in overseas clients. There is a demand for more farm people to provide all inclusive farmstays for overseas visitors who wish to have a real Australian farm experience. Self-contained accommodation on farms for Australian families is also in demand.

There is a diverse range of farming activities being undertaken in North East Victoria and in the Southern Riverina of NSW. Some farms are open for tourism and provide farm stays, others on-farm technical-educational day visits only. An opportunity exists to visit some farms at certain times of the year and experience the harvesting, shearing etc. There is sufficient diversification to create year round farm tourism in the AWACC region. At the moment there are too many quiet tourism periods in between holiday/tourism periods. However, on-farm activities that could be experienced in the region include;

Lambing, calving, kidding (goats and cashmeres), fawning, foaling, shearing, aquaculture – trout, Murray cod, aquatic worms, water buffalo, camels, alpacas, citrus fruit, hops, cut flowers, lavender, persimmons, figs, potatoes, timber growing-milling-drying-processing, seed production, shearing, olive – picking-tasting- pickling-making oil-food cooking demonstrations-walkabouts etc, wine activities, chestnuts, berries (blue and raspberries), cherries, jam making, honey, strawberries, wine and liquor, apples, essential oils – peppermint, herbs – culinary and medicinal, rosemary, yabbies, rice harvesting, grain and canola harvesting, organic farms, garden visits etc.

Farmstays could be developed along with ecotourism on farms that have significant flora, fauna, Forests, State and National Parks on their boundaries. This would be particularly attractive for farms in 'isolated' areas. A new agrieco tourism product will probably evolve as a result of this project.

OLIVE TOURISM

An example of how to mix farming with tourism would be to tap into the newly established olive industry. The region is starting to produce quality olives for oil and the table and it compliments the region's wine industry. The North East of Victoria with its rolling hills and valleys could become the "Tuscany" of Australia with the creation of 'olive tourism'.

The tourism could involve holding festivals to celebrate the harvesting, olive walkabouts, cooking demonstrations, pickling classes, olive oil schools, marketing co-products such as soaps, creams etc.

The best period for this type of activity is during the harvesting period from May to July. This time of year is usually slow for the local tourism industry – agritourism can and will create year round tourism and thus fill the current void.

For agritourism to occur there is a need to develop a strategic marketing plan and manual so that a standard is set for anyone wishing to enter this industry. Tourism requires a lot of thought particularly if it is conducted on a busy working farm. To the uninformed visitor the farm can be potentially a dangerous place given the machinery, vehicles, equipment, dams, chemicals, animals etc on most farms. There needs to be a 'best practice' system in place prior to the farm tourism business being established. This will ensure that a high standard is maintained from the start of the new business venture with expectations being met for all concerned. Tourism is also a different type of business from farming and requires different skills. Therefore, planning, researching and training should be undertaken prior to commencing an agritourism business. Below are considerations for people or organisations to consider if they wish to enter agritourism.

6.1 AGRITOURISM DEVELOPMENT

1. Why Develop Agritourism?

Agriculture can no longer be depended on to provide the economic stability for rural towns and communities. The constant instability of net farm incomes and the loss of jobs in rural Australia has led to a human and financial capital drain from many rural areas, with many farming families and businesses under economic stress. Further stress is occurring as more farm partners and their children seek work off farm to 'pay the bills'

Coming to terms with these changes presents challenges to farmers, rural people and the extension services provided to them.

Among these challenges are:

- β developing new ways and means of diversifying the rural economic base;
- β finding alternative uses for farm, rural and natural resources;
- β helping communities identify and implement options designed to increase jobs, generate opportunities and develop rural areas.

Within this context agritourism has gained a new level of importance as a potential income and job generating activity. In addition there is a growing demand from the city-based urban population to enjoy and participate in country living with expectations for physical outdoor recreation, fresh air, mental peace and tranquility. This has resulted in more and more people seeking information and 'know how' on how to establish farm based tourism businesses.

The following benefits can be derived by developing agritourism in rural areas:

- β assists farming and other rural families use existing resources better in order to improve income and the viability of the farm business;
- β develops the unexploited potential of a rural area;
- β provides tourists with a new and "different" product and provides a greater understanding of rural living;
- β improves facilities and standards for tourists and local people;
- β provide employment (farm partners and rural youth in particular) and maintain rural population;
- β improve viability of the community – standard of living and quality of life;
- β improves local trade and industry;
- β improve infrastructure;
- β enriches the heritage and culture of the region;

- β increases foreign currency;
- β provides a basis for integrated rural development.

2. Critical issues

Critical aspects of looking at agritourism include

- β Product not clearly defined – different components make up the agritourism product, definition needed and endorsed at a national tourism level
- β Product not developed – early stages of development, not a mainstream tourism product
- β Market destination not always convenient – sometimes conducted in ‘isolated’ areas, lack of transport and back up services etc.
- β Lack of integration into the whole tourism economy – not ‘recognised’
- β Poor marketing structure – funding has not been allocated to develop agritourism and there is no national marketing plan
- β Lack of market research on agritourism. Private companies are running the product.
- β Competition – no sharing of secrets of success = fragmentation
- β Lack of co-ordination of the different components making up an agritourism industry in a region.
- β Lack of business management approach by product operators– anyone can be an agritourism operator.
- β No training or best practice program in place.

Critical to success will be people’s ability to get the facts, make decisions and knowing the appropriate key questions about the market and product systems and the influence of the working environment on their development.

Questions such as:

The strengths/weaknesses/possibilities and opportunities/threats and competition

How all of these influence;

- The development of the product
- The development of the market
- How the situation can be improved or changed?
- How the product can be packaged to satisfy marketing needs?
- How the market can be secured?
- What can be done to harmonize the needs of the operator and the customer within the constraints/strengths of the working environment?

3. Developing Agritourism

Agritourism can no longer be seen as only farmhouse accommodation, which depended on “word of mouth” promotion or on business from the passing trade, nor can it be seen as mass tourism. It is a tourism product in its own right offering a special experience that will give peace of mind and intellectual stimulation to the visitor. It should be packaged and promoted so that it will attract tourists to a region and provide enough interest, activity and entertainment to keep the visitors in the area and encourage them to return. Targeted promotion is necessary to attract new clients whether it is school groups, couples, families and or international visitors.

Agritourism is a rural business and should therefore be seen as an industry that will benefit the rural community as well as the visitors.

6.2 REQUIREMENTS FOR PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

There are several parts that make up the agritourism business, these parts are: accommodation, amenities, activities, food and retail products.

Every farming region is endowed with different farming activities and assets and it is the potential to develop these activities that will generate new employment and income through the establishment of agritourism. It is worth noting that some agriculture lands in the less favored 'traditional tourism' areas offer the tourist prime amenities and natural beauty. At the same time these areas usually fall short in suitable accommodation, access facilities and available services. Parts of the project region fall in this category.

The focus needs to be on the potential of bringing together the people and the potential 'agritourism' products in the region.

Designing the right mix of product into a packaged tour that meets the needs of the targeted tourists is possibly the most effective way of developing the agritourism business. The product needs to be planned, organised, marketed and managed according to the special features, the strengths, the weaknesses, the potential and the opportunities of the region and its inhabitants as well as the requirements of potential customers. This would facilitate the development of branding products (eg. farmstay holidays) and the promotion and marketing of them to target markets.

Accommodation – farm hosting is a vital component of the package and should carry its own quality hallmark. Types of accommodation can vary and can include farmhouses, guesthouses, self-catering cabins, caravans, camping or shearing quarters. Very few people go on holidays just because of quality accommodation. They also look for amenities, places of interest and services. More and more people are associating agritourism with action tourism and therefore look for available activities either structured or unstructured. Such activities can relate to sports (land, sea or air) health, hobbies, culture, education or exploration.

Whichever aspect of agritourism is developed, emphasis should at all times be on a quality product.

In the development of the product it is important for the product providers to establish a network of contacts with tourism associations, related agencies, extension services, local development committees and other local influential groups and, to integrate or parallel with these agencies in the development of the product. There are opportunities to package tourism products together.

6.3 MARKETING THE AGRITOURISM PRODUCT

Agritourism must be “market driven” rather than “product lead.”

Unlike other agriculture products (eg. rice) marketed through co-operatives etc, agritourism generally does not have a sound marketing structure. The Departments of Tourism in both NSW and Victoria have not supported agritourism as a mainstream tourism product. It is worth noting that the Department of Agriculture in Victoria was

interested in developing agritourism and this may still happen. Tourism Victoria may also include it in a future marketing strategy.

Marketing is an aggressive “customer oriented” business. Marketing agritourism begins with the identification of a customer need, rather than working on the basis of a preconceived perception of a need, which too often is a flaw in the agritourism business. It is worth noting that many successful agritourism operators in the AWACC region fell into tourism as a result of people requesting visits to their properties. There was little or no planning or research done to make it a business.

Therefore the first crucial step in selling agritourism is market research. This means gathering, analyzing and evaluating information about the customer and the market and identifying and strengths the weaknesses, competition, new customers and opportunities. In short it means gathering information about the business and the environment within which it works in order to better understand the business and be aware of what can and cannot be changed.

Failure to source the market information could result in poor quality decisions to the detriment of the total business. Accurate market information is essential for effective business planning.

The information should relate to the marketing mix ie:

- Product – What is required?
- Place – Where is the market?
- Package – What to put together and how?
- Price –How much are people prepared to pay?
- Promotion – What, where, how, when and who?

THE PROCESS INVOLVED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN AGRITOURISM BUSINESS?

1. Do the homework

Agritourism is a demanding commitment on farming families and therefore careful consideration must be given before entering this type of business pursuit.

Financial viability is also a major consideration as it does cost money to establish properly and the pros and cons need to be costed out before proceeding.

