

Gippsland Tourism Response and Recovery Group - Weekly Bulletin

Thursday 20th December, 2006

The Gippsland Tourism Response and Recovery Group (GTRRG) have been working hard to minimize the impact of the fires on the industry during the impending Christmas and New Year period.

The last seven days have demonstrated how circumstances can change. The Coopers Creek fire in Central Gippsland has had a significant impact on several communities in Central Gippsland including Walhalla, Toongabbie and Seaton.

While it is frustrating to lose bookings it is understandable that people are nervous. Our priority as an industry has to be the safety of visitors first and then ensuring that people coming to the region have a good time.

The DSE, PV and CFA have made a significant effort to ensure that people thinking about coming to Gippsland have appropriate information available to them.

We are working on timeframes so short that advice issued yesterday is no longer current. This will have an impact on visitors who are travelling longer distances. Please be aware that interstate and international travellers may not even be aware that we have fires!

One of the critical issues is educating people who are visiting about how best to stay informed. ABC Radio (100.7 FM and 828AM) are probably the best bet, but ultimately it is up to us as individuals to let people know what is going on. Please find attached a list of key phone numbers and websites that you could display in your business.

It goes without saying that holiday makers who have made the decision to support our region by coming here despite the uncertainty need to be made feel welcome in the brightest possible way.

Even if the situation is depressing, we need to add value and ensure that people return home remarking on the resilience and positive attitude of our beautiful region, not how we are suffering.

Tourism employs 4,500 people and generates \$600 million per annum in direct spend for Gippsland. These numbers reinforce the

need to work in partnership with business, community and government to ensure that the response effort is as efficient and effective as possible.

The GTRRG is implementing **The Crisis Communications Plan**. It is now available on the industry website. We welcome your feedback and ideas. It is a living document that will change over time. www.gippslandtourism.net.au

Ongoing Communication with Industry

The GTRRG will provide support for Gippsland's Tourism Industry during the Christmas and New Year period. Additional human resources are being deployed in the New Year to ensure that the forward momentum generated by the industry over the last 12 months is not lost because of these fires.

If you require assistance during the Christmas period please contact Glenn Watson on 5142 3487, or for urgent matters Chris Buckingham on 0429 869 638. Email will be checked daily - please send to glennw@wellington.vic.gov.au to ensure prompt response.

Communication

There has been considerable progress in the distribution of clear communication regarding where it is safe to visit. Metropolitan media have been very supportive and the ABC has been outstanding over the last few days.

CFA, PV and DSE are acknowledging the importance of tourism in the response and recovery effort and the GTRRG acknowledges the commitment these agencies to our sector.

The GTRRG continues to work with Parks Victoria, DSE and CFA to ensure that people know where they can go for an enjoyable experience. Please be patient, these organisations are coordinating the fire fighting effort with a primary focus on keeping people safe.

The Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund

An appeal has been launched to aid fire stricken families who received a devastating blow from this week's fires across Gippsland.

The Gippsland Emergency Relief fund is urging Gippsland and Victorian communities and businesses to support those who have lost homes and belongings by making a much-needed donation.

Donations can be made via the post or at any National Australia Bank in Gippsland. Donation cheques can be posted to PO Box 508, Traralgon, 3844.

The fund provides financial support to those affected by bushfires, floods and other natural disasters and is managed by a committee of volunteers.

If you are interested in supporting fund raising activities please contact us or the fund directly: John Mitchell (President) 5177 4635, - Andy Tegart (Secretary) 5176 1362, or Ron Boskma (Treasurer) 5135 5181.

Support Services for operators

If things are getting you down and you need someone to talk to, call:

LIFELINE GIPPSLAND 24hr telephone counseling 13 1114

To access business planning support and advice through State Government please contact **Business Line 13 2215**

Community Recovery Fund

The Prime Minister and Premier have agreed to provide more than \$800,000 in additional funding to help families, business and primary producers recover from the devastating bushfires.

The agreement establishes a \$700,000 Community Recovery Fund with equal contributions from the State and Commonwealth. This is over and above the support the Commonwealth government provides under the enhanced Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements.

The Community Recovery Fund would be used to address the needs of the community as they arise and to assist the region to recover fully from the fires.

The funding would support grants of up to \$15,000 for charities, small business and primary producers to assist with costs that are not covered by insurance arrangements.

Arrangements for the payment of funding under the grants are expected to be in place by Monday, 18 December 2006.

Information on Disaster Relief from the Australian Government Go to www.disasterassist.gov.au or for further

assistance call the **Australian Government Bushfire Assistance Helpline on 1802233** or visit your local Centrelink Office.

Partnership with North East Tourism

Gippsland is already benefiting from the partnership with North East. We have been regularly exchanging ideas and building relationships across what was the Great Divide.

The cooperation between the regions has been positively noted by Government at all levels. As the recovery process gains momentum, the unified approach will ensure that we avoid duplication of effort and resources.

EPA Air Quality Website

If you have customers wanting reassurance regarding air quality before coming to the region please direct them to the following link.

<http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/air/bulletins/aqbhour.asp>

Water

Many of the thousands of weekenders coming to the region over the coming weeks will not be aware of the impact of ash in their water tanks.

Please inform people coming to the region of the potential risks of ash contamination.

Media relations

The need for a strong and unified response to bushfires is critical. If you are contacted directly by the media regarding the impact of the bushfires, please refer them to Chris Buckingham on 0429 869 838.

If you have a positive story to tell about how your business or community is responding please let us know. We can provide PR support, even during the Christmas to New Year period

And finally...

Thank you for your patience and understanding. We know livelihoods are being affected, jobs are being lost and what was going to be a great season is now going to be a matter of survival for many operators. Please take the time to smell the roses, enjoy the company of family, friends and customers.

Chris Buckingham
General Manager, Gippsland Tourism
Chairperson, Destination Gippsland Inc
0429 869 638

Be inspired by Gippsland - Go to www.destinationgippsland.com.au

For industry info - www.gippslandtourism.net.