INQUIRY INTO TOURISM IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

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I am pleased to hear that this enquiry has been initiated. Whilst the Terms of Reference state the objectives, some clarity is required about terms such as "unregulated tourism". The term in some way implies that if it is not regulated then it is bad. It isn't. It is merely free formed approaches to tourism; e.g. going for a full day drive.

In this submission I want to address my area of interest, my hobby which is metal detecting, coin detecting, fossicking.

Generally, when detecting is referred to, it means the hobby or interests of using a portable hand held detector to scan the ground for coins or if in designated goldfield areas, for gold. The two categories bring with them distinct differences and effects upon tourism.

Gold detecting
The gold detectorist generally is headed for a location in state goldfields like the Golden Triangle in Victoria or the Bathurst region in NSW and generally will stay in the area for longer than a day and most likely for a week or two. Those detectorists whilst frugal will spend their money in the small towns nearby on fuel, food supplies, counter meals in pubs and clubs. I am sure that those regions welcome the hobby of detecting. Without it, those regions would be a shadow of their current economic success.

Coin detecting
The coin detectorist generally seeks out old home sites on farms (with permission from the owner) and spends a day at a time detecting around the site. They utilise local town libraries to research the local history, spend some money in the local towns on lunch and engage with the locals to gain insight into the area.

A valuable adjunct to the detecting hobby is the practice of removing rubbish from local parks, home sites, swimming beaches (both sea and inland rivers) etc. There is a vast amount of discarded rubbish in Australia lying a few millimetres under topsoil. When a detectorist performs an extraction of a find (for that is what we call it), a small hole is cut with a purpose designed knife creating a soil plug of approximately 100 mm in diameter and about 100mm deep conically. This is referred to as a "plug". The plug is cut neatly so as to allow it to be placed back into the hole for regrowth. Often, aluminium cans, pull tags, beer bottle tops and broken glass is found by detectorists in these holes. An unofficial code of conduct promoted amongst the detecting fraternity states that rubbish extracted from a hole must be taken away and disposed of correctly. Detectorists benefit local communities by removing rubbish. This includes rubbish that lays on the ground surface.

In playgrounds which utilise sand as soft cover, detectorists often remove broken glass or sharp metal as a consequence of their hobby, benefitting families who use the playground for their children.

Fossicking areas
I note that in the town of Young, NSW, the area known as Blackguard Gully is a designated fossicking location. That area was the site of a gold rush in the 1860's and detectorists visit the location hoping to find relics and coins. As stated before, detectorists spend money in the town whilst there.
More local shires should consider adopting the approach that the Young Shire council has - that of welcoming the detecting hobby.
Additionally, many Grey Nomads travelling around Australia have metal detectors and visit some towns specifically for that reason.

It goes without saying that the revolution of the Grey Nomad has immensely benefitted local town economies.

Whilst I am not able to project the financial value to our local region economies, I would proffer that without the influx of hobby style tourists, the viability of communities would suffer.

Recommendation

I recommend that this committee recognise hobby related activities such as detecting as a valuable contribution to local communities and that the committee, in its findings, supports the concept of gold, relic and coin detecting as an integral part of unregulated tourism that is valued by local communities.