

Ecotourism potential to unlock the outdoors

Extra MRC funds

KERRIE ALLEN

DOMESTIC overnight tourism results are out and Queensland is closing in on Victoria.

The results also show an increase in ecotourism, which is being heavily promoted in Gannawarra.

Results released for the 2018 calendar year show New South Wales is still ahead of the game with 34.6 million visitors and their \$21.1 billion spend, (the latter up 13 per cent on the previous year), while Victoria sits on 25.7 million visitors at \$14.9 billion spend (up 9 per cent).

But Queensland is quickly closing in with 24.1 million visitors and a whopping \$18.3 billion spend, a huge 16 per cent increase in spend on last year.

A study for the Tourism and Transport Forum "Unlocking the Great Outdoors" (2017) put nature-based tourism – which has grown faster than all other forms of tourism combined – at \$41 billion across our country.

In recent weeks the Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Simon Birmingham noted in the media "ecotourism is on the rise in Australia".

Queenslanders are certainly reaping the rewards with another example just announced of a new 2.2-kilometre Mount Vane walking track at Stradbroke Island, designed and constructed by the island's traditional owners, the Quandamooka people.

Queensland Minister for Tourism Industry Development, Kate Jones said it was "one of the many new ecotourism experiences we're delivering on across the island over the next few years, as part of the economic transition strategy" and that research had revealed walking tourism alone has the potential to pump \$16 million a year into the local community.

Here in Victoria, Phillip Island Nature Parks contributes \$500 mil-

lion a year and 2100 jobs; the Great Ocean Road \$1.3 billion; Lake Tyrrell now sees up to 1000 visitors a day in peak times.

And Winton Wetlands, just to one area near Benalla, despite drought - where they shoot birds with cameras - saw a whopping 44 per cent increase in visitor numbers last year - up to 52,000, already around a quarter of Kakadu's annual visitor numbers (and about twice the number of duck shooters across Victoria).

Our Victorian Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Martin Pakula gets it; "we know regional Victoria has the best of everything and also untapped potential".

And as he says, tourism already accounts for one in 10 jobs in regional Victoria.

With international overnight tourism relatively low and declining in many areas across regional Victoria, let's hope for Victoria he strengthens the nature-based tourism trend which is booming elsewhere as soon as possible.

In so doing, he just may lift both domestic and international visitation. Our biggest international inbound tourist market are the nature-loving Chinese.

A new study by Kantar Consultancy found, "nature and natural wonders are the most mentioned factor in destination choice" for Chinese travellers. According to Tourism Research Australia another key criteria for Chinese tourists is safety.

Our stunning waterways each offer something unique to nature tourists. Home to rare and threatened species of birds and rich in aboriginal culture, they remain largely undiscovered and crying out for inclusion in a regional nature-based tourism trail.

There's a better way for our waterways.

KERRIE ALLEN is spokesperson for Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting.



A great egret. Picture – DORITH CALLANDER

MURRAY River Council has resolved to deliver \$81,040 worth of annual community grant allocations via its 2019/20 budget deliberations.

This is in addition to the \$60,000 of funding allocated to the competitive community grants program which is run twice annually.

The annual grant allocations are non-competitive and are allocated within council's annual budget towards regular celebrations, projects or events.

Council mayor, Cr Chris Bilkey said the annual allocations are a way for council to offer support to organisations who continue to deliver great initiatives across the council area.

"This is about actively supporting community organisations who regularly contribute to the recreational and cultural life of our region."

"There's a number of dynamic projects, programs and activities that occur on a regular basis and council are keen to not only support them, but deliver the assistance needed to help these projects grow," he said.

Annual allocations have been provided to initiatives such as Pericoota Pop and Pour, Southern 80, Barham-Koondrook Show, Moulamein Photography Competition, Mathoura Easter Fair and Good-night Christmas Tree event.

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