

**INQUIRY INTO THE CLOSURE OF CASINO TO  
MURWILLUMBAH RAIL SERVICES**

**Organisation:** Northern Rivers Tourism Incorporated  
**Name:** Mr Paul Donovan  
**Position:** Chair of the Board  
**Telephone:** 02 6626 9317  
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**Subject:**

**Summary**



31 May 2004

**Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4  
Inquiry into the Closure of Casino to Murwillumbah Rail Services**

Northern Rivers Tourism Inc is the peak tourism industry body for the Northern Rivers region which encompasses an area including the local government areas of Clarence Valley, Richmond Valley, Lismore, Ballina, Kyogle, Byron Bay and Tweed.

We are saddened by the government's recent decision to close the Casino to Murwillumbah XPT service and are now concerned with what may happen to the rail infrastructure along that route.

The Northern Rivers region currently enjoys approximately 2 million domestic visitors per year equating to approximately eight and a half million visitor nights, an increase of 19% over the previous year. The Northern Rivers region receives more visitors than the Northern Territory or Tasmania. Of note is the increase in the use of 'train' from 1% to 3% of transport used to the Northern Rivers. We also enjoy approximately 200 000 International visitors per annum which equates to 1.3 thousand visitor nights in the region. We have the highest international visitation of any region outside Sydney in NSW. (Source: BTR Regional Profile June 2002)

**Tourism Opportunities for Rail**

Rail travel is increasingly seen as a 'tourist' activity, with many private operators now restoring old rolling stock to provide a tourist experience like no other. The best case example of such a tourist experience is probably 'Puffing Billy' found in The Dandenongs in Victoria. The Northern Rivers has the potential to have such an exciting and different tourist experience, particularly as the rail track passes through some of the spectacular countryside our region has to offer. This also has a historical aspect as some of the train stations in the region are heritage-value buildings. There are many opportunities for private operators to build businesses on train station platforms, along the route as places of interest for rail travellers and to add to the experience on the train.

**Regional Tourism Strategic Plan**

In the Regional Tourism Action Plan for the Northern Rivers, a three year strategic plan (copy enclosed), one of the main objectives of the strategies in the plan is to disperse visitors from the coastal strip throughout the region. Having the option of rail travel is seen important for helping achieve this goal for visitors in Byron Bay and surrounds. (See Key Issues)

The option of a rail trip is also seen as important in adding to the activities visitors may engage in whilst staying in the region – increasing their length of stay. It also offers an added special interest area for tourists. (See Goals)

Other major objectives include conserving the current quality of life in the region and preserving the environment. Of course rail travel meets this objective far more effectively than increasing the traffic on the already overburdened and underfunded roads of the region. (See Goals)

### **Extension into Queensland**

Northern Rivers Tourism would support an extension of the rail track from Murwillumbah to Robina in Queensland. Visitors from Queensland would then have two rail options of entering the region – on day trips or for longer stays – via Murwillumbah or via the Brisbane to Sydney line through Kyogle. This would make rail travel an important aspect of travel throughout the region.

### **Regional Community/Tourism Amenity**

As a tourism industry organisation, we understand the importance of tourism and the local community working towards the same vision and goals. As has been cited in many reports\*, regions with more amenities for the local community also are an attractive place to visit. (\* See Dwyer J. & Lawson, J. (2002) Labour Market Adjustment in Regional Australia, Research Discussion Paper, Economic Group, Reserve Bank of Australia.)

### **Population Growth**

The Northern Rivers area is one of the fastest growing regions of NSW and Australia however the provision of essential infrastructure services such as road and rail funding does not match this growth pattern.

In the recently published report by the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources (2004) "NSW State and Regional Population Projections 2001 – 2051", the Richmond-Tweed region "has the second highest growth rate over 30 years of any region in NSW" and "has the highest projected net overseas migration of any region outside Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong".

