

# Northern Rivers Regional Visitor Services Strategy

November 2012



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FINAL - November 2012

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Northern Rivers is the fourth highest visited area in New South Wales, with 1.960 million visitors a year (Tourism Research Australia - National Visitor Services 2011). Accredited Visitor Information Centres in the Northern Rivers, contribute significantly to tourism yield by increasing the number of activities that a visitor can be influenced to undertake whilst in the region, and increase their length of stay. This Strategy seeks to reach, engage and influence a greater number of visitors to further increase yield and visitor economic contribution to the Northern Rivers economy.

Well informed visitors will stay longer in regions, potentially move on to other neighbouring regions and, most importantly, will want to return. The Tourism Management Group (TMG) has the opportunity to work together to ensure information is modernised, integrated regionally and maintains pace with technological advances.

Methods of providing visitor information must evolve over time in response to advances in technology and changes in consumer behaviour. To enable this, information on market and technological trends, on visitor behaviour and on best practise in information provision must be more widely available leading to informed decision making at every level.

The Tourism Management Group (comprising of Tourism Managers from the seven Local Government Areas (LGAs) and local Tourism Associations situated in the Northern Rivers of Ballina, Byron, Clarence Valley, Kyogle, Lismore, Richmond Valley and Tweed) identified that there are opportunities to collaborate at a regional level with which to improve performance, resource allocation, economies of scale and plan for emerging technologies in a changing consumer landscape.


Aurora Research was appointed by the TMG to undertake the Regional Visitor Services Strategy (RVSS). The Regional Visitor Services Strategy is the first of its kind in New South Wales, covering an extensive primary and secondary research platform, to identify consumer needs and perceptions with regard to visiting servicing.

The primary focus of the RVSS is to identify strategies and actions which can be employed to improve visitor's services in the next 5-10 years in the Northern Rivers region.

These strategies align visitor servicing towards a more collaborative model and takes a proactive approach in taking information to the visitor, instead of hoping the visitor comes to the information. The RVSS also provides an opportunity for the implementation of a Bricks and Clicks Strategy where the physical and virtual align to equip each Visitor Information Centres with the tools and product knowledge required to service visitor needs in a changing tourism landscape.

As part of this research, various strategies and emerging visitor servicing technologies were identified, which will place the TMG and their LGAs at the forefront of visitor servicing in New South Wales.

The RVSS identifies a number of areas for improvements;

- Functionality of Accredited Visitor Information Centres (AVICS)
  1. Improve directional and information signage
  2. Improve and align visitor servicing and location of infrastructure
  3. Implement new models for visitor servicing
- Clicks and Bricks Strategy
  1. Wi-Fi enabled Visitor Centres
  2. Website enhancement and optimisation
  3. Regional Rewards Program and Itinerary Management
  4. Development of range of digital platforms, including social media and multimedia collateral
  5. Construction and implementation of information bollards in high traffic visitor points and Visitor Information Centres for 24hour servicing
  6. Development of Quick Response (QR) codes for information boards and plinths
  7. Consistent branding of the accredited AVIC logo 
- Resource Sharing
  1. Purchase and development of information vehicle (mobile visitor information points)
  2. Professional Development AVIC staff and volunteers (inspirational visitor servicing)
- Revenue Generation Opportunities
  1. Online Shopping
  2. Group buying and cooperative merchandising for retail
  3. Wholesaling opportunities
  4. Ticketing services
  5. Commercial alliances and other fee for services
- Stakeholder Engagement - local and regional cooperative partnerships and government agencies

The RVSS aims to improve and align visitor servicing across LGA boundaries whilst focusing resources to maximising efficiencies in each Accredited Visitor Centre, as well as implementing new best practice standards for visitor servicing across the entire Northern Rivers Region of NSW.

With the change in consumer attitudes and perceptions and the emergence of mobility technology, this is an exciting time to develop a new visitor servicing platform which allows Local Government Area's and Accredited Visitor Information Centres to connect with visitors and consumers like never before.

## INTRODUCTION

The Tourism Management Group (TMG) is made up of local Councils and Local Tourist Associations (LTAs) in the Northern Rivers region overseeing the development and implementation of tourism projects in destination management, development, advocacy and marketing. The TMG provides more effective and efficient destination management both within and across Council boundaries and through economies of scale for tourism projects. The TMG identified the development of a Regional Visitor Services Strategy (RVSS) as a priority project.

The TMG's funding partner for this RVSS project is Trade and Investment NSW. Aurora Research was contracted to research and formulate a Regional Visitor Services Strategy for the Northern Rivers Region.

The objective of the engagement was to produce a Regional Visitor Services Strategy, which will enable the TMG to:

- improve and align visitor servicing in the region
- adapt and maximise the opportunities available in emerging visitor servicing technologies
- focus its resources on developing the best locations for Accredited Visitor Information Centres in the region
- implement a range of resource sharing initiatives between Councils
- maximise efficiencies in each AVIC
- implement new best practice standards for visitor servicing
- incorporate new technology into AVICs
- implement new models for visitor servicing including, but not limited to, traditional bricks and mortar centres, mobile centres and interactive self-serve models

This report involved extensive field work within each LGA of the Northern Rivers, meetings with Tourism Managers from each destination, development of questionnaires and surveys, operator interviews, visitor interviews and industry stakeholders meetings and consultations.

A total of 202 Pre Visit interviews and 202 Post Visit interviews were completed outside AVICs, gleaning first-hand visitor impressions of the region, the service delivery they received and intentions to visit more of the region as a result of their visit.

Infield research included 'Visitor Hot-Spots' to gather data from visitors to the region who may not have visited an AVIC on this journey.

A total of 155 Hot-Spot interviews were undertaken in all LGAs across the Northern Rivers.

This base data, together with RVSS stakeholder survey data and background research, was an important tool in forming the Regional Visitor Services Strategy contained within this Report.

Further in-region research was undertaken in the form of a signage audit, visits to many attractions and events in the region, the Secret Shopping of AVICs, and randomly selected stakeholder businesses plus the completion of 11 Accreditation Audits across the AVICs in the Northern Rivers Region. In total, between the three in-field personnel, Aurora spent 104 days in the region, over the August to December research period.

Aurora has researched, developed, liaised and sought feedback from the TMG members on the development of new digital technology and asset solutions. This Report contains many of the digital assets and solutions tailored to suit the emerging needs of AVICs in general and information has been merged to show their effectiveness for the TMG and the key service needs for the Northern Rivers.

Across the Tourism Management Group all these elements exist in differing ways and levels of sophistication and merge to define the Regional Visitor Services Strategy.

The body of this Research Report addresses in detail six key areas:


1. Accredited Visitor Information Centres
2. Delivery of Visitor Information
3. Professional Development
4. Revenue Generation
5. Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities
6. Prospective Partnerships



## 1. ACCREDITED VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRES

**DEFINITION:** A clearly labelled, publicly accessible, physical space with personnel providing predominantly free of charge information to facilitate travellers' experiences.\*

*\*Dr Philip Pearce is Prof. Tourism, School of Business, James Cook University, Australia.*

Accredited Visitor Information Centres (AVICs) are easily recognisable by their  brand and signage, gained through accreditation by the State and National agencies which serves to guarantee quality service and reliable information. National and State-wide marketing and promotion of the brand ensures visitors to New South Wales recognise AVICs and the values they represent.