Good communication skills and personality are a further ingredient needed along with the tolerance and patience to deal with people who visit and or stay on a farming property. The loss of privacy and disruption to family and farm life is a further consideration.

People wanting to enter agritourism need to visit and network with existing operators and see what time and effort is involved in doing the type of activity they wish to pursue. Assessment needs to be made of the potential operators own ‘tourism’ and ‘human’ assets and see what can be offered to visitors.

Risk management and fall back strategies are also important given recent world events that have affected people’s desire to travel. This coupled with local airline problems and also large increases in insurance premiums have and are affecting many businesses and their long term viability.

The cost of outlaying large amounts of money to be ‘tourism ready’ may not justify the entry into agritourism. Careful planning is therefore essential especially with this new tourism product.

2. Investigate marketing costs

More often than not, agricultural commodities are marketed by people other than farmers and therefore many farm people do not know the cost of marketing and how to do the four P's - product, price, place and promotion. Budgets need to be prepared that cost the marketing expenses in and professional help doing these budgets would not go astray. Tourism can and is promoted in many different ways and some marketing campaigns are very expensive. Therefore good advice is essential so that marketing expenditure is kept under control.

3. Business and marketing plan

Consultation with an accountant or business adviser is recommended when entering a new business. If possible, a visit to an accountant who does accounting work for agritourism operators would be worthwhile. The accountant being in a strong position to give relevant advice. Other advice will be needed in relation to the allocation of overheads ie electricity, office space within the home, motor vehicle expenses, tax deductions, GST, commissions, breakeven point etc.

4. Consult with State government departments, farm industry tourism associations, tour companies, visitor information centres and local tourism associations

Consultation with companies bringing agritourism clients to the region is essential. Potential operators can learn about the opportunities available, the potential income to be earned when it is paid and the expenses associated with incurring it. These companies have their own best practice standards that must be adhered to when their clients visit and or stay on farming properties. State Government tourism departments, local tourism associations, visitor information centres and existing operators can also provide valuable information.

Help is available from the Department of Small Business in each State and the Office of Fair Trading for registration of a business name.

5. Points affecting Agritourism Businesses

• Seasonal

Will it be a year round business or are there restrictions at certain times because of farming activities?

• Location and Access to the Property

What are the roads like both on and off farm? Are people/groups prepared to travel a long way to visit or stay on the property? Are the roads in good order and suitable for coaches and other visitors to use, are they all-weather roads?

• Public Amenities

Toilets are a big issue and expense for potential agritourism to consider. Accessibility to toilets for day visitors to the property and/or extra toilets for farmstay visitors is a major consideration. Local councils need to be consulted on what public amenities are required. Another consideration for farmstay operators being the provision of a reliable water supply and hot water system for visitors.

For day visitors to a property a large comfortable building may be needed for groups to sit in. Is there one available on the property and does it have adequate heating and cooling? Many coach companies book well in advance and they must be guaranteed that if the weather is unstable that the visitors have suitable shelter available to them. The agritourism operator will probably have to have a backup activity to do in-doors if it cannot be done outside due to poor weather conditions.

- **Dangerous Places and Activities**

There are many hazards on farms from electric fences, to dams to animals that aren't friendly, open fires and chemicals. Care needs to be taken when visitors come to a farming property. At the beginning of the visit the agritourism operator needs to spell out how the activity is going to be conducted, where the 'no go zones areas are' and why it is so. Many visitors to farms have little or no knowledge on how for example animals behave or how farm equipment operates. Also will people be allowed to smoke on the property and bring their pets and weapons? Is there a first aid kit on the property and is anyone trained in first aid? Is there a contact list with phone numbers to call if there is an emergency?

- **Food Handling**

Food handling is a big issue and the law varies in NSW and Victoria. Contact the local council and request information on what is required to meet the current legislation. Significant changes may be required on the premises where food is being prepared.

- **Insurance**

Extension on the existing public liability policy will be necessary for agritourism operators. Insurance companies need to be advised of what is being proposed, how often it will happen, how many people will be involved etc. If the insurance company is not prepared to cover the new 'risk' then assistance should be sought from an insurance broker or by speaking to other agritourism operators. Legal advice on what is being proposed should be considered, signs on potential hazards do not necessarily protect the property owner from litigation.

7.0 TRAINING AND EDUCATION

7.1 TRAINING PROVIDERS IN THE REGION

There is a significant difference between nature/ecotourism training and agritourism training. The main difference being an abundance of ecotourism training versus very little agritourism training conducted in Australia including none being offered in the AWACC region. Further studies need to be done on how many ecotourism graduates end up being employed in the ecotourism industry. There are opportunities to conduct agritourism training in the region that meets the needs of new and existing operators.

ECOTOURISM TRAINING

Betty Weiler, PhD, Associate Professor of Tourism, Department of Tourism, Monash University carried out an inventory of eco-guide/interpretation training in Australia. She identified 37 University courses, 22 TAFE courses and 18 “others”. These training programs are available to the public, but exclude those being done ‘in house’.

Tour guide accreditation is available through the Ecotourism Association of Australia and assessment can be arranged through Charles Sturt University, Thurgoona campus.

AGRITOURISM TRAINING

University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury offers a 3-year full-time course – Bachelor of Applied Science (Rural Tourism & Community Development). There is also a course in Environmental Management and Tourism). A short course in Rural Tourism by distance education is being worked upon. The University of New England and the University of Wollongong have both tried to run agritourism training but have now put the courses on hold.

7.1 TRAINING PROVIDERS IN THE REGION

CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY, THURGOONA (NEAR ALBURY), NSW

Charles Sturt University offers a Bachelor of Applied Science (Ecotourism) degree at its Thurgoona Campus. The course aims to educate students as practitioners in natural area tourism, including the associated areas of heritage and cultural tourism. Students gain a sound scientific basis as well as develop a range of business, communication, leadership and social skills as required by the ecotourism industry in Australia. The course also aims to provide education in the area of ecologically sustainable tourism by fostering an understanding and an appreciation of the relationship between the natural and cultural environment, conservation and tourism.

The degree takes three years (full time). Graduate programs are also offered in the ecotourism area, starting with Graduate Certificate (Ecotourism) (four subjects) Graduate Diploma (Ecotourism) (eight subjects), and Masters by coursework (16 subjects). These are offered by Distance Education, which would usually be taken as a part time enrolment, with two subjects taken in each semester. Research programs in the social and ecological sciences are also offered in the ecotourism and related fields, at Honours, Masters and PhD level. Other fields of research include areas such as protected area management, cultural heritage management, recreation, landscape and ecosystem conservation.

TRAINING WORKSHOPS

A recent development within the University, and in conjunction with the CRC for Sustainable Tourism, is the delivery of short course training programs which aim to provide high quality specialist courses to meet the increasing demands of integrated land use management in the Asia/Pacific region.

To date, courses have been conducted in ecotourism for protected area managers in India, China and Vietnam. Future courses are being planned for Papua New Guinea, Bhutan and Nepal. Short courses and training workshops can be conducted anywhere in Australia on all aspects of ecotourism practice and operations. Courses are available in Guide Training, Small Business Management, Design and Technology and Product Accreditation etc.

CONTACT

Dr Neil Lipscombe Phone: 02 6051 9835 Fax: 02 6051 9897
or Dr. Rik Thwaites Phone: 02 6051 9993 Fax: 02 6051 9897

ECOTOURISM DISCUSSION GROUP

During the project an Ecotourism discussion group was initiated by Dr Rik Thwaites from Charles Sturt University. It was an outcome of the 2000 Ecotourism Australia Association Conference. The common objective was to see the development of a successful and sustainable ecotourism industry in Australia. Independent objectives looking at ecotourism operators, education providers and graduates and students and see where the employment opportunities and the importance of establishing links between the stakeholders existed. The project consultant feels that this type of discussion needs to take place so that there are viable employment options.

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY ALBURY/WODONGA CAMPUS

Established formally in 1991, the Albury/Wodonga Campus plays a key role in the regional provision of high-quality tertiary education. In Graduate Careers Council of Australia evaluations, La Trobe University Albury/Wodonga courses consistently rate highly with students.

The campus is connected to other campuses via video conferencing facilities which allow for interactive communication within regional, national and international networks, with a microwave link to be commissioned in October 2001.

Total enrolment as at 31 March 2001 was some 1100 students taught by a staff of over 50 academics supported by a number of sessional staff and over 40 general staff.

Academic units on the Albury/Wodonga campus are integrated into the five faculties, with local Heads of Units/Departments. All faculties of the University are represented on the campus, which offers a range of degrees in common with other campuses, but with the following courses being unique to Albury/Wodonga:

Bachelor of Business (Hospitality Management) – final year specialization with access to International Hotel School

Bachelor of Science (Environmental Management and Ecology)

Diploma in Education (P-12)

Campus research strengths include Natural Resource Management, Freshwater Ecology, Regional Economic Development, Regional Tourism Development and Ecotourism, Regional and Rural Health, Community Mental Health, Stress and Well being and Language and Culture. The Department of Environmental Management and Ecology holds membership of the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Freshwater Ecology and the School of Tourism and Hospitality of the CRC for Sustainable Tourism.

The Albury Wodonga Campus of La Trobe has an elective subject in ecotourism.

CONTACT:

Megan Ritchie, Deputy Head of School Phone: 02 6058 3850

**NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL CENTRE – THURGOONA (NEAR ALBURY),
NSW**

The Riverina Institute of TAFE National Environment Centre (NEC) is spread over 185 hectares and is nestled amongst the picturesque Albury-Wodonga Regional Parklands. The NEC buildings and grounds optimise environmentally efficient features and employ solar energy, on-site recycling operations and natural resources. Courses in environmental management, natural resource management, agriculture, bushland regeneration and organic farming are offered through the Centre.

