



thredbo valley distillery Pty Ltd
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Secretary, Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water
Legislative Assembly for the ACT
GPO Box 1020
Canberra ACT 2601

Submission to the Inquiry into Current and Potential Ecotourism in the ACT and Region

Introduction to Thredbo Valley Distillery

Thredbo Valley Distillery is the only schnapps distillery in Australia and a unique eco-tourism experience. It is located in the heart of the Thredbo alpine region of New South Wales.

Visitors to the 'Distillery Door' can taste and buy a range of schnapps and vodka, view the distillation process and enjoy an extensive food and beverage offering from the licensed café. A range of local produce, art and craft is also on display and available for sale. Throughout the year we host a range of events, these include musical performances, art and photography classes and exhibitions.

Thredbo Valley Distillery was developed and is operated by Monika and Brad Spalding and every facet of the operation reflects our passionate commitment to environment, culture and community. Examples of this commitment include the extensive use of recycled materials and sustainable agricultural practices.

The operation employs, on average, 11 full-time equivalent employees and has an annual turnover in excess of \$1.5 Million. The business was the inaugural winner of the Canberra & Capital Region Tourism Award for Sustainable Tourism in 2011 and is currently seeking certification via the Climate Action Australia Eco-Certification scheme.

Terms of Reference

a) Ecotourism in the region

Thredbo Valley Distillery is one of just two commercial businesses who promote themselves as eco-tourism operations in the Thredbo Valley. The other, Alpine Habitats, is located next door to TVD and offers luxury accommodation in eco-friendly cabins. Alpine Habitats was built as a direct result of Thredbo Valley Distillery's success in attracting tourists to the region. Thredbo Tourism offers young visitors to the ski region access to a 'Ski-Ecology' educational package which highlights the unique and delicate nature of the alpine region and provides information on how to care for it. This package was developed by Brad Spalding of Thredbo Valley Distillery.

b) Impact on ecosystems.

Water. Potable water is sourced on site from rainwater catchment and non-potable water collects in a dam for use in agricultural irrigation (via drippers) and toilets. No external water supply is accessed. Waste water is treated on site and returned to the ground via transpiration trenches. Water quality has been tested annually and remains of the highest purity.



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Soil quality. Thredbo Valley Distillery operates 3 commercial-scale worm farms. Worms compost all organic waste including the by-products of schnapps production and produce organic solid and liquid fertilizer. This is used throughout the property to improve soil microbial activity, production yields and resilience in crops. Regular testing shows steady increases in soil quality.

Biodiversity. Thredbo Valley Distillery and Alpine Habits have created a fauna and flora reserve which spans both properties. They have constructed a walking track which links both properties and provides visitors with a chance to experience the enormous diversity of plant-life, birds and animals native to the region. When we bought our property it was predominantly grazing pastures. Over several years we have undertaken plantings of native species to create windbreaks and native vegetation corridors. These activities have seen both plant and animal biodiversity increasing.

c) Contribution to regional economy

Thredbo Valley Distillery is one of two significant tourist attractions between Thredbo Village and Jindabyne. Novotel Lake Crackenback, a 46 suite resort, is the other. Thredbo Valley Distillery is a destination drawcard, bringing significant numbers of tourists to the region in its own right, and adding to the destination experience of those already in the region. In its application for Demand Building Funding (the Five Minute Gallop project), Tourism Snowy Mountains noted

*'Wildbrumby Schnapps Distillery is a product that Tourism Snowy Mountains highlights as a **must do** activity in its campaigns'.*

"A visit to Thredbo Valley Distillery in the Snowy Mountains has become a must! Why? Disciplined, reliable, first class product and friendly service. You go there with confidence and come away happy, every time! And it's always open, there's no hit or miss, unlike too many other establishments in regional Australia. It makes a very positive contribution to the Snowy Mountains for visitors and locals alike. And it's a preferred employer of choice. If only other small businesses in the tourism sector could look, feel and operate like this!"