AVICs play an important role in the New South Wales' tourism industry. New South Wales has a network of more than 175 AVICs across the State.

AVICs make a significant economic contribution to tourism, particularly in regional areas, by providing information to visitors that encourages them to stay longer, spend more money, experience more attractions and revisit a region. AVICs also create significant social benefits, as many rely heavily on a volunteer workforce and operate as an important community facility.

Accredited Visitor Information Centres provide a welcome to a specific area and act as the showcase of all things to see, do and experience within a destination. The AVIC sets the tone and scene on how the area portrays itself and engages with local community and the travelling and touring public.

In some cases, AVICs have successfully managed to become attractions within themselves, or have combined their physical structure with their immediate environment by linking the built structure with the surrounding environment, thereby creating a sense of place to be etched in the memory of the visitor.

As a Best Practice benchmark, AVICs should aim to provide effective, authentic, innovative and accessible tourism information services and bold, accessible interpretation for the utilisation of both visitors and the local community.

A vital element of any Accredited Visitor Information Centre is the people who perform the meet and greet functions and it is paramount that these people are trained in communication techniques, especially how to inspire the visitor.

AVICs also fulfil an important development role, in terms of destination strategy, product development and marketing.

AVICs work with State and Local Government, Industry associations and organisations including cultural groups, local business operators and stakeholders to promote and disseminate information in all forms.

During the course of this RVSS project, widespread visitor surveys were conducted, which are detailed more in Section 2C. The RVSS in-field research confirms that the friendliness and engagement with an informed local at the AVIC was, by far, the most compelling reason to return to the Centre for more information or current deals whilst in the destination. Visitors who regularly use an AVIC during their travels confirmed that the AVIC was their first planned stop whilst in a destination.

RVSS in-field research has mirrored that of findings of other States, such as:

- Tourism Alliance (Victoria), VIC Fast Facts – Fact Sheet 2010, where 90% of visitors surveyed were more likely to make a return visit to the region as a result of their visit to the AVIC;
- South Australian Strategic Regional Research Impacts on Regional VICs on Visitor Behaviour in SA, where 97% of visitors interviewed had planned to do activities after their visit to the AVIC;
- RVSS Pre and Post Visit Survey results show that 84% of visitors were likely to return visit, with the remaining 16% being locals to the area.

Overwhelmingly, all three surveys confirm that AVICs provide an opportunity to convert intention into behaviour and while visitors must want to visit a region prior to arrival, an AVIC will add value by expanding the visitor's consideration set by providing access to the information, activities, events, accommodation, tourism product and retail product.

The additional value provided by the AVICs can be considered as the amount of visitor expenditure on tourism-related product that would not occur without the AVICs. Some visitors may still spend more than they had originally planned. However, without the aid of the AVICs, this expenditure may occur in other sectors of the economy (SA research)

As part of the RVSS research and engagement with Northern Rivers stakeholders, Aurora also presented to Local Government Area (Mayors and Councillors), summarising the value of a focus on visitor services and the economic contribution tourism generates and flows on to communities in the Northern Rivers. Following is a summarised version of the Clarence presentation.

## Visitor Centres Northern Rivers



- 11 accredited VICs
  - 697,000 visitors last year
  - foot traffic approx 13 % of regional visitors
- provide a welcome to the destination
  - form a relationship with visitors
  - influence decision making and spend at the destination



## Visitor Centres Economic Value



Research states that of the visitors to a VIC:

- 22% stayed an extra night = \$18.8 million
- 21% took an additional activity / tour = \$5.8 million
- 59% visited additional attractions = \$10.2 million
- 22% spent more than budgeted
- 72% increased their duration of stay

**\$34.8 million** extra spend into local businesses because of VICs

Statistics provided by Aurora Research March 2010 and Peter Hill Tourism WA 2009



### BENEFIT

- 153,000 visitors spent an extra night x \$123 average = **\$ 18.8 million**
- 146,000 spent on additional activities x \$ 40 average = **\$ 5.8 million**
- 411,000 visited additional attractions x \$ 25 average = **\$10.2 million**

The total extra visitor spending is more than \$34.8 million. This equates to a direct injection into the regional economy because of the role Northern Rivers Accredited Visitor Information Centres play in engaging locals and visitors.

## VIC Consumer Influence



Recent research shows

- the importance of **personal** and **professional** service
- both local and regional information is sought at destination
- **interpretation** and local product **inspire** people to explore
- **technology** is a major driver of **change**
- booking services are important for tourism operators and Visitor Centres



Research by Aurora Research March 2010 and Peter Hill Tourism WA 2009



## Visitor Centre Consumer Influence



Recent research shows that VICs provide:

- Improved tourism outcomes
- Improved environmental and cultural outcomes
- Improved community outcomes
- Improved safety

Research by Aurora Research March 2010 and Peter Hill Tourism WA 2009



### VISITOR CENTRE CONSUMER INFLUENCE

- improved tourism outcomes – people have better experiences, stay longer, spend more, come back, tell others
- improved environmental and cultural outcomes – directing tourism activity away from inappropriate places



- improved community outcomes – enhanced community esteem, focused use of community resources, stability, employment opportunities, less conflict
- improved safety – enhanced information to avoid tourists getting lost and hurt

AVICs help visitors plan their time at the destination by:

- introducing the destination's stories and providing a comprehensive overview so visitors can more fully understand, experience and enjoy their visit
- playing an important role in making visitors feel welcome
- influencing and educating the local community
- by good signage and exhibits with well trained and outgoing staff who can best offer this type of service

The 2011 South Australian Benchmark Study on Regional Visitor Centre Visitation Impact (a similar Study to the RVSS), was completed in September 2011 and the results from this research show that:

- AVICs play a central role in the distribution of tourism product :
  - through the provision of information
  - through the bundling of tourism products
  - by providing mechanisms for consumers to make, confirm and pay for reservations
- AVICs contribute to tourism yield :
  - by increasing the number of activities that a visitor will engage in
  - by increasing the time a consumer will stay at a destination

Tourism is predominantly a service-driven industry. However, the terminology 'tourism product' is commonly used to describe both the products and services offered by the industry.

Using the South Australian research results, 59% more expenditure will occur with AVIC engagement which ends up in the community, through visitor spending on fuel, food and retail, accommodation and attraction services.

It is important to look at the future as AVICs will operate around a number of visitor/consumer wants and needs as follows:

- professionally delivered information
- visitor experience packaging (by market segments)
- itinerary development and management (by price, time and interest)
- continuing product development (including retail strategies)
- event and peer group visitation development
- adaption to new technologies to enhance the visitor experience and increase yield
- AVIC layout and design optimisation (reflects and tells the story of the destination)
- development of staff skills required (no longer a library approach but a fully integrated visitor servicing portal)
- AVIC team will be the mentors in the continuing development of a tourism/visitor services industry
- to increase numbers and attract new demographics to the AVICs (with the RVSS and resource-sharing strategies)

## A. ACCREDITATION AND AUDIT OF AVIC FACILITIES/SERVICES

### 1. ACCREDITATION

Accreditation is a set of standards established by the State Tourism Organisations. Its criteria has been developed by a National Accreditation Board and aims at standardising the service delivery and operations and providing a high level customer service that is consistent across the State. Accreditation assists AVICs in running a more professional service, promotes continuous improvement and provides access to the AVIC Network which offers the opportunity to liaise with colleagues, seek feedback and discuss issues with all AVICs across the State, and Nationally, if appropriate.

