

Tourism Advisory Committee Meeting Record 3 June 2020



Location:	Zoom Meeting
Date:	3 June 2020
Time	Started at: 3.02pm Closed at: 5.10pm
Chair	Councillor Chris Holstein
File Ref	F2018/01648

Present:

Councillor Chris Holstein, Councillor Jane Smith, Robert Diaz, Bill Jackson, Nadia O'Connell, Emma Perham, Catharine Retter, Glenn Caldwell – Destination Sydney Surrounds North, David Jewell – Central Coast Tourism Inc, Russell Mills – Tourism Central Coast

External representatives present:

Carolyn Childs – My Travel Research (left 4.16pm), Penny Spoelder – TRC Tourism (left 4.16pm)

Council Staff present:

Julie Vaughan – Director Connected Communities, Sue Ledingham – Unit Manager Community Engagement, Jacqueline Svedas – Business and Economic Development Manager (left 4.41pm), Gemma Axford – Team Leader Marketing and Tourism, Zoie Magann – Advisory Group Support Officer

Item 1 Welcome, Acknowledgement of Country and Apologies

Apologies received: Councillor Jeff Sundstrom, Tim Faulkner

Councillor Chris Holstein welcomed the Advisory Group and completed an Acknowledgement of Country.

Item 2 Disclosures of Interest

Councillor Jane Smith declared a less than significant non-pecuniary interest as she had done so previously, as a member of the Marine Discovery Centre Trust Committee.

Item 3 Confirmation of Previous Meeting Record

The Advisory Group confirmed the Meeting Records from 19 February 2020.

The Advisory Group discussed the Action Log. It was noted that an update on waterways activation and the 2020/21 budget will be provided at the next meeting.

Action: Information on waterways activation to be circulated to Advisory Group members via email as soon as practicable.

Item 4 Tourism Opportunity Plan Update (standing item)

Sue Ledingham (Unit Manager Community Engagement) provided the Advisory Group with an update on the Tourism Opportunity Plan (TOP) and other areas of interest.

The following key points were noted:

- Tourism Management Review: adopted by Council 11 May 2020. Recruitment will be undertaken to fill two tourism roles within Council, to allow progress towards the actions identified in the TOP. Procurement has also commenced for engagement of digital marketing and industry services to complement the model of work.
- Destination Brand campaign: Campaign artwork is being finalised, launch locally end of June early July and then external to region in August/September 2020.
- 'Love Local' campaign is continuing – this started amidst pandemic to generate support for local businesses and has been largely successful.
- 'Always On' campaign out of region is also continuing to encourage regional travel that is opening up.
- Good news story: Council had a segment on the Today Show on Monday 1 June in partnership with Destination NSW to promote the Central Coast region. There was limited time to prepare (less than 24 hours), but the team managed to pull together a package that reached ~200k viewers, ~300k people across social media, and generated ~\$120k for Central Coast tourism. Various businesses were highlighted as part of the segment and it was a huge win for the Central Coast.
- Staff have been working with the New Zealand Warriors NRL team to leverage marketing opportunities with hosting NRL games at Central Coast stadium. The first game was held Saturday 30 May 2020. Various opportunities are being explored to generate tourism for the region.
- The Harvest Festival will be running online this year via Council's YouTube channel and social media. It will focus on showcasing the hinterland region and operators, through provision of online talks and workshops.
- Destination Sydney Surrounds North (DSSN) campaign 'Now's the Time to Love NSW' is focused on regional destinations (including Central Coast) and highlights what is available in the areas. This is a good opportunity to leverage exposure for the Central Coast. There is a call for uniting and activating the market for Newcastle Airport to support this.
- Noted that some plans need adjustment considering COVID-19, and any highlights will be brought back to the group for their information.

Russell Mills (Tourism Central Coast) noted there is currently a \$50k match funding opportunity available to promote the region in partnership with Newcastle Airport, which is separate to the Love NSW campaign. It was highlighted this is a time sensitive matter and would need to be raised with Council staff formally to be considered. It was also noted there is a current Council Resolution regarding partnership with Newcastle Airport, so this is an area of interest for Council.

Action: Russell Mills to follow up with relevant stakeholders about submitting a formal request to Council staff about the match funding opportunity to promote the region in partnership with Newcastle Airport.

Action: Sue Ledingham to share highlights of Today Show segment.

