

Valley 'must increase its tourism profile'

< Paul Shaw

The Richmond Valley must increase its tourism profile, according to Richmond Valley Council (RVC) tourism and promotions officer Rod Caldicott.

Mr Caldicott was commenting following the recent release of regional tourism statistics for the RVC and other local-government areas.

Mr Caldicott said the methodology behind the Regional Tourism Profiles, released by Tourism Research Australia (TRA), needed to be clearly understood and that the profiles needed to be read in that context.

"While domestic tourism is flat right across the country, the Northern Rivers, thus Richmond Valley, is holding its own with international tourism reversing the negative trend in local respects," he said.

"The lesson to be learned is 'don't drop the ball' and withdraw from proactive and cooperative engagement in tourism marketing/product development and visitor servicing.

"Like any other industry - the squeaky wheel gets the oil. There is a lot of competition for the shrinking disposable income these days. The current financial crisis is not assisting. Consumers will lean towards the destinations that are on top of the game.

"Richmond Valley must increase its profile, not pull back. In that regard it is council policy that dictates the outputs via the Management Plan and budgetary process."

While the Richmond Valley profile includes figures for domestic overnight and domestic

day visitors, it does not have figures for international visitors.

Mr Caldicott said that international tourism was important to the Northern Rivers as a whole, but as the profiles were based on Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) stastics, that were sourced from the National Visitor Survey and the Domestic Tourism Monitor data, the volume of international visitation for smaller regional areas was not statistically significant and thus was not reflected in the profile for Richmond Valley.

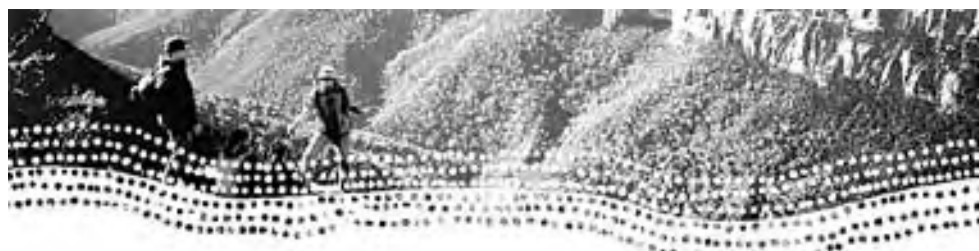
"Data collected at the Casino Visitor Information Centre do reflect a rise in international visitation over recent years, but this also would not be statistically significant to report in any concrete manner," he said.

The Richmond Valley profile lists the yearly number of domestic overnight visitors as 103,000 and the number of domestic day visitors as 139,000, compared with Lismore 165,000 and 403,000, Ballina 238,000 and 349,000 and Byron Shire 484,000 and 599,000. There is no profile for Kyogle Shire.

When the profiles were released, the Federal Member for Page, Janelle Saffin, said they would greatly assist development of the local tourism industry.

"Last year alone, visitors spent \$1.1 billion in the Northern Rivers tourism region with the 4.7 million visitors helping support 7200 tourism-related businesses," she said.

For more information or to download the Regional Tourism Profiles, visit www.tra.australia.com.



Richmond Valley Shire

SUMMARY OF INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC TRAVEL TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA
Three or four year average to June 2007

	International	Domestic overnight	Domestic day
Visitors ('000)	NP	103	139
Visitor nights ('000)	NP	395	-
Spend (\$million)	NP	31	10
Average stay (nights)	NP	3.8	-
Average spend per trip (\$)	NP	302	71
Average spend per night (\$)	NP	79	-
State average			
Average stay (nights)	19	3.4	-
Average spend per trip (\$)	1849	429	97
Average spend per night (\$)	99	125	-
National average			
Average stay (nights)	28.5	3.9	-
Average spend per trip (\$)	2758	500	95
Average spend per night (\$)	97	127	-

SUMMARY OF TOURISM BUSINESSES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA AS AT JUNE 2007

Tourism businesses	Number	%	State average %	National average %
Non-employing businesses	225	47	50	50
Micro businesses (1-4 employees)	111	23	29	27
Small businesses (5-19 employees)	111	23	15	16
Medium to large businesses (20 or more employees)	30	6	6	7
TOTAL BUSINESSES	477	100	100	100

Councillor takes a fresh look

< Maria Walsh

Cr Donella Kinnish is on the new tourism committee of Richmond Valley Council (RVC) and has taken a fresh look at the existing RVC policies and practices.

"I would like to see people encouraged to tour our beautiful region throughout the year," she said.

She believes this would put less pressure on individual events, such as Beef Week and the Evans Head Fishing Classic, when we generally see peaks in visitor numbers.

"Adverse weather during these events can have a big impact on numbers, so depending on them to bring in visitors makes us vulnerable from a tourist perspective," she said. "However, a clever and targetted promotions campaign could assist these events and also bring visitors all year around."

Cr Kinnish said she did not believe this

would mean putting more money into the almost \$600,000 kitty for RVC's tourism function. She points out that volunteers already play a big role in these successful events and providing support to these groups with some canny publicity and strategy could enhance their efforts and increase tourism.

"Volunteers do a lot of the hands-on work for our events such as Beef Week, the Great Eastern Fly-In and the Fishing Classic," she said.

"These events have been running for many years, organised by their respective committees and events like these bring great benefits to the local economy. I think we should have a billboard-type promotion at strategically placed locations in the council area to show the events that are organised for the year ahead, so visitors can then plan to come and book ahead. At each major event a brochure showing all upcoming events should be distributed. Repeat visits and new visits are the aim."

