28 August 2013

The Hon David Koch, MLC
Chair, Environment and Natural Resources Committee
By email: enrc@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Mr Koch

Submission by Australia ICOMOS – Inquiry into heritage tourism and ecotourism in Victoria

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on Heritage Tourism in Victoria. I provide this letter as a submission on behalf of Australia ICOMOS.

ICOMOS – the International Council for Monuments and Sites is a non-government professional organisation that promotes expertise in the conservation of cultural heritage. ICOMOS is also an Advisory Body to the World Heritage Committee under the World Heritage Convention. Australia ICOMOS formed in 1976 is one of over 100 national committees throughout the world.

Australia ICOMOS has over 600 members in a range of heritage professions. We have expert members on a large number of ICOMOS International Scientific Committees as well as on expert committees and boards in Australia. We have a particular interest in Australia’s world heritage sites.

The goals of Australia ICOMOS are to:

- Ensure that the organisation retains a leadership role in conservation philosophy and practice for culturally significant places
- Promote an understanding of the cultural significance of places and raise conservation standards through education and communications
- Inform and influence key decision makers concerning Australia ICOMOS’ aims and approaches to conservation philosophy and practice
- Participate in the international arena, both within and beyond the ICOMOS International family
- Develop, maintain and support a broad-based membership through effective administration

Australia ICOMOS will respond to the terms of reference as established by the committee with a primary focus on heritage matters as they relate to built and natural environments.
BEST PRACTICE

Best practice in cultural tourism spans both tourism and heritage interpretation. In April 1997 ICOMOS released its ‘Charter for Cultural Tourism’, which positions cultural tourism as ‘places where people enjoy the culture of the destination, interacting with the lifestyle, heritage, arts industries and leisure pursuits of the local population’.

Heritage tourism, as a branch of cultural tourism, makes use not only of tourism professionals but also heritage specialists. International best practice in heritage tourism draws from best practice in heritage interpretation, where the significant and unique values of a heritage site inform all visitor activities, from the visitor’s first encounter with the heritage site to branding and marketing activities, experiences on site and offsite and the visitor’s final or ongoing interactions with it. This experience-based model allows a large range of non-site based heritage ‘experiences’ to be created, ranging from heritage-themed walks, tours and drives to events, art, food and beverage activities, retail, theatre and education. Social and digital media further extend the reach of traditional heritage products and open them up to new audiences.

All of these models make use of tourism models to build economic, social and cultural capacity through heritage-themed activities while still respecting the authenticity of a site and preserving and conserving its fabric.

EXAMINING THE CURRENT SCOPE OF ECOTOURISM AND HERITAGE TOURISM IN VICTORIA, INCLUDING THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS MAXIMISE THE BENEFITS TO THE LOCAL INDUSTRY:

Positioning

A branch of cultural tourism, heritage tourism is a vital part of the Victorian economy. Victoria’s well developed cultural heritage tourism sector is underpinned by the Victorian Heritage Strategy, Heritage Studies and work undertaken by local councils. Natural and cultural heritage has underpinned much of Australia’s tourism product. Specialist tourism ventures, whether nature-based, adventure, indigenous, historic, cultural or ecotourism, all rely strongly on heritage and heritage places. Festivals such as Open House Melbourne and Ballarat Heritage Weekend celebrate Victoria’s architectural and cultural heritage and local councils devote significant resources to heritage interpretation.

Heritage tourism is particularly important in attracting cultural visitors to regional Victoria. In 2007-08 period, historic & heritage places featured on the itinerary of 251,000 international visitors and 429,000 domestic overnight visitors to regional Victoria. Studies have shown that cultural tourists tend to stay for longer and spend more than non-cultural tourists. Research conducted in the UK indicates that heritage attributes can enhance business and property values by making precincts more appealing for indirect tourism activities such as shopping, eating and drinking, and meeting friends.

Victoria proudly can boast the longest history of state managed heritage conservation in Australia. This has given Victoria an extraordinary diverse range of buildings, precincts and townships of different historic periods, particularly gold rush. Many heritage places are in their original settings and condition and whether as a backdrops or destinations, deliver benefits for local communities and tourism industries. As a result, Victoria’s has secured reputation within the tourism sector for possessing history & heritage that is important to the national story.
A substantial scoping study has been completed for the Goldfields Region (‘Developing Victoria’s Goldfields into Australia’s Cultural Heritage Region’, 2012). Its job was to assess the Goldfields against other significant heritage regions elsewhere in the world, review the importance of heritage tourism in the region, identify strengths and weaknesses, consider economic benefits and recommended what sort of investment projects needed to be rolled out to achieve a world-class tourism reputation.

