

Western Melbourne Tourism Inc

Independent Chair Report

2015 Annual General Meeting

It is with mixed emotions that I stand down as Independent Chair of Western Melbourne Tourism after 4 years in the role. Emotions include pride, sadness and faith.

Pride in that my job was to get a governance framework established to support a sustainable organisation. This has been achieved, in that we have a high performing Executive Officer Richard Ponsford, Origin Consultants Pty Ltd supporting a happy and healthy board. We have a 3-year plan and have survived one of our member Council's withdrawing their support this year. Board positions are sought after and the recruitment for a new Chair this year saw a stellar field showing interest. The appointment of Jan Jacklin to the role will see the Board take its next steps in being recognised as the organisation to make Melbourne's West a compelling place to visit and this interest converts to visitation growth.

Sadness in that I have made great friends on the Board and through the Boards networks.

Faith that the Board has a strong platform upon which to achieve the recognition that Melbourne's West deserves.

My parting gifts of feedback to the incoming Board are that it is critical that we:

- Deliver year three of our plan as it's a good one;
- Concentrate on industry buy in and product development for the next three plan;
- Be the exemplar of an urban regional tourism association in the eyes of the state government and be invited to participate in \$for\$ campaigns;
- Revisit the 'narrative' of the West ie what is our story (ies) and how can we direct individual and cooperative marketing efforts to contribute to that narrative;
- Have the difficult conversations around a working board vs a representative board; and
- Be realistic and focussed on what can be achieved.

For the record I wish to document Western Melbourne Tourism's current agreed purpose

Western Melbourne Tourism Inc (WMT) is an association incorporated for the purposes of developing a stronger more competitive tourism sector in Melbourne's west. Melbourne's west embraces the municipal boundaries of Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Maribyrnong, Melton, Moonee Valley and Wyndham City Councils. The value of our organisation is in its regional approach and the synergy it is able to achieve between individual members and councils.

The Board is committed to working together with other key stakeholders to enable an increase in recognition and greater contribution of tourism to the region's economy; and also, ensuring potential visitors are aware of the unique factors that make Melbourne's West a compelling place to visit and this interest converts to visitation growth.

As a regional tourism association well WMT is well positioned to advocate to state and federal tourism bodies for a fair share of cooperative funding and regional opportunities. It is also well placed to attract industry funds for research, regional promotions and industry development projects.

For 2015 /16 WMT is funded with the combined support from five of the six western metropolitan Councils (not including Maribyrnong for 2015/16), in addition to other funds raised from the local tourism industry. Each Council has contributed \$26,138 (excl gst) for the 2014-15 year. Each Council also has a board representative. The membership of the board also comprises representation from Parks Victoria, Victoria University, LeadWest and other industry and community representation (this currently includes Zoos Victoria, Scienceworks, the arts sector, Quest Apartments).

The board membership is strong, energetic and focussed. Our Patron is the Hon Steve Bracks and the West is known to be a stable and high functioning region in the eyes of state and federal tourism bodies. Within a formal board structure are working committees convened as required to support with project delivery. This has ensured the important connection back to the key Council staff of each partner Council.

And here is a summary of activity for the year

The WMT board is currently in the process of delivering series of projects based on its 3 year strategic working framework (2014 – 2017) and an Action Plans for the 2014-15 and 2015-16 years.

WMT has a strong focus on building collaboration and leveraging existing resources where possible. There is also an underlying commitment to building stronger direct engagement and support from industry operators and thereby improving ongoing financial sustainability.

We have also been optimising our partnership with LeadWest. LeadWest provide office accommodation and administrative support for the Executive Officer role (30 hours per week).

Project delivery is focused in five key areas (as summarised in the diagram attached):

- Advocacy
- Visitor Experience
- Industry Development
- Communications/Engagement
- Organisational Performance

What has been accomplished in the past year?

- Developed a new 3 year strategic plan (2014- 2017) and Action Plan for 2014 -15, including a more effective and purposeful board working committee structure.
- Successful advocacy – in particular bringing on very positive relationships with Tourism Victoria and Destination Melbourne, and the Victorian Tourism Industry Council. Advocacy has included submissions State Inquiry into Heritage Tourism and Ecotourism, and the recent State Visitor Economy Inquiry, and the Senate Inquiry in to Commonwealth Arts Funding.
- Delivered a second very successful one day industry conference at the Sun Theatre, Yarraville – *The Tourism Fest in the West* - held in May 2015 (attended by 110 industry representatives and stakeholders).
- Communications – a comprehensive quarterly newsletter *Loving the West enews* (400+ stakeholders).

- Familiarisation activity - In November 2014 WMT coordinated a familiarisation visit for 8 senior staff from Tourism Victoria to showcase the region
- Social media – *LovetheWest* Face book page – following of over 1400 on the LovetheWest Facebook page to further augment Council's own social media activity
- Mapping – developed a digital mapping prototype - as well as the development of a new map for inclusion of a new map of Melbourne's west in Melbourne's *Official Visitor Guide* published quarterly by Destination Melbourne
- Commissioned valuable customised research specifically profiling the visitors to the west by segment group and down to an LGA level;
- Developed a new website as resource for industry (still in final development, but expected to be live by December 2015)
- Supported Councils in the development and promotion of events eg. Melbourne Food and Wine Festival.
- Contributing to Regional Development initiatives – Western Metropolitan Region Bike Trails Strategy, Artswest network
- Facilitating key partnership project with Essendon Fields – product development and destination positioning for the international market.
- Range of media and PR, including appearance on ABC 774.
- Supported each local Council's own tourism development initiatives/ projects – WMT's Executive Officer has been an active participant in economic development forums local business networking events, as well as giving direct support to local operators.
- Contributed to the strategic tourism development for the region via participation in relevant other government and industry forums.
- Implemented a very lean and productive office base at Leadwest.
- Exercising strong fiscal control to ensure is WMT now in a strong financial position.

What's ahead?

- Sustaining the ongoing communications activities described above
- Tourism Positioning Project – Essendon Fields
- Development of further digital content - eg Westside stories
- A *Tourism Fest in the West* program , but in a revised format to improve reach across the region
- Launch of a new upgraded website – as a local resource for industry
- A coordinated advocacy platform in partnership with Leadwest
- Mapping – Ongoing development of maps for other applications
- Further board reform – right balance of strategic influence and skills
- Digital audit and strategy for further digital content development.