Surf and Turf? Indigestible!

< Maria Walsh

An item which has slipped from this coming year's Richmond Valley Council Events Calendar is the Surf and Turf Short Film Festival.

Organised and managed by council's economic development and promotions unit for the first time in 2008, this event caused bewilderment and anger among volunteers in the community.

Shirley Dawson, then president of the Evans Head Village Players Amateur Theatre group, was invited to a couple of meetings with one of council's tourism officers soon before the event.

"What they wanted was volunteer help - manpower basically - for the film screenings in Evans Head," Ms Dawson said. "After that they were proposing that we take it over for the following years. It was all very sketchy, so we asked for details and a proposal of what our role would be, their expectations and so forth, so we could make a decision.

"We did not hear from them again on that matter and we did not get the information we asked for, but this is what we (as an organisation) have come to expect from council's tourism officers - they are very difficult to contact, and there is little or no follow through. I certainly was not going to make a commitment without proper details and a proposal from council about how it was all going to work."

Nevertheless, the Village Players did provide volunteers for the three screenings at Evans Head during Easter. Ms Dawson was unimpressed.

"At one screening no-one turned up at all and over all there would have been a handful of view-

ers," she said. "The whole thing was read wrongly. Easter visitors to Evans Head are not likely to be interested in a film festival. The marketing was poor. The volunteers were very disappointed."

One of those volunteers (who was prepared to comment but not named) was an usher on the day of screening at Evans Head.

"The tourism officer from council was completely unprepared for the event on the day," he said. "Equipment had not been checked, some was not working, and I was sent to buy essential bits of equipment at the last minute because he had not brought it with him!"

No-one arrived for the first screening, but this did not surprise him. "Sunday morning during Easter in a seaside town was not an ideal time for a film festival," he said. "I am a film enthusiast and I support film festivals, but this was just shoddy, unprofessional, and I felt sorry for the entrants."

His conclusions? "My feeling was that this was a 'tick a box' exercise without any genuine intent for it to be successful," he said. "Council is so insistent that we provide comprehensive details about our own events to ensure that proper planning has taken place, so I would expect that good planning and preparation should go into its own activities of this nature."

Another volunteer said: "To add insult to injury, one of the tourism officers arrived at the screening and acted as if the poor attendance was our fault. We had advised them earlier that the promotions should be focussed, intensive and making full use of our local media, with an emphasis on posters. However, they said they preferred to use a TV ad and that local media was 'not suitable'! We knew that approach was not going to work and it didn't."

Under the spotlight

< Paul Shaw

At its November 18 meeting Richmond Valley Council (RVC) voted on two lengthy items involving its economic development and promotions unit.

A report, by tourism and promotions officer Rod Caldicott, detailed the history, structure and status of the unit and discussed the ongoing review of the economic development/promotions program.

Mr Caldicott said the unit, headed by the director corporate services, Wayne Halcrow, consisted of three permanent full-time positions, community development coordinator, tourism and promotions officer and events and cultural liaison officer, and three part-time positions, tourism community communications and development officer and two visitor services coordinators.

RVC general manager Brian Wilkinson said the report effectively responded to a resolution at the October council meeting that he advise the status and proposed action in relation to the tourism and economic-development functions of council.

The report presented four recommendations, which council adopted unanimously.

They were that: Council endorse the development of an economic development/promotions policy, staff actively pursue external funding and/or other options to fast track the development of an economic development strategy for the RVC, further progression of the economic development/promotions review be undertaken (in conjunction with elected representatives) and council give further consideration to the program's organisational structure as part of the overall organisational review and management plan for the 2009/2010 year.

Mr Caldicott also presented a report which questioned whether Beef Week was the appropriate event to be accorded 'signature' status.

"It is recognised that the current board is somewhat different in make up to the past board and again different to the originating board that entered into the contract for the signature event," he said.

"The similarity, however, between the three boards is that their indifferent attitude towards council as a facilitator of change and lack of respect for council as a primary supporter through sponsorship, has not changed.

Rod Caldicott presented a report questioning whether Beef Week is the appropriate event to be accorded 'signature' status.

"Despite numerous attempts by council staff to offer assistance and guidance to successive Beef Week boards in order to ensure the 2006 resolutions of council and intent by both parties (Beef Week board and RVC) for a Richmond Valley signature event were met, council's offers have not been embraced.

"Consequently, despite a resurrection of the festival in 2008, there has been very little progress reported to council to date in regard to adoption and implementation of the 2009-13 business plan.

"Council currently has an allocation of \$26,000 indexed at CPI made available within the 2008-12 management plan to support a 'signature' event. The question is not should this money be made available for same, but which event has the capacity and desire to meet the obligation to receive the support ...

"... Council needs to now consider the above and make determination as to the future of the signature event and the worthiness of all contenders to carry the signature-event mantle in order for staff to be confident in their future actions in respect to same."

RVC unanimously adopted recommendations that council invite further written submission from the Beef Week office/board as to their view: (a) in regard to the 'signature' event status, (b) as to ongoing funds to Beef Week by council, (c) as to the continuation of business planning/marketing and research projects, (d) as to the distribution to board members of council's stated position on matters of future interest to council, (e) as to their capacity/willingness to engage with council's tourism and events staff to facilitate initiatives from the Business Plan 2009-2013 including aspects of the Summary Notes of July 30, 2008 and that a further report be presented to council upon receipt of the advice sought above.