### **Commuter Services**

This raises an urgent need for improved public transport and commuter services, particularly from the Coast into Lismore and other business hubs in the region. For example, as one of the major employers in the Richmond-Tweed area, Southern Cross University have over 2100 car parking spaces for staff and students, and these are filled to more than capacity every day. At least 50% of these travellers would be travelling from coastal towns where they live, and possibly as many as 30% (ie. 350) come from within the rail corridor starting from Mullumbimby, through Byron Bay, Bangalow and Eltham. The potential for a sustainable commuter rail service for locals is obvious.

We ask the government to further consider the long term implications for tourism and the general community without a rail service to this area of NSW.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Paul Donovan', with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the signature.

Paul Donovan  
Chair of the Board

# Northern Rivers Tropical NSW

Regional Tourism Action Plan 2002-2005



*"Crystal Creek Rainforest Retreat"*



New South Wales  
Department of State and  
Regional Development



## The Vision

By 2005 the Northern Rivers Tropical NSW region will be firmly established as a premier destination, providing a mix of high quality products and experiences for mainstream domestic and international visitors and special-interest markets.

The focus will be on a whole-of-region approach to industry development and the achievement of strong growth in market share in co-operation with local tourism organisations and Tourism New South Wales.

In fostering tourism growth, emphasis will be placed on conserving the region's natural environment and heritage assets for future generations and preserving the character of the villages and the lifestyle quality for residents.

The attainment of this vision will be underpinned by the commitment of all stakeholders to achieving the common goal.

## Background

The document Towards 2020: New South Wales Tourism Master Plan, to be released shortly by the New South Wales Government, establishes the strategic direction for the State's tourism industry.

To complement this direction Regional Tourism Planning studies are being progressively completed for most regions. This initiative will be the blueprint for the future development of regional product infrastructure, organisational structures, and marketing.

These planning projects are being commissioned in recognition of the importance of regional tourism to New South Wales, and to encourage industry growth at both the state and regional levels. Furthermore, the Plans are essential for regional economic development and to improve the professionalism, industry co-ordination, development of alliances and partnerships, and ultimately, the competitiveness of the State.



Because of the large number of strategic studies previously completed for the Northern Rivers Tropical NSW region, this Action Plan is designed to start from this point, building on the existing strategic work and taking into account the findings derived from fieldwork, the consultation process, and the human and financial resources available.

It is a plan for tourism across the region and brings together actions and opportunities that involve a wide range of partners.

## Northern Rivers Tropical NSW

The region covers 10 local government authorities and extends south from the Queensland border to include Corindi Beach, and west to Tabulam and Kyogle.

Tourism is one of the main economic drivers for the region:

- Currently, tourism contributes \$762 million to the economy in the Northern Rivers and generates 5,863 jobs.
- The Northern Rivers region receives more tourists than the Northern Territory or Tasmania.
- The region also has the second highest visitation from international tourists in New South Wales.
- Travel for holiday is far higher than the State average (59% compared with 44%).
- The largest market comprises singles of all ages. Intrastate visitors account for 49%, whereas interstate visitors make up 51% (State average 31%).
- Average length of stay is 4 nights.
- The region also has a large interstate day-trip market with 32% of these visitors from Queensland.
- Most visitors are domestic (85%), however, international visitors typically stay seven nights in the region, which is well above the State average of three nights.
- The main mode of travel is private vehicle (86%) with travel by air accounting for 8% (excluding Gold Coast Airport).

Northern Rivers Tropical NSW is a diverse destination area and one of contrasts with tourism assets ranging from excellent beaches, superb rural scenery, river valleys, villages, World Heritage areas, events, arts and crafts, lifestyle, and a variety of good support facilities and services. Collectively, these attributes have the capacity to build

existing markets, attract special-interest segments and grow the yield (economic benefits from tourism).

Notwithstanding the mix of product and experiences offered, the Northern Rivers region has yet to achieve its potential as a widely recognised destination. Nevertheless, with the initiatives already being implemented, and the opportunities identified in this Action Plan, the region is moving forward to achieve destination prominence.