Visitor Information Centres play a pivotal role in visitor servicing yet, from the consumer's point of view, they will see no differentiation from a Level 1 AVIC to a Level 3, as all levels are branded with the Trademark i. However, the standard of service can vary substantially between the three levels. Aurora's field work has demonstrated that this variation also exists in the Northern Rivers Region.

Currently there are six Level 1, five Level 2 and three Level 3 AVICs in the Northern Rivers and during all Pre and Post AVIC Visit Surveys, the feedback was generally very good. However, the irregularity of opening hours and the provision of after-hours information between AVICs is often confusing to visitors where the required opening hours between Level 1 and 2 AVICs is often the only main difference. It is frustrating, as a visitor, to arrive in a destination and think the AVIC will still be open, e.g. after 4.00 pm when, in fact, some AVICs are already closed at this time. It is unrealistic to suggest that all Level 1 and 2 AVICs in the Northern Rivers have the same opening hours but the provision of after-hours information could be enhanced to, at least, offer visitors a sufficient or even better-than-sufficient information service after closing time.

The new suite of digital offers (explained in detail in Section 2) is one way in which after-hours visitor information delivery can still be achieved. The inclusion of 📶 wi-fi in all Northern Rivers AVICs and the display of an information sheet and QR Code directing visitors to the AVIC website and/or the 🌐-visit website, will allow visitors to access these visitor information services from their laptop or mobile device, even after-hours. The AVIC App and Interactive Digital Publication will also contain valuable information about accommodation services as well as attractions and activities. These can be downloaded using the 📶 wi-fi at the AVIC or via any Android or iPhone App store and utilised at any time of day or night, regardless of the AVICs opening hours.

The audit reports detail more specifically the meeting of Accreditation requirements as they relate to each AVIC.

It is evident that AVICs are looking at many avenues for income generation in order to assist in operational costs. Reduction on the level of Government funding on all levels has meant that resource allocations and budgets are under pressure. AVIC Managers are searching for ways to earn more income in order to meet the consumer demand for improved services and, at the same time, run an efficient operation.

AVIC staffing numbers and training levels seem to be the most common problem (more will be said about this in Section 3 of this Report) where AVICs such as Byron Bay, Brunswick Heads and Kyogle are run largely by volunteers and AVIC Managers rely on little to no Council funding, thus experiencing operational budgetary constraints. It is therefore very difficult for these Centres to offer the same quality and consistency in customer and information servicing than those AVICs which receive far greater levels of Council funding and are staffed by predominantly paid employees.

A training program has been detailed in Section 3 of this Report which will help to combat some of the issues faced by AVICs with regard to staffing levels and the skill gaps between volunteers and paid employees.

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## 2. ACCREDITATION AUDIT

Accreditation Audits of Northern Rivers AVICS were conducted by Aurora during the RVSS research period.

Accreditation is a process designed to establish and continually improve industry standards for conducting a tourism business. It aims to assist every AVIC to improve the way it operates to meet the increasing demands of domestic and international consumers and stakeholders.

Accreditation also provides consumers and the industry with an assurance that an Accredited Centre is committed to quality business practice and professionalism. The primary focus is to ensure that standards of service delivery meet and, where possible, exceed the visitors' expectations.

All audits have been completed and were forwarded to each Tourism Manager separately, along with the Secret Shopping feedback of each AVIC.

Observations are made on each AVIC within the audit reports. An area that requires addressing by all is the inconsistency of service delivery.

These areas of service delivery require addressing:

- Operating Hours
- Operating Structures

- Operation Manual Content/Layout
- Branding
- Customer Service Culture
- Name Badges
- Layout and Accessibility

The public's view is that AVICs offer reliable and trustworthy information, free assistance with travel and accommodation enquiries and a consistent level of customer service. The public are not aware of differing funding models, the mix of volunteers and paid staff, the variability in operation models or the amount of work that has gone on behind the scenes reporting, planning and documenting all the information that sits within the AVIC and online. They simply expect that AVICs are a place to go to get trusted information about the destination they are in and the various locations they may go to along the way to their end destination. The travelling public sees that the AVIC provides not only unique local knowledge which is communicated face-to-face, but also an assurance that the visitor is receiving all the correct information to make an informed decision.



## B. INVESTIGATE WAYS TO IMPROVE FUNCTIONALITY

Visitor Information Centres help visitors plan their time at the destination. They introduce the region's stories to the visitor and provide a comprehensive overview so visitors can more fully understand, experience, and enjoy their visit. Visitor Information Centres also play an important role in making visitors feel welcome.

Visitors today have high expectations therefore the AVIC needs to be an attraction in itself but, at the same time, **be reflective of all the area has to offer. It needs to be well branded, promoting the theme and colours of the region. In short, the AVIC needs to engage the visitor in its product offer in a positive and enticing manner.**

The key floor space area for showcasing the destination is within the AVIC itself.

The AVIC plays a significant role in up-selling the Northern Rivers tourism experience and this role could be amplified with the use of prominent signage, brand presence and 'photo opportunity' silhouettes (or similar significant icons of the region), in the grounds of the AVIC which would encourage visitors, who may not intend to stop at the Visitor Centre, a reason to do so.

Good signage and exhibits and well-trained and outgoing staff can best offer this type of service. Most visitors need to feel comfortable in an unfamiliar environment so basic orientation to each destination, its villages, attractions and activities is vital.

Year-round orientation/information boards (can be seasonal to reflect the different elements throughout the year) outside the AVIC would assist visitors to identify their bearings and should include a map of the area highlighting historic sites and visitor services, a welcome message and introduction to the region. A good example of this is outside the Hunter Wetlands AVIC with the installation of an outside board, matching their branding and theme, as seen below.




**Figure 1: Hunter Wetlands Information Board**

While it is not possible to provide a one size fits all map in terms of AVIC layout and design and considering the vast differences in size and location of each AVIC, it is difficult to make generalised recommendations which will enhance the functionality of all Northern Rivers AVICs. However, there are a few key points to strengthen internal and external layout functionality - ensuring the presence of:

- clean and tidy grounds surrounding the AVIC
- clean and accessible toilet facilities
- adequate signage to the AVIC car park, entrance, services offered and toilet facilities (as mentioned above)
- adequate car parking for cars as well as the provision of parking space for caravans and/or buses
- a service desk/front counter which is easy to find and of a medium to low height to ensure staff are highly visible which will enable visitors to easily receive information 'over-the-counter' e.g. staff drawing on maps, etc.
- clearly defined 'areas' of the AVIC including retail space, information/brochure area, service area, accommodation/tour booking area and, if applicable, art gallery or display area
- any retail displays should be presented at eye-level
- a key icon or storyline that visitors can engage with
- consistent use of colour and lighting in the AVIC as well as consistency in any branding of merchandise

To assist we have added a Best Practice matrix for AVIC operations in Section 1E of this Report.

