

**Submission
No 26**

INQUIRY INTO REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND A GLOBAL SYDNEY

Organisation: Newell Highway Promotions Committee

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The Newell Highway Promotions Committee

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4 June 2017

The Hon Greg Pearce MLC
Chair
Inquiry Into Regional Development and a Global Sydney
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear The Hon Greg Pearce MLC

Thank you for the opportunity for the Newell Highway Promotions Committee to provide a submission to the Legislative Assembly Committees Inquiry Into Regional Development and a Global Sydney, and I extend an invitation for the Committee to hold one of its public hearings in West Wyalong. The Newell Highway is the premier inland touring route in NSW and is the third largest freight corridor.

Background

Following a recent NHPC meeting and teleconference it was resolved that as the Chair of the NHPC I write to you in relation to:

- The Newell Highway Promotions Committee
- Destination NSW (DNSW) Funding and the Regional Development Fund
- DNSW Sector Development
- Destination Networks
- Accredited Visitor Information Centres
- The Drive Tourism Sector and
- Local Government Contribution to the Visitor Economy
- Telecommunications
- Tourism Signage
- Additional Funding for the Newell Highway

The Newell Highway Promotions Committee

The NHPC was established in 1977 to promote New South Wales and Australia's Premier Inland Touring Route, the Newell Highway. The NHPC was one of the first touring route promotional committees in Australia and has survived changes of State and Federal Governments, State and Regional Tourism Organisations, Council Amalgamations, the formation of the Destination Networks and the cost shifting by State and Federal Governments to Local Government.

Since 1977 the Committee has grown to incorporate all Local Government Areas (LGA's) and other organisations along the Newell Highway as well as adjoining LGA's in the Newell Highway corridor including:

| NHPC Member Organisations | NHPC Member Organisations |
|----------------------------------|---|
| • Greater Shepparton (Victoria) | • Narromine Shire |
| • Berrigan Shire | • Dubbo City |
| • Deniliquin Shire | • Gilgandra Shire |
| • Jerilderie Shire | • Warrumbungle Shire |
| • Narrandera Shire | • Narrabri Shire |
| • Temora Shire | • Fossickers Way |
| • Bland Shire | • Inverell |
| • Villages of Cabonne | • Moree Plains Shire |
| • Forbes Shire | • Goondiwindi Regional Council (Queensland) |
| • Parkes Shire | • Leichhardt Highway (Queensland) |

The Newell Highway travels through four Regional Tourism Organisation (RTO) areas. The RTO figures in the following table have been extracted from the attached DNSW RTO trend data <http://www.destinationnsw.com.au/tourism/facts-and-figures/regional-tourism-statistics> which highlights that the total visitor expenditure for the four RTO's is \$3,273 million:

| RTO | Expenditure |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Murray | \$629 million |
| Riverina | \$668 million |
| Central West | \$1,183 million |
| New England North West | \$793 million |
| RTO Expenditure Total | \$3,273 million |

The NHPC produces and publishes a very informative touring guide that is promoted at the majority of the Visitor Information Centres on the eastern seaboard of Australia and at the major caravan and camping shows.

The NHPC also maintains the well visited Newell Highway Website:

<http://www.newellhighway.org.au/route39/> and the following table provides some information that was extracted from the attached Newell Highway 2016 website analytics:

| Month | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | June | July | Aug | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec | Total |
|-------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| Pageviews | 10,767 | 8,001 | 8,434 | 9,150 | 9,164 | 11,328 | 12,594 | 11,718 | 25,861 | 27,948 | 11,904 | 13,965 | 160,834 |
| Location | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Users by Country | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Australia | 3,015 | 2,211 | 2,400 | 2,613 | 2,523 | 3,377 | 3,435 | 3,226 | 9,968 | 10,340 | 3,908 | 4,059 | 51,075 |
| United States | 29 | 11 | 18 | 22 | 22 | 20 | 17 | 17 | 21 | 33 | 41 | 49 | 300 |
| United Kingdom | 10 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 8 | 10 | 4 | 6 | 14 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 61 |
| New Zealand | 10 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 9 | 14 | 18 | 16 | 0 | 5 | 88 |
| China | 0 | 27 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 32 |
| India | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Canada | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 16 |
| Singapore | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 |
| Not set | 7 | 8 | 10 | 6 | 9 | 12 | 9 | 21 | 23 | 57 | 34 | 25 | 221 |
| Total | 3,064 | 2,256 | 2,429 | 2,643 | 2,559 | 3,416 | 3,465 | 3,263 | 10,044 | 10,389 | 3,960 | 4,113 | 51,601 |