## Key Issues

To further develop the region's tourism industry and gain the social, environmental and economic benefits, several issues need to be addressed:

- An integrated whole-of-region approach must be adopted, and followed through with action.
- Industry sectors must work together for a common purpose. There must also be a substantial improvement in networking, communication and product co-ordination.
- Appropriate management policies need to be set in place to ensure sustainable tourism growth in the long term.
- There must be the realisation that competition is fierce and that throughout Australia many new and innovative products are being aggressively promoted, giving the visitor market an ever-increasing choice of options.
- Concerted efforts must be made to maintain a high level of professionalism and service in order to achieve maximum visitor satisfaction.
- Emphasis needs to be placed on dispersal of visitors throughout the region.

## Challenges

- 1) Increasing the budget for Northern Rivers Tourism;
- 2) Reinforcing the region's brand;
- 3) Creating increased awareness of the region in source markets;
- 4) Establishing the 'Rainforest Way' project;



- 5) Increasing the focus on the region's World Heritage areas;
- 6) Building regional unity;
- 7) Improving co-ordination and communication across the region; and
- 8) Addressing training needs and levels of service.

## Northern Rivers Tourism

With the formation of development and marketing teams, and the appointment of a new Executive Office to provide an efficient administration function, the regional tourism organisation, Northern Rivers Tourism (NRT), now has the foundation to effectively undertake its industry leadership and advocacy roles.

Northern Rivers Tourism is recognised by the industry, the region, and Tourism New South Wales as the peak tourism body, and will therefore be the lead agency for implementation of this Action Plan.

To enable NRT to achieve success in its endeavours, and facilitate sustainable development of the region's tourism industry, stakeholders across the region must look to the future and support the regional tourism body in its leadership of the Action Plan implementation.



## NRT Mission Statement

'To provide strong industry leadership and effective regional marketing, celebrating lifestyle and landscape, and encouraging sustainable tourism based on best-practice principles for economic, environmental and social development'.

## Action Plan

The region has now reached the stage where a period of consolidation is essential, and this is the underlying thrust of the Tourism Action Plan.

The preparation and implementation of the plan is based on the fundamental principle that the primary focus of the region is to drive demand for the products, services and experiences of Northern Rivers Tropical NSW and that the primary focus at the local level should be on the delivery of quality visitor experiences.

Northern Rivers Tropical NSW has much to offer and is a refreshing change from the over-developed regions to the north. Given that the actions in this report are implemented, and that all stakeholders are willing to work as a cohesive force towards the common goal, there is no reason why the region's tourism industry cannot grow and prosper.



## Goals

### 1) Management Goal

To implement appropriate management policies, and provide strong leadership and a clear direction for the region's tourism industry.

### 2) Community Goal

To develop public awareness of the value and benefits of tourism, conserve the quality of life, and preserve the environment.

### 3) Industry Goal

To encourage co-operation, excellence in service standards and professionalism, and to assist established tourism businesses to grow.

### 4) Product Development Goal

To encourage development of high quality facilities, services and visitor experiences, and to assist organisations and individuals who wish to establish sustainable tourism-related ventures.

### 5) Consumer Goal

To recognise the needs and aspirations of visitors, ensure that expectations are satisfied, and marketing promises delivered.

### 6) Marketing Goal

To further develop target markets, increase length of stay and visitor spending (yield) by increasing awareness of the Northern Rivers Tropical NSW region as a desirable, rewarding, day-visit/short-break/holiday/special-interest destination

## Industry Leadership And Co-Ordination Actions

- Increase the funding base for Northern Rivers Tourism by expanding existing partnerships;
- Develop a greater understanding of the different roles of the regional body and tourism groups;
- Continue through NRT to build strong and harmonious alliances and partnerships with national, state and regional stakeholder organisations, local government, operators and the media;
- Present a series of practical day / half-day training workshops for operators; and
- Host regular networking functions in the three river valleys.