The Goldfields Scoping Study found that the region did possess the necessary attributes to become a world-class destination and that a cross-regional approach to historic heritage was the best way forward to enhance tourism benefits. Currently nearly 40,000 (24% of the total) jobs in the Goldfields region are in tourism-related sectors and to the year ending 2011, and tourism visitation delivered an estimated spend of $1.6 billion.

SKM Economics, in their valuation study into the Social and Economic Benefits of Heritage to Ballarat, found that “A region with a strong representation of heritage buildings should gain a net benefit from increased tourism attracted by the heritage properties and precincts. This benefit will be fiscal; tourism numbers, internal expenditure by local members of the community visiting heritage sites and cultural; ‘public good’ generated by the presence of heritage properties and the importance they hold within the community.” Tourism was found to be worth $300 million per annum and heritage was the main attractor. Using the Valuing the Priceless formula by the Allen Consulting Group, Ballarat residents would be willing to pay $6.7 million per annum for a modest increase in protection to heritage.

**Distribution**

Tourism Australia defines the key cultural tourism destinations in Australia as Sydney, Melbourne and Perth, and Melbourne is heavily featured on the Visit Victoria website. However, according to ‘Sustainable Heritage CRC: Cultural and Heritage Tourism: Understanding the issues and success factors’, many of Australia’s historic heritage assets are located in non-metropolitan regional Australia where the contribution of cultural tourism to economic growth and policy is of great importance. In addition, although Australia’s non-indigenous cultural assets are only circa 230 years old, they represent important icons and appear to contribute to a sense of national identity.

**Capacity and capability**

Despite the wealth of built and cultural attractions in Victoria, product development for heritage tourism sites lags far behind consumer expectations and requirements. Heritage tourism is currently based around heritage ‘assets’—historic buildings and sites—with experiences left for the visitor to create for him or herself. Within the Tourism Victoria Visit Victoria website, heritage is not featured under the home page but under the tab ‘attractions’. This section reflects the dominance of the goldfields in the representation of Victoria’s past, with ‘Highlights’ of Sovereign Hill and Bendigo Talking Tram, then the sub-sections ‘Gold Rush History (High Country, Goldfields, Gippsland)’, Maritime History (Great Ocean Road, Gippsland, Mornington Peninsula) and Coal Mining History (Coal Creek). Under these subsections, the main attractions are museums and theme parks, but sections such ‘gold rush history’ (under ‘High Country’) feature a grab bag of ideas of what to do (‘Visit Victoria's historical and cultural precinct’, ‘wander through nineteenth century streetscapes’, learn about the mining past of Howqua Hills historic area’) with no associated itineraries or experiences developed around these themes.
Heritage assets are vulnerable to natural disasters, wear and tear. Preservation and creative re-use are important issues associated with large-scale tourism. These issues can only be addressed through investment for long-term, multi-strand regional development programs designed to protect and enhance heritage places and precincts. It is important that this investment is not piecemeal. It needs to be at a scale and timing cluster effect to realistically enhance branding for heritage tourism. This requires investment in broader regional tourism development projects dealing with:

- improving the quality of the assets (by increased expenditure on preservation and restoration activities)
- improving accessibility to the assets by increasing the number of walking tracks and the quality of existing tracks
- improving accessibility to knowledge of the assets by increasing the availability of written and multimedia material describing the assets, their inception and their past and present roles in the community
- improving the public recognition of key assets up to the level of World Heritage listing, and
- increasing the quality and quantity of tourist infrastructure available in the region.

Heritage professionals, with additional resources, better support and build on the success of the ‘Jigsaw’ Campaign through the development of an overarching historic heritage strategy based on opportunities identified in the Goldfields Scoping Study. These opportunities could be fleshed out for the whole of regional Victoria. They include:

Infrastructure
- heritage conservation projects and advocacy for funding
- streetscape enhancement and best practice design
- accommodation
- transport connections

Tourism Product Development
- touring routes extended through ‘hub and spoke’.
- tracks & trails
- themed stories with regional and local themes.
- consistently branded visitor materials and collateral.
- genealogical tourism
- re-use of heritage places for tourism.
- coordination of heritage related events

Building Capacity and Leading Change
- support by all levels of government
- advocacy and communications
Opportunities
There is currently no formal relationship between the heritage sector and tourism industry. Development takes place on an *ad hoc* basis and frequently under the initiative of local tourism operators, many of whom have little or no training in heritage-related matters. Moreover, the factors that make heritage sites special—their authenticity, which in turn derives from their historical significance—are sometimes overlooked in the rush to create a destination brand.