Item 5 Update on Current Tourism Studies Underway

Penny Spoelder (TRC Tourism) provided an overview of the Eco and Rural Tourism study currently underway.

The following key points were noted:

- Study is two thirds (2/3) complete and examines opportunities for ecotourism/agritourism.
- Agritourism is hard to measure, but DSSN stats show that Central Coast has had significant (almost double) growth in stats for visitors coming to the region for food/wine in the past 5 years. This is consistent with growth seen across NSW.
- Water based activities are also seeing strong growth (about 76%), as is bushwalking (about 179%). This suggests demand is outweighing the supply of infrastructure.
- Survey is being conducted (closes Friday 5 June 2020) to complement study, and will guide recommendations to be provided in a subsequent report to the Small Business Commissioner.
- Two of the top priorities identified from the study are activating waterways and improving agritourism for operators. Challenges include marketing, meeting government regulations, public transport, and availability of infrastructure.
- Noted that agritourism is an emerging industry which is important to Central Coast hinterland – support is needed to establish a strong position in the developing market.
- Key finding of the study is that agricultural growth is essential to get the agritourism sector moving, as opposed to improvements needed in the tourism sector.
- Important to develop partnerships with other areas including Hunter Valley and Cessnock Shire Council, as well as supporting local farmers.
- It's also worthwhile to explore opportunities with Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council (DLALC) and groups who represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Indigenous tourism experiences such as short interpretative walks are very valuable. National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) are another key group to consult with.

Action: Penny Spoelder (TRC Tourism) to confirm when report to Small Business Commissioner is made publicly available and can be shared with the Advisory Group through Convenor.

Carolyn Childs (My Travel Research) provided an overview of the RV feasibility study currently underway.

The following key points were noted:

- Study examines opportunities for RV tourism and the provision of camping facilities.
- Stakeholder consultation is underway and draft frameworks are being developed. An initial report is expected mid-June to allow for feedback, with expected completion of final report for 30 June 2020.
- Study is being conducted in conjunction with Penny's ecotourism study to avoid overlap and share key information.
- Noted it's important to think about sector holistically to best understand opportunity because the distinction between free vs paid caravanners is blurred, and 'towables' still account for the majority of 'RV' production.
- Key finding of the study is that this sector has strong long-term growth, and is expected to be one of the first to recover post pandemic as restrictions ease (safety and security are key factors, particularly with regard to hygiene and management of space). Noted that sector will likely see reduction in over 60 age group following pandemic, given demographic vulnerability to virus and resonating concerns.
- Area provides opportunity for partnership with neighbouring LGAs (eg. Great Pacific Drive)

Action: Both presentations on tourism studies to be shared with Advisory Group members for their information and feedback.

Action: Staff to find out how many RV sites are on the Central Coast and how many of these are free, and report back to the Advisory Group.

Item 6 Update on Economic Taskforce re Tourism Sector

Jacqueline Svedas (Business and Economic Development Manager) provided a presentation on the Central Coast Economic Taskforce with regard to the tourism sector.

The following key points were noted:

- Australia is now in recession after the March quarter for the first time in 29 years.
- Estimated there have been ~12,600 job losses on Central Coast, resulting in 5.7% decrease in overall jobs and 4.9% decrease in total wages.
- A taskforce has been established to address the rapidly fluctuating economy and comprises of four working groups: enabling infrastructure, job growth, education, and visitor economy (last is of interest to this Advisory Group).
- Aim of the taskforce is to lessen impact of economic downturn and improve outcomes for Central Coast. It met for the first time one week ago.
- Noted there are over 24,000 registered businesses on the Central Coast – 97% of these have less than 15 employees and are classified as small businesses (e.g. small retail shops, restaurants, cafes, recreational facilities).
- Retail spending stats show that each town centre (Woy Woy, Umina, Terrigal, The Entrance, Tuggerah, Wyong, Erina and Gosford) all have different experiences and have been impacted in various ways with regard to pandemic.
- Tourism and marketing have key roles in boosting outcomes for Central Coast through visitor economy, particularly over the next 12 months.
- Local businesses are being promoted through avenues such as Bigger Backyard App and website, which was a partnership between Council, Business NSW and the six Chambers.
- Important to continue working across organisations to multiply efforts and avoid duplication (efficiency), in effort to provide economic support and uplift the Central Coast.

Advisory Group members suggested that a representative from Hotels industry be on the Visitor Economy Taskforce.

Action: Jacqueline Svedas review presentation on the Economic Taskforce and share applicable slides with Advisory Group members for their information.

