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Great egret in flight. Picture supplied.

The nature-based tourism train Victoria must get on

Opinion

KERRIE ALLEN, spokesperson for Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting

AMID a financial landslide taking place in rural communities around our State, jobs remain the number one issue in small country towns, according to researchers from SGS Economics and the Grattan Institute.

How do we address the need for rural jobs when manufacturing can be so fickle and agriculture is sadly unreliable due to climate and market fluctuations? We look to our own beautiful backyards! Tourism contributes more to

the Australian economy than agriculture.

It employs more than 1 in 20 Australians, supports 1 in 8 businesses and has out-performed the national growth rate for the last three years.

The latest data shows tourism provides 143,000 jobs to Victoria and is worth a whopping \$12.2 billion to gross state product.

Nature-based tourism has grown faster than all other forms of tourism combined over the last five years.

There is record participation in bushwalking (up 14 per cent), visits to nature parks and Aboriginal cultural sites.

Kakadu just won a top tourism award, Winton wetlands brings

36,000 visitors a year to just one area, and Lake Tyrrell now sees up to 240 visitors a day.

Phillip Island Nature Parks, the brainchild of premiers Cain and Kirner, turned the fairly common penguin into a multi-million dollar tourist attraction, contributing \$500 million a year to Victoria - \$122 million and 800 jobs to the Bass Coast area alone.

Victoria is blessed with stunning wetland habitats - rich in indigenous culture and home to rare species of birds - which could rival Kakadu.

Yet these wetlands remain largely undiscovered. Our stunning Lake Boort, known for its rich bird life and re-

cently nominated to the National Heritage List for outstanding Aboriginal cultural value, is one such site.

If we followed the lead of other states and stopped the shooting of our native waterbirds in places like this, we would attract bushwalkers, birdwatchers, jobs and cash for our regions.

It's time to replace duck shooting with nature-based tourism and give our rural community the fair go we deserve.

Of the two major political options, it is the Labor Party that appears to get more things done for rural Victoria, with initiatives for climate and rural tourism - both of which are critical to the bush.

in outcomes such as dairy industry liaisons, the inclusion of Nat suppliers in the Fed concessional loan scheme. "These past four years unprecedented challenge dairy industry. I have had the opportunity Victorian dairy farmers lucky enough to lead team of elected volunteers away from their farms to represent the industry," he said.

The UDV Policy Committee of president as a role of meeting on December the UDV Policy Committee an election for the pre-

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BOOK EARLY
RAILWAY
BOORT

Inglewood Lic
Christmas Fest & Carols by Sunday, December 11
Recreation Reser
Christmas gift for children but they must be registered December 12 and at Online children registrations, Facebook and top the link, or at the Inglewood Bank, Champions Rd or
Free family B&B
CHRISTMAS LIGHT
Make your hot
Winners announced
Contact: Murray
Email: mbaud@