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DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR GREAT SOUTHERN TOURISM ASSOCIATION

SUGGESTED ACTION

Denmark Tourism Incorporated (DTI) seeks political and administrative support to proceed with Phase 1 (start-up), Phase 2 (Tourism Development Strategy) and Phase 3 (Implementation) of the proposed Great Southern Tourism Association; and for Council support to be underpinned by financial assistance.

STATUS QUO AND FUTURE

Where is Lower Great Southern Tourism Now?

- Town based branding, fragmented identity, LGA-centric marketing, promotion and visitor servicing.
- LGA based tourism planning; tourism a low-med priority; limited resources.
- Little recognition by State and Regional Tourism Entities.
- 3 LGs and 2-3 subregional tourism groups. Minimal collaboration, limited regional planning and no resource pooling.
- Growth in tourism low.
- Below adequate accommodation capacity (in peak season); many aged facilities; mixed quality and tourism focus.
- Fragmented administrative processes across local tourism associations.
- Many holiday homes; limited caravan park and camping capacity in peak-season.
- Inadequate signage, mixed quality

Where should Lower Great Southern Tourism be?

- Collaborative and partnership driven.
- Great Southern Tourism Association (LTO) – one strong voice, one strong advocate. Fully recognised and supported by regional stakeholders.
- Regional branding, strong town identities, experience-based appeal.
- Identified tourism priorities.
- Marketing alliance with Australia's South West (RTO).
- Development alliance with Tourism WA (STO).
- Standardised, high quality visitor information and way finding.
- Multi-channel communication (web, social media, digital, Apps).
- Increased accommodation capacity.
- Increased administrative capacity and efficiency.
- Development of iconic places and experiences.
- Development of event tourism.
- Improved trails, day trip, self-drive

- and standard, gaps in way finding.
- Low priority afforded to self-drive, RV and camping segment and trail infrastructure.
- Many seasonal short stay and overnight visitors.

- options.
- Support for tourism focused SME's, community, private and NFP; mentoring, training and networks.
- Short, medium, long term actions; prioritised improvements.

BUSINESS PROFILE - GSTA

Please note: "Great Southern Tourism Association (Inc.)" is a working title for the purpose of this paper. The governing Board would determine the final name of the Association.

The Great Southern Tourism Association (GSTA) seeks to be a highly effective Local Tourism Organisation (LTO), covering the local government areas of Albany, Denmark and Plantagenet. It is assumed that GSTA will broaden its footprint to the whole of the Great Southern in time.

The GSTA concept is modelled on a contemporary approach to regional tourism development – that is, extending its reach and influence beyond a single municipality to deliver outcomes throughout a wide geographic area.

GSTA aims to provide a focal point throughout the region for a number of key tourism outcomes, including destination:

- Development
- Marketing
- Planning
- Management

GSTA will offer a strong focus within the WA tourism system for Albany, Denmark and Plantagenet by working collaboratively across municipal boundaries. Put simply, the tourism industry will have far greater prospects of leveraging funding and stakeholder support for tourism projects and initiatives in the region by demonstrating that they 'speak as a united industry'.

REGIONAL DELIVERY MODEL

Tourism in the lower Great Southern has historically been:

- Administered by LGs working independently with minimal collaboration at the subregion or regional level.
- Administered by LG subsidised LTOs (e.g. Denmark Tourism Inc. / Mount Barker Tourist Bureau Inc.), Visitor Centres and the Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPaW) with minimal collaboration at the regional level.
- LGA-centric with unaligned tourism aims and varied tourism resources.

Taking a proactive role in facilitating a collaborative approach to regional development an alternate model is required and expected by state and industry bodies.

The success of strategic tourism in the lower Great Southern relies on its delivery. Participation and support for implementation activities are required from all levels of the industry – from those operating tourism related product and managing visitor centres through to all tiers of government.

The regional delivery model we seek to establish is industry driven and involves two new 'roles' within the lower Great Southern tourism industry:

1. **Great Southern Tourism Association (Inc.)**, that is industry led, and has membership held by industry representatives. In addition to, representatives from government agencies, non-government and regional stakeholders; collectively becoming a driving force in facilitating collaboration-cooperation across the many facets of tourism development.
2. A **Regional Chief Executive Officer** position with a focus on tourism development. A full time position that reports to GSTA and has the responsibility of implementing initiatives and relationship and partnership management.

