

**Submission
No 47**

INQUIRY INTO TOURISM IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Organisation: Leeton Shire Council

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1. The Value of tourism to NSW communities and the return on investment of Government

Grants & Funds.

- The grants and funds that support tourism related events/attractions bring visitors into the community which brings outside money into the community's economy.
- The social impact on communities of bringing a feeling of worth by people from the "outside world" who visit.
- The positive social impacts from drawing communities together to run events as part of the organisational group.
- The heritage protection value of drawing communities together regarding historical and environmental assets and promoting them long term.

2. The value of tourism to regional, rural and coastal communities.

- Allows communities to showcase what they have to offer
- Money goes into a variety of industries that directly and indirectly benefit
- Locals are able to engage with visitors which could potentially get the visitors to return in the future
- As per points in 1. above

3. The impacts of tourism on Local Government Areas including:

- a) Infrastructure services provision and asset management

Visitation generates additional use of public facilities such as parks, gardens, pools, stadia and museums. It also generates demand on physical infrastructure such as roads, water supply and waste water systems, public toilets, signage, car parks and other public utilities such as broadband. More broadly, visitation can also increase demand for public services such as health facilities.

b) Social impacts

Ensuring that the impacts of tourism on a destination are monitored and managed is important for a sustainable tourism industry. Tourism development and management in a destination that is in line with the aspirations of local communities provides for a more authentic visitor experience and also attracts stronger community support for tourism.

As a consequence, a growing number of destinations want to ensure that local residents have a say in how tourism evolves, ensuring a long term ownership of the industry.

Efforts are therefore being put into monitoring local community views on tourism. If monitoring of impacts finds negative sentiment towards tourism amongst a community, for example, then it can be determined what needs to be fixed, or what communications can be implemented to ensure the right messages are getting across.

Subjective indicators endeavour to measure the impacts of tourism as perceived by local residents.

c) Unregulated Tourism

In its capacity to raise awareness of issues of environmental concern, tourism also has many positive benefits for the physical environment. Encouraging people to see things first-hand is a very effective way of promoting environmental conservation.

In this way, the environmentalist movement and the tourism industry have fuelled each other in a beneficial way over the past few decades, which is when tourism started to become much more environmentally friendly.

While the environmentalist movement has generated more interest in areas of natural significance and made people want to experience things in real-life situations, tourism has generated more understanding of the beauty of our natural world, which has made people feel more strongly about protecting it.

The relationship between environmental conservation and tourism could therefore be described as one of symbiosis, which means they have formed a bond based upon mutual benefit and dependence.

Often there is a fine line between what people consider to be positive and negative in terms of tourism's impacts upon Australia's physical environments.

While stopping tourism altogether would now be unfeasible, minimising its impacts and striking a balance between economic gains and environmental conservation, is something that should be worked towards.

The survival of the tourism industry ultimately depends on its ability to protect the features of the environment which it promotes.

As a result of this realisation within the industry, the concept of ecotourism emerged in the 1980s.

Ecotourism, also known as nature-tourism, combines tourism with the principles of ecological sustainability, endeavouring to minimise human impacts on the environmental features that form the basis of a tourist attraction.

In doing this, ecotourism encourages people to explore places in ways that enhance their appreciation and understanding of the values of a site, without degrading them. It also emphasises the importance of displaying 'cultural sensitivity' when visiting host sites.

This helps to reduce the negative social and cultural impacts of tourism by encouraging people to interact with locals and behave in a respectful, responsible manner.

As tourism delivers a growing economic benefit to our local community – the case for conservation rather than resource extraction grows stronger also.

However, we always have to be careful – and plan things out sensibly – and whilst eco-tourism provides an excellent economic alternative to destructive resource extractive industries, it must be noted that tourism in itself also has the potential to cause significant environmental harm if not managed sensibly.

Inappropriate off-road vehicle use is causing serious damage in parts of National Park precincts, whilst bushwalkers often unknowingly spread the damaging root-rot fungus into previously uninfected parts of eco-tourism environments.

Poor planning around visitor sites and walking trails could lead to erosion, pollution and other management problems. This has proven to be the case in other areas, where these issues have on occasion not been properly thought out.

d) Employment opportunities

Tourism is an extremely important industry in Australia. Each year it creates thousands of jobs and generates a great deal of wealth for the nation.

Most industry sectors are involved in providing goods and services directly and/or indirectly to visitors who come to the destination for holiday purposes, to visit friends and relatives or to participate in business meetings, including attending conventions, participating in incentive travel programs, exhibitions or other meetings, receive economic benefits from tourism.

The income derived from this is injected into the local economy and counters income leakage to larger centres by residents.

As a local economy derives an imbalance towards the positive regarding income leakage, it grows and provides an opportunity to increase employment through greater production or service, therefore fuelling further growth.

The most important factor in regional communities is to raise awareness that many more businesses, than the traditionally seen “tourism” entities, such as motels and tour guides, are involved in the visitor economy.

Once this realisation occurs, a greater growth can be achieved from within a local economy, which is the most valuable type of growth economically.

4. The marketing and regulation of tourism

- The vision is to develop and promote Leeton as the central tourism destination for domestic visitors travelling to the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, by working cooperatively with the Leeton Shire Council, Leeton businesses and the broader Leeton community.
- To improve the current visitor appeal of Leeton Shire and the surrounding region by developing a compelling, consistent and long term branding strategy.
- To link the community with business to ensure a consolidated approach to visitors.
- To increase visitation to the Leeton area by number and duration

- To focus Marketing and promotional activities on priority markets
- To undertake, complete and maintain Destination Management Planning
- To improve quality experiences and events of region
- To strengthen the Shire's tourism infrastructure and industry awareness

5. The utilisation of special rate variations to support local tourism activities

Special rate variations are extremely valuable to promote and grow local business communities once established but are exceptionally difficult to instigate due to the unpopularity generated.

A hindrance to implementation is the "absent landlord" situation, where the business premises is a rental site, and the landlord/owner is not located in the same community.

These are traditionally and typically difficult to deal with, by both tenants and local government, and add a complication to any process undertaken to implement a special rate variation.

Once established, there are many models of administration of funds which show positive results, such as joint community/local government groups and these can be assessed before choice of an applicable model is made.

6. Any other related matter