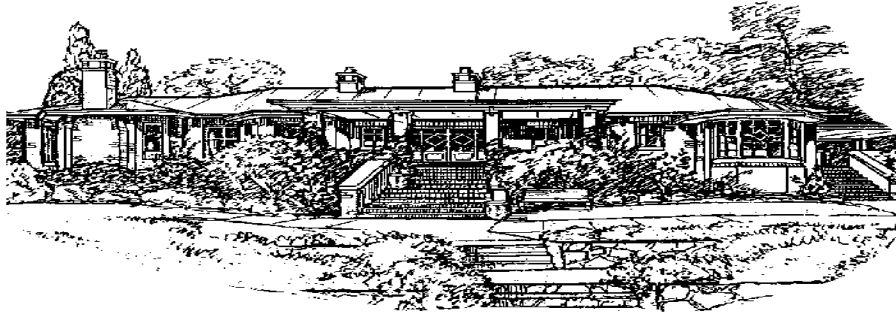




Cuppacumbalong

29th March, 2012

Submission for Potential Ecotourism

Dear Committee

We feel that Tharwa is perfectly placed to be the gateway to the Namadgi and southern ecotourism sites; including as a starting point for biking, walking and river activities for the ACT Southern Murrumbidgee area and the ACT Centenary Trail.

In response to the Terms of Reference for Current and Potential Ecotourism:

a) The extent to which organisations currently deliver ecotourism activities in the Region.

At Cuppacumbalong we have development plans for Eco tourist style accommodation, both self-contained and budget dormitory. We will have other tourist facilities associated with the Murrumbidgee River and the Heritage of the precinct, including art and crafts, farm tourism, veggie garden, permaculture display and a wood fired bakery.

2km North of Tharwa village at "Castle Hill" property we are developing plans for overnight camping facilities and farm tourism activities, aimed at both the ACT's Centenary Trail and the adjacent, existing National Bicentennial (horse) Trail for the touring public and visitors for river and walking activities. We would also expect this site to be extremely popular with Canberrans who just wish to spend a short time out of the city and in the calm of a beautiful and relaxing countryside.

b) The extent to which these activities contribute to the Region's economy.

At both of these properties we carry on holistic farming practices with low or no man made fertilisers, prospective woodlots for sustainable energy for the tourism facilities and selling of our products into the local markets, minimising our carbon footprints. These activities do not in any way detract from conservation and restoration of ecosystems throughout the Region. In fact, quite the reverse is the case.

Although only in the planning stage at the moment we hope to employ 5 or 6 permanent staff and have a turnover in excess of a million dollars once up and running. We believe that the farm tourism activities with accommodation onsite will bring more tourism dollars to the southern ACT than seen before, allowing tourists to stay close to the beautiful Namadgi National Park to enjoy the day walks and also as a base for longer treks.

d) The industry self-regulation and government regulation, including, but not limited to, accreditation and licensing, which is most likely to incentivise ecotourism activities that assist in the protection and enhancement of the Region's ecosystems.

We do not have strong views on this issue at the present time. However, we consider that the most important aspect of government assistance must come from a Territory Plan which encourages, supports and allows eco

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tourism in as wide an area throughout the ACT as possible. In the longer term, we would like to see more family-based tourism enterprises based throughout the western portion of the Territory. One only needs to look at the success of New Zealand in providing access to family enterprises in many of their wilderness areas; and to the popularity of these places to Australian tourists. At home, the Corin Bank music festival is a perfect example of what we can achieve. We need to move away from some of the (often justified) negative thinking of the past and accept that as a community we can now insist on world's best practice and be confident it will be both achieved and maintained.

e) The industry and government measures that are most likely to promote understanding of the biodiversity and other benefits of ecotourism organisations explicitly basing their processes and outcomes on principles of ecological sustainability.

We do not consider that an eco tourism enterprise should be aimed at only those who want to address issues of ecological sustainability. Whilst this is a most admirable goal, and one which we support, we believe that the wider community has many different reasons for wanting to experience time out in the countryside, away from their busy and stressful city lives, and all of these should be provided for.

The best and cheapest way to promote an understanding of the biodiversity and other benefits of ecotourism is for us to provide a product of such high standard that our clients will more readily support operations based on principles of ecological sustainability.

f) Any other relevant matter.

The area of public riparian zone immediately downstream of the Tharwa Bridge has enormous potential for eco tourism. However, funding has never been available to utilize this opportunity. One method of overcoming this could be to augment the ACT Government's current Murrumbidgee Fish Habitat Improvement Project. We strongly support this development which will commence very shortly and is located just downstream of the Tharwa Bridge. This is the second \$250,000 project to attempt to break up the sand slug at the site in the last 10 years or so. It aims to do this to improve the habitat for native fish in a very small section of the River. However, in the longer term it may not be possible to secure sufficient public funds to continue and extend this valuable project to make a real and sustained improvement.

An obvious way to address this is to licence a very small, privately operated and funded, world's best practice sand extraction enterprise to operate in the area. This would be below and above the bridge but would not extend below the Lanyon woolshed (and thus would not be anywhere near historic Lambrigg homestead).

Such an environmentally sensitive operation would provide a financial means of developing the public recreation and tourism potential at no cost to the government, by allocating a significant proportion of its profits to two main local community groups. It is suggested that these would be the Southern ACT Catchment Group and the Tharwa Progress Association. In addition to the eco tourism benefits, activities to be funded by the revenue from sand extraction could include micro weirs to trap European Carp and an associated *Charlie Carp* micro enterprise; repair of the river bank and removal of remaining non-native willows etc.; removal of all weeds of national and regional significance; deepening the river (in association with and extension to the Murrumbidgee Fish Habitat Improvement Project) to allow native fish breeding areas; fencing out and re-tree/vegetate the immediate adjacent area, and opening parts to public access for swimming and recreating.

There is local private investor support for such a proposal and it is considered that an appropriate group, operating under the direction of the Environment Protection Agency, could be promptly formed.

Kind regards

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and Geoff Hyles
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