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SUBMISSION TO:
THE PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO RURAL
AND REGIONAL TOURISM

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia Ltd (CMCA) has almost 50 000 members nationwide and is the largest representative body for the Motorhome and Self Contained Vehicle (MSV) market.

The CMCA aims to increase the awareness of the community, industry and government of the needs of MSV travellers and of the facilities required to sustainably develop this growing and valuable niche market. The organisation has proactively been working with local, state and federal governments to improve the infrastructure network servicing this market across Australia.

Regional Victoria, in particular is an attractive destination for MSV travellers, for its attractions and scenery, for the opportunity to experience regional lifestyles and interact with local communities, and for the opportunity to contribute to community development and environmental enhancement.

In this submission, the CMCA makes comment on points 1-4 of the Terms of Reference for this Inquiry, indicating both the importance of this niche market to regional Victoria and the key product and infrastructure development elements that would assist in attracting a larger share of the MSV market to regional Victoria.

2.0 REFERENCE 1: ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF TOURISM IN REGIONAL AREAS

In 2003/04, Tourism contributed \$3.4 billion to the regional Victorian economy – 31% of the State's total tourism output – and employed 61,000 people – 39% of the State's total tourism employment¹.

The domestic MSV market consists largely of over 55 year old retirees, originating primarily from Queensland and New South Wales and travelling in twos². They travel in self contained vehicles that range from converted buses to luxury purpose built vehicles. They travel at least twice a year for an average 3-4 weeks at a time and stay in caravan parks, rest areas and parks³. Self contained vehicles are also a popular with international visitors. In 2005, 20% of international caravan and camping visitors used campervans or motorhomes for transportation⁴.

The MSV segment continues to grow and is becoming increasingly apparent as a niche market in its own right. For example, in the year ending December 2005, domestic caravan and camping visitors over 55 years of age spent \$1.3 billion dollars while travelling in Australia and accounted for 38% of nights (approximately 14.8 million) in caravan and camping accommodation⁵.

In 2005, Victoria received 56 000 international caravan and camping visitors with over a third of these over 45 years of age⁶. The state also received 2 million domestic caravan and camping visitors accounting for 7 million visitor nights⁷. 40% of these visitors were over 45 years of age with 17% falling into the older non working lifecycle segment⁸. It could be inferred that many of this 17% (approximately 340 000 visitors) would fall into the MSV segment discussed. The key domestic markets were Victoria (85%) and NSW

¹ Tourism Victoria 2006 Tourism and Industry Events Strategy

² Tony Charters and Associates et. al. 2006 Grey Nomads as a Mobile Workforce: Stage 1 Summary Report

³ Tony Charters and Associates et. al. 2006 Grey Nomads as a Mobile Workforce: Stage 1 Summary Report

⁴ Tourism Research Australia (2005) Caravan or Camping Snapshot

⁵ Tourism Research Australia (2005) Caravan or Camping Snapshot

⁶ Tourism Victoria (2005) Caravan and Camping Tourism market Profile Year Ending December 2005

⁷ Tourism Victoria (2005) Caravan and Camping Tourism market Profile Year Ending December 2005

⁸ Tourism Victoria (2005) Caravan and Camping Tourism market Profile Year Ending December 2005

(8%) with the most popular destination being Western Victoria, receiving a total visitation of 1.2 million nights⁹.

From the available tourism research, it is evident that caravan and camping visitors travel for longer periods, have longer stays and engage in more activities (particularly nature based) than other visitors. Also, within this group the over 55's segment travel more consistently throughout the year and stay the longest. The MSV segment is largely captured within this group.

The self sufficiency of the MSV segment, together with modern communications and technology further increases their ability to travel to remote areas (e.g. GPS, internet and solar energy). CMCA research has also shown that they are more likely to travel in off peak periods, are particularly interested in visiting regional and rural destinations, and have a strong interest in contributing to regional economic development and supporting local communities¹⁰. CMCA members for example have participated in community partnerships such as the Keep Australia Beautiful program and have implemented a range of environmental policies including a self containment code of conduct for member vehicles. In addition, almost 50% indicated in a recent survey an interest in undertaking some form of voluntary work while travelling – particularly in regional and rural areas¹¹.

In addition, this niche market can be catered for with minimal comparative investment as sites with minimal infrastructure and facilities are most desirable to the self contained vehicle market, who have no desire to pay for additional accommodation and other facilities which they don't use or need.

Consequently, engaging and attracting a larger share of the MSV niche market may present considerable potential as part of the strategy for generating socio-economic benefits in regional and rural Victoria.