| Month | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | June | July | Aug | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec | Total |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| Australia | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| NSW | 1,095 | 784 | 856 | 1,072 | 925 | 1,263 | 1,267 | 1,177 | 4,424 | 3,991 | 1,447 | 1,499 | 19,800 |
| VIC | 835 | 688 | 747 | 737 | 894 | 1,184 | 1,125 | 988 | 2,542 | 3,331 | 1,231 | 1,197 | 15,499 |
| QLD | 969 | 625 | 682 | 692 | 579 | 789 | 906 | 908 | 2,787 | 2,884 | 1,096 | 1,238 | 14,155 |
| SA | 72 | 61 | 53 | 62 | 84 | 83 | 82 | 87 | 187 | 284 | 105 | 93 | 1,253 |
| ACT | 21 | 28 | 40 | 39 | 30 | 48 | 53 | 38 | 139 | 109 | 41 | 79 | 665 |
| TAS | 46 | 39 | 36 | 42 | 43 | 66 | 37 | 39 | 72 | 54 | 31 | 32 | 537 |
| WA | 22 | 17 | 16 | 17 | 7 | 18 | 25 | 39 | 66 | 58 | 32 | 24 | 341 |
| NT | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 13 | 0 | 6 | 4 | 30 |
| Not set | 29 | 18 | 22 | 26 | 15 | 23 | 15 | 23 | 38 | 69 | 58 | 49 | 385 |
| Total | 3,089 | 2,260 | 2,452 | 2,687 | 2,577 | 3,474 | 3,510 | 3,306 | 10,268 | 10,780 | 4,047 | 4,215 | 52,665 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| International | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| UK / England | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 37 |
| Netherlands | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| UK | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| USA | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Virginia | 19 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 19 |
| Shandong | 0 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 14 |
| Beijing | 0 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 12 |
| Massachusetts | 0 | 0 | 7 | 5 | 0 | 10 | 8 | 9 | 0 | 19 | 14 | 12 | 84 |
| Minnesota | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| New York | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| Ontario | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 37 | 0 | 0 | 37 |
| Total | 27 | 26 | 11 | 13 | 6 | 19 | 8 | 9 | 14 | 56 | 14 | 12 | 215 |

The NHPC efficiently operates within a conservative funding model supported solely by the member organisations. Currently there is no funding committed to the organisation by the NSW Government and it's agency Destination NSW (DNSW). The NHPC has been informed by DNSW that the funding criteria for the new Regional Tourism Fund does not support core marketing activities of the organisation including design, production and distribution of the Newell Highway Touring Guide, yet the Newell Highway is the New South Wales and Australia's Premier Inland Touring Route.

At the recent 2016 Australian Tourism Awards <http://australianaward.com.au/2016-awards/2016-winners/> the following Newell Highway corridor organisations, events and attractions received awards:

Festivals and Events

- **BRONZE:** Parkes Elvis Festival NSW

Caravan and Holiday Parks

- **GOLD:** BIG4 Deniliquin Holiday Park NSW

Unique Accommodation

- **GOLD:** Taronga Western Plains Zoo NSW

Destination NSW (DNSW) Funding and the Regional Development Fund

In Minister's Ayres Destination Network Message, the Minister mentions that through Destination NSW six new Destination Networks will be established with more funding guaranteed.

The NHPC has concerns that the funding mentioned by the Minister will be absorbed in the establishment, staffing and running the Destination Networks i.e. the General Manager of the Regional NSW Division will have a total remuneration package of \$255,051 - \$320,900. In addition to this position DNSW recently advertised for six Regional Tourism Development Managers who will each receive a total remuneration package of \$112,000 - \$124,000.

The NHPC is lead to believe that DNSW will advertise the following positions for the six Destination Networks in the very near future:

- 6 x General Managers – (this position may have a salary range of \$150,000 - \$170,000)
- 6 x Business Development or Marketing Manager / Officer
- 6 x Administrative Assistants

The NHPC has been made aware that three of the Directors of the Riverina Murray Destination Network were Directors on the Riverina Regional Tourism Board in unpaid positions. The three Directors will now be paid \$10,000 each per annum on the Riverina Murray Destination Network Board. The six Chairpersons s will each receive \$20,000 and the 32 Directors will each receive \$10,000.