## 1. IMPROVE SIGNAGE

In general, the field work and audits reveal some common functionality issues across the region, such as ensuring prominent  logo display, both on internal and external areas of each AVIC, and on any directional signage to the AVICs, as well as removal of out-dated and faded signage (particularly the use of the Roman i).

Throughout Northern Rivers there is a lack of AVIC directional signage present in the majority of the LGAs.



**Figure 3 - No directional signage on approach to Murwillumbah AVIC**

Directional signage should start from at least 5km out from the AVIC on all main roads into town. This signage should be repeated as the visitor approaches the AVIC from the following distances: 2km from AVIC, 1km from AVIC, 500m from AVIC, 100m from AVIC as well as into the AVIC car park.

Research into consumer behaviour and AVIC functionality has revealed that AVIC signage needs to be more frequent as visitors approach the AVIC as, once the traffic flow slows down, people tend to start looking around for signage to direct them to the AVIC.

If that signage is not displayed, visitors become confused and frustrated which can then unfortunately translate into a negative visitor experience so soon after arriving in a region. Below is an example of clear visible signage versus obstructed signage.



**Figure 4a – New signage at Tweed Head & Figure 4b - AVIC signage obstructed by trees at Brunswick Heads AVIC**

It is also important for AVICs to have internal as well as basic external signage to AVIC facilities such as the AVIC entrance, the toilets and any other service offered by the AVICs, such as where to make enquiries, as well as accommodation and/or tour bookings, location of any galleries or art displays, inclusion of brochure and visitor guide signage (and clear categorisation), as well as signage to direct visitors to the retail area of the AVIC.

As a result of the audit process a number of suggestions were made with regard to new external signage. Tweed Heads have implemented this new signage (see Figure 4a) and, as a result, has seen an increase in visitor numbers and bookable products at their AVIC as it clearly articulates the services on offer which informs and attracts the visitors. As previously mentioned, any specific AVIC issues have been noted in the audit reports.

## C. RECOMMENDED RESOURCE SHARING INITIATIVES, INCLUDING STAFF

During the research phase of the RVSS a complete list of staff skills and position descriptions were gathered from the Tourism Management Group. There are numerous AVIC staff who were identified with expertise which would be of benefit in ensuring a 'whole-of- region' approach. These key staff members and their designated roles should include, but are not limited to:

- Graphic Design
- Social Media Management
- Public Relations
- Marketing
- Membership Management
- IT
- Staff Training
- Event Organisation
- Planning
- Reservations
- Booking Systems Training
- Itinerary Development
- Product Audit
- Product Development
- Merchandising
- Retail Sales
- Customer Service
- Volunteer Management

It is important to note that this list contains only suggestions for the above roles based on the information received from the Tourism Management Group and field-work research. Additional roles may need to be created to contribute to the promotion and enhancement of the wider Northern Rivers Region Visitor Servicing. These above identified roles are region-specific, not just AVIC-specific. Therefore, the resource-sharing around these roles could reduce costs and provide much greater shared outcomes for the TMG and AVICs.

There is significant opportunity for resources to be increasingly shared among the LGAs of the Northern Rivers. Recent activities involving the sharing of ideas, skills and resources such as the Clarence Valley and Richmond Valley shared-region Visitor Guide and the development of the Northern Rivers Scenic Drives brochure by the Tourism Management Group, are both



positive initiatives to promote a greater sense of regional ‘identity’ and ‘experiences’ for visitors.

These resource-sharing initiatives enhance the visitors’ experience of the Northern Rivers Region by creating a sense of consistency and collaboration in the service, style and suite of information options available at all Northern Rivers AVICs.

A number of resource-sharing initiatives are discussed in detail in Sections 2B and 2C of this Report, including the need for AVIC staff skills to be shared across the whole Northern Rivers Region in order to reduce operating costs.

## D. RECOMMEND LOCATION OF MEDIUM AND LONG TERM INFRASTRUCTURE

The design, location and accessibility of Visitor Information Centres have an impact on the number of visitors to the Visitor Centre. There are advantages to AVICs being located near attractions or co-located with interpretation materials, such as the Orange AVIC and their Banjo Paterson Poetry space. Those AVICs that provide distinct and innovative design have the opportunity to enhance the tourism experience and compel the visitor to stay longer and explore the area. A distinctive design welcomes visitors, assists their sense of place and encourages exploration.



Figure 5: Distinctive signage at Orange

- Visitor Centres co-located with museums, exhibition space, galleries, libraries and cafes exist in NSW with operational success with the added bonus of shared resource costs. Visitors gain from such partnerships if there is a convenient car park that allows a visit to several tourism assets in the one location.
- Another location advantage is being adjacent to or within a park area (Lismore AVIC), where visitors can take time out to soak up some outside fresh air, stretch their legs and have some time to peruse brochures, maps and guides sourced from the Visitor Centre.

- Toilets have always been amongst the top reasons to stop at a Visitor Centre and, these too, can be an information point on what there is to see and do in a location via images, wall advertising and call-to-action posters.

A major point to consider regarding location is to determine **where the most influence over the most visitors would occur**. Is the visitor coming by car, train, plane, or bus? Where is the visitor coming from? Where is the visitor heading?

All Visitor Centres can target the drive market and expand their reach by providing prominent and consistent information and marketing messages via billboard style and town entry welcome signage, which is well placed to allow the consumer the time to consider a stop and prepare for it. Reinforcement of the “stop here” message on the approach to town and leading to the AVIC adds to a positive experience for visitors.



Figure 6: Orange roadside sign


It should be noted that, on the lower section of the ‘Welcome to Orange’ signage, there is provision to add localised upcoming events and attractions. This, coupled with an 1800 telephone number to the AVIC, helps orientate the visitor to the area, making them aware of the quick contact/access to further information available through the AVIC. This sign is placed 5km from the AVIC with follow-up signage every 1km until the speed limit drops to 80km per hour, then 60km per hour, where the signage becomes more frequent. This assists greatly in reassuring the visitor that they are on the ‘right track’. The easier you make it for the visitor (orientation), the greater their level of satisfaction.

## ROAD WORKS

The impact of road works including new bypasses, proposed bypasses and highway re-alignment occurring within the Northern Rivers and the potential impact road changes may have in relation to the location of present AVICs (or possibly new or relocating AVICs) has been considered as part of the RVSS research.

Amongst the top issues to consider is Roads & Maritime Service (RMS) Pacific Highway road works at Ballina, where the first bypass has been completed. In view of this bypass, effective AVIC information billboards and gateway signage will be required, both northbound and southbound.

### **Recommendation 1:**

*It is recommended that similar signage to the Orange 'Welcome to ...' Gateway signs be considered as a priority to assist the travelling public across all LGAs in the Northern Rivers linking the  and tourism products available in the area.*

In view of the RMS upgrade of the Pacific Highway and the Grafton bypass coming on line within the next 4 to 7 years, it will be extremely important for the Grafton AVIC, and the other Northern Rivers AVICs, to consider viable options to capture traffic that would otherwise be bypassing Grafton, much like a gateway scenario, so as to not disadvantage the AVICs impact on the visitor yield into the local economies. Further work is planned for the Bruxner Highway which connects the Summerland Way through locations such as Ballina, Lismore, Casino, Grafton and Kyogle. At Casino, the Summerland Way provides a connecting route to Grafton to the south and to the Queensland border and Brisbane via Kyogle to the north.

