

## **Press Release - 4 January, 2007**

### **Tourism Response and Recovery Efforts on track**

The Gippsland Tourism Response and Recovery Group met this week to build on the positive momentum generated during the Christmas - New Year period.

Mr Chris Buckingham Convenor, GTRRG said: 'We are focussing on how to provide additional support to tourism villages in Gippsland's High Country, while planning the Recovery process for the rest of the region.'

'Feedback from industry representatives and local government tourism managers suggest that the coastal areas of South, Central and East Gippsland are doing OK, despite the flurry of cancellations before Christmas.'

The Hon. Tim Holding, Minister for Tourism, and Mr Greg Hywood, CEO Tourism Victoria, came to Gippsland last week. The low-profile visit resulted in a \$25,000 funding announcement for the 'Inspired by Gippsland – Celebration of Food and Wine' to be held across the region in March.

Mr Buckingham thanked the industry for the way they have supported the response efforts, 'It is heartening to see the industry working together so well. We are now seeing the results, with a positive response from community and government.'

Tourism is worth \$600 million per year and employs 4,500 Gippslanders.

Mr Buckingham reinforced the need for the community's support: 'The best way the community can support the recovery process is to get out in their own back yard, enjoy great Gippsland Food and Wine and invite their friends and family to come and visit.'

The State Government funded full page advertisements in Melbourne's major metropolitan newspapers promoting Gippsland as 'open for business' have been most welcome.

Mr Buckingham observed: 'Small villages and towns such as Jindivick, Koonwarra, Neerim South, Yarragon, Stratford, Metung and Walhalla have something special to offer. We need to welcome

all Victorians into our communities and ensure they have a great time.'

One of the key challenges facing the GTRRG is addressing the needs of Alpine communities still directly affected by these fires such as Omeo, Dargo, Buchan and Licola.

Mr Buckingham added: 'There have been some outstanding examples of leadership in these small communities, they have fought these fires and now face some really tough times as visitors stay away.'

The GTRRG will be visiting fire-affected communities over the next fortnight to ensure that response efforts are co-ordinated in partnership with the community.

The acting Premier Hon John Thwaites announced funding for Tourism Response and Recovery Officers in Gippsland and the North East in a visit to Victoria's High Country yesterday.

Mr Buckingham observed: 'With this support from State Government we can work with the Alpine communities on the response efforts, while initiating planning for the recovery in other parts of Gippsland.'

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For information on the Gippsland Tourism Response and Recovery Group and industry information please go to

[www.gippslandtourism.net.au](http://www.gippslandtourism.net.au)