

INQUIRY INTO TOURISM IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Organisation: Bombala Council

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Current Situation

Since around 1995, the Bombala Region has marketed itself as “Platypus Country” due to the high numbers of Platypus in the local rivers and streams. While the marketing has had some success tourism within the local area is still an emerging industry. Eco-tourism has been identified as a niche that has good potential and has been supported by the creation of the South East Forests National Park, in particular the Myanba Gorge and Nunnock Swamp recreational precincts located within an hour of Bombala. These sites offer the visitor different experiences that are unique to the Bombala area and allow for the opportunity to educate the visitor on local conservation issues and programs.

Other niches that have been identified as offering potential are history based tourism and motorcycle tourism. The village of Delegate some 35kms south of Bombala is promoted as an historic village and attractions to support this have been developed. In addition Council leases the Railway Land from State Rail and has assisted with the development of history based attractions on site.

In addition since 1995 NPWS has worked with Bombala council to create a Platypus Reserve of Crown Land 4.5 kilometres south of Bombala. The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) have been running the successful Discovery program “Paddle with the Platypus” which won the 2007 Local Tourism Event of the Year award at the Reserve since late 2006

Indeed since the inception of the local NPWS in 1995, the agency has been working closely with the Bombala Council in an effort to build tourism within the local area. There has been a slow but steady increase in tourism numbers with the majority of visitors coming to the area to view the platypus and experience the local national parks.

There are strong working relationships with Victorian agencies including Parks Vic and East Gippsland Shire Council and of course closer relationships with the relevant state agencies and surrounding councils within NSW.

Future Plans (Immediate)

The NPWS in Bombala are currently establishing walking tracks in the South East Forests National Park east of Bombala, within in the Coolangubra section linking important visitor destinations and north of Bombala, in the Tantawangalo section of the park around the Nunnock Swamp and the Alexanders Hut Historic site.

This has enabled the Bombala Council and PWD to establish and develop a *Visit Bombala* concept. This project will commence in early 2009 and work to establishing regular guided walks within the local national parks and other activities including, Paddle with the Platypus at the Platypus Reserve and range of activities taking place on the railway land in Bombala and also in the village of Delegate south of Bombala.

In principle support has been gained from the local tourism operators who are beginning to recognise the potential tourism opportunities in the local area.

This concept will require a significant marketing and promotion budget to ensure its success.

Future Plans (Long Term)

Better engage with the youth by developing programs with agencies and schools that focus on maintaining a healthy, sustainable environment. Linked to this are ideas around improving camp sites in the local national parks to enable a broad use of the sites for educational as well as recreational purposes. For example, installation of permanent tent structures and outdoor educational aids.

Build on the success of the marketing of Platypus Country by improving the visitor facilities and interpretation at the Platypus Reserve.

Work with local universities, community groups and the Australian Platypus Conservancy on developing research projects to enable a greater understanding of local platypus populations and their ecology.

There will be a need to enhance our communication with the Southern Rivers and East Gippsland Catchment Management Authorities to provide education and awareness about invasive weeds and feral animals which may impact on the habitat of the platypus and sustainability of our local catchments.

Additional work on the Railway Land is planned and includes a timber/farming/specialty producer centre which will focus on the history and future of the various industries, their links to the natural environment and the need to ensure that all future developments are sustainable and environmental sound.

Opportunities

The acceptance of the area known as Australia's Coastal Wilderness as a *National Landscape* is anticipated to bring considerable benefits to the Bombala area and is a good fit with the current focus on developing eco-tourism within the local area. Bombala will be a gateway town to this National Landscape and the project will strengthen existing relationships, generating new promotional opportunities and at the same time enhance existing promotion..

In addition there will be a further benefit to the local area with the acceptance of the Australian Alps to the National Landscapes program.