⁹ Tourism Research Australia (2005) Caravan or Camping Snapshot

¹⁰ Tony Charters and Associates et. al. 2006 Grey Nomads as a Mobile Workforce: Stage 1 Summary Report

¹¹ Tony Charters and Associates et. al. 2006 Grey Nomads as a Mobile Workforce: Stage 1 Summary Report

3.0 REFERENCE 2: IMPEDIMENTS TO THE GROWTH OF REGIONAL TOURISM, ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AND JOBS

The caravan and camping sector is often assumed to have homogenous needs and interests that are adequately catered for by the type of services currently supplied by commercial camping providers. However, MSV travellers, being largely self contained, do not regularly require many of the services offered by caravan parks. In addition, they are seeking alternative experiences in quiet, natural surrounds, with minimal facilities and infrastructure.

The main impediments to attracting and catering for a larger market share of the MSV niche market and hence greater spending in regional Victoria are: the lack of an infrastructure network that suits the needs of self contained travellers; and the inadequate level of attention given to the development of appropriate tourism infrastructure by regional planning and regulatory bodies.

With regards to the development of regional economic activity and job creation impediments are seen to include the lack of diversity in the product mix of regional economies and the lack of skills and training opportunities.

3.1 CAMPING SITES AND FACILITIES

In addition to existing caravan parks, which are infrequently required, a network of alternative short and long term camp site options need to be developed. Government managed areas (eg showgrounds, racecourses, local parks etc) are particularly attractive but currently delivered to the MSV market via short term and ad hoc arrangements which lack consistency and coordination within and across the states.

The key infrastructure requirements for self contained vehicle camping areas are simple, minimal and relatively inexpensive: a large area of flat, hard-stand land, with nearby access to fresh water and a Dump Point. Strategic placement of such sites throughout regional Victoria would attract the MSV market, facilitate movement around the state and encourage longer stays and hence greater expenditure in regional economies. The number and placement of Dump Points throughout Victoria is currently a major inhibitor to travel for the MSV market.

3.2 TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING AND FUNDING

Planning and regulatory bodies do not currently view the development of regional tourism infrastructure that caters for MSV travellers as a priority. The approach to the provision of dump points and alternative camp sites is currently piecemeal with little coordination between agencies.

For example:

- The State Environment Department supports the installation of dump points on environmental grounds only, which limits the required network;
- Many Councils support the use of showgrounds for temporary MSV camping but others are concerned about the lack of a supporting legislative framework;
- Many Councils support the installation of dump points on both environmental and tourism grounds but don't have state based financial support in installing them and in creating motorhome parks; and
- State Government departments who control showgrounds are not willing to have them opened on a permanent basis as overnight layover areas, even though there is local support for the idea.

An integrated approach to regional tourism infrastructure development incorporating all relevant environment, land and roads departments as well as local councils, regional development bodies and tourism authorities needs to be undertaken. Consultation with CMCA may be useful in identifying priority needs areas.

3.3 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND JOB CREATION

It could be argued that regional Victorian economies need to diversify their product mix to decrease dependence on primary industries. Niche market tourism offers several opportunities to do this by building on the existing attractions of rural lifestyle, environment and community.

For example, farm stays can supplement rural income and supply short term voluntary labour in exchange for providing visitors with opportunities to experience rural lifestyles and communities. Rural B&B's can also provide unique accommodation and experiences with rural properties often able to provide ideal camping sites for the MSV

market. Finally, the opportunity to learn and experience the local history, culture, lifestyle, food and wine of regional areas are key attractions to the MSV market that can be woven into regional products and experiences across the state.

Participation in local conservation and/or community development projects is also of interest to many MSV travellers who carry a desire to contribute, a valuable pool of professional and trade skills across many areas and an interest in learning and lifestyle benefits that often outweighs the desire for financial rewards. MSV travellers may also provide mentoring, training and education services which can help address the lack of skills and training opportunities in rural and regional areas.

These characteristics of the MSV market give further weight to the considerable potential for generating socio-economic benefits in regional and rural Victoria to be gained by engaging and attracting a larger share of the MSV niche market.

4.0 REFERENCE 3: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRENT PROGRAMS TO PROMOTE AND ENHANCE TOURISM IN REGIONAL VICTORIA

Tourism Victoria's *Strategic Plan 2002-2006*, the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development's *Tourism and Events Industry Strategy 2006*; the Regional Cooperative Marketing Program and the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund demonstrate that regional tourism has certainly been a high priority focus in recent Victorian tourism planning, infrastructure development and marketing. There has also been a focus on integrated marketing activities between regions and in consistent branding at the state and international levels (Brand Victoria 2006 campaign, Jigsaw campaign, Discover Victoria Campaign and VisitVictoria.com).

Caravanning and camping has been recognised as a strength of several Victorian regions in these documents and in the relevant regional Destination Management Plans. It is recognised that these visitors show a high propensity to visit regional Victoria relative to other groups and significant efforts have been directed towards the development of integrated touring routes within the state and between states.