## Target Markets

Based on current state and national marketing structures, the marketing focus for the region has been identified as follows:

- a) Domestic : short breaks and drive-based experiences.
- b) International : touring and special-interest markets.
- c) Meetings / Incentives (MICE)

## Key Marketing Actions

- Continuing the current marketing initiatives, e.g. those centred on the short-breaks campaign in South-East Queensland, the Pacific Coast Touring Route, and participation in selected trade and consumer shows;
- Undertaking market research (particularly in S-E Queensland) compatible with new statewide research initiatives being introduced by Tourism New South Wales, and disseminating the information to regional stakeholders;
- Developing marketing policies that favourably position and promote accredited businesses and products linked to nature/eco-based product;
- Upgrading the region's local area websites and establishing a visitor information website under the control of NRT in accordance with Australian Tourism Data Warehouse standards;
- Establishing an integrated approach to whole-of-region motivational materials, information and maps, and including nature-based lifestyle and cultural information in promotional material for the region;
- Introducing a communications strategy focusing on a continuous public relations campaign highlighting the different attributes and local areas;
- Encouraging a co-operative approach by the region's tourism operators and establishing strategic alliances with adjoining regions, the region's airports, and Gold Coast Airport; and
- Supporting only those regional marketing activities approved and initiated by the NRT Marketing Team.



## Key Product Development Actions

- Identifying future nature-based and ecotourism opportunities and encouraging high quality interpretation of these natural assets;
- Continuing efforts to gain investor interest in environment / lifestyle-based accommodation;
- Developing drive market opportunities focusing on designated tourist drive routes, the 'Rainforest Way' project, and development of 4WD facilities and trails in line with best-practice methods;
- Producing a recreational fishing guide for the region's diversity of fishing opportunities;
- Building existing special events and co-ordinating annual forums for event committees;
- Further developing the regional cuisine and food trail experience and developing other special-interest / hobby tourism product;
- Publicising activities and experiences for the aviation touring market; and
- Encouraging participation in package development and co-ordinating annual packaging workshops for operators.





## Expected Outcomes

With adequate human and financial resources to implement this Action Plan, the expected outcomes over time would be:

- Higher levels of domestic and international visitation;
- Extended length of stay;
- Higher yield;
- Expanded range of specialised accommodation;
- High level of visitor satisfaction;
- Increased co-operation, networking and product co-ordination within the industry, with a whole-of-region approach; and
- Increased economic, employment and other benefits for the wider community.

## The Benefits Of Sustainable Tourism

- Multiplier effect of visitor spending;
- Employment opportunities;
- Diversification of the regional economy;
- Improved facilities for residents;
- Opportunities for new business and expansion of existing businesses;
- Improved transport services;
- Potential to create export markets for local products;
- Catalyst for residential development;
- Increased educational opportunities;
- Preservation of natural assets;
- Conservation of heritage; and
- A broader social outlook.

## For More Information

To obtain more information about the Northern Rivers Tropical NSW Regional Tourism Action Plan contact:

Northern Rivers Tourism  
PO Box 157  
LISMORE NSW 2480  
Phone: (02) 6626 9197  
Website: [www.northernriverstourism.com.au](http://www.northernriverstourism.com.au)

For information on other regional plans across New South Wales, contact:

Tourism New South Wales  
GPO Box 7050  
SYDNEY NSW 2001  
Phone: (02) 9931 1111  
Website: [www.tourism.nsw.gov.au](http://www.tourism.nsw.gov.au)

This Tourism Action Plan was prepared jointly by:

Rob Tonge & Associates  
PO Box 26  
COOLUM BEACH QLD 4573  
Phone: (07) 5446 1318  
Website [www.robtongetourism.com](http://www.robtongetourism.com)

Proactive Consulting  
PO Box 1106  
CARINDALE QLD 4512  
Phone: (07) 3843 1035

