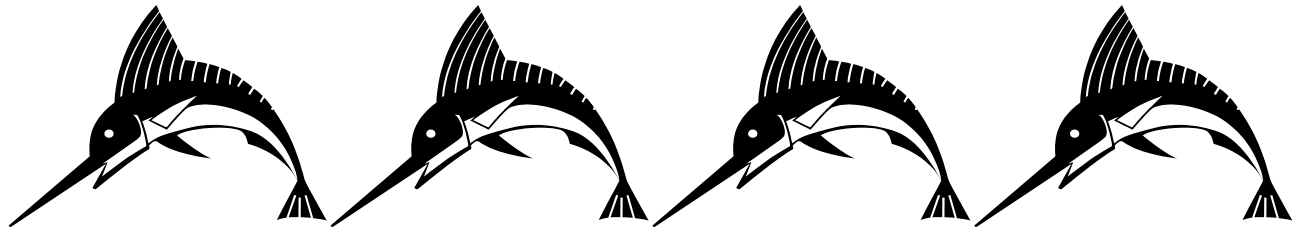


The following is a summary of main points and discussion at the Forum. Read on



TRRA TOURISM FORUM – 11 MARCH 2013

“REVITALISING THE VISITOR ECONOMY”

SPEAKER: John King, OAM Chairman, Australian Tourism Export Council (ATEC)

BACKGROUND

Mr King was appointed by the NSW State Government as one of four members of the Visitor Economy Taskforce charged with responsibility for devising a whole of government/industry strategy to double the value of tourism in NSW by 2020. Tourism was one of the 5 areas selected to turn the NSW economy around. The Taskforce report was released in August 2012 with 47 recommendations and 167 actions and all but two recommendations were officially accepted and supported by the Government in December 2012. You will find the Taskforce Report and Actions report on a link on the TRRA website.

Mr King was in our area to be the keynote speaker at the NSW Local Government Tourism Conference held at Shoal Bay Resort. TRRA Inc took the opportunity to invite him to be the guest speaker for a specially convened Tourism Forum to take the place of our March meeting.

THE FORUM

There was a disappointing attendance from tourism operators with only one local operator present. They missed a good opportunity to hear an outstanding speaker on tourism.

The information provided by Mr King was invaluable in assisting our community to understand the changes proposed in the way tourism funding will be allocated in the future.

MAIN POINTS

- Not just about tourism – encompasses the whole visitor economy - local, interstate, businesses that benefit from direct and indirect economic activity.
- Infrastructure – airport arrivals and spreading these out of Sydney; cruise liner berths & inability to get supply trucks to the ships (a missed opportunity for our agriculture and horticulture industries)
- Significant market share decline in NSW over 10 years. Survey identified NSW and SA lost out on the “unique experience” . NSW returned a low rating in all categories of the survey.

- Regional tourism was not being promoted in NSW. Individual towns with well established festivals/attractions being targeted for funding to grow their tourism market for the whole year, eg, Dubbo Zoo, Tamworth Country Music Festival
- More short trips are being taken involving wider forms of transport. More fly and drive. More are out to experience unique events.
- Future funding not focused on boundaries of LGAs but rather on the opportunities an area has to offer.
- Focus will be on existing major attractions/events, complement and extend during the whole year.
- The new tourism body Destination NSW is assisting local areas build Destination Management Plans with the focus on entrepreneurial and innovation and looking at outcomes rather than process.
- The industry, not the government, needs to take the lead. Recommendations focus on changes to planning to simplify processes, encourage investment.
- Funding will not in future be provided on the basis of the misguided concept to provide the same amount of funding regardless of the areas' ability to attract visitors. Innovation will be important to attracting funding.
- Community involvement is important in the success of tourism. It has to come from the community, not from outside and the community needs to have control.
- Partnerships with industry and the broader community will ensure better outcomes.

QUESTION TIME AND RESPONSES

Emerging Chinese market (Geoffrey Bassier)

- Earlier on this was guided by tour operators with shopping trips at Chinese shops in Sydney and very little experience outside the capital city. Australia is the first destination driven by the Chinese government with 6 major cities approved for free and independent travel (there are 103 cities the size of Sydney!).
- Seeing more people moving independently to such destinations as Great Ocean Road, Melbourne, Uluru.
- Individual expenditure has also risen with total spend and spend per head now greater than any other country.
- Need to be properly equipped with understanding of their culture and requirements, eg, accommodation, tour guides.
- Accredited training organizations are now gearing up and offering training opportunities
- Currently restricted to \$5,000 cash and \$2,000 on Visa/Mastercard. There is no limit on the China Union Debit card which permits them to access funds while here. Important to facilitate access to this source of spending, eg a special purchase of \$900,000 made in Sydney when this facility was available.
- Need to understand culture as well as language.

Funding Local Initiatives (Frank Future)

- Destination Port Stephens (previously known as Tourism Association) is well on the way with our Destination Management Plan.