However, the fact that there are distinct segments of the caravanning and camping sector, requiring different infrastructure, accommodation and service needs has not been adequately recognised in these plans. The MSV market in particular needs to be recognised more explicitly in strategic tourism and infrastructure research, planning and marketing activities – particularly at the regional planning level. Consultation with peak consumer groups should be part of this process as these groups can provide easily accessible market research and can also assist in identifying infrastructure and service priorities. They may also prove a valuable partner in infrastructure investment, design, instalment, monitoring and maintenance.

VisitVictoria.com provides information on touring routes, attractions and camping in regional Victoria in both caravan parks and national parks in each region. However, as an MSV traveller:

- If you search within accommodation for camping facilities you only get a listing of commercial caravan parks, and the information provided does not specify motorhome accessibility.
- If you search within National parks you can get some information on camping information in these areas, but contacting parks is still necessary to confirm permits/fees and motorhome accessibility.
- If you search the touring maps provided, they don't show dump point locations or public or other rest areas available for short term camping.

Also, while the tourism potential of Crown Land and adjacent areas was recognised in the 2002-2006 Strategic Plan, little progress has been made in the development of a framework that supports access for camping in such areas for self contained vehicles.

In order to attract a larger market share of the MSV market to Victoria, a coordinated and holistic approach needs to be taken to the development of infrastructure, information and standards specific to this niche market. The key planks of such a program would be:

- to provide a mix of public, private and commercial camping sites offering different levels of infrastructure and services. In particular, MSV travellers note a lack of areas at the minimal service end of the spectrum (such as rest areas, racecourses and showgrounds that simply offer flat land, fresh water and ideally a dump point);
- to develop appropriate and agreed upon environmental standards for different types of camping areas - for example, self containment may be deemed a requirement for camping access and/or a determinant of length of stay in natural areas with few facilities;
- to develop mapping information systems and signage that indicates the whole network of public, private and commercial camping facilities and dump points accessible to MSV travellers in each region across the state; and
- to develop a marketing and information program targeted specifically at this niche market.

5.0 REFERENCE 4: INITIATIVES TO INCREASE INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC VISITOR NIGHTS IN REGIONAL VICTORIA

For residents of Canada, United States and much of Europe Campervanning and Motorhoming is a well established recreational pursuit. With purposeful initiatives it would be possible to encourage international tourist MSV use. Themed trials, convenient pull in bays, international signage, clear website information and high standard information services will encourage international MSV demand.

CMCA have initiated several programs to assist in the provision of relevant regional tourism infrastructure and contribute to the maintenance of environmental quality – two critical components in attracting a larger share of the MSV market to regional Victoria.

These include: a Self Containment Code of Conduct; the Dump Point Subsidy Scheme; the RV Friendly Town Scheme; and the Grey Nomad Mobile Workforce Research Project.

5.1 LEAVE NO TRACE SELF CONTAINMENT CODE OF CONDUCT

The CMCA is committed to minimising the environmental impact of member vehicles and activities. Among a broad range of environmental policies and awareness programs, a key initiative has been the development of a **Self Containment Code of Conduct**. This scheme provides a consistent process and set of standards for assessing a vehicle's ability to operate as a self-contained unit that can carry on camping activities without discharging any wastewater or leaving any rubbish in the camping environment.

Vehicles are assessed according to their capacity to hold fresh, grey, black water and garbage waste. Members with qualifying vehicles are required to sign an additional undertaking to behave within strictly defined environmental guidelines.

The scheme provides a consistent and environmentally sound basis for identifying vehicles that are suitable for camping in bush areas and other locations where facilities and dump points are not readily available. CMCA has already negotiated access to many such areas on this basis. The club believes the scheme offers local councils a low investment and sustainable solution to providing camp sites in areas currently unsuitable due to a lack of facilities, but attractive to the growing self contained vehicle market.

5.2 DUMP POINT SUBSIDY SCHEME

CMCA has also been extremely proactive in guarding against environmental pollution from inappropriate disposal of waste by helping to address the lack of critical dump point infrastructure, particularly in regional areas.

The Dump Point Subsidy Scheme is a joint CMCA and KEA initiative which identifies areas where there are significant distances between dump points and offers councils managing these areas a “Dump Easy” dump point unit (valued at approximately \$1 480) free of charge (including GST and freight).

CMCA has also been liaising with Main Roads Departments to establish Dump Points and fresh water facilities in key roadside layover areas, large truck stops and major service centres along main road networks.

5.3 RV FRIENDLY TOWN SCHEME

The RV Friendly Town Scheme is a new CMCA initiative that aims to identify towns that provide amenities and services that meet the needs of MSV travellers and to make those towns identifiable by providing RV Town Friendly signage (similar to that used in the United States). Similar signage is also being made available to accommodation providers that offer appropriate and navigable sites for motorhomes.

