



AUSTRALIAN REGIONAL TOURISM NETWORK

*SUBMISSION:
TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
NORTHERN AUSTRALIA INQUIRY INTO
OPPORTUNITIES AND METHODS FOR
STIMULATING THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN
NORTHERN AUSTRALIA*

*“Tourism is vital to the economic and social fabric of regional and remote
communities in Northern Australia “*

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To the Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia,

RE: Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia Inquiry into Opportunities and Methods for Stimulating the Tourism Industry in Northern Australia

The Australian Regional Tourism Network (ARTN) welcomes the opportunity to provide input into your inquiry.

There are many ways in which tourism/the visitor economy in Northern Australia can grow and thrive, and ARTN is keen to continue working with all stakeholders to achieve this outcome. Following you will find a profile of ARTN, and then our submission proper with responses to the Terms of Reference of this inquiry.

Preamble

The Australian Regional Tourism Network (ARTN)

The Australian Regional Tourism Network (ARTN) was established in 1990 to rebalance an increasing focus on discussing tourism from an urban capital city perspective. Originally an informal network of regional practitioners formed through the then Tourism Council of Australia (TCA), the ARTN acted as a voluntary advisory group to the TCA Board. When the TCA ceased to operate nationally (late 1990's), and the State Chapters stood alone, the ARTN has continued to give a national voice on regional issues.

In the early 2000's the ARTN became an incorporated association with up to 100 partners and has run 16 successful national conventions. It is the only convention of its kind in Australia that looks at the opportunities and challenges for regional tourism.

ARTN is now a vibrant national voice for regional tourism, advocating on behalf of its many members including Local Government Authorities (LGAs), Regional Tourism Organisations (RTOs), Local Tourism Organisations (LTOs) and individual businesses. The organisation has in place MOUs with The National Farmers Federation (NFF), The Caravan Association of

Australia, Eco-Tourism Australia and the Transport and Tourism Forum (TTF). ARTN works in partnership with other industry groups such as the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) on like-minded projects.

Strategic Framework

ARTN is a pro-active organisation. The organisation Strategic Plan is reviewed annually following the annual ARTN Convention. Consultation takes place with members and stakeholders in the lead up to the annual convention, where issues of importance to growing tourism in regional and remote areas are discussed. The manifesto is then integrated into the overall strategic plan when applicable.

A Tourism Manifesto is then created at the end of the convention based on these discussions, which the working Board and Executive Officer action over the course of the following year. The Tourism Manifesto, has identified those issues raised in response to the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry and have been consulted with ARTN's members and stakeholders.

A copy of the 2016/2017 Tourism Manifesto is attached to this submission.

Response to the Inquiry Terms of Reference

The items following are mostly related to point two in the Terms of Reference, as this is the space within which ARTN predominantly operates. An example of how we can assist the Federal Government in relation to point two of the Terms of Reference is our recent joint initiative with the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA). With funding from Austrade, we partnered with ALGA to research and quantify the financial contributions that LGAs make to tourism development. We understand that LGAs are a critical partner in delivering frontline tourism services, funding regional tourism bodies and delivering many tourism projects, yet their contributions weren't quantified. This project, recently completed, demonstrates ARTN's proactive and collaborative approach to tourism development in regional and remote areas.

We put forward the following issues to be addressed and offer our assistance in helping you to achieve these goals.

Annual ARTN Convention

The ARTN Convention is a forum for discussing regional and remote tourism issues. Point two of the inquiry Terms of Reference seeks input on the 'role of peak bodies, local communities and all levels of government in developing and promoting tourism opportunities'. We are pleased to say that we have a forum for discussing this, as well as for releasing your findings! This is precisely what happens at our annual convention. In particular, we have time in the program dedicated each year to a National Visitor Information Centre Conversation, a National Regional Tourism Organisation and a National State Tourism Organisation (STO) Conversation. We also hold regular STO and RTO reference group meetings, so ARTN provides the perfect forum for the Joint Standing Committee to seek input into point two of the inquiry Terms of Reference and to present your findings.

Tourism Demand Driver Infrastructure Grants

ARTN welcomes the release of the Building Better Regions Fund, with its regional Australia focus. Of great need to the tourism industry though is a fund specific to tourism infrastructure that will drive demand. In the past, Tourism Demand Driver Infrastructure grants have been available, at times being eligible for applications from for profit and not for profit/local government organisations. The ARTN would like to see and provide advice on the development of a new Tourism Demand Driver Infrastructure grant program. These organisations could submit applications for projects that create increased or new demand to grow the visitor economy.

