

**Western Melbourne Tourism Inc AGM
Chair's Report
28 November 2019**

It's my pleasure to provide a report on activities and achievements of Western Melbourne Tourism for the past 12 months.

And we have a lot to be proud of as we move into the final 6 months of our current 3-year strategic plan. It's timely to reflect on the work of the board over the last 12 months and look forward to 2020.

This year, 5 became 6 as we welcomed back the City of Maribyrnong. Western Melbourne Tourism is now truly representative of our region with all six Local Government Authorities at the table.

I also acknowledge the industry expertise brought by our other board members - Victoria University, Parks Victoria, Quest Accommodation and Zoos Victoria.

Having worked with a number of boards, committees, and organisations, this partnership of Councils, the university and industry is unique.

Collaboration has been a competitive strength for Melbourne's west and our unity is the envy of other parts of metropolitan Melbourne. It is particularly valuable in advocacy, sharing knowledge, in the development of linkages across the region and increasing market impact.

The role of the Board is to work collaboratively to grow the visitor economy of Melbourne's west.

Why is our work important?

Because the visitor economy delivers economic benefits for our region through investment, jobs and prosperity.

And a thriving economic base is essential in maintaining a high quality of life for residents, as well as people who work in and visit our region.

I also note this is the 16th AGM held by Western Melbourne Tourism. The longevity of this organisation is commendable.

What's On Platform

The development of our 'What's On' digital platform is a milestone and it will be officially launched at our stakeholder briefing this afternoon.

This is the first and important step in visitors (and locals) being able to search for events, activities, attractions and things to do in Melbourne's West - across the whole region, not just by council boundary.

Now the What's On platform is established, we need to market it to consumers. We can then look at how to increase the offer on the platform, by adding information on accommodation, dining, transport, and there is the possibility of monetising this valuable asset, as it grows.

The What's On platform gives the region a single call to action, one that we haven't had before; it takes us directly to the consumer, and increases the opportunity for our local businesses, events and activities to be 'found' and promoted on line.

This leads to a larger discussion about what we say about the west, what is our narrative, what is our brand and importantly, how can we resource direct consumer engagement?

Hanging Local Project

Another significant development this year was the successful application for funding through Study Melbourne's International Student Welfare Program.

This grant of \$63,180 has been matched with in-kind and cash contributions from Victoria University and WMT – giving the project a total value of \$128,000.

A new program called '*Hanging Local*' will engage international students and encourage them to uncover Melbourne's West and 'Hang Local', during their study at Victoria University.

The program is being developed in a partnership with V.U. and Get Lost Travel and will be rolled out early next year.

It will offer a program of local experiences and give students the chance to connect and make friends, as well as providing experiences to share with their own friends and family when they visit.

Preliminary work has begun, and the project will be officially launched next month.

It underlines the importance and value of international students to the visitor economy.

Increase in Advocacy

There have been several changes in the tourism landscape in the last 12 months which prompted action by the Board and an increase in our advocacy.

The closure of Destination Melbourne has left a significant gap in the tourism structure and the management of Melbourne as a destination.

While some programs will be picked up by Visit Victoria and the Victorian Industry Tourism Council, who will be responsible for leading the overall management and strategic direction of the visitor economy across Melbourne?

A letter to Tourism Minister Martin Pakula noting our concerns resulted in meeting with the Minister – which lead to fruitful discussions with senior marketing staff at Visit Victoria; with a number of positive initiatives flowing from that.

We also invited by Member for Melton Steve McGhie to address MPs from Melbourne’s West at a briefing at Parliament House. It was an opportunity to again outline the value of the visitor economy, the level of infrastructure and investment and the need for more accommodation to grow our yield.

Western Melbourne Tourism responded to the State Government’s Regional Tourism Review, strongly advocating for the review to be extended to take in the whole of Melbourne. The tourism industry is dependent on the interconnectivity of councils, accommodation, attractions, cultural and sporting assets, hospitality, education and transport sectors. We need a strategic plan that brings Inner Melbourne, Greater Melbourne and Regional Victoria into a cohesive industry strategy.