The Centre operates as an organic farm and aims to achieve a sustainable balance between agriculture and the environment. Seven Mile Creek runs through the property and an aboriginal interpretative walk has been established along this Creek. Aboriginal students are enrolled in a cultural heritage course.

CONTACT:

National Environment Centre Phone: 02 6043 6700

Website: www.rit.tafensw.edu.au

**WODONGA INSTITUTE OF TAFE AND RIVERINA INSTITUTE OF TAFE –
ALBURY CAMPUS**

Both of these TAFE's have substantial campuses and offer Tourism and Hospitality training. They are willing to look at training options for people who wish to do either agriculture or ecotourism. Even though guiding training is not provided at the moment, both TAFE's are willing to run an Accredited Tourism (Guiding) Certificate Course if there is a minimum of 10 participants (Albury) and 12 (Wodonga).

CONTACT:

Wodonga Institute of TAFE

Phone: 02 6055 6600 Fax: 02 6055 6611

Course information Phone: 02 6055 6530

Website: www.wodonga.tafe.edu.au

Riverina Institute of TAFE – Albury Campus

Phone: 026058 2800

Fax: 02 6021 5816

Course information Phone: 02 6058 2868

Website: www.rit.tafensw.edu.au

ALBURY WODONGA BUSINESS ENTERPRISE CENTRE

The Albury Wodonga Business Enterprise Centre acts as a focal point for the small business community of the region, with the aim of identifying business training needs, answering enquiries from intending or existing business people, and providing counselling or training to satisfy their needs.

The Centre with an office in both Albury and Wodonga is a reference point for Government services, and for the various professional services available in the community which are vital to the operation of any small business.

Free and confidential “one stop” advice, counselling and referral is provided the Centre. Reference assistance in the areas of professional services relating to: Business Planning, Statutory Requirements, Sources of Finance, Advertising and Promotion, Cluster Groups and Networks, Organisation of Training Groups, Legal Matters, Insurance, Marketing and Sales, Technical aspects. They support self-help projects and are a Resource Centre. The Centre conducts a range of workshops throughout the year which are very suitable for small business operators.

CONTACT:

James Burgess

Phone: 02 6041 3704 Fax: 02 6023 0125

ADULT CONTINUING EDUCATION AND NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRES

Throughout the project region there are adult continuing education and neighbourhood centres. These centres provide very cost effective training and activities at community level.

The Albury Wodonga Continuing Education Centre is based in Wodonga and has centres in Indigo and Towong Shires in North East Victoria and in the Southern Riverina. A wide variety of training can and is provided from first aid training to learning about food handling and safety laws to learning how to be a tour guide. In the project area there are 3 neighbourhood centres in Wodonga and one at Bandiana, Baranduda, Yackandandah, Birallee Park, Chiltern-Rutherglen, Corryong, Tallangatta, Beechworth. In NSW there are four in Albury and one at Culcairn-Henty, Jindera, Howlong.

The Riverina Community College Inc based at Wagga Wagga covers part of the project region with centres at Corowa/Oaklands/Balldale and Tumut/Adelong/Batlow. Over 300 quality courses are offered each term in a wide range of vocational, hobby,

health/lifestyle and recreational areas run by experienced tutors who are experts in their subject areas.

These centres are ideally placed to provide information to communities as they are very much part of it, it stops the need to travel long distances to attend classes and it is a starting point for people who wish to learn. The centres provide sufficient information for people to know if they would like to know more and start a skill building process ie they may enrol in a TAFE course to achieve a certificate or diploma after attending a short course on their area of interest at their local centre. Many of the centres now offer accredited courses. It is worth noting that the full day workshop on Tour Guiding cost only \$25 per participant and that includes handout notes and catering.

CONTACT:

Albury Wodonga Continuing Education Centre

Phone: 02 6024 1800

Riverina Community College Inc (Wagga Wagga)

Phone: 02 6921 7663

8.0 CURRENT INITIATIVES IN THE REGION

8.1 COMMONWEALTH AND OTHER CROSS BORDER PROGRAMS

8.2 NEW SOUTH WALES

8.3 VICTORIA

There are some good initiatives in the region which provide the public with the opportunity of increasing their awareness of programs and projects that they can benefit from. For example farm people who have bushland on their property in parts of North East Victoria can now receive payment to manage the bush – see Bush Tender Trial.

There are many programs that provide funding support to revegetate, fence areas to protect flora and fauna etc. The exciting thing about this is that farm people and people living in small communities are starting to realise the value of conserving their native vegetation, improving soil health and creating biodiversity. New opportunities in both agri and nature based tourism are now open to them for the first time

This section of the report provides information on programs and initiatives currently available in the project region. The first section below is common for people living in either NSW and Victoria, the other sections are for people based in that State only.

8.1 NATIONAL AND CROSS BORDER PROGRAMS AND ORGANISATIONS

NATURAL HERITAGE TRUST

The Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) is the major source of Federal Government funding for natural resource management. NHT funding applications are submitted late February, results given September, funding received the following February/March.

Priority areas:

- Improving the condition of existing native vegetation (fencing, revegetation) and
- Revegetating cleared land with local native species.

NHT grants must be matched dollar for dollar with time, labour or money. Farmers can access NHT funds through their Landcare group. Farmers not involved in a Landcare group can access fencing and revegetation funds through regional organisations such as: Greening Australia and some Landcare Steering Committees.

CONTACT:

NHT hotline: 1800 065 823

Website: www.nht.gov.au

LANDCARE

Landcare is a unique Australian grassroots organisation of individuals including landholders, conservationists and natural resource managers who work in groups and are dedicated to sustainable nature resource management. They are people who care about the conservation of soil, water, plants and wildlife that are affected by degradation.

The organisation is supported by all levels of government and by small and large businesses. It has support because of the efforts and commitment of community Landcare group members and individuals who work to benefit everyone.

Landcare helps communities understand problems and find solutions to local problems.

Group members tackle local concerns like salinity, weeds, erosion and water pollution and other problems that degrade their environment and stop them from using an area as they want or need to.

The AWACC region has a significant and very active Landcare movement. In fact the impact of the on ground work is attracting much attention and is drawing people from not only Australia but internationally as well. There are now real opportunities available to farmers and others to be paid to teach others how they have carried out Landcare activities on their properties. For example, corridors of native trees are being planted to improve soil health and deal with salinity. This has also created new habitats for birds and other wildlife and is attracting 'nature lovers' to the properties. It has come to the stage where farmers need to be paid to conduct on farm tours so that their time away from other farming activities is paid for. The project work has identified real opportunities in this area with eight farm people wishing to undertake tour guide training.

The growing Landcare network links Landcare groups with technical advisers, educators and students, Catchment Management Committees, businesses and others. Landcare also provides a guide for tourists and the general population to show people how to care for and use public areas like parks and bushland.

Landcare co-ordinators facilitate activities that have been set down by their committees. The co-ordinators are the creative community builders and communicators, they report to the Regional Facilitators, see below.

CONTACTS:

North East Victoria: Tom Croft, Regional Landcare Facilitator.

Phone: 02 6055 6133

South West Riverina: Helen Wilson, Landcare Facilitator – Murray Region.

Phone: 02 6043 0113

Murrumbidgee Area (includes Tumut): Peter Reagan, Regional Landcare Facilitator. Phone: 02 6923 0528.

GREENING AUSTRALIA

Greening Australia is a national community organisation with members and staff in each state and territory. They work with the community to strategically retain, restore and replace trees and other vegetation needed to ensure the long term health of our land, our wildlife and our people.

Since 1982 Greening Australia has provided practical support and technical advice to thousands of community groups and individuals who are working on vegetation and landcare-related projects. Through their Australia-wide network they work with farmers, landcare and other community groups, local councils, schools and educators, conservation organisations, service and youth clubs, government agencies and the corporate sector.

Greening Australia's work is funded through contracts with public and private agencies, corporate sponsorship, membership fees and product sales.

From their simple community origins in 1982 they have grown to be one of Australia's largest community-based NGO's (non-government organisation) with an annual budget of nearly \$10 million.

CONTACT:

National Office: Phone: 02 6281 8585 Fax: 02 6281 8590

LOCAL CONTACTS:

NSW - Ian Davidson. Phone: 03 5766 2759 Mobile: 0428 478665

VIC - Dennis Martin. Phone/Fax: 03 5728 2191 Mobile: 0408 527604

GREEN CORPS

Green Corps is an initiative of the Commonwealth Government, administered by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs in association with Environment Australia. The Green corps program is managed nationally by Conservation Volunteers Australia.

The objectives of the Green Corps program are to give young Australians (17 to 20 year olds) the opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to the environment by contributing to high priority conservation projects whilst being provided with quality, accredited on-the-job training.

Over the past three years more than 4,000 trainees have completed the program. This success has resulted in the Federal Government extending funding through until 2002, involving a further 5,000 young Australians.

Green Corps can provide labour assistance to land managers and community groups with priority environmental projects. Each Green Corps project involves ten members and a Supervisor and is of 6 months duration. A Green Corps project comprises a major project, one or more minor projects, one or more community projects and a minimum of 134 hours of accredited training.

CONTACT:

Phone: 1800 032 501

Website: www.greencrops.org.au

CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS AUSTRALIA

Conservation Volunteers Australia is Australia's largest practical conservation organisation. CVA attracts and manages a force of volunteers that complete more than 1500 vital conservation projects across Australia each year. CVA projects include: tree planting, native seed collection, endangered flora and fauna surveys, and walking track constructions and maintenance.

CVA offers schools, TAFE's, Universities and students a variety of great conservation programs in which to get involved.

