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16 April 2018

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Dept. Environment, Land, Water and Planning

Submission on Great Ocean Road Region Issues Paper

### Introduction

My name is John McInerney and I have been a resident of Port Campbell for twenty six years. During this time I have been the Ranger in Charge of the Port Campbell National Park, Bay of Islands Coastal Park, Twelve Apostles Marine National Park and Tower Hill Wildlife Reserve.

I currently operate Port Campbell Touring Company and Portside Motel in Port Campbell. Port Campbell Touring offers private tours on the Shipwreck Coast with 70% of clients flying in by either helicopter or fixed wing plane from Melbourne. Consequently my clients are at the upper end of the market whereas Portside Motel is a 3.5star motel catering for overnight self drive market.

I have previously been president of the Twelve Apostles Tourism and Business Association and the initial president of Port Campbell Progress Group.

In my younger years I travelled international for three years, mainly in Asia and Europe ( including overland to Europe) and in recent years spent time in Asia and America. Consequently I have had the opportunity to experience many of the international “must do sights”. This has given me an excellent insight into the “tourism product and economy”.

I apologise for not using the Question and Answer form but there are several aspects of the governance of the Shipwreck Coast which will not fit into the form.

### Scope.

As I have limited experience over the entire length of the Great Ocean Road I will limit my comments to the Shipwreck Coast.

## Current Issues

Lack of governance – the visitor facilities are managed by Parks Victoria whose primary role is conservation and natural resource management. Funding at the Twelve Apostles etc. is currently provided to cover cleaning of facility, car parking, car/coach management, maintenance of boardwalk, toilet management etc. Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism is primarily a marketing and advocacy body. There appears to be a lack of onground governance in terms of onsite management with the primary aim of increasing the visitor experience.

## Lack of Funding –

The Kennett Government recognised the economic importance of the Twelve Apostles. Unfortunately the 1997 proposal for a world class visitor centre didn't get up and consequently, we now have an inadequate toilet blocks and car park unable to cope with the demands. The current facility when built in 2000 had an effective sustainable life span of ten years. Now 18 years on and a huge increase in the Chinese market over the last seven years, it is particularly disappointing as an “Australian International Icon”, primarily due to lack of funding.

## Expectation –

My experience ( and borne out by Monash University survey) is that the visitor, due to grandiose international marketing, is disappointed in the infrastructure and experience when visiting the Twelve Apostles. With my guests, expectations are high and delivery is low in terms of the visitor infrastructure on ground. The day trip market ex Melbourne may have a different perspective. With current social media, this can have a devastating impact.

## Decision Making –

Good decision making is based on good data. Unfortunately the data being used by government/agencies appears to be based on Tourism Research Australia. Anyone who works at the Twelve Apostles will know that the vast majority of visitors are international ( my estimate is 85- 90%). Yet officially domestic visitors are outnumbering internationals two to one. The same applies to visitation in Port Campbell. Accommodation providers in Port Campbell have a 70% plus international occupancy. Privately, Portside Motel gained funding through VECCI for an internship to engage a Masters of Sustainable Tourism student from Monash University. His report over four months, contradicted the TRA official data being used by Corangamite Shire and tourism agencies. The Chinese occupancy data by TRA re; regional Victoria overnight stays appears to be particularly incorrect.

I firmly support the concept of a Great Ocean Road Authority managing the Great Ocean Road and major visitor nodes into the future on the following conditions.

1. Funding is adequate to improve the visitor experience to an iconic status.

2. Funding raised can be put back into the infrastructure and educational/interpretation program to ensure a greater understanding and appreciation of the Shipwreck Coast. A **statutory authority** based on the Phillip Island Nature Parks seems to work exceptionally well with funding going into tourism experience, education and research.
3. Parks Victoria manage the balance of the Port Campbell NP, Bay of Islands Coastal Park etc for conservation and natural resource protection and park education and funding from tourism contributes to this management.
4. User pay principle applies and includes coaches (do coaches ex Melbourne pay a \$2.40 pp fee or does this just apply to smaller licensed tour operators?) Ratepayers need reduced fees.
5. There is no delay in funding the Shipwreck Coast Master Plan. The proposed funding needs to be allocated now and not delayed for three years if this proposal gets up!
6. This proposal does not change the natural linear experience of travelling from Apollo Bay to Port Campbell on the Great Ocean Road. Current planning restrictions should continue to apply ensuring there is no linear development along this section of Great Ocean Road. For many international visitors, the sense of “space” outside of towns is something we need to retain into the future.
7. Current planning restrictions in Port Campbell continue to apply – we want Port Campbell to remain a small seaside town without large buildings overpowering the town. We need to look at high yield/low volume visitation model whereas now we have a high volume of visitors going through the town with little yield.
8. The Corangamite Shire is able to offset cost of improved infrastructure and servicing of visitor facilities in some way i.e. ratepayers are not subsidising visitor services.
9. Encourage future developments (outside of Port Campbell) to cater for a high end market i.e resort type developments which compliment the Port Campbell NP
10. Future marketing should concentrate on encouraging the overnight stay and not the coach /self drive one day trip ex Melbourne.

Regards  
John McInerney  
Director  
Port Campbell Touring Company