The criteria used to assess whether towns are RV friendly or not can include the following:

1. Access to medical facilities or an applicable evacuation plan.
2. Access to a pharmacy or a procedure to obtain pharmacological products.
3. Access to a general shopping area with groceries & fresh produce supermarket style.
4. A service Centre able to provide basic repairs.
5. Provision of appropriate parking within town centre for shopping.
6. Tourist Information Centre (TIC) with appropriate parking facilities within a reasonable distance.
7. TIC to provide a town map showing essential facilities such as hospital, medical services, fuel, shopping area, dump point (if applicable), fresh water, etc.

8. Access to potable water.
9. Access to a Dump Point. (If applicable)
10. Provision of short term (say 24 hour) parking within 2.5 km of town centre.
11. Provision of long term parking at a reasonable rate within 5-10kms of town centre.
12. Council to provide one person as contact.
13. 'RV Friendly Town' signs to be erected at town entrances.

This scheme provides the following benefits:

- it increases awareness by local authorities and the tourism industry of the needs of this market and how a greater market share of these travellers can be accessed by regional communities;
- it provides promotion for the businesses and towns identified under the scheme directly to CMCA members; and
- it provides MSV travellers with better trip planning information as to what businesses and townships can provide the kind of services and facilities they need.

5.4 GREY NOMAD MOBILE WORKFORCE RESEARCH PROJECT

CMCA has been working on a project to investigate the potential for 'Grey Nomads' to fill labour and skills shortages and contribute to regional development by participating in voluntary and paid work opportunities while travelling.

Stage 1 of the project focused on profiling a national sample of the potential target workforce, their skills base, their preferences, their willingness to participate in forms of volunteer and paid work and their perspective on the opportunities and constraints involved. A total of 2204 surveys were statistically analysed.

Results indicated that the **skills base** of Grey nomads was diverse, but predominantly in the areas of heavy vehicle driving, building trades and labour, engineering and both child and aged care areas. Almost 60% of respondents were interested in undertaking **paid work** in some form while travelling. This group indicated rural/fruit picking, building trades/labour as key skill areas of use in rural and remote communities, but also

mentioned domestic cleaning, retail, teaching and health care (child/aged). Nearly 80% did not have a preference for the kind of work they would do while travelling. In general:

- around 80% were willing to work for up to a month;
- winter was the preferred season for travel;
- the preference for just over half is for work to be undertaken in a block; and
- over 85% would modify their travel plans if there was access to paid work, with the destinations being the most flexible aspect and the time of year chosen for travel the least flexible variable¹².

Nearly ½ of respondents were interested in undertaking **voluntary work** in some form while travelling. This group indicated health care (age and child care), building and general help as key skill areas of use in rural and remote communities, but also mentioned a range of other skills. Nearly 90% did not have a preference for the kind of work they would do while travelling although environment or land care work was mentioned. In general:

- around 70% were willing to work for up to a week;
- winter was the preferred season for travel;
- the preference for almost 2/3 was to work in a consecutive time block; and
- nearly 2/3 would modify their travel plans if there was access to voluntary work, with the destinations being the most flexible aspect and the time of year chosen for travel the least flexible variable¹³.

It is suggested that engagement with the CMCA and support of these initiatives by Victorian tourism and planning authorities will assist in attracting a higher market share of MSV travellers to regional Victoria. Aside from the tourism benefits, it is also likely to provide a range of additional regional community development and capacity building opportunities.

¹² Tony Charters and Associates et. al. 2006 Grey Nomads as a Mobile Workforce: Stage 1 Summary Report

¹³ Tony Charters and Associates et. al. 2006 Grey Nomads as a Mobile Workforce: Stage 1 Summary Report

6.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the CMCA suggests that engaging and attracting a larger share of the MSV niche market may present considerable potential as part of the strategy for generating socio-economic benefits in regional and rural Victoria.

In particular, because of:

- their propensity to travel to regional areas, in off peak times, for long periods of time;
- the continual rapid growth and value of this market;
- the minimal infrastructure and service investment required;
- their commitment to environmental protection; and
- their desire to contribute to regional community development.

The main impediments to attracting and catering for a larger market share of the MSV niche market and hence greater spending in regional Victoria are:

- the lack of access to minimally serviced camping sites that suit the minimal needs of self contained vehicles;
- the need for more and better placement of dump point facilities around the state;
- the lack of recognition of the unique characteristics and needs of the MSV niche market by regional tourism planning and regulatory bodies;
- the lack of coordination between the variety of land managers involved in the provision, regulation and management of various camping areas (national parks, main roads rest areas, private land, local authority areas etc); and
- the absence of a targeted marketing and tailored information strategy.

Consultation with peak consumer groups such as the CMCA should be part of the regional tourism development strategy as these groups can provide easily accessible market research and can also assist in identifying infrastructure and service priorities. They may also prove a valuable partner in infrastructure investment, design, instalment, monitoring and maintenance.