The implementation of this proposed grant scheme could link with each region's destination management planning process. Local Government would be encouraged to create Destination Management Plans incorporating tourism focussed local planning, and action items from those plans could be eligible for funding under a new grant scheme. This would ensure that the projects being submitted for funding have broad tourism industry acceptance as a demand driving outcome.

Destination Management Plans

As mentioned above, Destination Management Plans are how LGAs and regional tourism bodies can plan properly for tourism growth. ARTN has been a keen advocate and developed in association with Austrade and The Australian Standing Committee on Tourism (ASCOT) the guide to best practice Destination Managements Plans (DMP). ARTN has for many years been Australia's lead agency for the DMPs, and has developed new template briefs to assist LGAs and regional tourism bodies scope and procure experts to create these documents. In acknowledgement that LGAs and regional tourism bodies have varying budgets. The ARTN has created templates for Destination Management Plan briefs for both small and large budgets. It is accepted though that many LGAs and regional tourism bodies still cannot fund the creation of a Destination Management Plan.

Through a Federally funded initiative, LGAs and regional tourism bodies could be offered the chance to develop Destination Management Plans, to ensure there are many 'shovel ready' projects that will drive visitor demand in regional areas. ARTN can aid in this space, and offer their services to assist in creating a Destination Management Plan process for regional bodies, using the template briefs already created.

National Agri-Tourism Policy

As previously mentioned, ARTN is a collaborative organisation. One of the partnerships ARTN is proud of is with the National Farmers Federation (NFF). Through this partnership, sealed in 2016 with a Memorandum of Understanding, ARTN and the NFF seek to create a National Policy for Agri-Tourism, allowing farmers to diversify their income and grow wealth in regional and remote areas. With Federal Government support, a policy and toolkit can be created and implemented, through initial funding of policy production and then a specific funding program for its implementation.

Farmers are seeking ways to protect their livelihoods, and are also keen to can grow their incomes into the future, thereby encouraging future generations to remain on the farm and diversify product offering and income streams. With the overcrowding of our cities and the continued flow of people from regional areas to cities, a National Policy for Agri-Tourism and implementation program could assist in retaining youth in regional and remote areas, that not only assist the economic structure of a region, this initiative will assist in the wellbeing of many regions. There are many opportunities for farm diversification, and the ARTN stands with the NFF in advocating for this policy.

Upon completion of the policy, one of the first items that needs to be addressed is a practical toolkit for farmers to understand how they can diversify their on-farm income. To achieve this, ARTN and the NFF propose to produce a farm diversification toolkit, backed up with advice to LGAs on how to ensure their planning laws enable new farm tourism enterprises. A roadshow is then necessary to show how the toolkit can be used around regional Australia. The roadshow will be a capacity development exercise for the many farmers around the country who want to remain on farm and retain workers, but aren't sure how this can be achieved.

Young Tourism Professionals

Our youth are the future of the tourism industry. Without their enthusiasm for the tourism industry, we will not be able to make up the shortfall in skills required into the future. The ARTN runs an annual Young Tourism Professional program, culminating in a winner being identified at the annual convention. This winner receives training, mentoring and Board experience they can then use to fuel their advancement in the tourism industry. This national, regional young tourism professional program is soon to grow, and ARTN is seeking support from the Federal Government to enhance this program. Funding for its growth and the provision of opportunities to the alumni of this program are required, and ARTN requests the Federal Government to consider being involved to provide leadership, guidance and mentoring to the fine young people who participate.

Tourism Policy

The Australian Regional Tourism Network is calling on the Federal Government to work with the State and Territory Governments and ALGA and tourism industry to develop a Tourism 2030 policy with roles, responsibilities and an action plan and reporting on the development of Tourism in line with the proposed Tourism Minister Meetings (TMM) and the Australian Standing Committee on Tourism (ASCOT) meetings.

To assist with progressing this policy, there should be a ministerial sub-committee formed that reports to the house.

Industry needs to be encouraged to take a lead role in the development of the tourism policy.

Summary

ARTN is a collaborative organisation representing the interests of LGAs, RTOs and LTOs across regional Australia. We seek the Federal Government's commitment to:

- Participating in the annual ARTN Convention
- Creating a new Tourism Demand Driver Infrastructure grant program
- Assistance with ensuring more LGAs have Destination Management Plans
- Working with the NFF and ARTN to create a National Policy for Agri-Tourism including the production of a toolkit for farm diversification; and
- Helping mentor our young tourism professionals to success
- National Tourism 2030 Policy.
- Digital and mobile connectivity for Regional and Remote Australia to complete in the e-commerce space.

Conclusion

The Northern Australian Initiative needs to align with the Regional Futures Program that embeds a long term vision and strategy outside the election cycle will enhance the economic and social well-being of Northern Australia.

Yours Sincerely,

David Sheldon
Chair
Australian Regional Tourism Network