

25 August 2014

Manager, Park Planning and Procedures  
Environment and Heritage Division  
Parks Victoria  
Level 10  
535 Bourke Street  
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

## **RE: GREATER ALPINE DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN**

To whom it may concern

The Tourism & Transport Forum (TTF) is the peak national body for the tourism, transport and aviation sectors. We are a CEO forum representing some of the most prestigious institutions and corporations in the Australian visitor economy, with our membership spanning accommodation and transport providers, restaurants and retailers, business and major events organisers, property developers and land managers, amusement and cultural attractions, and professional services.

TTF utilises our expertise and networks to develop and advocate public policy for the sustainable long-term growth of the visitor economy, within which the natural landscape plays a significant role as both destination brand signifier and visitation demand driver. Nature holds tremendous appeal for visitors and Victoria is well placed through assets within the alpine national parks to capture the potential benefits of visitation for environmental conservation, cultural preservation and economic development.

### THE GREATER ALPINE VISITOR ECONOMY

The economic contribution of visitors to the Victorian alpine region is significant. In the High Country region alone, which encompasses a majority of the area under review, visitation contributes \$806 million to gross regional product (GRP) and supports 8,500 jobs<sup>1</sup> – representing 24.6 per cent of GRP and 21.8 per cent of total regional employment. Expenditure by visitors supports the viability of local businesses, create vibrant and diverse communities and provide revenue for conservation.

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<sup>1</sup> Tourism Victoria (2013) – *Value of Tourism to Victoria's High Country*

A key component of the region's tourism offering is the network of alpine resorts that act as gateway hubs to local nature-based recreational experiences. TTF commends Parks Victoria on the draft plan's explicit recognition of these resorts in providing supporting infrastructure and services including accommodation, visitor information and food and beverage. The alpine resorts make a significant contribution to the region's economic welfare, provide employment opportunities and amplify the efforts of government agencies in developing and promoting opportunities afforded by the visitor economy.

Indeed, the value of the visitor economy has been endorsed by the state government's *2020 Tourism Strategy*, which aims to boost overnight visitor expenditure to \$24.7 billion by 2020. At present, overnight visitor expenditure has only increased 3.5 per cent per annum since the launch of the strategy in 2009, whereas growth of 6.6 per cent per annum is required to meet the 2020 target. A sound and well-resourced plan of management for one of Victoria's key tourism regions would form a crucial part of delivering this strategy.

TTF welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Victorian government's *Greater Alpine National Parks Management Plan* and congratulates Parks Victoria on the delivery of this document. Prioritisation of infrastructure investment and experience development in areas of high tourism value would yield the greatest benefit to the Victorian government's conservation and economic development goals. We support the overall direction of the draft plan and look forward to progress on the delivery of the cultural, recreational and tourism initiatives identified within.

## INTERGRATING STRATEGIC INTENT

It would be beneficial to have a succinct version of the long-term vision featured in the executive summary, given its significance in setting the tone and direction of not only the management plan but subsequent implementation and action plans. As an on-going reference document and as part of a communication strategy for stakeholders, a concise summary of the overall plan of management would be ideal.

It is pleasing to see the vast majority of the 900,000 ha within the parks and reserves under consideration permits recreational and tourism use by visitors. This aligns well with the Victorian government's recent initiatives in encouraging nature-based tourism investment and experiences in protected areas – an alignment that could be more strongly emphasised as part of the broader context of the plan of management.

In particular, the strategic intent of the recreation and tourism components of the draft plan aligns well with existing key strategies published by the Victorian government, including the aforementioned *2020 Tourism Strategy* – which identifies “investments which enhance the state's nature-based tourism products” as a key focus – and *Victoria's Regional Tourism Strategy 2013-2016* – which identifies nature as a key strength for the state and outlines a number of action items in the alpine region for building on this competitive advantage.

Further, it would be helpful to acknowledge and integrate the work undertaken as part of the *Alpine Resorts Strategic Marketing Plan 2014-2018*, published in May 2014 by Tourism Victoria and the Alpine Resorts Coordinating Council, as well as strategic management plans currently in place for a number of the alpine resorts. It would be good to see issues of

integration addressed in the final management plan to ensure a collaborative approach to delivering key initiatives.