Then there is the setting up and fitting out of the six Destination Network offices and supplying transport and motor vehicles etc.

The NHPC believes that the money being spent on the Destination Networks could be better allocated in promoting Regional NSW and enhancing the visitor experiences in Regional NSW.

In Minister's Ayres Destination Network Message, the Minister mentions that DNSW will also be working with each of the Destination Networks to market each region, showcasing the diverse range of destinations and experiences Regional NSW has to offer to potential visitors across NSW, Australia and to the world. The NHPC has concerns that DNSW's priorities will focus on the Sydney, Blue Mountains and the North, Central and South Coast regions with an emphasis on food and wine. There is a great deal more to NSW and we encourage the vast range of experiences beyond the mountains to be supported through funding and showcased to on the global stage.

The NHPC has had discussions with DNSW regarding assistance in funding (50/50) the printing and distribution of a new Newell Highway Touring Guide and we were informed that DNSW Regional Cooperative Tourism Marketing Program (RCTMP) fund does not cover the production and distribution of the Newell Highway Touring Guide which is a core component of the marketing strategy for the organisation.

The NHPC also would like to see the Regional Tourism Product Development Program (RTPDP) be changed to include the refurbishment and improvement of existing assets and facilities including picnic or playground areas, local parks, barbeques, meeting facilities and regional and town entry features.

The RTPDP Guidelines state that the upgrade or develop meeting and/or local community facilities—including picnic or playground areas, local parks, barbeques, meeting facilities and regional and town entry features are not eligible. The upgrade or refurbishment of existing

attractions is a long term recurring business cost that should be factored into the ongoing operation of the attraction. The intention of this funding program is to support new tourism product development opportunities. The development of new assets places financial pressures on LGAs and increases the operational and depreciation costs.

The NHPC mentioned that for established organisations like the NHPC it should be easier to apply for and acquire DNSW grants. From the information contained in the RTPDP and RCTMP guidelines the red tape has not been reduced.

DNSW Sector Development

Destination NSW's sector development or main activities are concentrated around:

- Aboriginal Tourism
- Youth
- Food & Wine
- Cruise and
- Regional Conferencing

The NHPC believes that this sector development is extremely limited and there is more to regional NSW than these sectors. One sector that is overlooked by Destination NSW is the caravanning and camping sector and I have attached a copy of the latest Caravanning and Camping State of the Nation report for your information.

Tourism Australia's core pillars are concentrated around:

- Aquatic and coastal
- Food & Wine
- Nature & Wildlife and
- Youth

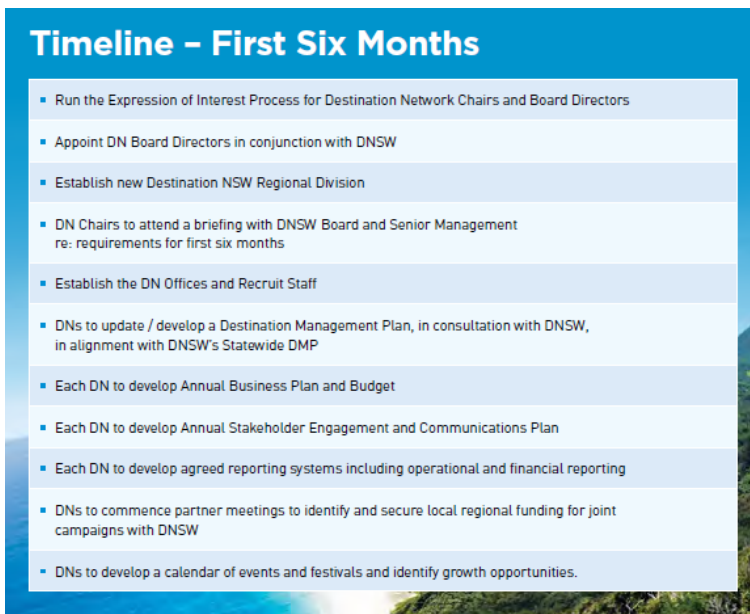
These core pillars are similar to the Destination NSW sector development and are extremely limited and there is more to regional NSW than these core pillars.

Destination Networks

The NHPC would like to sight the report that came out of the review into the structures and operations of regional tourism organisations in NSW that was the basis of the formation of the Destination Networks is made public.

The NHPC are concerned that the six new Destination Networks are not in operation which is 8 months after the Minister announced the formation of the Destination Network on 6 July 2016. The Destination Network Staff have not been recruited or the offices have not been established.

