

## **Media Release 15th December, 2006**

### **Tourism Response Group Backs Walhalla Fire Break Bake**

The Gippsland Tourism Response and Recovery Group (GTRRG) met today and finalised the Crisis Communications Plan that will provide strategic guidance for the industry.

In a positive and focused meeting, representatives from the tourism industry, local government and state government agreed that the tourism sector had to 'pay it forward' and support a regional approach to the response and recovery effort.

Mr Chris Buckingham, Convenor of the GTRRG said: 'Michael Leaney and the Walhalla and Mountain Rivers Tourism Association have hit the nail on the head with the Fire Break Bake Off. They are feeling the pinch and are committed to doing something positive to support the response by baking thousands of biscuits for fire fighters.'

The GTRRG discussed how the positive momentum generated by the tiny mountain community could be supported.

'The way the tourism industry across Gippsland has responded so far is great. The majority of operators in the region are small family businesses, who live in the communities where they operate. They are feeling pain, but understand that the only way to beat the impact of these fires is to stick together.'

He continued: 'We are working in partnership with Parks Victoria, DSE and CFA to ensure clear communication of where fires will impact on visitor safety and where people can still have an enjoyable experience.'

The Gippsland Tourism Response and Recovery Group will be teaming up with North East Tourism to ensure that a streamlined and effective response is delivered by government.

'The GTRRG will distribute a weekly bulletin to the industry to ensure that people are kept in the loop. This response and recovery process will require a sustained effort', added Mr Buckingham.

Operators who are not receiving regular updates should contact their Local Government Tourism Units.

'The state government knows that Tourism employs 4,500 people in Gippsland. We will be working in partnership with business, community and government to ensure that the response effort is as efficient and effective as possible; people's livelihoods depend on it.'

Mr Buckingham reaffirmed the need for unity: 'As we face this threat, it is important to remember that we will get through this if we stay positive and work together.'

People who are planning a trip in Gippsland over the next few days should call the Victorian Bushfire Information Hotline on 1800 240 667 before heading towards fire affected areas.

**Media representatives:** For more information please contact Chris Buckingham, Convenor of the Gippsland Tourism Response and Recovery Group on 0429 869 638