All the proposed new highway sections offer the opportunity to inspire the travelling and touring public with effective signage that is captivating and provides purposeful orientation as opposed to just having the standard i sign with 5km ahead.

There is an opportunity to link with The Legendary Pacific Coast, particularly with the newer areas of the Pacific Highway. Timely liaison with TASAC and the RMS should occur to secure relevant AVIC information on Rest Area signage (including QR Codes). It is understood that Destination NSW is in the process of contributing content for signage and it is therefore important that each AVIC in the Northern Rivers has updated all their information with the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW)/Get Connected, including imagery, which may be utilised in the signs prior to installation and roll-out of the signs which includes information on Aboriginal nation, safety information and local tourism panels, as well as i signage for AVICs and map references as to where AVICs are located.



## **Grafton**

With regard to the re-alignment south of Grafton, it is considered that the Grafton LGA and the AVIC will be significantly disadvantaged. As the economic contribution from the AVICs within the Grafton LGA is significant, the highway bypassing Grafton would mean a significant loss of visitor yield for the local economy.

**A Gateway AVIC could also allow for co-location and be a focal point for visitors to source information, rest and rejuvenate.**

Planning is underway for a second river crossing in Grafton which would, in fact, see the present AVIC earmarked for resumption to allow for the new road works to be constructed. It is therefore paramount to engage with the RMS at the earliest possible time to present the case for a Grafton Gateway AVIC.

### ***Recommendation 2:***

*A Gateway AVIC be constructed, either at Halfway Creek or Glenugie, where there is the opportunity for visitors travelling north and south to access the Gateway Visitor Information Centre.*

Prominent signage similar to that of Orange is suggested as a way to capture the travelling and touring public's imagination, providing a distinctive 'sense of place' for all things Northern Rivers and a positive call to action to visit the AVICs within the Northern Rivers.

### ***Recommendation 3:***

*In the medium to long term, major gateway signage be installed north and southbound on the Pacific Highway and Bruxner Highway.*


## Maclean

With regard to the second Clarence AVIC at Ferry Park, Maclean, the highway re-alignment also creates some significant issues, as the interchange for Maclean will be directly outside the Ferry Park AVIC. This will only allow north lane traffic to access the AVIC, whereas the southbound traffic will have to turn off a considerable way back from Ferry Park to access the AVIC.

Maclean Visitor Centre is not appealing from the outside. Upon entering the building, it is confusing, as the craft centre is prominent, before experiencing the impact of the Visitor Centre counter and fabulous view down the river.

### **Recommendation 4:**

*Maclean AVIC precinct requires work to be able to provide enhanced visitor services. The Pre and Post Visit interviews showed that many visitors were not serviced adequately and they found the layout of the AVIC confusing. An internal and external plan, in line with AVIC Best Practise, should be undertaken with Maclean to improve visitor servicing.*

Signage around Maclean is very tired, faded and not consistent in the use of the  branding. The construction of prominent signage, similar to that of Orange, to draw visitors from the highway for Maclean, Iluka and Yamba, will be required so as to not affect the service delivery by Grafton (Clarence) AVICs. Again, the RMS will need to be engaged effectively to understand what is required to orientate the southbound travelling and touring public to allow for planning to exit to these destinations.

### **Recommendation 5:**

*All white i logos should be removed from any directional signage, buildings, fixtures and information board signage on or around the grounds of any Northern Rivers AVIC.*

### Lennox Head

The images below are of the Lennox Head Cultural and Community Centre. It is a very impressive building, one street behind the main street. This building offers the potential to service the community as a Visitor Centre incorporating the services already being delivered to the community and visitors.

Since Aurora's initial visit, there has been a reduction of operating hours and the Centre is not open across the weekend but, with the volume of visitation it attracts naturally, this building and its location would make an excellent venue for the provision of visitor services, particularly from a cost sharing perspective.

This is a medium to long term infrastructure development opportunity. Therefore, Lennox Head has been identified as a potential Level 3 AVIC.



**Figure 7 - Lennox Head Cultural and Community Centre**

There should be further discussions with the Tourism Manager and the Chamber of Commerce to determine a case to provide visitor services within this facility, which has excellent parking and is in a high visitor foot traffic area. Lennox Head has a high level of visitation and a very well established café and eating precinct. Having an AVIC located in these premises could provide enhanced visitor satisfaction and influence visitors to travel through the rest of the Shire and other regions within the Northern Rivers.

### Yamba

Yamba is a major tourism drawcard within the Northern Rivers and is not adequately resourced in terms of visitor servicing. It is recommended that an AVIC be constructed to adequately service the high visitation numbers.

With the change to the planned exit to Yamba (southbound), there will need to be adequate signage as the Maclean AVIC will not be able to direct people southbound.

### **Recommendation 6:**

*That a stand-alone Accredited Visitor information Centre be constructed within Yamba (which could be a transportable AVIC structure), co-located with an existing business or organisation, or a mobile AVIC for peak periods.*





Consideration should be given for an -Go bollard information kiosk strategy at Visitor Hot-Spots (explained in detail in Section 2B).



Figure 8:  Go Prototype

An -bollard information kiosk would see visitors better informed and engaged to experience more of the area. This -bollard would be very suited to each high volume foot traffic area, as it is highly visible and relates/redirects visitors to the AVIC for more detailed information.

With several road works projects within Northern Rivers and the imminent impact on Maclean for example, this -bollard could complement the services of the new improved Maclean AVIC.

## **E. BEST PRACTICE OPERATIONS**

AVIC audits, an operational overview, consumer research and comparative operational analysis of each AVIC in the Northern Rivers has revealed some obvious strengths and weaknesses.

To help achieve greater consistency in visitor servicing across the Northern Rivers Region, an AVIC Best Practice Model has been developed. It is understood that each AVIC in the Northern Rivers operates under different circumstances, including budget constraints, management practice and paid staff/volunteer ratios as well as the differing physical sizes of each AVIC.

This Best Practice Model is based on standardised Key Performance Indicators which allows for an objective and calculated review of service levels.

The Best Practice Model has been developed by evaluating the strengths of each AVIC, as well as Best Practice services offered at other AVICs in New South Wales, Australia and around the world. Recommendations have been made which can be adapted to suit the individual and operational needs of each AVIC, as per the requirements of the Regional Visitor Services Strategy.

The Best Practice Model can act as a guideline to ensure that visitors to the region receive top quality service whenever they come into contact with a Northern Rivers AVIC or any of their services, hence obtaining a more 'inspired' and 'enhanced' holiday experience in view of this contact with an AVIC.

