

**Submission
No 55**

INQUIRY INTO TOURISM IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Organisation: Urana Shire Council

Date received: 28/06/2013



Urana Shire Council

Submission to NSW Government – Tourism in Local Communities

28 June 2013

Urana Shire Council is pleased to be offered the opportunity to make a submission to the NSW Government General Purpose Standing Committee number 3, in relation to their report to be produced on Tourism in Local Communities. Council is also a member of Riverina Regional Tourism (RRT), and supports the submission made by RRT.

Response

Council's submission addresses the terms of reference of the Committee, focussing on the most relevant matters to this area. Although our tourism market is relatively small, important economic benefits can still be gained from utilisation of businesses such as the Urana Aquatic Centre/Caravan Park, and flow on effects for other businesses. The survey feedback forms from the Caravans Park guests show a larger number of people are coming off the Newell and Hume highways to come through these areas. Most are pleasantly surprised at the facilities on offer. More development of the area such as the footbridge and finalisation of the golf course will also assist. Other towns such as Oaklands and Morundah also have important tourism products that Council are going to focus more on, to help raise awareness and develop the products. There exists a magnificent natural asset just to the West of Urana, called Lake Urana. It is a 16,000 acre natural lake, with untapped environmental, social and economic potential. Council are also focussing on the further development of this product and see it as being critical to the future tourism development in this area.

1)

The value of tourism to New South Wales Communities and the return on investment of Government grants and funds;

The current funding proposals, based on the information provided by (RRT) are not going to be sufficient to enable them to maintain an adequate sustainable presence in the region going forward, based on current financial inputs. The Riverina, being of a very large area, with mostly small rural Councils, and relatively small tourism businesses, cannot be expected to generate the same revenues as larger tourism regions.

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Assuming the NSW Government accepts some of the Local Government Review Panel recommendations around doing away with the Regional Organisations of Councils (ROC's) and creating new Regional County or Strategic Councils, Councils should be supported with their tourism bodies into ensuring tourism becomes a major focus for this group. The State is over regulated and governed with representative bodies that all cost Councils significant amounts to be part of. Not to mention commitment in attending meetings for all of these bodies.

Whilst the predominant economic drivers for this Council, historically and will continue to be agriculture, Council regards tourism as being an emerging and important industry, and hence are increasing their focus and resources on this area. Whilst we don't have any specific examples to comment on the return of investment of Government grants and funds, we note the importance and strong performance of RRT as testament to a strong return on Government funding.

2)

The value of tourism to regional, rural and coastal communities;

Urana Shire values the importance of tourism, and has invested heavily in the Aquatic Centre including the Caravan Park, and other amenities to cater for tourists. Council have not historically been able to employ a specific tourism officer and so have been limited in their ability to be a major player in RRT or work with local businesses to improve the tourism products in the area.

Council believes the State should take a more equitable approach and recognise the smaller rural areas with increased funding to allow them to develop capacity, recognising that more and more, people are coming off the main highways to explore the smaller areas.

3)

The impacts of tourism on Local Government Areas, including –

a) Infrastructure service supervision and asset management

Council does not have any negative impacts from tourism, due to the low numbers. Council values the economic benefits of tourism, and have untapped potential in projects such as raising awareness of Lake Urana, and the proximity of Morundah to the Newell Highway, with potential for a large community and cultural centre for concerts, building on the existing Opera brand that is associated with Morundah.

b) Social impacts

Council sees positive social impacts from increased tourism into the area, in gaining awareness from the locals as to life in the country. Some smaller areas have targeted tourists in an attempt to encourage permanent re-location to their areas.

c) Unregulated tourism

Council does not have any issues at present with illegal camping or any other matters associated with unregulated tourism.

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d)

Employment opportunities

There are limited opportunities at present due to the small tourism market, but small initiatives such as increasing tourism products, such as accommodation, would assist in employment opportunities.

4)

The marketing and regulation of tourism

Council due to a limited staffing structure at present, have not been able to actively market the area, or participate strongly in RRT promotions. Council does believe the State Government should do more for the smaller tourism regions to assist in funding for marketing.

5)

The utilisation of special rate variations to support local tourism initiatives;

Council's limited rate base means that it is not an option to propose a special rate base for this purpose.

Conclusion

Council hopes the Standing Committee, through its deliberations and submissions received can provide a strong case for the NSW Government to continue to support the Tourism Industry in Regional and Rural NSW. Council would urge the Committee to consider the limited financial resources available to the rural areas in particular, including the lower number and scale of tourism businesses, with corresponding lower financial capacity. In this regard, some sort of adjustments to tourism spending to enable these areas to build capacity would be the best outcome.