



Mackay Tourism
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Fri 28 May 2010

Ms Lyndel Bates
Research Director
Economic Development Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane QLD 4000



Dear Ms Bates

Inquiry into developing Queensland's rural and regional communities through 'grey nomad' tourism

Mackay Tourism and Mackay Isaac Region

Mackay Tourism welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Economic Development Committee's 'Inquiry into developing Queensland's rural and regional communities through 'grey nomad' tourism.

We look forward to greater recognition of the economic value of 'grey nomads' and the introduction of policies which support growth of this important tourism segment, as outcomes.

Mackay Tourism is one of Queensland's fourteen Regional Tourism Organisations, covering the Mackay and Isaac Regional council areas. We speak on behalf of our 268 members - comprising public and private sector organisations and businesses - committed to tourism growth to our region.

Grey Nomads

Tourism is a vital industry in our region, worth some \$350m annually and generating approximately 700,000 visitors each year. Leisure and Visiting Friends / Relatives traffic accounts for two thirds of the total. Of the pure leisure market, the majority arrive by road and we estimate between 50,000 and 100,000 are domestic grey nomads - over 45 years of age, originating in SEQ and the Southern States, travelling for extended drive holidays - often the entire length of the Bruce / Pacific Highways and / or the Great Inland Way. Mackay is ideally located to capture this market and provides many essential services and attractions to such travellers.



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The 'grey nomad' market is of particular importance to our region - and particularly the caravanning and camping sector of our industry. They have the time and interest to explore the region more thoroughly than any other segment, and they visit in large seasonal flows - generally between May and September - as the climate is most attractive to them at that time. One of our marketing strategies is to extend this season into the shoulder months of April and October. They travel independently and unstructured (ie no detailed itinerary pre-booked) and their average stay in our region in 3 or 4 days, sometimes longer if they friends or relatives locally. Our accredited Visitor information Centres play a vital role in welcoming 'grey nomads' and encouraging their dispersal and length of stay within our region.

Infrastructure Requirements

Mackay Tourism acknowledges the infrastructure and service needs of this ageing visitor segment - such as 24 hour medical access, vehicle repair services, access to dump points and potable water, signage and information bays on major highways, and parking in close proximity to general shopping precincts.

Mackay and Isaac Regional Councils also fully recognise these needs, and Mackay RC has recently begun the implementation of three new waste / dump points, including at our central VIC within Mackay city.

Without doubt, all of these requirements can be better served in every region, Mackay - Isaac included. However, we are cognisant of the needs and the major impediment for further or enhanced public infrastructure (eg signs, information bays) is financial.

Camping and Caravan Parks

These are in short supply and of varying quality in both Mackay and Isaac regions. It is notable that along this section of the Central Coast, there is only one Big 4 park (at Airlie Beach) - over 700km - those existing are run by independent operators - of varying (but generally average) quality.

The need for more Caravan park capacity was highlighted in the Mackay Whitsundays Regional Tourism Investment and Infrastructure Plan (MWRTIIP) of 2006, but no new capacity has yet eventuated.

In recent years, Mackay Tourism is aware of six caravan parks locally (in prime sites) that have closed because the owners sought a better return on investment than such useage was providing. While operator under-investment or lack of business skills was, and remains a weakness in this industry segment, the performance of these businesses, in turn, is being adversely impacted by the imposition of severely increasing government license fees and other charges (Federal, State and Council). The proposed land valuation system change, for instance, could inflict further operating costs on caravan park businesses. In addition to these, new entrants are often confronted by daunting costs of infrastructure and installation of utilities, threatening any viability if the business is to offer competitive prices to its customers. To complicate matters, there are disparities between local government laws and regulations across the state - of particular concern to management companies and park chains.

Of the Caravan Parks that remain in our region, many have been utilised for months on end as affordable housing by the wave of migrants being recruited by the coal industry - housing development has not kept pace with our population demands.

The dearth of quality caravan park capacity (and thus, our inability to serve a lucrative market) remains a major concern to Mackay Tourism and Mackay Regional Council, and we recently commissioned a State-funded study into solutions - the consultants' recommendations may be downloaded from our website - www.mackayregion.com - click on downloadable reports - they identify suitable possible sites, if developers can be found and persuaded / encouraged to invest.

Mackay Tourism believes that an expansion of the State's capacity to cater for 'grey nomads' could be achieved with simplification of government regulation to make the industry more viable, and a review of the use of public land for free or discounted camping and the associated conditions attached - in Mackay, for instance, we have a perfectly located Showgrounds, vacant for much of the year, which could be easily adapted to handle overflow from the commercial parks.

State Government could be very helpful in identifying suitable land that could be marketed to potential developers, with appropriate incentives. The RTIIP noted Mackay then (in 2006) needed an additional 250 sites.

Marketing and Promotion

Mackay Tourism, supported financially by TQ, Councils and our business members actively promotes our destination to the 'Drive' market (with the slender funds available). It should be noted that State funding to the RTO's for this purpose has not changed since 2002.

Given that the target audience is visiting a succession of destinations and experiences along their chosen route, there is good sense in combining resources to jointly promote the concept externally eg 'Drive the QLD Coast to Cape York and back).

Government could play a greater role in leadership and co-ordination of this effort between the desiring destinations with an umbrella 'drive ' advertising campaign, co-operatively funded, to portray the incredible range of experiences and facilities to be found along, and off, the highways of Queensland.

Given the nature of this unstructured target market (the 'grey nomads'), on line promotion lends itself perfectly - many of them research their route broadly before leaving home, but travel with their laptop to examine prospective stopovers and accommodation in the days approaching their next stopover.

Printed maps and guides remain highly sought and effective in promoting specific regions and districts and providing essential reference information such as health services, vehicle repairs, industry contact details etc Another effective way to reach and stimulate this market is by promotion at the Caravanning and Camping Shows held in major cities across the year - 'grey nomads' are a dominant group attending these shows each year. We work closely with the Caravan Parks Association, and with the Caravan and Motor Home Owners Association.

In our region, Mackay Tourism, in conjunction with the Mackay and Isaac Regional Councils, and with support from local businesses, is launching a new tourist drive route on 1 June 2010 between Clermont and Mackay. Named the Mining Trail, this corridor promotion is intended to bring leisure tourism to the mining towns and rural landscape of our hinterland, tracing the passage of coal from the mines to export from Hay Point. It is a good example of a regional marketing initiative, very much with the "grey nomads' in mind.

Use of their Skills in regional and rural Queensland

There is no doubt these travellers can bring highly useable skills and expertise to the regions they visit. These, in turn, could be used by local industries eg mango and tomato harvesting, as well as local festivals and events, to fill seasonal or occasional vacancies. We would thoroughly support greater government and community effort to harness this opportunity - what is needed is clearer advice and dissemination of such opportunities to be advertised to travellers. Perhaps a 'Seasonal Work in Qld' document (for Grey Nomads) could be published annually - on the web so it can be updated regularly.

Mackay Tourism looks forward to reading of wider suggestions, and the conclusions the Committee reaches, with outcomes to better harness this valuable tourism segment for our state.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D Phillips', written in a cursive style.

David Phillips
GENERAL MANAGER