While the focus of the National Landscapes program is on attracting overseas visitors, it is anticipated that the advertising campaigns mounted by Tourism Australia will also stimulate the interstate and local tourism markets. The increased awareness of the region can only boost the local tourism industry and open up opportunities

There is a need for increased engagement with local Aboriginal people. There are opportunities for links with local education providers to better connect and educate the local community and potential visitors about the unique culture and traditions of local Aboriginal people. For example, the Bundian Way¹ an Ancient Aboriginal Pathway linking the pre-European whaling of the coast to the moth eating festivals in the alps is a traditional pathway older than the Silk Road and has been nominated for National Heritage Listing. To date there has been very little promotion of this very important pathway.

There has not been a great deal of marketing of the Bombala Region to the Canberra market. Over the past 5 years this potential market has substantially grown in size. In addition with the Canberra suburbs spreading south, Bombala Region is now seen as more attractive in terms of travel time and potential tourism and recreational opportunities.

There has been an emergence of community and volunteer organisations such as the Platypus Pals who are keen to work with the Bombala Council, NPWS and other agencies in order to promote both the aims of the particular organisation and tourism in the local area. Platypus Pals have also formed effective links with the Australian Platypus Conservancy to enable additional research to be undertaken in the Bombala area.

The location of Platypus Country Bombala Region in relation to Sapphire Coast offers the visitor a chance to experience a wide range of nature based activities and opportunities within an easy drive of each other. For example, within one day a visitor to the far south could experience a Whale Watching Tour out of Eden on the far south coast and participate later on that day in a NPWS Discovery Paddle with the Platypus Tour at Bombala Platypus Reserve. This visitor will also travel through and experience a diverse range of forest ecosystems types along the drive and also soak in the history and culture within the hinterland villages such as Wyndham, Rocky Hall and Cathcart.

Tourism within the Bombala area would benefit greatly from an injection of investment into the accommodation sector.

Likewise, there are currently no commercial tour operators within the Bombala Region. There are numerous opportunities to invest in the local tourism industry and establish small businesses catering for the needs of tourists such as back packer tours, four wheel drive tours, fly fishing tours, guided walk and bush tucker activities.

Bondi Forest Camp, uniquely located within Bondi State Forest has the potential to be developed into an educational facility focusing on sustainable development. This would require a large injection of funds to develop the infrastructure and a willingness from Forests NSW to become involved.

¹ Author John Blay has nominated the Bundian Way for Listing on the National Estate
http://www.netspeed.com.au/seforests/bundian_way.htm

Issues, Considerations and Constraints

- Due to its location and road conditions until recently Bombala has not lent itself to being marketed as a stop over destination. Slowly this is changing over the past five years the Monaro Highway has been sealed linking the Victorian, East Gippsland coast through to Canberra. Over the last 3 years Bombala Council has been working with the East Gippsland Shire Council to promote the route through Bombala as a tourist route and the benefits of our area are now more widely recognised. The sealing of the Snowy River Way which will link the mountains to the Bombala region via a all weather sealed road is anticipated to bring additional opportunities.
- Networks amongst the various tourism businesses/operators is not strong due in part to the fact that tourism is still only a small industry within the local area
- Lack of understanding amongst community members of the benefits that tourism can bring to the area tends to hinder tourism development.
- The current lack of commitment to tourism development by existing businesses does mean that there are opportunities that could be developed. In particular there is an urgent need for additional accommodation of varying levels to cater for the slowly increasing tourism market. If a back packer style accommodation was set up NPWS could enter into an agreement to offer guided walks in the local national parks.
- Limited resources on behalf of local council to mount substantial marketing/ advertising campaigns, results in the need to rely on partnerships with other agencies, both state and federal, and a need to engage strongly with surrounding local government areas.
- Local agencies are only recently improving their ability to capture data related to visitor numbers at their various visitor destinations. This has resulted in a limited understanding of the real tourism potential of the local area. This in turn has caused a lack of infrastructure provision within the local area to date.
- Lack of commitment from Forests NSW to continually maintain access particularly east and north of Bombala leading to important national park destinations. This seems to be a result of their focus on industry priorities rather than broader community needs eg tourism. Local NPWS customer feedback forms often reflect tourist dissatisfaction with the condition of local Forest NSW access roads.
- Managing visitor numbers, carrying capacity and the impacts of visitor sites over time. Resources will dictate that developing further opportunities will be limited.