Wayne Kirkpatrick, Director, Tourism Snowy Mountains, Director Tourism Tasmania, Former Director Tourism Australia

Local employer. We employ 8 local staff in a range of roles, including four key leadership team roles. By providing meaningful, stable and well-paid employment, we provide long-term job security and career development paths for local residents and keep valuable skills in the region.

Skilled, local trades. The residence and Distillery Door were painstakingly restored by skilled local trades people using locally sourced, recycled materials including bridge timbers and corrugated iron.

In 2010, we constructed our Wedding Chapel. The chapel was built using local stone by local stone masons. Commissioning work of this high standard provides valued employment and showcases the skills of our local trades and keeps skilled craftspeople in the region.

We have ongoing maintenance contracts with a local gardener/landscaper, electrician and plumber. Each of these trades people have worked on the installation, commissioning and ongoing maintenance of our three commercial worm farms, gaining valuable skills in the process. Their experience has been in demand throughout the region as more and more worm farms have been commissioned. Our commitment to working with local trades people provides long-term financial security for them, their families and the local economy.

Supplies. Drygoods, fruit and vegetables (to supplement those grown on site) and meat is supplied by local suppliers from Jindabyne with specialist products being sourced from Canberra, the nearest city, just 200 km away. All produce, art and craft on sale is sourced locally or regionally and has been selected to showcase the best the region has to offer. Nothing on sale originates from beyond a 250 km radius, with 90 % of produce sourced within a 25 km radius. The size and viability of our business and our 'buy and promote local' policy provides ongoing support for our local economy.



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In summary, the business attracts tourism dollars to the region and injects them into the regional economy where, via the economic multiplier effect, their value is amplified by a factor of 2.5 : 1. (In other words, \$2.50 worth of economic activity is generated for every tourism dollar spent in the region).

d) Regulation and accreditation to incentivise ecotourism activity and enhance ecosystems

Tourism operators have a long history of leveraging external accreditation systems to market their business. Operators turn to external accreditation to combat the wide variation in standards within specific categories of the industry. The most ubiquitous would be the AAA Touring 'Star Rating' system. Also highly valued is the Tourism Industry Council's 'Tick' Accreditation. The recent development of the T-Qual Tick provides a high-quality non-commercial accreditation system for the industry and will be of considerable benefit to operators and consumers alike.

When considering eco-certification specifically, it is important to note that there are wide variations in the scope and quality of schemes on offer. Some set the bar quite low, others are of international quality. We welcome the endorsement of the Climate Action Australia Eco-Certification scheme within the T-Qual Tick scheme as we are currently seeking certification within this framework. For a business to achieve Eco-Certification it must clearly demonstrate a strong commitment to the ecosystem in which it operates. This endorsement in turn attracts patronage from the target market the business is seeking to attract – socially and environmentally aware eco-tourists.

e) Industry and government measures to promote the benefits of ecotourism to biodiversity and beyond

As the recipient of the Sustainable Tourism award for the region in 2011, we strongly endorse the Canberra and Capital Region Tourism Awards scheme as a vehicle to promote eco-tourism businesses. As noted above, T-Qual's endorsement of Eco-Certification is also significant.

It would also be beneficial if national, state and local tourism organisations could display accreditations for properties they list and include a search criteria specifically targeted at highlighting eco-friendly tourism businesses. For example, when searching for accommodation via www.visitcanberra.com.au, in addition to the existing criteria (accommodation type, rating etc.) people could nominate 'Eco-friendly' as search criteria.

f) Any other relevant matter

We are very pleased to have been given the opportunity of providing feedback to your inquiry. When preparing future Terms of Reference, could thought be given to framing them in 'plain English'? We struggled to properly understand 'Reference e)' and hope that our response addresses the criteria adequately.

Please contact us if you require clarification of our responses or any additional information.

Thanks for your interest in our industry. We look forward to the outcomes of your inquiry and to growth in the eco-tourism sector. It's good for people, it's good for the planet.

Brad Spalding
Owner, Thredbo Valley Distillery