Our network has increased with our membership of the Committee for Melbourne. A forum last week addressing the Visitor Experience in Greater Melbourne was facilitated by the Committee for Melbourne. It was sparked by discussions with our Executive Officer Richard Pondsford.

We continue to contribute to the Western Melbourne Partnership, WOMDEA and Lead West.

Richard Pondsford is a member of the VTIC Policy Advisory Committee and is also a board member of Cultural Tourism Victoria.

There is a growing interest in Western Melbourne Tourism from businesses and corporates. I look forward to our strategic review to consider how this interest can be harnessed.

Social Media and Communications

Further improving our communications has been a focus for the Board in the last 12 months. Our communications contractor Amy Gardner and Strategic PR consultant Madeleine Blake have delivered strong results.

Highlights:

- We started the year by hosting 30 travel writers at Sebastian restaurant in Williamstown, resulting in increased awareness of the region with key Melbourne based travel writers – two articles have been produced as a result, with additional stories in the works;
- By working as a region, we have secured 8 pages devoted to Melbourne’s West in the Cultural Tourism Guide;
- For the first time, all 6 councils will participate in ‘Eat Drink Westside’, as part of the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival in 2020. It’s a model that could be replicated for other hallmark events;

- Time Out voted Footscray as the 13th coolest neighbourhood in the world and we worked with Visit Victoria to amplify that achievement;
- We continue to distribute a comprehensive 'What's On In The West' e-newsletter each month to a growing database with over 800 industry stakeholders;
- Expansion of our social media content continues with growth in our following on all channels. Ongoing daily posts have led to increased engagement with Facebook and a 23% increase of followers. Instagram followers have increased by 48%. This is significant as it is all organic growth (no money spent);
- We have prepared media pitch material, conducted media famils and worked closely with Visit Victoria; and
- We have achieved feature articles in The Age Good Food, Family Travel magazine, Out & About With Kids, The Australian Senior, Avalon INBOUND:OUTBOUND and Kidspot.com.au

New Research

The Board commissioned an update on visitor numbers and profile which will outline further at the Stakeholder Briefing this afternoon.

Of note is the value of the visitor economy:

- Worth \$1.45 billion dollars to Melbourne's West (that's more than the value of tourism to the Great Ocean Rd)
 - The region attraction 4.1 million visitors in 2018
 - 76% are day visitors
 - 19 % stay overnight
 - 3% internationals
-
- 71% who stay overnight are here to visit family and friends.
 - Just under half dine out
 - 20% go shopping for pleasure
 - Our international visitors stay a long time – on average 37.4 days, well above the average for Melbourne.

Ongoing strategic development

Western Melbourne Tourism has contributed to the strategic tourism development for the region:

- With ongoing participation in industry forums including the Werribee Tourism Precinct Group, Hobsons Bay and Melton tourism stakeholder groups, and the new #Startwest initiative for start-up enterprises;
- We have been part of the consultation for new visitor strategies for Hobsons Bay, Brimbank and Wyndham Councils;
- We've had input in the development of a new School of the Visitor Economy at Victoria University, based in the region:

- We have taken part in economic development forums, local business networking events, and
- We have provided advice to local operators as well supporting new tourism development proposals, with data.

Administration & Office Accommodation

Our Memorandum of Understanding with Lead West was not renewed after changes to that organisation. As a result, our office will move from the Lead West office at Brimbank to Victoria University Footscray campus in the new year. Our thanks to VU for offering peppercorn rent and providing us with a new base.

Administrative costs have also increased as a result of changes to our agreement with Lead West and we have outsourced book-keeping and accounting services.

In the new year we look forward to developing a new strategic plan and contributing to the review by Lead West.

Thank you

I would like to thank the board for delivering another strong year of results in line with our strategic plan.

To Richard Ponsford in particular, who has an unwavering passion for promoting the west and real belief in what we offer our visitors; your contribution is greatly valued.

To the six councils which financially support the work of Western Melbourne Tourism, thank you.

Melbourne's west is dynamic region to visit, live, work and invest and I look forward to working with the Board as we continue to champion the visitor economy and the value it brings.


Jan Jacklin
Chair - Western Melbourne Tourism