Action: Sue Ledingham to raise Hotels Industry representation for the Taskforce with the Visitor Economy Taskforce convenor.

Item 7 Impact of COVID-19 on Tourism Sector (particularly on Central Coast)

Glenn Caldwell (Destination Sydney Surrounds North) provided the Advisory Group with an update on the tourism sector, with regard to impacts of COVID-19.

The following key points were noted:

- There has been a significant reduction in occupancy rates for May period with regard to accommodation. This data only represents the cluster of hotels that subscribe to database. Reduction results in ~84% loss of income.
- DSSN completed a state-wide survey to assess impact of COVID-19 on tourism sector. There were 1,000 responses received in total, with about 300 of these coming from the Sydney Surrounds North region. Noted that survey commenced in March when some restrictions were not yet in full force, so data varied.
- Around 80% of respondents indicated a reduction in turnover and staffing. More than 50% indicated they were impacted in terms of loss of revenue. One third (1/3) indicated loss of staff. Noted most of this data was expected, but DSSN were surprised that 45% of businesses reported receiving forward cancellations for significant periods of time (6 months in advance).
- Glenn commended the Community Engagement team for pulling together the Today Show package in such a short time and generating such positive exposure for Central Coast.
- It was noted that each region is at different stage of recovery with regard to pandemic and are facing various challenges – not 'one size fits all' approach. Council's economic recovery plan has been shared with other councils and was very well received.

It was commented there was a fact sheet generated by Tourism Australia in April 2020 and Central Coast wasn't included amongst suggested locations. It was suggested sites on the list are likely generated as default for international market and is limited. DSSN is undertaking an international study that considers how to get Central Coast on the map (e.g. need to increase number of international 'products' and exposure of these entities).

Action: Glenn Caldwell (DSSN) to provide the following for the Advisory Group's information: STR data, DSSN survey report, recovering marketing campaign.

Item 8 General Business and Close

- a) Impact of COVID-19: Advisory Group members were invited to share comments on how the pandemic has affected them/their organisation. The following points were noted:
- Florida Beach Bar will be opening in time for the long weekend although some restrictions are still in place (e.g. number of patrons). The hotel will officially open 1 July 2020, which is good timing for the school holidays.
 - Noted there was a notice in local newspaper that Council is taking tourism in-house. Staff advised this was a decision for Council following industry feedback and benchmarking.
 - Some local businesses have fared quite well during pandemic with shift to residents focusing on local adventure rather than leaving the region. Still unfortunate to see impact on others and that not all were this lucky.
 - Firescreek Winery has opened again. It's expected that winter will be challenging, but positive change is expected with September. Noted that 'silver market' may be impacted with suspected decline due to concerns for safety. Many weddings and events have been postponed which generates a loss.
 - Ettalong Diggers opens next Tuesday, and staff have been undertaking significant training in preparation.

- It was noted that Racing NSW announced owners will be allowed back on course shortly for metro racing. Numbers will still be restricted, but working towards accommodating groups for race meetings.
 - Planning for COVID-19 recovery was a requested action by the Advisory Group and this should be scheduled for next meeting or extraordinary meeting.
 - Coast Publishing launched Coast Online on Monday 1 June 2020, which has been a long-term goal further enabled by the shift to online working during COVID. The magazine is expected to be back in print for summer.
 - Tourism Central Coast have been holding a webinar series. The next webinar is 24 June 2020 and will give the industry a sneak preview of Council's Destination Brand Strategy.
- b) Zoom Meetings: the Advisory Group indicated they are interested in continuing to meet over Zoom moving forward. This will be further considered as the shift is made to working in office again.
- c) Destination Brand: Staff will liaise offline to organise an extraordinary meeting prior to the launch event, in accordance with Action 22.

Action: Update on changes to Operational Plan that affect Tourism Opportunity Plan actions to be provided at the next meeting. Key information and questions to be circulated to Advisory Group members prior to meeting for consideration. (**NB:** Council staff noted that Advisory Groups are a main stakeholder in the development of the Tourism planned activities and will be consulted in development of a 3-year Tourism Action Plan as per Council Resolution for Tourism Management Review on 11 May 2020.)

Action: Staff to share clips from Today Show segment with Advisory Group members when available.

The meeting closed at 5.10pm

Next Meetings: **Thursday 6 August 2020**
 3pm – 5pm
 Location TBC