Throughout the project region the CVA and Green Corp teams have provided extremely valuable support to rural communities. Many communities want to be involved in nature tourism activities but do not have the manpower to do the necessary on ground work such as putting in walking tracks, establishing wetlands to attract

native flora and fauna etc. The teams with their supervisors have provided not only labour and skill but given rural communities the confidence to move forward.

CONTACT:

Conservation Volunteers Australia, PO Box 423, Ballarat Vic 3353.

Phone: 1800 032 501

Website: www.conservationvolunteers.com.au

THE HUME & HOVELL WALKING TRACK

The Hume and Hovell Walking Track has been developed by the Department of Land & Water Conservation (NSW) with the co-operation and assistance of the State Forests of NSW, and the national Parks and Wildlife Service.

The DLWC also acknowledges the contribution of many private landholders who have co-operated to help make this Track a reality. The Track stretches over 440km between Yass, through Albury then through Indigo Shire on its way to Port Phillip. Rediscover the route taken by Hamilton Hume and William Hovell in 1824.

It is worth noting that there are opportunities for the Hume and Hovell Track to become as successful as the Bibbulmun Track in Western Australia. This Track stretches 963 km from Kalamunda (near Perth) to Albany across some of the most beautiful, peaceful areas of Western Australia. To walk the entire Track would take eight weeks.

The Track links small communities together who are receiving economic benefits from being on it. Accommodation places, food and retail outlets have been established to cater for walkers.

There is a comprehensive calendar of events held along the Track during the year. As there is no charge to walk the Track, the Friends group relies on sponsorship, events, merchandise sales, grants and membership etc to fund their activities. A large team of volunteers does 70% of the Track maintenance work. There are 48 timber shelters along the way so people can stay overnight for no charge, they do need to bring their own food, sleeping gear etc.

CONTACT:

Hume and Hovell Walking Track

Contact: Department of Land & Water Conservation

Phone: 02 6921 2503

Bibbulmun Track

Email: friends@bibbulmuntrack.org.au or

Visit the Website: www.bibbulmuntrack.org.au

AUSTRALIAN ALPS NATIONAL PARKS

The Australian Alps form the largest area of mountainous alpine country in Australia. It extends from Canberra and the nearby Brindabella Range, through the Snowy Mountains of NSW and along the Great Dividing Range to north east of Melbourne.

A wide variety of native plants and animals are found in the alpine area, including many species that live only above the tree line. The brilliant summer wildflower displays of daisies and heaths bloom almost miraculously, after months under the snow.

The mountains cradle the headwaters of great river systems, which supply water to south-eastern Australia. These rivers were harnessed by one of Australia's largest engineering projects, the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Scheme, completed in 1972.

This year, the Co-operative Research Centre is carrying out a major study of the tourism value of the Australian Alps National Parks for Sustainable Tourism at the University of Canberra and La Trobe University. The study is being done on behalf of the Australian Alps Liaison Committee.

This will be the first comprehensive study of the tourism value of the entire system and will provide valuable information for use in future planning.

CONTACT:

Professor Trevor Mules, Tourism Program, University of Canberra ACT 2601

Phone: 02 6201 5016. Fax: 02 60201 2550.

Email: tjm@comedu.canberra.edu.au

PARKLANDS ALBURY WODONGA INC

Parklands Albury-Wodonga (Parklands) provides an opportunity for people to access and experience the extraordinary range of natural and developed recreational open-space in and around Albury-Wodonga. Their vision is 'to establish the most magnificent regional parklands in Australia'.

The regional parklands area will eventually embrace in excess of 6,000 ha. of land along the riverine environments of the Murray and Kiewa Rivers, tributary creek valleys, Lake Hume foreshore, and the hills and ranges in the Albury-Wodonga region.

Parklands has established partnerships with key groups, including land management agencies, tertiary institutions, schools, community service organisations and community groups.

Some of their current projects in Victoria include; Lower Kiewa River Parklands; High Country Rail Trail; Huon Hill Parklands; McFarlanes Hill Parklands; Gateway Island, Baranduda Parklands and Block 19, Bonegilla Migrant Reception Centre. NSW projects – Eight Mile Creek Project; Indigenous Seed Orchard; Regent Honeyeater Habitat Recovery Project.

CONTACT:

Community Liaison Officer – Wayne Carlson.

Phone: 02 6023 6714.

Email: carlson@parklands-alburywodonga.org.au

Website: www.parklands-alburywodonga.org.au

THE MURRAY VALLEY TRAIL

The Murray River is Australia's greatest river and one of the world's significant catchments. The river sustained indigenous people, provided a highway for explorers, water for settlers and inspiration for millions. The Murray's water contributes to the nation's wealth and is crucial for the environmental health of Australia. The idea of

creating the Murray Valley Trail came from the NSW Department of Land & Water Conservation and received support from the Murray Darling Association in 1997.

The Murray Valley Trail will provide the backbone that links and promotes a network of tracks and trails on public land improving community understanding and knowledge of the Murray River, its ecosystems and fragile ecology, Aboriginal culture and heritage from the mountains to the sea. The Trail will build on and enhance sustainable environmental, tourism, recreation, business, community development and employment opportunities of the Murray Valley while also protecting a vast natural resource.

CONTACT:

Adrian Wells – Project Manager

Phone: 02 60 21 3655

ECOTOURISM ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

The Ecotourism Association of Australia (EAA) is the peak national body for Australia's ecotourism industry. The Association has a diverse membership which includes key industry sectors such as ecotourism accommodation; tour and attraction operators; tourism planners; protected area managers; academics and students; tourism, environmental, interpretation and training consultants; and local and regional tourism associations. The Association was formed in 1991 and is an incorporated, non-profit organisation.

NATIONAL ECOTOURISM ACCREDITATION PROGRAM

The National Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP) is a world first. It has been developed by industry for industry, addressing the need to identify genuine ecotourism and nature tourism operators in Australia.

The benefits of accreditation include:

- β criteria to assist operators plan and develop their nature tourism and/or ecotourism product;
- β a guide to assist operators implement the principles of ecologically sustainable development
- β an opportunity for operators to continually improve performance to a standard recognised as best practice;
- β a recognised logo for operators to use in their marketing material;
- β a recognised means for protected area managers and consumers to identify genuine nature tourism and ecotourism operators;
- β a tool for protected area managers to encourage improved practices that lead to less environmental impact;
- β a tool to help local communities determine a mix of tourism activities that maximises benefits and minimises negative impacts and
- β an essential educational and information tool.

ECOGUIDE PROGRAM

The EcoGuide Program is a voluntary, industry driven and run certification program for nature and ecotour guides. It provides an industry 'qualification' that rewards guides that achieve specified competencies and standards. The program is not designed to train guides, but to assess guides' skills, knowledge, attitudes and actions. The

Program is managed by the EAA with help from a panel of experts, a network of Workplace Assessors and a Program Administrator.

CONTACT:

Ecotourism Association of Australia, GPO Box 268, Brisbane Qld. 4001

Phone: 07 3229 5550 Fax: 07 3229 5255

AUSTRALIAN FARMHOST HOLIDAYS

Australian Farmhost Holidays pioneered Australian agritourism to the world in the early 1970's. The company, now in Sydney, was originally established at Culcairn in the Riverina and is the leader in developing farm and outback station holiday product throughout Australia for inbound individual travellers and groups.

One product, 'The Australian Farmhost Program' (homestead stays for group tours) is available at 28 destinations in four States (850 homesteads).

In the Murray and Riverina region there are eleven host centres with in excess of 250 participating homesteads involved. The value of this product to the region is substantial. Each year between 80 and 90 inbound groups visit to be farmhosted in the Riverina, many tours spending two to three days in the region.

An impressive 80-page tour Operators manual, a Condensed National Directory featuring copy on all products is produced by the company. This is supported by an extensive TRADE website at www.australiafarmhost.com.

AFH has agritourism 'product education' brochures in English, Japanese, Chinese, Korean and Indonesian languages.

The company has successfully contracted Australian agritourism into approximately 600 wholesale travel systems in over eighty countries. Their Farm and Outback Station Stay Chain is one of the most established and best known Australian accommodation products in the international marketplace.

A division within the company, AFH Tour Planners creates agricultural and industry technical tour itineraries for Australian and New Zealand inbound tour operators and wholesale travel agents.

CONTACT:

Australian Farmhost Holidays, David Lyons, Managing Director

Phone: 02 98100800 Fax: 02 98103233

Email: info@australiafarmhost.com

Website: www.australiafarmhost.com

8.2 NEW SOUTH WALES

NSW NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

This organisation is responsible for managing national parks and other protected areas throughout NSW.

They are also involved in doing other activities such as;

- β scientific research into the needs of native plants and animals and how best they can be conserved.

- β establishing and maintaining tracks, visitor centres, displays and facilities for wheelchair access.
- β working with local government and community groups to protect and enhance native habitats outside national parks.
- β identifying areas to make our reserve system more representative of the state's natural environments,
- β promoting the importance of conservation across the NSW landscapes.

A further responsibility is the special role in looking after objects and places of special importance to aboriginal people. They also acquire and protect places of historic significance.

The project area is covered by the Department's office in Tumut. There has been a Comprehensive Regional Assessment (CRA) done which identified what should be reserved for conservation and what should be maintained for a sustainable timber industry. The CRA was an intensive environmental, social and economic study of the south eastern region's natural and cultural heritage values and of the forest-based industries, involving a number of Government agencies and stakeholder groups over the past three years.

Across the south east of the State the Government has declared:

- β 16 new national parks
- β additions to 11 existing national parks
- β 55 new nature reserves
- β additions to 7 existing nature reserves
- β new State Recreation Areas
- β 15 new Crown reserves (a new category of conservation reserve)
- β almost 320,000 ha in new NPWS managed conservation reserves
- β 6 new flora reserves totaling 8,013 ha (to be managed by State Forests).