## LEVERAGING EXISTING NETWORKS

TTF supports the prioritisation of investment in areas of high tourism use, identified in the draft plan as Visitor Experience Areas. Doing so leverages the existing networks of tourism expertise, resources and branding, ensuring critical mass in destination development and providing greater returns on investment for businesses and the surrounding communities.

A crucial component of leveraging existing assets is ensuring contemporary, engaging visitor interpretation and wayfinding. Signage infrastructure plays a role in this – in particular at key sites of environmental and cultural heritage (both indigenous and colonial) as well as along trails. A coordinated approach to destination marketing will also be essential to ensure consistent core messages are relayed to target visitor markets.

While new product development will be essential to maintain competitiveness, the plan should also focus on greater utilisation of existing investments, including maintenance for infrastructure and partnership with operators. For example, Parks Victoria must be adequately resourced to manage its existing asset portfolio, and where possible, collaboration should be enhanced with operators already invested in the region.

Existing operators could also be granted additional certainty in making future investments through streamlined license renewal processes, including the potential for automatic renewals.

## ENHANCING EXISTING ASSETS

TTF supports upgrades to key existing infrastructure, including the expansion of the Mount Hotham ski field to Eagle Ridge, investment in an all-weather gondola at Mount Buller's Horse Hill, and improved visitor access through the creation of a road linking Mount Buller and Mount Stirling resorts. Similarly, the development of new tourism experiences should focus on areas adjacent to alpine resorts to ensure maximum returns.

An example of an outstanding initiative that would enhance the appeal of the region is the development of a new high-altitude training centre at Falls Creek, identified as a key action item in *Victoria's Regional Tourism Strategy 2013-2016*. Such a facility would act as an internationally-competitive site for athletic training and entrench the region's reputation among the wellness and lifestyle visitor segments. Substantial work has already been undertaken in investigating the feasibility of this project, which would benefit from continued government investment and partnership.

A component of the training centre facility would be a visitor centre at Rocky Valley Dam, as identified in the draft plan. It is important to ensure this investment does not result in a static pamphlet booth, but a well-serviced central hub for information and engagement, allowing greater opportunities to deliver educational and interpretative experiences by acting as the gateway to the surrounding areas. A similar initiative at other resorts would likewise benefit visitors and businesses within their respective regions.

Finally, the Greater Alpine management plan should ensure appropriateness of shared use in Visitor Experience Areas – in particular the compatibility of low-impact recreational activities such as hiking in areas with permitted four wheel driving, horse-riding and hunting. Such potentially conflicting activities should be managed in well demarcated areas to ensure all users' ability to enjoy safe and rewarding experiences within the greater alpine area.

## DEVELOPING NEW PRODUCT

TTF also supports strategic investment in new products and the facilitation of private investment in protected areas, in line with the Victorian government's nature-based tourism policy. Chief among these should be demand-driving infrastructure such as multi-day walks, accommodation options and visitor facilities. Given constrained public funds, providing incentives to facilitate private tourism investment is key to unlocking the region's potential.

Trails for iconic multi-day walks, cycling and four-wheel drives serve as crucial demand drivers for the key experience seeker segment who want more immersive experiences in nature. A new multi-day walking experience between Falls Creek and Mt Hotham would be a key plank in this demand driving strategy, tapping into existing visitor markets at both alpine resorts and providing the potential for low-impact accommodation and guided tour options along the way.

The development of sensitive and appropriate accommodation options in protected areas would also create unique and compelling new reasons for visitation. These can range from low-impact huts along multi-day walking trails such as the one proposed for Falls Creek to Mount Hotham, to wilderness retreats such as the chalet proposed for Mount Buffalo National Park. TTF endorses the prioritisation of competitive tendering processes for private operators with the expertise to effectively deliver and manage these initiatives.

Where new products and experiences would be of strategic benefit to the region, incentives could be provided to would-be investors by offering exclusive licenses. TTF recognises the Victorian government's initiatives to allow lease terms of up to 99 years and supports further work in this space to ensure certainty and encourage product innovation.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me – we would welcome the opportunity to discuss our recommendations further.

Regards



**ADELE LABINE-ROMAIN**  
Executive Director