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PROPOSED - BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- (a) The affairs of the Association will be managed by a Board of Directors. The Board shall consist of –
- i) An independent President, who may hold office for only two consecutive two-year terms.
 - ii) One member nominated by each of the City of Albany, Shire of Denmark, Shire of Plantagenet.
 - iii) One member nominated by the Great Southern Development Commission.
 - iv) Three (3) members from within the Great Southern Tourism Industry.
 - v) Two (2) representatives co-opted by the Board for particular skills and expertise.

From these Board members, the position of –

- Vice President
- Will be filled.

- (b) The Board members referred to in 6(a)(iv) must be financial members of the Association – if for any reason the member ceases to be a member of the Association they will be deemed to have simultaneously vacated his/her office.
- (c) Where possible the Board members referred to in 6(a)(iv) shall comprise of members who are representatives of the following sectors:

Accommodation and Hospitality	Tours, Attractions and Support Activities	Winery and food producers
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- (d) The independent Chair referred to in 6(a)(i) shall be appointed by a Selection Committee, the members of which shall be:
- Mayor, City of Albany
 - President, Shire of Denmark
 - President, Shire of Plantagenet
 - Chair, Great Southern Development Commission

The Selection Committee shall have a quorum of three (3) members and may make decisions by simple majority.

Appointments shall be made by the Selection Committee only after advertisement to the members and by public advertisement in the media of the position to be filled.

ECONOMIC ADVANTAGE

Tourism has the ability to offer significant future economic development opportunities for the immediate local government areas of Albany, Denmark and Plantagenet – with flow on effects to destinations on their periphery.

By banding together, the lower Great Southern can consolidate their individual strengths to create a synergy otherwise unavailable to autonomous destinations. Regional partnerships draw on the unique qualities within the region to create a distinct marketable regional identity, which in turn attracts visitors and significantly improves yield. Tourism should be seen as a catalyst for growth in what is a very important sector of the economy of the Lower Great Southern.

The region's tourism has evolved unevenly and irregularly as a result of resource constraints and LGA-centric approaches to marketing, visitor servicing and infrastructure development.

Ultimately, the growth of regional tourism requires a concerted effort based on alliances, knowledge and strategies formed by regional interests in order to improve economic benefits.

- Tourism provides employment, therefore results in additional residential population, providing a stronger rate base for Council.
- Greater opportunities for new investment growth and development.
- Opportunities for significant cost savings due to economies of scale and the consolidation of operations and like activities through partnering / outsourcing
- Through GSTA, Council will have better access to greater knowledge and skills.
- Improved work and management practices – and perhaps accountability (KPIs).
- Improved marketing will lead to better awareness of the destination = improved yield (length of stay and spend).
- Increased visitation leads to a more viable private sector – this also impacts on social capital.
- Increased recognition and thereafter support by / of State and Federal Government dealing with a recognised Sub-Regional Tourism entity.
- GSTA can assist in achieving strategic economic development for the region identified in all current strategic plans.

Lower Great Southern (Albany, Denmark and Plantagenet) regional tourism has significant potential to grow the tourism economy and stakeholders have recently embraced the need for collaboration in pursuing regional development of tourism.

Success of the initiative is reliant upon the collaboration of government, tourism operators, industry stakeholders and community in resourcing and supporting a regional approach to tourism development.

PROPOSED PHASES

PHASE 1: START UP

- Development of a Business Plan
- Creation of Constitution including objects of the Association.
- Determination of agreed name of the Association (current working title of GSTA)
- Appointment of the Board
- Special General Meeting of Denmark Tourism Inc. Membership (250 members) to agree to transition from DTI into GSTA
- Development of Association brand to be used on all formal correspondence and marketing collateral in relation to the Association
- Membership drive including development of a Membership Prospectus.
- Promotion and marketing of the Association (launch of the association).
- Costing for Phase 1.