The following table has been extracted from page 18 in the attached Destination Network document that was released with the Ministers announcement. The table is the timeline for the first six months and indicates that the formation of the Destination Networks is way behind schedule.



Accredited Visitor Information Networks

The NHPC supports Accredited Visitor Information Centre's (AVICs) and actively promotes AVICs throughout our marketing material and online platforms. We were surprised and disappointed that a Queensland Company has been awarded the contract for the management of NSW AVIC's.

The Drive Tourism Sector

The NHPC acknowledges and identifies that the drive tourism sector is a crucial market for tourism in NSW, as has the Queensland Government as outlined in this report, <http://teq.queensland.com/industry-resources/industry-sectors/drive-tourism>.

The NHPC strongly encourages Destination NSW to provide the same level of support and promotion for inland touring routes as they currently do for the Coastal Touring routes.

In the attached DNSW's Travel to Regional NSW year ended March 2015 report, it mentions that private or company vehicle (87.2%) was the most popular form of transport used by visitors to regional NSW, followed by 'air transport' (6.1%) and 'railway' (3.3%).

The attached The Caravan and Camping State of the Industry 2015 report also backs up the importance of the drive tourism sector, *the Caravan and Camping sector is a major economic driver for Australia's tourism and manufacturing industries, contributing an estimated \$19.02 billion worth of economic value to the nation's economy in 2015.*

Regional Local Government Contribution to the Visitor Economy

The NHPC Local Government Organisations contribute a significant amount of funds to assist the NSW Government to reach their goal of doubling overnight visitor expenditure by 2020.

The following list is an example of what Local Government Organisations fund to assist in meeting this goal of doubling overnight visitor expenditure by establishing, operating and maintaining:

- Visitor Information Centres
- Conference, Meeting and Event Facilities
- Parkes, Gardens and Ovals
- Art Galleries and Museums
- Sporting Facilities
- Airports
- Roads
- Rest Rooms
- BBQ facilities
- Caravan Parks
- Wetlands
- Lookouts
- Websites and Social Media
- Brochures
- Leaflets
- Posters
- Signage etc etc

I have attached a copy of the Australian Regional Tourism Network presentation on their findings of the local governments' contribution to the visitor economy.

Telecommunications

There are sections along the Newell Highway that do not have access to the mobile phone and internet services that are taken for granted in urban Australia. Reliable mobile phone and internet coverage is critical for the future growth of regional NSW. Enhancing mobile coverage in regional and remote areas also has clear social, economic and safety benefits.

Access to reliable and affordable mobile phone and internet coverage in remote and regional areas is essential to Australia's future growth, and the growth of regional NSW.

Mobile phone blackspots, extensive grey and shadow spots and mobile phone coverage failures adversely affect community resilience and increase the vulnerability of communities when the need for mobile communications is heightened.

Inadequate mobile phone coverage disadvantages individual communities and the wider national economy. Lives can quite literally depend on access to mobile phone coverage.

It is accepted that the Australian population is increasingly reliant on mobile services as a convenient utility for safety and emergency purposes. However, mobile phone blackspots, extensive grey and shadow spots and mobile phone coverage failures exist in regional and remote areas of Australia meaning mobile telephones services cannot be relied upon or do not exist in some areas.

The Newell Highway has numerous black spots, extensive grey and shadow spots and mobile phone coverage failures. This not only proves difficult and frustrating for the businesses, residents, motorists and visitors, but also represents a specific risk during disaster and emergency conditions.

Tourism Signage

The NHPC feels that the Tourist Attraction Signposting Assessment Committee (TASAC) rules and regulations are too restrictive and inflexible and have further concerns with the proposed changes to the Draft Changes to planning rules for outdoor advertising: SEPP 64.

Signage will be more important should the international tourists disperse into regional NSW and along the Newell Highway, Australia's and NSW's premier inland touring route.

Additional Funding for the Newell Highway

The NHPC would like to see additional funding allocated for the Newell Highway for:

- Improve the road pavement
- Additional overtaking lanes
- Additional rest stops
- Installation of the wide centre line treatment
- More appropriate and modern signage
- Flood proofing the Newell Highway
- More and regular cleaning of the Newell Highway Corridor

The Newell Highway is more than just a highway and please do not hesitate to contact myself Jeff Stien should you require any additional information.

Yours faithfully

Jeff Stien
Chairperson