***Recommendation 7:***

*That all Northern Rivers AVICs adopt AVIC Best Practise Operational Guidelines in order to achieve greater consistency in the servicing of visitors to the Northern Rivers, consequently improving the quality of their tourism experience in the region.*

The **Best Practice Model** has been broken down into six key areas:

- Display Services
- Information Services
- Booking (and Ticketing) Services
- Retail
- Print and Marketing Services
- Regional Cooperation and Communication

**(1) DISPLAY SERVICES**

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- Location is crucial. The AVIC must be in a prominent position with plenty of good external display opportunities to attract passers-by.
- All AVIC grounds and facilities should be clean, tidy and well maintained.
- Clear directional signage should start from at least 5km from the AVIC and become more frequent as the visitor approaches. Signage should also be used to clearly direct visitors to the AVIC car park and also to AVIC entrance and facilities, e.g. toilets.
- Have beautiful and 'inspiring' images of the local region displayed around the walls of the AVIC.
- Categorise all member brochures, AVIC information brochures and visitor guides by local, other Northern Rivers Regions, other New South Wales regions and, if applicable, interstate. These brochures should then be sub-categorised to make it as easy as

possible for visitors to find specific information. Sub-categories could include attractions, activities, accommodation, tours, special-interest, National Parks, walks, etc.


## (2) INFORMATION SERVICES

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- Frequent and joint staff training to be conducted in areas relating to accommodation and tour enquiry and booking services, usage of social media and digital platforms as well as customer service. (See *Inspire Program* in Section 3 of this Report).
- Provision of 📶 wi-fi in all Northern Rivers AVICs – the need for this service was established by conducting customer research at Northern Rivers AVIC and Visitor Hot-Spot sites. Visitors want convenient internet access and wi-fi will also allow for easy download access to the AVIC App and Interactive Digital Publications (IDPs), whilst enabling visitors to easily retrieve visitor information after hours.
- Provide town walking tours, e.g. scenic, nature or historical walks and trails. A study in the UK has shown that demand for walking tours continues to grow steadily and current RVSS field work and observations in the region have mirrored this trend.
- Provide information on a range of special-interest group travellers common to the region such as bird-watching, naturalists, bush-walking, river-based activities, cycling and 4WDing, etc. These often present an opportunity for itinerary development as well as inter-regional cooperation with regard to the research, development and packaging of such information.
- Package special-interest information and categorise it for easy access via web, AVIC or the AVIC App.
- Use a permission-based system of encouraging visitors to sign up for a AVICs e-newsletter online, either in the AVIC or via the AVIC App and, in return, the visitor will be sent all current special offers and deals in the area.

### (3) BOOKING (AND TICKETING) SERVICES

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- Accommodation and tour bookings through a unified platform – the -visit website.
- Offer a range of ‘booking channels’, e.g. web, telephone and over-the-counter, email, AVIC App, etc.
- Develop a database of your customer contacts so you can keep track of their behaviour and needs and keep them coming back to use your services. Customer relationship management is essential in the modern business world. Retaining a customer is much cheaper than advertising to find a new one.
- The new booking channels call for a wider range of skills and experience - not only product knowledge and customer service - but also IT literacy and excellent selling skills. Managers will need to critically review their staffing to ensure they have the right team to cope with more pro-active customer relationship management and telephone work and then provide training to maximise sales. The key to effective selling is having an understanding of customer needs and making suggestions to meet those needs.
- Encourage all AVIC staff to follow up general enquiries with a courtesy call.
- Increasingly, people book to visit something or someone, and not necessarily somewhere. In other words, the destination is less important than the experience. The growth in events tourism and the visiting friends and relatives market is evident in the entire Northern Rivers Region. AVIC Managers should look at major events occurring in their area, make a list of the key ones and approach the organiser/s to offer a potential AVIC booking service.

### (4) RETAILING

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- Ensure the clear presence of a retail section including souvenirs, local products and arts and crafts, which accurately reflect the region and are consistent in style (and regional branding).
- Encourage in-house training to ensure all staff are aware of the key principles of effective merchandising, display and selling.
- Set a minimum level for pricing new goods and have an agreed discounting policy when there is a need to shift ‘out-dated’ stock.
- Select a retail range according to the time of year and the changing needs of the visitor market. As a general rule, AVICs do best from retailing gifts and publications which have a strong local connection and the more distinctive and authentic this is, the better.
- Consider lighting, window displays, smells, sounds, point-of-sale material, digital technology and interactive elements.

- Consider theming retail displays by customer group, product type and colour.
- Re-position stock regularly to keep displays fresh and ensure everything is priced clearly.
- Option of selling transport tickets as well as supplying transport information if there is demand for it in that LGA
- Sale of local event and festival tickets

## **(5) PRINT AND MARKETING SERVICES**

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- Offer regular call-to-action options for visitors to go to the local AVIC during their stay in the Northern Rivers by placing 📍-bollards, information boards and kiosks in various Visitor Hot-Spots in each LGA. These should contain a QR Code with a direct link to an AVIC and point-of-interest information page, as well as printed information detailing the telephone, website and address of the nearest AVIC. These call-to-action points should also be regularly maintained and updated by a designated AVIC staff member to include current special offers or campaigns which visitors may benefit from if they visit the local AVIC.
- Work closely with all local and regional marketing partnerships to maximise AVIC publicity.
- Include the AVIC website, address and telephone number on all publicity material – brochures, mailings, etc.
- Encourage staff to pro-actively sell the AVICs services to customers when they are in contact with all current and potential visitors, through all mediums (digital, telephone, face-to-face or print).

## **(6) REGIONAL COOPERATION AND COMMUNICATION**

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- Have a good relationship with Tourism Managers, AVIC members and event/festival organisers, business owners and attraction/accommodation/hospitality providers in the region. Keep them up-to-date and involved in all activities and on any changes or updates to tourism and visitor services in the region.
- Establish new partnerships (e.g. supermarkets and major chains, particularly those that have large real estate footprints), with the goal of increasing revenue for the AVICs and the venues. Be pro-active in meeting with such partners, promoting the differing services that AVICs provide, which will be of interest to these partners, as many people do not know what their local AVIC is for, and what it can do for them.
- Share staff and skills across AVICs with regard to whole-region training sessions, famils, events or marketing activities.



### Suggested AVIC Key Performance Area Indicators

KPI AREA	ITEMS
Statistics	Door count Emails Telephone enquiries Social Media/website hits as percentage of potential visitation
Customer Satisfaction	Regular Customer Service Surveys and review of ratings Number of complaints received
Retail Sales	Turnover Profit Margin Local merchandise on sale
Bookings/Bookable Product	Commissions earned from bookings, proportion of custom that uses booking service
Access	Opening hours Out-of-hours information delivery
Industry Members	Number of members Number of tourism operators and local businesses members Income generated through membership Number of bookings and referrals made Level of promotional/marketing activities
Industry Liaison and Communication	Frequency of information provided to members, Industry and stakeholders
Product Awareness	Famil schedule List and regular review of tourism products bookings and referrals made, level of promotional/marketing activities
Community Engagement	Number of volunteers involved Coverage in local media
Partnerships	Existence of formal partnerships RTO/TMG, etc. other AVICs, Chambers of Commerce Potential sponsors Local business Involvement in local activities Events
Operational Management	Accreditation requirements Staff mix Level of staff training, level of local employment

*Adopted from WA Tourism Commission Visitor Servicing Study*

## 2. DELIVERY OF VISITOR INFORMATION

Delivery of visitor information is a vital service undertaken in all destinations. Visitor information is sought prior to a journey, trip or holiday. It is also sought, not only on arrival at a destination but also while in the destination, and often influences repeat visitation or visitation to neighbouring areas.

