

Gippsland Tourism Response and Recovery Group

Weekly Bulletin Thursday 28th December, 2006

The Gippsland Tourism Response and Recovery Group (GTRRG) will be reconvening in Sale on Wednesday 3rd January to review the Response efforts so far and start making plans for the Recovery Process.

It is ironic that the cool weather that has brought us welcome relief from the fires over the last few days may well be affecting peoples travel plans.

The current fire situation is much improved, but we are still operating in a fluid situation. The warmer weather predicted for the weekend may bring increased numbers of visitors, but we may also see a flare up on the fire front.

The Visitor Information Centres throughout Gippsland are reporting that the fires are having a significant impact on visitor numbers, but they are generally positive about the season.

While accommodation providers in coastal areas of South Gippsland are full until after the New Year, there is still capacity available on the Gippsland Lakes, Walhalla, Mallacoota, Tarra Bulga and West and Central Gippsland. Access to Gippsland's alpine region is still restricted, but the Great Alpine Road and the road to Dargo are open.

Our best wishes go to those operators in Dargo, Omeo and areas near the Alpine National Park that are facing a very bleak summer.

The VICs and Local Government Tourism Managers have acknowledged the sense of optimism and resilience shown by individual operators and associations despite the challenging circumstances.

Ministerial Visit

The Hon Tim Holding Minister for Tourism and Mr Greg Hywood CEO Tourism Victoria visited Gippsland today.

The visit was deliberately low profile and the delegation met with VIC managers, volunteers, Wellington Shire Council and a group of operators from across Central Gippsland.

The feedback on the visit was very positive, it was heartening to hear from operators who are really hurting as a result of the fires

put forward so many ideas and suggestions that clearly demonstrated an understanding and empathy for the impact these fires are having on the whole region.

Special thanks to: Carolyn Crossely, Nick Goldsmith, Graeme Watt , Simon Peavey, Marg Rawlins, Fiona Barr and the volunteers at the Wellington VIC for giving up their time and providing a considered perspective on the current situation.

Media/ Public Relations

The GTRRG is generating significant levels of positive media coverage for the region and it appears that the decision to focus on examples of operators, communities and government working in partnership is being well received.

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.

After issuing a media release before Christmas encouraging people to buy Gippsland Food and Wine, we are now focusing on encouraging people to get out in their own backyard. This includes asking the community to invite friends and family to come and stay in Gippsland as well as encouraging locals to hop in their car and visit local attractions.

We welcome story ideas and suggestions from operators and industry associations as to how we can leverage additional positive PR for the region. We are still in the 'pay it forward' mode and need to emphasise our commitment to a regional approach, but, want to start focusing on 'villages' and destinations that have a story to tell.

People looking for inspirational experiences in Gippsland can go to: www.destinationgippsland.com.au and www.parkweb.vic.gov.au

Gippsland Tourism Response and Recovery Officer

Jenny Brown from Sale will be employed as the Gippsland Tourism Response and Recovery Officer on a part time basis over the next three months to assist with the Response and Recovery Process. Jenny will play an important role in providing administrative support and assisting with the implementation of the Crisis Communications Plan.

Ongoing Communication with Industry

The GTRRG will continue to provide support for Gippsland's Tourism Industry during the Christmas and New Year period.

If you require assistance during the Christmas New Year period please contact Glenn Watson on 5142 3487, or for urgent matters call Chris Buckingham on 0429 869 638.

If you want more information on the Response and Recovery effort please go to the dedicated tourism industry website www.gippslandtourism.net.au

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**
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.

The Last Word...

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 Tourism Response effort has been successful so far and the credit sits largely with the vast majority of operators, who have pulled together during this time.

Thank you for your ongoing support.

Chris Buckingham
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For information on the Gippsland Tourism Response and Recovery Group and industry information please go to www.gippslandtourism.net.au