The creation of the new conservation reserves has resulted in the establishment of a continuous north-south corridor of National Parks running for 350 km along the coastal escarpment between the NSW/Victorian border and the Illawarra.

One of the most significant outcomes is the establishment of the Woomargama National Park, which is located 20 km south of Holbrook and just north of the Murray River. This 23,000 ha reserve is the largest west of the Great Dividing Range in South Western NSW. It is significant in its remnant vegetation and is also an important haven for a large number of threatened and endangered species of wildlife.

CONTACT:

NPWS offices:

**Albury to Tumut, potential nature operators phone Rob Perry at Tumut office.
Phone 02 6947 7000**

**For Khancoban phone Fiona Solomon at the Jindabyne office
Phone: 02 6450 5555**

CONSERVATION PARTNERS PROGRAM

The three programs listed below are part of the National Parks and Wildlife Service Conservation Partners Program. These programs aim to provide practical guidance,

information and involvement in a range of activities to people interested in being 'conservation partners'.

1. Voluntary Conservation Agreements

There is support for landholders to enter into voluntary conservation agreements. The aim of this program is to conserve the natural, cultural and/or scientific values of an area of land. The terms of each agreement are negotiated between the landholder and the NPWS, which acts on behalf of the Minister for the Environment. The agreement is intended to provide permanent protection for the special features of an area.

When entering into an agreement, the NPWS may provide assistance in the form of:

- β fencing materials
- β plant and animal surveys
- β stabilisation of works on Aboriginal sites and historic places
- β specialist advice or other assistance

2. Land for Wildlife

This program is a voluntary property registration scheme, which aims to encourage and assist private landholders in managing areas for wildlife on their property.

Benefits for members include:

- β Information about wildlife management
- β Information about the role of wildlife and native vegetation in sustainable agriculture to control pest species, provide shade and shelter, manage salinity and control wind and water erosion
- β Membership links and contacts with like minded people
- β Notes and news on particular management issues and ecology
- β Signs for property owners who have properties registered with the scheme
- β Access to education programs and activities

3. Wildlife Refuges

A wildlife refuge is a voluntary commitment of land by a landholder to protect and conserve native wildlife. The purpose for a Wildlife Refuge can include; recovery of local wildlife species, restoration of natural environments, study of wildlife and natural environments and creating simulated natural environments.

Benefits for members includes:

- β All the benefits listed above in the Land for Wildlife plus
- β Property management planning advice
- β Biodiversity surveying and assessment assistance
- β Assistance programs to support implementation of management plans.

CONTACT:

Education and Community Involvement Unit Phone: 02 9585 6040

National Parks and Wildlife Service, PO Box 1967, Hurstville NSW 2220.

Email: conservation.partners@npws.nsw.gov.au

Website: www.npsw.nsw.gov.au

STATE FORESTS OF NSW

State Forests of NSW is a NSW Government trading enterprise responsible for sustainably managing more than 2 million hectares of public native forests and an expanding estate of hardwood and softwood planted forests. They manage their performance in terms of Commercial Efficiency, Environmental Care and in Social Contribution.

State Forests' goal is to manage the forests under its care to provide the widest range of benefits to the present and future generations of people in NSW.

The State forests are nature's playground – great places to camp, explore, rest, learn, play or just get away from it all. The State forests in NSW provide timber, clean water, clean air and a haven for native wildlife.

State Forests' maintains an enormous range of recreation sites. Some have space for tents or caravans.

Many sites provide picnic tables, drinking water, fireplaces and toilets. Horse riding is permitted in State forest. There is no charge and State Forest offices and local visitor information centres can provide help.

CONTACT:

State Forests Information Centre

Phone: 1300 655 687 or 02 9871 3377 Fax: 02 9872 6447

Email: cumberland@dsf.nsw.gov.au

LOCAL CONTACTS:

Gary Rodda Phone: 03 5881 2266

At Tumut: Charlie Taylor Phone: 02 6981 4109

DEPARTMENT OF LAND & WATER CONSERVATION – NSW

The purpose of this Department is to 'to sustain ecosystems which support and enhance the quality of life in New South Wales'. Their vision is to work together to achieve healthy and productive environments for present and future generations. The Department's strategy is to involve governments and communities through leadership, participation and support.

The department's work is diverse, and is increasingly undertaken in partnership with local communities and other State and Local government agencies.

It includes:

- β developing policies on resource use and management;

- β maintaining databases on the condition of the State's land, soil, water and vegetation;
- β managing assets such as Crown land across the State; including the Crown reserve systems, dams and fishing ports
- β providing expertise with management of the coast, estuaries and floodplains;
- β managing the country towns' water supply and sewerage scheme;
- β managing the planning and sharing of water across the State;
- β providing survey and mapping services (the geographic information infrastructure), ensuring the fundamental interests and rights in land of individuals; and
- β offering a range of consulting services nationally and internationally.

Below are two programs that are available for property owners in NSW:

1. Registered and Unregistered Property Agreements

The Department offers formal or non-formal agreements (either registered on property title or not) which provides funding for fencing, weed control, revegetation and establishment of native vegetation and technical advice. Available all year round.

STATE CONTACT:

Bruce Thompson

Phone: 02 9895 6131

2. Native Vegetation Management Fund

\$15 million is provided by the NSW State Government to enhance and protect native vegetation. Landholders sign a Registered Property Agreement or Management Contract.

STATE CONTACT:

Phone: 02 9228 6111

LOCAL CONTACTS:

Albury

Phone: 02 6041 6777

Wagga Wagga

Phone: 02 6923 0400

Website: www.dlwc.nsw.gov.au

ENVIRONMENTAL TRUST

Administered by NSW Environmental Protection Authority specifically for the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded ecosystems. Funding applications due by July, results by December, funding by February/March the following year. Grants between \$5,000 to \$100,000 available to community organisations and local government.

CONTACT:

Phone: 02 9995 5369

Website: <http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au>

NSW MURRAY WETLANDS WORKING GROUP

In NSW there is an incentive scheme to assist landholders and the environment. The NSW Murray Wetlands Working Group Inc has a Natural Heritage Trust funded incentives scheme for landholders that will provide funding assistance for wetland rehabilitation and management on private properties between Albury and Buronga in NSW. Grants of up to \$2,000 per property are available for fencing, revegetation, earthworks or other on-ground rehabilitation works that contribute to wetland protection.

The scheme is aimed to:

- β protect and promote wetland ecosystems on private properties,
- β promote integration between farm management and wetland conservation,
- β provide demonstration sites,
- β establish support networks for participating landholders.

CONTACT:

Deb Nias:

Phone: 02 60 416777

WONGA WETLANDS, ALBURY, NSW

Wonga Wetlands is a five minute drive from the centre of Albury along the Riverina Highway (Howlong/Corowa Road).

The Wetlands incorporates seven lagoons covering surface area of about 80 ha on the Murray River floodplain. The Wetlands utilises water recycled from Albury's new advanced, wastewater treatment plant to recreate the natural wonderland of the Murray River floodplain as it was before the impact of Europeans and the Hume Dam.

More than 130 species of native birds are now part of the rich tapestry of Wonga. Some of the rare species include the Japanese Snipe, the Caspian Tern and Sea Eagles.

Plans by the City of Albury for this exciting new environmental destination include:

- β Develop the Wetlands as a significant ecological, educational and environmental resource for the community.
- β Establish Wonga Wetlands as an important eco-tourism and nature-tourism destination.
- β Promote and support flora and fauna and biodiversity research projects in partnership with local schools, TAFE's and Universities.
- β Complete the development of community facilities at Wonga Wetlands including an education/interpretive centre, nature trails, boardwalks and bird hirs.
- β Support the development of a Wiradjuri Community Camp site.
- β Seek sponsorship to develop and maintain facilities.
- β Market the tourism potential of the facilities.

Wonga Wetlands has a Community Advisory Committee.

The Committee is a cross section of expertise from community groups, Charles Sturt and La Trobe Universities, the Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre and Albury City Council. The City of Albury currently funds the maintenance of the wetlands and invites sponsors to lend their support in the development of an interpretive centre.

CONTACT:

Daryl McGregor, Manager – Albury Water, Albury City Council

Phone: 02 6023 8220

Email: dmcgregor@alburycity.nsw.gov.au

Website: www.wongawetlands.nsw.gov.au

MURRAY-DARLING FRESHWATER RESEARCH CENTRE, ALBURY, NSW

The Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre (MDFRC) was established in 1986 to provide a focal point for research in freshwater ecology to support management of the Murray-Darling Basin (MDB). The Centre has national and international scientific recognition for research relating to algal physiology and management, invertebrate taxonomy and the functioning of floodplains and lowland river systems.

The MDFRC is an unincorporated joint venture between CSIRO Land and Water (CLW) and the Murray-Darling Basin Commission (MDBC). The joint venture expresses long-term commitment to contribute to the generation and communication of the scientific knowledge necessary for the sustainable management of the Murray-Darling Basin.

The aim of the Centre is to provide a reliable scientific basis for the sustainable management of surface waters and aquatic ecosystems in the Murray-Darling Basin. The Centre's expertise covers a unique range of disciplines necessary to maintain a core of strategic, immediate to long-term research projects.

These have the primary purpose of building understanding for application to the sustainable management of the Basin's water resources and for the solution of immediate problems such as algal blooms. The Centre collaborates with other research groups and undertakes contract research and consultancies for government agencies and private enterprise. The Centre has established effective interactive contact with users of its research at policy making, managerial and community levels.