There is increasing opportunity to use new visitor information delivery systems to assist AVICs in providing visitor services. New technology is continuously being updated and improved, becoming more accessible, appealing and user-friendly for both people and businesses to use in every aspect of their day-to-day lives.

Today's consumers now have access to new touch points which are very diverse, given the technology available. For successful reach and engagement, **Accredited Visitor Information Centres need to be ready with inspirational information, offers and itineraries, all professionally delivered to provide high quality visitor servicing.**

In the recent past, our idea of visitor information delivery has been something that we did person-to-person and perhaps follow up with mail or telephone calls. Traditionally AVICs were considered to be 'information libraries' and presented information via visitor guides, brochures, A4 handouts, tear-off maps and other print collateral. Often AVIC staff would promote their region via desktop published location guides, walking trails, list of events and accommodation providers, etc. all sourced via personal communication with operators and organisations. AVIC staff would also attend trade/consumer shows and provide a range of information resources for hand out at point of contact with the consumer.

Whilst consumers still pick up brochures when they visit an AVIC, as the adaptability and usage of mobile devices matures, there is likely to be a decline in brochure demand. Indeed, there will always be a need to have current and timely information on hand for distribution at the AVIC itself but it is now more important that a new level of sophistication enters the marketplace, where the message to the consumer is articulated in a way that attracts attention, is easily digested and can be instantly booked or actioned.

These new information delivery channels and digital technologies offer the ability to cost-effectively put information in front of the visitor very quickly and take advantage of any offer, special, deal or even emergency notices.

These technologies are also a mechanism for direct visitor feedback to AVICs (information metrics) and provide new opportunities for income generation from the selling of 'advertising space' or the ability to encourage product purchases, accommodation and tour bookings as well as the general use of AVIC services, such as itinerary development and information packaging during all stages of a visitor's journey in the Northern Rivers.

In this section, we will identify how the use of technology including digital media, online and electronic delivery of information, opportunities for regional cooperation (resource sharing, i.e. 🚚 mobile vans, mobile 🚚 trailers), production of multi-media collateral and consistent branding and communications, all tie together to deliver effective and relevant visitor information servicing. **This chapter considers how to make the delivery of information easy for the consumer.**

With the uptake of the worldwide web in the nineties, AVICs were able to deliver their information via websites, to a voracious travelling and touring public, which allowed them to gather information about a destination and make informed decisions through the offering of significant choices from the comfort of their own computer screen. This information has been successfully compiled by AVICs over many years and, due to technology, is now accessible to a much wider range and number of people than more traditional mediums of information delivery allowed. The web was just the start of the new information super highway.

The next information platforms were travel and touring-focused television shows, e.g. Getaway and The Sydney Weekender, which provide the most aspiring window into travel destinations. More recently the development of digital platforms such as smart-phones has allowed consumers to retrieve and engage with information and information providers more efficiently and instantly than ever before.

By the year 2015 it is expected that there will be approximately 18.5 million Australians using smart-phones (*Telsyte's Australian Smartphone Market Study 2011 - 2015*).

The tablet computer was developed in the eighties but was re-invigorated by Apple with the development of the iPad in 2010. The iPad provides a significant piece of new technology, as it is essentially a piece of 'internet-connected television' that people can carry with them everywhere and use in a more immersive and interactive way than traditional laptops or desktop computers allow. "As iPad penetration increases, they have the potential to play a similar role to a visitor guide during a trip. The iPad does not have the same screen size restrictions of a smart-phone and offers interactive benefits not available in a guide." (*South Australia Regional Visitor Guide Study, TRA, August 2010*).

The opportunity now exists for an AVIC-specific digital focus to develop and provide media creation, new content distribution and consumer consumption that can be managed and updated in real time and at a much lower cost than television or other traditional advertising mediums or channels.

## The always-connected traveller: How mobile will transform the future of air travel

The global study identifies traveller attitudes to airline mobile services whilst also highlighting emerging mobile technologies set to transform each stage of the travel experience.

### Importance of each step

"When flying, how important are the following 6 steps for your overall airline travel experience?"



**73.4%**  
of the Earth's population  
subscribe to wireless services

### Global mobile subscribers

The number of worldwide subscriptions for wireless services reached **5 billion** in September 2010. The worldwide smart-phone market grew **79.7% year on year** in the first quarter of 2011 (1Q11), according to the International Data Corporation (IDC) Worldwide Quarterly Mobile Phone Tracker.



- 1 Pre-trip**  
The most important stage of the process. Passengers are looking for easy ways to plan, book and board the plane
- 2 At the airport**  
Mobile is used if things go wrong with the travel experience i.e. lost bags, seating and disruption
- 3 On-board**  
A unique opportunity for airlines to provide enhanced services with the increase in connectivity on planes
- 4 At the destination**  
Passengers are increasingly using mobile to explore, connect, and share experiences
- 5 Post-trip**  
Social media provides an immediate outlet for feedback from customers



**16%**  
of travellers surveyed  
currently use smartphones  
to book trips

Trends for Brighter, Bolder, Better travel

For more information visit:  
[www.amadeus.com/alwaysconnectedtraveller](http://www.amadeus.com/alwaysconnectedtraveller)

amadeus

Figure 9 - Mobile connectivity

Part of the digital focus is the availability of Apps, which are used on both the tablet and smart-phone platforms.



Figure 10: Smart-phone

Apps were first developed with the introduction of Apple's App Store for the iPhone and iPod Touch in July 2008. This popularised manufacturer-hosted online distribution for third party applications and was originally focused on a single platform – the iPhone. Prior to this, smart-phone application distribution was largely dependent on third party sources providing applications for multiple platforms. Following the success of Apple's App Store, other smart-phone manufacturers quickly launched application stores of their own. Google launched the Android Market in October 2008 and Blackberry App World was launched in 2009.

The ability to create Apps is a massive opportunity for AVICs to increase their service delivery armoury. It allows for rich content development plus distribution across a huge range of visitor information and product service offers. It also creates a means of providing new consumer data and analytics that can help determine demand, product and marketing development, as well as segmenting markets in a way which was not previously possible at a local AVIC level.

These new mobile device platforms have seen a change in buyer behaviour. People can now self-select everything they do. They are no longer simply driven by advertising, but are looking for those things that will personally inspire them. People can now make decisions more easily, about a destination or travel plans, before leaving on their journey, whilst on their journey and whilst in a destination.

The AVICs, through their online presence, can aid and influence this decision-making process, by also having the benefit of offering a real and personal visitor experience once the visitor arrives at the destination – something which websites alone cannot do.

In recent times the web has provided an increase in the ability to tell the ‘movie story’ but there are website restrictions, quality and content variability. This experience is less than optimal. In marketing terms, it has always been desirable to get the inspirational story, about any destination across to the touring public via television, but for AVICs and tourism organisations, the costs to produce and distribute has always been prohibitive.



**Figure 11 - Sample tablet technology**

New digital platforms, such as tablets, Apps and smart-phones, offer a means of distributing this information in a much more efficient and immersive way than traditional technology allows. Even DVDs, which were once the best means of displaying rich video content, are now being surpassed by the newer digital platforms which allow for even greater and more flexible content building, unlimited distribution, instantaneous updates, cheaper production costs and a means of interacting with consumers while they are ‘on-the-go’.