- Need to be funded by partnerships between State and local.
- One of two recommendations not accepted was that Councils had the ability to raise funds within existing rating system via a levy. NSW has rate cap. Guidelines are being prepared to address this.
- Identify issues such as infrastructure and roads and seek funding beyond tourism bucket for these Brand name needs to deliver on the promise – needs alignment with the experience being offered.
- Concern that the funding may be Sydneycentric to overcome infrastructure run downs.

Local Co-ordination (Geoff Warrener)

- Concerns about overall co-ordination and how it all works locally. Doesn't perceive there is someone to "bring it all together". Seems to be left to individuals.
- Support for co-ordinated packages to be developed that look after the visitor from start to finish.
- \$3/4 M spent on marketing Port Stephens with high percentage going to Asia. (FF)
- All sorts of visitors to NSW generally – 40% are intra-state; 27% independent market (JK)
- Prediction is that the inbound share will grow to 35%

General

- Needs to be a core attraction and need to target to the markets that will respond to what we have.
- Concern about empty shops and the dependency we have on Christmas and school holidays.
- Encourage visitors to stay longer and package with the Hunter Valley and surrounding areas.
- What will happen at the Tourism Conference and will there be a strategic plan and will this flow through to other businesses?
- Our natural environment is our main attraction. 60% of our income comes from Sydney
- Still compatible to build on rock concerts concept (as Byron Bay)
- More local people need to be involved. More feedback from the community to tourism operators would be helpful.

Airport Opportunities

- Small percentage come to Port Stephens by air. What could we do better?
- Government has a part to play in better directing some of the aircraft bottleneck to Newcastle and Canberra. Opportunities for low cost carriers. Government needs to be asked to escalate this.

"Take you There" DataTrac App for smart phones and Ipads

- Taking a different approach to the traditional Visitor Information Centre where users can download the app (free of charge) and click on the information for the area. Launched at Tamworth last week.

- Compliments VIC information especially out of opening hours.
- Also opens other opportunities, eg in Scotland an app takes travelers on a “Treasure Hunt”.
- Need to find innovative ways not necessarily via the visitor brochure from the Visitor Information Centre, particularly as funding is being reduced for them.
- Hard for DataTrac to get even information and logos to include on the App for this area from Port Stephens Council.

Other Opportunities

- Build on local history – opportunity for Marine Display Centre.

OPEN FORUM IDEAS/DISCUSSION

- Disappointing response from tourism operators. Perhaps need to look beyond their own business interest.
- Experience is not unique to Port Stephens. Another coastal town had only 16 people turn up so we have done well.
- Market from Korea appears to be thriving yet little known about their culture/language
- Potential to build on Sister City concept with our existing links.
- Need to drive the natural environment and foster our environment and balance with future built developments
- Foster basic interaction with tourists – make it a visit to remember – directions given with a smile and more positive approach.
- Foster Australian made products – a shop that guarantees all Australian made souvenirs etc.
- Encourage use of excellent computer programs to develop language skills
- Opportunity for Asian students on their summer holidays to get out of the cities
- Major restrictions placed on backpackers on length of employment in tourism industry. Can only work 88 days and then need to move to another industry such as agriculture. Need changes at the Federal level to allow students to better develop their skills
- Mandarin is the most common language for Chinese visitors
- Opportunity for Council to control rental housing designations and developments in areas designated Rural (complex being built on sand dunes at Birubi Beach with work currently on hold)
- Opportunity for more TAFE College courses – the initiative needs to start from business requests
- Destination Management Plan for Port Stephens has identified the need for more training for operators and the community should be involved.
- Opportunity for Nelson Bay Golf Club to grow business and encourage more to take up golf as it is a declining sport. Link with Newcastle Golf Course (part of Port Stephens Shire) Nelson Bay course is the 3rd most used course in NSW.
- Infrastructure needs improvement, eg Conference Centre with adequate facilities for large numbers.

- Need to use existing resources in a much better way.
- Frustration with advertising this Forum with local media. TRRA website is a good source of information and a copy of the recommendations of the Taskforce and Actions has been included for people with a lot of reading time on their hands.

FURTHER COMMENTS RECEIVED:

- Promotion of natural assets (our main feature) – Walkway/cycleway around the Bay area and/or an ocean walkway Fingal to One Mile Beach (through the National Park)
- Extension of Dolphin/Whale Water Activities – an Aquarium
- Welcome signs leaving airport, entering Port Stephens – in English/Mandarin, Kanii (which Japanese, Koreans can also read)
- Possible Festivals – Christmas Bush; Oyster; Whale
- More cultural activities – Classical Concerts; plays. Maybe at Fly Point with all weather alternative.
- Cheaper flights to and from Sydney (formidable at present)
- Hotel at site of Tomaree Lodge – will require much needed access road – Nelson Bay bypass urgently needed
- Totally packaged tours; eg, Customs at Cairns – Flight to Newcastle --- Buses to packaged accommodation at Port Stephens, eg, Landmark; Country Club and then
- Daily organized packages eg, golf; fishing; whales; bushwalking; Hunter Valley; Gloucester (golf)
- Local language experts or expats used
- Quality shops selling quality souvenirs
- If there were 42 warships in Shoal Bay during World War II, what is stopping a cruise ship coming into port? Port Stephens
- Red bus concept linking all parts of the Bay
- Nothing will be achieved without the full participation of Council
- Need for negotiation with airlines to set fares which encourage tourists to move between places, eg Newcastle to Canberra \$400 each way
- Package deals – similar – need to be attractive
- Accommodation needs to be of a good standard and good sized rooms (Council involvement in approval process)
- Road access into Nelson Bay from all directions needs urgent upgrading to dual carriageway.
- Nelson Bay/Shoal Bay/Fingal Bay – easier road access needed urgently
- An identifiable logo which is identifiable throughout the whole of Australia.
- Funding naturally is the main issue with all concepts.