The Rotary Club of Albury has played an active role for 7 years in the co-ordination of the annual Rotary-Murray-Darling School of Freshwater Research. Each year Rotary contacts over 200 schools and encourages students who are interested in ecology to apply to be participants at an intensive 5 day school held in the region.

CONTACT:

Murray Darling Freshwater Research Centre

Phone: 02 6058 2300

LEARNING FROM FARMERS

The Learning From Farmers project aims to encourage farmers to adopt sustainable native vegetation management by learning from case study sites located across the Murray Catchment in the Southern Riverina. A network of farmers who have demonstrated sound management of native vegetation, and who are recognised as

experts in this field, has been established. The original project, a joint vision of Greening Australia and Murray Catchment Management Board, began in March 1999 under Natural Heritage Trust funding, and has recently received a grant from the NSW Environment Trust.

This is to continue the dynamic developments and ongoing purposes of the project, being targeted towards “Environmental Education Project – Making known the benefits of biodiversity conservation on farm productivity”.

The group has designed a peer education program by farmers for farmers. *To facilitate this objective, members are participating in training workshops, covering such areas as biodiversity and productivity assessment, delivery skills.* Tourism was not the primary target audience, however, several of the 12 properties in the group do host visitors and participate in ecotourism. Several members of the group are now wishing to take this further and are undertaking tour guide training, the ultimate aim to be an accredited ecotourism operator.

CONTACT:

Learning from Farmers Co-ordinator:

Ann Sloane Phone: 02 60 359415

Email: aasloane@bigpond.com

STATE FARM TOURISM ORGANISATION

The following is a state member organisation that people can belong to.

Farm & Country Tourism – NSW.

Phone: 02 9999 0388.

Outside Sydney

Phone: 1800 803 007. Email: farms@bedandbreakfast.com.au

8.3 VICTORIA

PARKS VICTORIA

Parks Victoria manages the State's outstanding parks system which covers 16% of the total land in Victoria. Over 25 million visits per annum occur in 'assets' managed by Parks Victoria.

Below are some of the estate managed by Parks Victoria throughout the State;

- β 36 National Parks
- β 3 Wilderness Parks
- β 31 State Parks
- β 83 Regional Parks
- β 3,000 Crown Reserves
- β Key Heritage Properties and over 200 historic places.
- β Sanctuaries
- β Gardens

The Department has a commitment to Conservation through effective environmental and visitor management. Parks Victoria is dedicated to preserving the natural and heritage values of their parks. The parks system is characterised by a diversity of

natural ecosystems. Its landscapes offer a wide range of visitor opportunities from intensively serviced recreation to self-reliant wilderness experiences.

Parks Victoria has a strong commitment to working with and nurturing Friends Groups and volunteers. On-line information services, such as the internet site will assist and encourage these invaluable supporters. Other initiatives include a new \$1 million Community Environment Fund providing grants for community groups. These grants will enable local government improvements which enhance and complement the parks system.

In North East Victoria Parks Victoria has played a significant role in rural communities through the establishment of 'Friends' groups. The program provides \$500 towards the incorporation of a group and each year groups can access funding to work in their local area.

The Parks Victoria Grants Program aims to:

- β Protect and enhance the natural, cultural and heritage values of Victoria's parks and reserves.
- β Further develop and support the creation of a parks network that includes parks, trails, rivers, creeks and coastlines.
- β Provide diverse recreational, educational, cultural and tourism opportunities across Victoria.
- β Facilitate the involvement of the wider multicultural community in the protection and enhancement of Victoria's parks.
- β Groups can apply for funding under 3 targeted components;
- β Parks Victoria Volunteer Grants
- β Conservation Support Grants
- β Priority Conservation Grants

This is a very successful partnership which creates an ownership and involvement of assets within small rural communities.

CONTACT:

Parks Victoria

Phone: 131963,

Website: www.parkweb.vic.gov.au

BUSH TENDER TRIAL

The Victorian State Government recognises the value of native vegetation and are offering payment to landowners to care for their vegetation. The 'Bush Tender Trial' was launched on 22 June 2001 and is a new approach to native vegetation management on private land is being undertaken by the Department of Natural Resources & Environment in Victoria. In the project region landholders establish their own price for the management services they are prepared to offer to improve their native vegetation. The price forms the basis for their bid, which is compared with the bids from all other landholders participating in the trial. Successful landholders will receive periodic payments for their services under a three-year management agreement signed with the Department.

This type of activity has the potential of creating nature based tourism opportunities for landholders, particular those who have rare and valuable vegetation on their property. The way in which the farmer conducts the improvements to native vegetation can

become a working example for others to follow with the opportunity of being paid to train others on how it was done.

CONTACT:

**The Department of Natural Resources & Environment Customer Service Centre
Phone: 131 963**

LAND FOR WILDLIFE

This is a voluntary wildlife conservation program for both private and community owned land. The Land for Wildlife was established in 1981 and by 1996 over 3,800 properties are participating throughout Victoria. Landholders are encouraged to provide habitats for wildlife on their properties, even though the property may be managed primarily for other purposes.

Advice is provided;

- β on how wildlife habitat can be integrated with other uses of private land to the benefit of the landholder and wildlife,
- β on the management of wildlife habitat, the fauna occurring in an area, it's ecological role and its needs,
- β on other forms of assistance or incentives available.

The scheme is backed-up by its own team of extension staff, with access to the wide ranging skills and resources in the Department of Natural Resources and Environment and the Bird Observers Club of Australia. The creation of healthy ecosystems on properties creates nature and ecotourism opportunities.

CONTACT:

**The Department of Nature Resources & Environment Customer Service Centre
Phone: 131 963.**

TRUST FOR NATURE

Trust for Nature is a non-profit organisation working to protect remnant native bushland forever. Sixty-five percent of Victoria is privately owned.

Ninety-five percent of this land has been cleared for agricultural purposes and urban development. Only 5% remains untouched and every year more and more of this remnant native bushland is disappearing. With it, the animals and plants that called it home are rapidly declining in numbers and species.

In October each year properties in Victoria that have significant real bush which are permanently protected with a conservation covenant are open to the public.

A small number are retained by the Trust for Nature due to their regional conservation significance. Each property shows a different aspect of Victoria's wide and fascinating bio-diversity and its environmental treasures including unique plant, animal and bird life. An important feature of many of the properties is that their flora are not often well represented in the state or national reserves and therefore not often seen by the general public. The Bush Month in October allows the public to go on nature walks conducted by experienced and knowledgeable guides.

Properties that meet the criteria for support can receive \$2 a metre fencing subsidy. This is available under the 'Care of Remnants' Incentives Scheme.

CONTACT:

Trust for Nature, Level 2/385 Little Lonsdale Street, Melbourne Vic. 3000.

Phone: 03 9670 9933. Email: trustfornature@tfn.org.au.

Website: www.tfn.org.au

LOCAL CONTACT:

Jim Blackney, North East Regional Co-ordinator

Phone/Fax: 03 5728 6620 Email: jimb@tfn.org.au

VICTORIAN TOURISM OPERATORS ASSOCIATION (VTOA)

The Victorian Tourism Operators Association is an issue driven organisation committed to the professional development and operational needs of tourism operators in Victoria. VTOA represents tourism businesses and individual operators working at the coal face of the tourism industry.

Core development and service activities include: Professional Development, seminars and workshops, tourism accreditation, member representation, lobby voice to government, industry partnership, marketing and industry sector development. Full membership fee is \$400 per annum.

One of the attractive benefits of VTOA membership has been their insurance offer for adventure tourism operators. Unfortunately, this has been cancelled in recent weeks and has left many operators without insurance cover, as a result many operators have had to close their business.

CONTACT:

Victorian Tourism Operators Association

Phone: 03 9654 2618 Fax: 03 9650 5570

State farm tourism organisation

Farm & Country Tourism – Victoria.

Phone: 03 9614 0892, Email: factv@primus.com.au

9.0 CONFERENCE BUSINESS

The region is ideal for an increase in the number of conferences in both the agriculture and environment areas. There are a broad range of agricultural industries in the region including broadacre and new and emerging. It is worth noting that there are many agricultural leaders in the area that are at the forefront of their industry. At present they have people visit their properties and there are opportunities to capitalise on this and hold industry conferences. The strong focus on the environment in the region through the extensive Landcare network and Albury Council initiatives like Wonga Wetlands provides further conference opportunities.

The Albury Wodonga Convention Bureau has been responsible for securing a variety of conferences including the Agribusiness Association of Australia, Australian Food Industry, Australian Lot Feeders Association, Australian Network for Plant Conservationists, Australian Nut Industry, Australian Society of Limnology, Australian Stock Horse Association, Australian Water & Wastewater Operations Association, Deer Industry Association of Australia, Friends of Albury Botanic Gardens, Grasslands Society of Victoria/NSW, International Drought Symposium, Minerals Council of Australia, National Farmers Federation, Texel Breeders Association and United Dairy Farmers of Victoria. All these conferences had 100+ participants.

Albury Wodonga has the infrastructure including good transport, accommodation and venue facilities to host a wide variety of conferences throughout the year. New and emerging agricultural industries are part of the conference business planned this financial year. Conventions Manager, Kevin Bourke was invited to be guest speaker at two meetings during the project. He addressed both the Albury Wodonga Regional Tourism Forum Inc and the Regional Business Development Network Inc about what services he provides to people who wish to hold a conference in the region. As a result of this an olive conference is being planned and the possibility of holding the international deer conference in 2005.

In the outlying areas there are other venues where conferences can and are being held. This includes Albury Convention & Performing Arts Centre, Lake Hume Resort & Function Centre, the La Trobe University and Charles Sturt University Campuses in the region, All Saints Estate, Albury Performing Arts Centre, Wodonga Civic and Convention Centre, Wodonga Reception & Conference Centre, Commercial Club Albury, S. S & A Club Albury, Mulwala Services Club, Corowa RSL and other service clubs to name just a few.