The cultural heritage resource is fragile and requires sensitive use and management if it is to form the basis of tourism enterprises. A robust strategy for heritage tourism would outline ways of interpreting sites to ensure that the physical fabric is protected as well as the site’s authenticity. Digital media, including Near Field Communication, and offsite delivery of interpretation in the forms of websites, Apps and print publications, offer real opportunities to protect sites as well as to deliver high-level tourism experiences. Both the heritage and tourism industries need to move beyond the *de facto* assumptions that Victorian heritage should be delivered only through signage, exhibitions and themed Visitor Information Centres. These forms of built interpretation have their role, but the best interpretation will leave the visitor eager to know more and to explore the site without what the *ICOMOS ENAME Charter for the Interpretation of Cultural Heritage Sites* calls ‘intrusive interpretation infrastructure’.

Many opportunities, therefore, exist to develop sophisticated heritage tourism product by basing branding, marketing, experience and product development on the authentic values of a heritage site—that is, using the significance as a point of difference from other kinds of attractions to give both the site and heritage experiences depth and meaning. Areas to prioritise for development include:

- **Changing the parameters for site-based interpretation.** There is a need to move away from built forms of interpretation to create discreet and subtle immersive interpretation opportunities on and off site, which will in turn contribute to conservation and preservation by respecting the fabric of the site. These could include ground-based markers, small installations set low to the ground, Apps and Smartphone games for children.
- **Creating a Victorian heritage tourism strategy,** which would outline heritage experiences based around themes for a town and/or region, including site-based heritage experiences—a ‘Heritage Jigsaw’. This would not only enable Tourism Victoria’s current ‘Jigsaw’ campaign to continue to drive people to iconic attractions, but also offer a range of themed heritage experiences across the state, involve short or long itineraries.
- **Developing a better understanding of heritage interpretation** by engaging specialists from this sector to develop offsite and onsite interpretation for heritage sites
- **Developing a financial and sustainability planning strategy** for heritage tourism linked to economic, environmental, social and cultural outcomes
- **Linking heritage with ecotourism more comprehensively.** This would extend the penetration of both sectors and offers ‘rest and respite’ from too much heritage or too much nature tourism. These sectors could also be linked with outdoor recreational activities (e.g. ‘cycle the goldfields’).
- **Developing programs that use popular culture ideas and motifs to attract people to ‘authentic’ heritage sites and experiences,** where they can participate in interpretive activities that engage them with a site’s significance. This is a ‘tip of the iceberg’ approach to bridge the gap between popular culture and ‘heritage’.
DETERMINING WHETHER THE LOCAL INDUSTRY IS SUFFICIENTLY ADVANCED TO MANAGE INCREASED TOURISM AND ANY OBSTACLES TO THIS.

Building relationships
Tourism Victoria needs to create formal relationships between ICOMOS, Museums Australia Interpretation Australia and Parks Victoria to ensure that the respective skills of members could be maximised. Heritage professionals can work with Tourism Victoria and tour operators to:

- Have an integrated and holistic management strategy for heritage sites
- Develop opportunities for heritage-driven experiences
- Undertake economic modelling for heritage sites in order to measure the economic, social, environmental and cultural impacts of heritage tourism.

Recommendations:

- Australia ICOMOS supports the development of heritage and nature-based tourism strategies that respond to the issues identified by the CRC, and are in line with the considerations of the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter.
- Australia ICOMOS recommends that Tourism Victoria establish a ‘Heritage and Ecotourism’ Reference Committee with participants from the tourism industry, ICOMOS, Interpretation Australia, Parks Victoria and Museums Australia. This strategy will incorporate financial modelling for the sectors and formalise the role of heritage interpretation in relation to tourism.
- Australia ICOMOS agrees that it is vital that significance and authenticity be at the core of any cultural heritage tourism and that the Victorian Industry is encouraged to respond to the Guidelines on of ‘using heritage significance’ and ‘Creating a Quality Visitor Experience and to the ICOMOS ENAME Charter on Interpretation.
- Australia ICOMOS recommends the preparation of a Victorian Heritage Tourism Strategy based on this work, in a similar model to those in Western Australia and Tasmania
- That the Victorian Arts, Theatre and Cultural Heritage Tourism Action Plans are reviewed on this basis.

Yours faithfully

[Signature]

MS ELIZABETH VINES OAM, FRAIA, MICOMOS
President, Australia ICOMOS