IDEAS PUT UP ON POWERPOINT AS STIMULATORS (Insufficient time to discuss)

ENTRY POINTS

- ▶ Airport promotion & improvement to our entry, eg, flags, banners, well kept traffic islands & roundabouts.
- ▶ Live videos – large screens.

GENERAL APPEARANCE/MAINTENANCE OF CBD

- ▶ Empty shops – What can be done? Newcastle Mall experience?

INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

- ▶ Improvements to signage generally
- ▶ Cycleways and walkways well sign posted.
- ▶ Toilet facilities upgraded, clean and well sign posted.
- ▶ Streets - Clean and well maintained. Traffic islands included.
- ▶ Bus shelters offer opportunity for large (graffiti proof) displays of local scenes.

VISITOR INFORMATION

- ▶ Use of new technologies – how can we benefit?
- ▶ Smaller booths with brochures only staffed at peak times.
- ▶ Highlight our peak attractions and ensure good signage, eg: Cruise entry points; entry to Birubi, Gan Gan Lookout.

COMMUNICATION

- ▶ On Council website – events listings inadequate
- ▶ Links between Port Stephens websites. Currently complex.
- ▶ Alternate technologies – Facebook, Twitter etc

COMMUNICATION WITH LOCALS

- ▶ Promote indirect benefit
- ▶ Communicate with local residents about what's happening
- ▶ Widen email community newsletter distribution on upcoming events.
- ▶ Community education “courses” on importance of friendly exchanges with visitors (so they will spread the word) (Summer holidays excepted!!)

FESTIVALS DURING YEAR

- ▶ More encouragement from locals to participate.
- ▶ Need community notice boards in suburbia, strictly for festivals and community events.
- ▶ More use of Fly Point all year round – weekly informal events could bring people in from surrounding areas (to entertain and spend)\
- ▶ More alternate arrangements ready for wet weekends, eg. Co-operation of Clubs, hotels

OFF SEASON EMPTY APARTMENTS –IDEAS ?

- ▶ Weekend packages for Festival weekends
- ▶ Northern hemisphere block bookings Feb-Easter? Encourage long term stayers (6 weeks) for empty Nelson Bay units
- ▶ Airline packages from Melbourne – winter
- ▶ Midweek packages for retired baby boomers all year round (Advertise in Seniors Magazine
- ▶ Accommodation & golf packages

NATIONAL PARKS IDEAS

- ▶ Encourage higher usage & better signage
- ▶ Improvements to maps and signage available at all accommodation points.

- ▶ Better signage to access points (and road conditions ahead)
- ▶ Promotion amongst bush walking groups, combined with package at backpackers accommodation.

SPORTING EVENTS

- ▶ Flexible accommodation for all ranges of budgets (camping adjacent Sports fields?)
- ▶ Maintain a better system of Events Calendar to highlight sporting events well in advance to keep tourism operators & restaurants in the loop.

CHINESE/INDIAN VISITORS

- ▶ Improve Experience
- ▶ Multi-lingual signage for basic directions (even shops , local buses)
- ▶ Multi lingual menus in restaurants
- ▶ Encourage improvement to visual presentation of our Chinese restaurants, regardless of whether they want to eat Chinese food or not. They should look attractive.

OVERNIGHT STOPOVER - NELSON BAY

- ▶ Promotion of **Nelson Bay** as an overnight stopover for **North West** area residents on early morning flights – extra nights here
- ▶ Localised advertising in smaller country newspapers and television (cheaper costs), shopper dockets etc.
- ▶ For interstate flights, Packages including Local accommodation, airport transfer, secure car storage from apartments.
- ▶ Encourage international flights out of Brisbane (Newcastle links cheaply) or include package from Newcastle to Sydney by coach/train.

COMBINED PACKAGES FROM SYDNEY TO HUNTER; CRUISES

- ▶ Expand opportunities to include Nelson Bay in Hunter Valley packages from Sydney
- ▶ Promote Nelson Bay as a day option for Newcastle Cruises.
- ▶ Weekend packages promoted in Northern suburbs and North West suburbs of Sydney.

The above is a compilation of notes taken at the Forum, ideas presented in written format and ideas offered as stimulator ideas for discussion. Errors and omissions accepted.

Margaret Wilkinson

Hon Secretary

Tomaree Ratepayers and Residents Association Inc