CONTACT:

Kevin Bourke Phone: 02 6051 3750

Armidale based Australian New Frontiers Pty Ltd and Agritours Australia has held agricultural conferences in the region.

There is funding available under the Farmbi\$ program for farmers to attend conferences that provide training which meets the program guidelines. For information and details of approved activities, contact the following:

CONTACT:

NSW- Rural Assistance Authority

Phone 02 6391 3000 Website: www.raa.nsw.gov.au

Victoria– Rural Finance Corporation of Victoria

Phone: 03 9243 2600 Website: www.farmbis.ruralfinance.com.au

ATTACHMENTS

10.1 August Workshop Outcomes

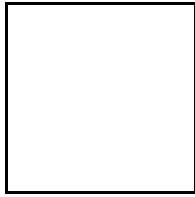
10.2 Skills Questionnaire

10.3 Sample-Ecotourism Planning

10.4 Proposed Model for New Tourism Operators

10.5 Map Awacc Region

Attachment 10.1



ALBURY WODONGA

REGIONAL TOURISM FORUM INC

**P.O. Box 775 WODONGA, VICTORIA
3689**

Website: <http://albury.wodonga.com> E-mail: ruralbiz@wang.albury.net.au
Phone: 03 5728 7311 ABN 56 092 689 537 Fax: 03 5728 7242

PLANNING A REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR NATURE AND ECO TOURISM WORKSHOP

10 AUGUST 2001, COMMERCIAL CLUB, ALBURY

OUTCOMES

ECO-TOURISM WHAT IS IT? RESPONSE FROM WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS:

- Becoming part of where you are (sense of place)
- Opportunity to experience different way of life
- Environmentally aware
- Resource management
- Experiencing landscapes
- Experience culture
- Peace and quiet
- Adrenalin – excitement
- Conservation through use
- Fresh air
- Stress relief
- Enjoyment
- Engaging with nature
- Biodiversity
- Economic contribution to community
- Minimal impact
- Involvement of local community
- Environmental exposure – experience
- Environmental education
- Nature experience
- Sustainable – Lifestyle – Education

- Future preservation
- Appreciation of nature
- Entertainment through nature

TRAINING/EDUCATION NEEDS

- Guide Training.
- Engaging Councils in dialogue in a workshop situation.

GROUP WORKSHOPS

Workshop participants divided into 6 groups and put together a strategic overview on what they would like to see happen in the region. Below is a summary of each group's – goal, objectives/strategies plus other comments.

GROUP 1

Goal -To establish a successful bird tourism business in the Albury Wodonga region within 5 years.

Objectives & Strategies

- To establish a network of interested people
- To locate appropriate sites of interest and organise access
- To find accredited guides, especially casuals eg. university students etc
- To develop a calendar of bird events in the region
- Establish networks and access all interested groups (eg. schools for excursions etc)
- Getting people involved
- Become involved in local conservation and research projects (eg. monitoring)

Strengths – Variety of birds, easily accessible, good accommodation, infrastructure, popular to all demographics, low cost, growing clubs, established sites.

Weaknesses – Seasonal, weather

Opportunities – Need to broaden

Threats – Competition

Resources required – Human (guides), 4WDs, financial – insurance, advertising etc

Who does the work?- guides, operators, secretary (all rounder)

GROUP 2

Goal- To build a comprehensive database of operations and opportunities in the region.

Objectives & Strategies

- Identify existing interests whether they are operators, land and water management authorities, Shires etc and harness the expertise in the region
- Develop a tour itinerary around Albury Wodonga
- To seek funding sources to seed operations – co-ordinator to develop itinerary
- Training
- Marketing the tours – develop interest within the host communities eg. friends and relatives
- Promotion of tours both internally and externally
- To identify strategic partners
- Take advantage of seasonal events – changes in the season – bird migrations/water availability in streams etc

Strengths – Have good existing operators, facilities and environment. Proximity to towns

Weaknesses – Not well co-ordinated

Opportunities – Develop more community awareness and enthusiasm for what we have

Threats – Competition – other regions campaigns

Resources required – Co-ordinator, support group. Funding \$20,000+. Industry commitment & contribution

Who does the work? – All of us – co-ordinated approach perhaps “steering group”

Evaluation of outcomes – Survey participants for feedback on success/interest level, level of participation (future)

GROUP 3

Goal – To achieve regional co-operation.

Objectives & Strategies

- To establish a local identity (logo/slogan)
- Establish a co-operative regional marketing plan – cost effective, valuable, “packaging” and “truth” in marketing the product
- To identify a regional skills audit
- To establish quality assurance procedures
- To identify and/or develop mechanisms to support operators
- A representative to reach all levels of the industry in the region
- Logo design/slogan that works in with not against other groups. Example slogan – “people face to face”
- Skills audit (General)

- Must get the product right
- Face to Face education

Strengths – Our product and the diversity (it's natural)

Weaknesses – Lack of cohesion, lack of finance, lack of familiarisation of what we have.

Opportunities – Rotating meetings, internal familiarisation

Threats – Lack of communication, lack of cohesion, other regions

Resources required – Financial support, infrastructure. Simple public education – for those who wish to be involved at a general level (not university).

Who does the work? – Operators with support from the top down.

Evaluation of Outcomes – Meetings, operators keeping updated records and operators spreading the word – everyone in the region becomes a publicity officer

GROUP 4

Goal – To maximize the region's tourism potential by developing viable marketing and activities that sustain, improves and educates on our environment.

Objectives & Strategies

- Create a database of natural, cultural and environmental points of interest in first year
- Create a database of local and regional tourism operators within first year
- Create a database of all organisations that can assist these operators and tourists within first year
- Achieve a 20% increase in nature and eco tourists within 3 years
- Gather data from nature and eco tourism operators on visitor numbers
- Discussions and networking with all key players
- Ensure benchmarking opportunities are identified
- Develop qualitative survey program for customer feedback

Strengths – Lots of products in the region. Diversity, natural features, clean and green.

Weaknesses – Lack of infrastructure in administration in tourism

Opportunities – Well placed between capital cities, coach companies travel through, education establishments. Websites and web .

Threats – Environmental degradation, competition, distance

Resources required – Printed material or packaged product

Who does the work? – Regional tourism organisation or a nature based/eco tourism organisations and operators. Co-ordinator – for central reservations

Evaluation of outcomes – Survey forms for groups and individual visitors.

GROUP 5

Goal – To maximise the region’s potential to offer an eco-tourism product

Objectives & Strategies

- Identify the market, identify the products, go to the market to configure the product ie Develop tour packages matched to identified need. eg. green groups, schools, rotary etc
- Regional co-ordinating body (put packages together)
- Get support of State and National Parks, Local Government, Department of Land & Water Conservation etc
- Revitalise rural communities
- Employ a marketing agent (approach the market physically)
- Create website – electronic marketing
- Target urban areas and school groups eg. Landcare tours

Strengths – Authenticity (not contrived) farm activities, fresh air, tranquility, cross section of agricultural activities, location, good accommodation and diversity.

Weaknesses – On the border (difficult dealing with 2 State governments and Federal government), lack of strong identity.

Opportunities – Good.

Threats – Bureaucracy, rising costs, litigation.

Resources required – Marketing agent, website, money.

Who does the work? – Christine Stewart.

Evaluation of outcomes – Visitations monitored.

Other comments – We need workshops to identify the products of each region. Need to utilise existing tourism information services

GROUP 6

Goal – To achieve self-sustaining tourism

Objectives & Strategies

- Professional service
- Hands on participation
- Financially sustainable
- Satisfied customers
- Communication – marketing, word of mouth, experimental
- Identify market
- Advertising
- Mutual learning – adopt best practice
- Networking/industry associations
- Provide training and induction strategies for prospective businesses

Strengths – Variety of attractions, tourism infrastructure, passing customers, transport (air, road, rail, coach). Consistent/reliable weather. Community support. Biodiversity.

Weaknesses – State regulations/different laws/rules in each State.

Opportunities – Location, labour pool, University/TAFE (pool of expertise), Local Government support.

Threats – Insurance. Apathy after reaching goals.

Resources required – Labour. Administrators – local – financial advisors etc.

Tourist Information Centres. Interactive Database for local contacts.

Who does the work? - Family. Students – tertiary.

Evaluation of outcomes – Customer feedback. Balance sheet.

Other comments – Start small and be flexible. Don't be afraid to seek professional advice and peer support.

5. TYPE AND LENGTH OF TRAINING PREFERRED:

	CONTACT 1	CONTACT 2
5.1 CORRESPONDENCE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.2 ATTENDING CLASSES/FIELD DAYS/WORKSHOPS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.3 COMPUTER BASED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.4 ONE ON ONE TUTORING	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.5 OTHER:		
5.6 LENGTH – OVER WHAT PERIOD OF TIME:		
COMBINATION OF DAY AND WEEKEND WORKSHOPS OR NOT:		
5.7 IS AN APPROVED/ACCREDITED COURSE IMPORTANT OR NOT		

BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

	CONTACT 1	CONTACT 2
Business Planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accounting – Record Keeping	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business Planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial and Budget Planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Finance for Business	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Taxation – GST	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quality Assurance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Risk Management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Industry Benchmarking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business Letters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contracts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other.....		

MARKETING MANAGEMENT

	CONTACT 1	CONTACT 2
Market Research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	CONTACT 1	CONTACT 2
Marketing Plan	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Co-operative Marketing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Selling and Advertising	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Media Relations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pricing your Product	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Promotional Material	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other.....		

TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT

	CONTACT 1	CONTACT 2
Basic Computer skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced Computer skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accounting package	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Using the Email and Internet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Website for Business	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other.....		

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

	CONTACT 1	CONTACT 2
Dealing with Difficult People	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public Speaking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Customer Relation Skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Setting Goals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Problem Solving and Decision Making	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Time Management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Motivation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Negotiation Skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Succession Planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leadership	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cultural Considerations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other.....		

WORKPLACE

	CONTACT 1	CONTACT 2
Industrial Relations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work Cover	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
OH & S	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Food Handling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
First Aid	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Permits & Licences	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Insurance - Public Liability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Professional Indemnity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child Care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other.....		

INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

	CONTACT 1	CONTACT 2
Tourism Industry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agri Tourism Information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nature/Eco Tourism Information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eco Tourism Training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tour Guide Training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other.....		

LIST THE THREE MAIN TRAINING PRIORITIES

Contact 1

Contact 2.....

Attachment 10.3

SAMPLE - ECOTOURISM PLANNING

ALBURY WODONGA, TUMUT AND REGION

Listed below is a suggested sample of what some of the issues and considerations might be for planning ecotourism in the Albury Wodonga and Tumut region. This is to provide an insight on the amount of work that there is involved in planning the introduction of a new tourism product. The list is a start and is not limited to what has been put. Extensive consultation and planning would need to be undertaken with all interested stakeholders so that the best possible plan is produced.

1. RESEARCH (for Best Practice)

Top Issues

- Stakeholder Inventory (Culture and Nature search)
- Eco-tourism equals Best Practice
- Accreditation of Product and Certification of Nature and Eco Guides
- Quality of Visitor Experiences
- Research into Bio-geographic Diversity

Important Issues and Considerations

- Conduct Human Resource Audit
- Charles Sturt and La Trobe Universities Key Resource
- Identify Eco-tourism Values
- Identify Limits of Acceptable Change
- Use of Innovative Technology
- Continuous Monitoring
- Learn from other regions
- Fauna, Flora & Community Audits
- Importance of Research
- Develop Education Programs
- Statistics
- Lack of Resources
- Need for Development of Infrastructure
- Learn from Landcare Process
- Programs to Support Endangered Species
- Appropriate Scale of Tourism
- Professional Development Programs
- Local Expertise
- Good Business Planning and Management
- Nature Based Interpretive Services

2. EDUCATIONAL INTERPRETATION AND DISCOVERY

Top Issues

- Education of Community
- Appropriate Guide Training
- Develop Interpretive Programs

Important Issues and Considerations

- Educate Tourists to Acceptable Behavior. Codes of Practice.
- Community Education Programs (Eco sites)
- Safety (Risk management & QA)
- Educate About Bio-geographical Diversity
- Encourage Commercial Responsiveness
- Need for interaction (Visitor & Animal)
- Develop Training Strategies
- Develop and maintain Professional Guides (including Indigenous)
- Training in interpretation presentation techniques

3. ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT

Top Issues

- Adequate Funding of Core Attractions
- Private Sector Incentives Needed
- Private/Public Collaboration

Important Issues and Considerations

- Appropriate Funding of Resource Management
- Financially Sustainable Development
- Clarity of Funding Resources
- Investigate User Pays
- Perceived Return
- Dollar Impacts (rightful share)
- Complete Environmental Accounting
- Business and Marketing Planning and Training

4. INTEGRATED ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Top Issues

- Integrated Management Planning
- Preservation of Environment and Cultural Heritage
- Co-ordination and Communication
- Integrate into Community & Industry Planning
- Bring Private Landholders into Process

- Maximise Existing Sites

Important Issues and Considerations

- Impacts on Local Lifestyles (Need for respect)
- Natural Resources Management
- Sustainable Environmental Development
- Importance of Community Ownership
- Landholder Legal Fears
- Maintain Bio-diversity
- No Inappropriate Interference with Wild Life Breeding etc
- Potential Major Impact on Places Visited
- Affordable One-Stop Permit Shop
- Maintenance or lack of in National, State Parks and Forests
- Conflict between Local Recreation & Tourism
- Community Staying Close to Nature
- Use of and lack of use of Park Permits
- Lack of Understanding of “Minimal Impact Tourism”
- Manage Unattractive but Important Places
- Encourage Self Regulation
- Needs Efficient Use of Limited Community Resources
- Fully Integrated Management Plan (Community/Govt)
- Balance in Development
- Use of Local Groups to Maintain Access
- Need to take in Small & Large Picture
- Elevate Running of Existing Parks (Quality)
- Impacts on Heavily Used Sites
- Controlled Facilitated Access to Parks
- Refine Visitor Management Policies
- Holistic Approach Needed
- Educate Tourists to Acceptable Behavior. Codes of Practice
- Safety
- Changes in Land Use (threats)
- Partnership with Indigenous Communities.

5. COPING WITH CHANGING POLITICS

Top Issues

- Total indifference from the Majority (Community)
- Need for Collaboration between Government and Private
- Need for Balanced Development
- Integrate with Town Planning and Regional Government Planning

- Respect Aboriginal Protocols

Important Issues and Considerations

- Competing and Overlapping Interest within all Spheres of Government/Agencies
- Political Games (State/Local Government)
- Political Influence & Change
- Planning & Implementing should be in “Private hands”
- Bring Private Landholders into Process (Incentive)
- Maintain Heritage Buildings
- Identify Organisations Seeking Environmental Credits
- Gain Ongoing Funding for Maintenance

6. INFRASTRUCTURE & MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT

Top Issue

- Need for Major Interpretation Centre. There is a need for a ‘one stop shop’ that will act as a gateway to all the natural attractions and activities that are available in the region.

Important Issues and Considerations

- Lack of Facilities (toilets, light, parking)
- Access Accommodation (large motels in region), Affordability, Attractions, Activities
- Maintenance of Full Spectrum of Experiences
- Develop and Maintain Walking Tracks and Trails
- Interpretive Infrastructure
- Pockets of Cool and Natural Environments
- Accessibility
- Aesthetic Opportunities
- Special Events
- Authentic Experiences
- Handicap Accessibility
- Need to Cater for Individual Travelers
- Develop “Goat’s Tracks”
- Self Paced Tourism
- Bush Walkers
- Lack of Infrastructure, Linking Existing Tourism Attractions
- Appropriate Signage
- Inter-activity
- Tourism Clusters
- World Class Climbing
- Fish Ladders where/when Necessary

- 4WD Access – (Early Retirees)
- Private Parks
- Walking Trails
- Product Needs Constant Updating
- Small, Quality Attractions
- Impacts on Heavily Used Sites
- Lack of Large, Family priced Hotels/Motels in some Areas

7. BIO-GEOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY

Top Issues

- Private Urban Gardens
- Maintain Bio-diversity
- Wonga Wetlands
- Concentrate on Flora and Fauna Experiences

Important Issues and Considerations

- Diversification
- Geography is the Source of Inspiration
- Extensive, Beautiful & Picturesque National and State Parks, Forests
- Extensive network of Lakes and Rivers – Hume and Mulwala Lakes, Dartmouth Dam, Murray & Mitta Mitta, Tumut, Paddys Rivers
- Clean, Green High Country
- Burnt Landscape – Southern Riverina in Summer
- Un-spoilt Image
- Cross Roads of Vegetation
- Unique Environment of the Australian Alps
- Pristine & Unspoilt Areas
- Healthy Fish Environment – Lake Hume, Dartmouth, Tumut, Murray

8. MARKETING STRATEGY

Top Issues

- Large Bird Watchers Potential
- Importance of Fauna including Kangaroos, Koalas
- Rare Flora
- Match Marketing to Experiences
- Create a “Sense of Place”
- European and Asian Markets – How do we service this market with language, food and other cultural differences
- Domestic and International Markets
- Online Service (know how people search)
- Identify Niche Markets

Important Issues and Considerations

- Identify the Target Audience (Customer needs)
- Co-operative/Collaborative Marketing
- Nature Awards
- Cost of Marketing to Europe and Asia
- Servicing Information Networks (Tourist Agents, Govt Offices and Embassies)
- Word of Mouth
- Eco Special Events including Conferences
- Maximise Marketing Dollar
- Marketing Advantage
- Link with all Strategies
- Changing International Market
- Strategically, Geographically placed
- Piggy-back Successful Marketing Campaigns
- Links between Fishing, Hunting and Conservation
- Address all Levels of Tourism
- Unspoilt Image
- Consortium/Co-operative Marketing
- Need for Whole of Albury Wodonga and Greater Region Focus in Promotion
- Accurate "Place or Regional" naming/branding Critical
- Lack of Advertising – internally and externally
- Hand in Hand With Mainstream Tourism
- Region equals "Real Australia"
- Tourism vs Entertainment
- Potential Growth in Holiday Drive Market
- World Eco Site Linkages & Sister City Relationships
- Establish linked Web site
- Ensure P.O.S. (Point of Sale) Reflects the Region

9. INDIGENOUS & POST COLONIAL CULTURE & HERITAGE

Top Issues

- Indigenous People's Participation Critical
- Use Culture, Heritage & Art as Vehicles for Communication
- Partnerships between Farmers and Indigenous People
- Tell The Local History (story)

Important Issues and Considerations

- Co-operation & Co-ordination in Arts
- Historical Importance of the Region
- Recognise Indigenous Cultural Values

- Cultural Heritage Values and Management
- Understanding the Environment Through the Arts
- Understanding of Other Cultures
- Educate about Art
- Opportunity to Further Develop Cultural/Art Tourism
- Art Critical to Interpretation & Communication
- Rock Art & Artifacts
- Recognise Rich/Diverse Culture
- Goes back more than 40,000 years