<i>Source</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>Status</i>
Shire of Denmark	\$10,000	Secured
RDA GS	\$5,000	Secured
City of Albany	\$20,000	Pending
Shire of Plantagenet	\$5,000	Secured
GSDC	\$10,000	Pending
TOTAL	\$50,000	

PHASE 2: TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

- Development of a strategic plan to provide the impetus and focus for improving and growing the lower Great Southern tourism industry over the next five years – this would include tourism marketing.
- Strategy will involve significant industry input from all levels of the industry, from operators through the LGs, Australia’s South West and State Government agencies.
- Thorough desktop review (i.e. existing reports, plans and analysis, industry data, and also a review of international best practice tourism structures and initiatives).
- Identify key issues covering local and regional opportunities, current gaps, future needs, target markets and regional trends.
- Consideration of consultant/s to work with GSTA on strategic planning.
- Costing for Phase 3 to be determined in Phase 1.

The objective of this initiative is to identify tourism opportunities, game changers, priorities and gaps for the ‘lower Great Southern’ region to inform future development and investment.

Phase 2 will focus on devising strategies to increase capacity to grow the visitor market and extend the length of stay; improve way finding to disperse visitors across the region; increase opportunity for expenditure; and build a stronger profile as a diverse destination extending from Plantagenet (i.e. Mount Barker and the Porongurup) to Albany to Denmark. In essence, a region-wide transition from LGA-centric tourism planning to collaborative ‘visitor-centric’ regional tourism development.

Gaps to address in lower Great Southern tourism in phase 2 include:

- Distinct and separate branding of towns and therefore no coherent (regional) identity in the minds of visitors;
- Varied approaches to visitor servicing and mixed standards of information for way finding (navigation to places of interest);
- Lack of distinctive ‘iconic’ activities and experiences compared to competitor regions;
- Accommodation, which is generally aged, and of mixed standards, with supply limitations during peak seasons;
- Limited RV and traveller amenities and accommodation options, such as low-cost or freedom camping for travellers transiting or stopping overnight;
- Regional product is not highly promoted; food-wine-culinary experiences are under-represented; and food tourism is under developed. We cannot compete with the Southern Forests Food Group, for example.

- Digital media and online promotional information is limited, including gaps in town information, day trip options, and experiences available and recommended 'must-do' activities.

PHASE 3: IMPLEMENTATION

Implementing strategic priorities and actions identified in Phase 2. These would be implemented over three to five years using a phased approach that addresses fundamental issues first, before realising and consolidating the growth, quality and capacity gains of this effort. Costing for Phase 3 to be determined in Phase 2.

IMPORTANCE OF MEMBERSHIP

Industry leaders (e.g. Local Government) must recognise the strength and value in regional collaboration and be willing to work from grassroots up to gain support from communities, individuals and key stakeholders. Leaders must strive to inspire tourism operators to implement improvements to their products and service standards and to work together as a region rather than seeing each other as competitors. *Everywhere outside the region is the competitor!*

The best way to achieve grassroots collaboration is through a membership based Local Tourism Organisation. This is the model adopted by one of the most successful LTOs nationally, the Augusta Margaret River Tourism Association (AMRTA). A membership-based association is the preferred model of the State (i.e. Tourism WA and Tourism Council WA).

Put simply, the tourism industry will have far greater prospects of leveraging funding and stakeholder support for tourism projects and initiatives in the region by demonstrating that they 'speak as a united industry'.

If a membership based association is foregone, the region will lack cohesiveness, presenting a fragmented and inarticulate voice that drives a lack of confidence and direction to funding bodies and investors. A description currently related to the lower Great Southern tourism industry.

The recently announced amalgamation of AMRTA and Geographe Bay Tourism Association (GBTA) is a clear indication that strength of the organisation is underpinned by their joint membership. The Mandurah and Peel Tourism Organisation (MAPTO) have also indicated that their future viability will partly be linked to membership.

MEMBER \$ VERSUS GOVERNMENT \$

The proposed GSTA will have multiple income streams:

1. Commissions through visitor centres (accommodation and tour bookings)
2. Retail sales through visitor centres
3. Service Agreements between GSTA and the respective LG / Tourism Association to operate regional visitor centres.
4. Membership subscription fees
5. Project based grant funding (e.g. GSDC, RDA, Tourism WA)

6. Recurrent funding from local government
7. Cooperative marketing
8. Events

Costs associated with member based services and benefits will be derived from membership income (this includes commissions).

Broad based projects such as destination marketing campaigns, planning, product development and infrastructure development will be derived from government grants and recurrent funding of local government; but also subsidised by membership generated income.

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