Our desktop and consumer research confirms that the consumer today is highly mobile. Our Visitor Hot-Spot interviews revealed that 43% of visitors surveyed were smart-phone users, while 70% liked using technology, mobile devices and Apps.

The Pre and Post AVIC interviews revealed that 37% of customers surveyed were smart-phone users (see Appendix for the Hot-Spot Survey Report and the Pre and Post AVIC Survey). Given the results of Telsyte's Australian Smartphone Market Study 2011-2015, it is obvious that we will see a significant increase in the number of consumers using technology, mobile devices and Apps in the coming years.

“Mobile devices have become an inextricable part of our day-to-day lives and are having a profound and far-reaching influence on how we engage with each other and the world around us, in ways we could never have predicted. The proliferation and accessibility of mobile technologies has made it possible to consume, produce and share information ‘on-the-go’, at any time and from almost anywhere. Mobility and connectivity have become fundamental expectations of people’s lives. People expect organisations to be no different”. (*Ellis, 2010*)

The huge and rapid growth in technology surrounding the world wide web and mobile devices, and their inter-connectivity, has allowed for the development of a wide range of digital platforms which have the ability to provide consumers with much richer and more immersive content than ever before. In the near future consumers will be able to purchase or download goods, and some services, e.g. travel itineraries via near-field communication and the ability to make pass payments, literally allowing them to ‘swipe and go’.

Digital technology has the ability to inspire the visitor like never before and offers a significant opportunity for AVICs to build interactive content (and personalised experiences). Today’s consumer ‘Googles’ for answers. They buy on iTunes. They can demand the information to be available when they want it on a device or platform they choose but, more importantly, they are doing this while they are on the move. Therefore, consumer demand in part is leading the need for change, and AVIC online and electronic information delivery strategies are vital to the future of visitor information services. With more information available, sorting through the myriad of information available to source credible and trusted information for the consumer is immensely important. Therefore, there is an urgent need for search engine optimisation to ensure that consumers can quickly access their visitor information directly from an authorised source. Maximising a competitive advantage and the ability to access new market segments are the benefits of meeting consumer demand and implementing online and electronic technology will allow access to and uptake of Northern Rivers' product offerings.

AVICs that do not have their content available and optimised will run the risk of losing traction with the visitors as the adaption of technology, Apps, tablets and smart-phone mobility grows.

***Recommendation 8:***

*AVICs need to look at ways to integrate mobile technologies to respond to the new consumer paradigm, both for their present customer base and to attract those segments that are currently under-represented as customers.*

## A. ONLINE AND ELECTRONIC DELIVERY OF VISITOR INFORMATION

### 1. THE ACCREDITED VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE CONSUMER INTERFACE NETWORK

By becoming **Accredited Visitor Information Centre Consumer Interface Networks**, AVICs can ensure their services are consistently available across the wider Northern Rivers Region so that visitors can establish a clear link between each AVIC in the region, despite each region also having their own unique 'identity'.

The **AVIC Consumer Interface Network** is formulated around two key strategies:

#### Strategy 1 - Physical Bricks

#### Strategy 2 - Online Clicks

The aim is to target and engage visitors based on their physical location and personal preferences with permission-based promotions and information delivered as rich-media and offers that are immediately relevant, valuable and actionable, either via the **bricks** or the **clicks**. The Regional Visitor Services Strategy seeks to align visitor servicing towards collaborative models while taking information to the visitor, instead of hoping the visitor comes to the information.



The dissemination of this information includes Broadcast Zones such as Visitor Hot-Spots, in-area interpretive signage, points of interest signage (QR Coded), shopping centres, accommodation providers and partnerships, 🚐-van and mobile services which clearly identifies and reinforces the regional interconnection with the 🚐 brand.

**These strategies, when combined, will allow the entire Northern Rivers Region, including its AVICS, to act as Broadcast Zones for quality and unique visitor experiences and information service delivery.**

The TMG should prioritise the following seven areas below towards Bricks and Clicks enablement:

1. 🚐 wi-fi enablement of AVICs
2. Website enhancement and optimisation
3. Develop a Suite of Offers around a Northern Rivers Rewards Program and Itinerary Management – 🚐 Welcome Card
4. Development of a range of Digital Platforms



5. Push future market offerings
6. Development of a QR Code platform (Signage and -plinths to be QR Coded)
7. Implement -bollards in Visitor Hot-Spots and AVICs to provide 24 hour service

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## STRATEGY 1 –BRICKS

Accredited Visitor Information Centres are not only a physical building (bricks) but are also a vital resource space, acting as the hub for all tourism-related information and promotion, often taking a lead role in economic development and community enhancement. They provide a welcome to the region to visitors and portray the region's stories and experiences. Some are attractions in their own right.

Across Accredited Visitor Information Centres in New South Wales, over 7.5 million people are serviced within the 'bricks' and over 1.5 million (and increasing) are serviced by the 'clicks' (web and email).

The Bricks and Clicks Strategy integrates existing physical channels and internet and digital technology to ensure that information delivery is modernised, highly accessible, inspirational and consumer focused.



The Bricks Strategy incorporates the traditional delivery of visitor information through AVICs where direct, face-to-face contact with customers/visitors/locals occurs, as well as the delivery of information managed by the AVIC team via:

- websites
- email

plus the newest forms of internet communication and technology (explained in further detail throughout this Report)

- social media, including Facebook, Twitter and blogs
- mobile applications
- QR Codes
- Touch Screens
- Interactive Digital Publication (IDPs)
- YouTube, including user generated content
- Near-field communication (NFC)
- Augmented reality (AR)

and creating a consumer interface network via:

-  wi-fi
-  information bollards, (24 hour kiosks) using both static and interactive platforms

- mobile 📱-vans/trailer mounted kiosks
- new signage (QR Coded)
- truck signage
- mobile library
- 📱 plinths (QR Coded)
- Local Rewards Programs, i.e. i Welcome Card

‘Bricks’ is part of the interface with ‘clicks’, for example, being the mobile applications that the visitor can download from the AVIC with their digital brochure, interest-specific information and bookable product that is still provided by the AVIC professional staff. The effective engagement by the AVIC staff with visitors is paramount to achieve an effective Bricks and Clicks Strategy.

The Bricks and Clicks Strategy is about providing high quality visitor servicing to ensure that visitors, consumers and local communities are provided with the most up-to-date and easily understood information which is reliable, accessible, actionable and provides immediate fulfilment to the visitor needs. The Bricks and Clicks Strategy extends the reach of information to visitors via the **Consumer Interface Network**, allowing for wider information delivery and diverse engagement.

By way of example, two Case Studies are noted that highlight the new consumer engagement, where the physical AVIC and technology platforms work together to provide the best result for both the consumer and the community.

#### Case 1 - Southern Highlands

- Southern Highlands Tourism ‘My Southern Highlands’ strategy encourages local residents to take their visiting friends and relatives out and about in the region by providing special offers and discounts, both online and in the form of a voucher book, which can be collected from the local AVIC and participating businesses.
- The My Southern Highlands website has been created to allow both visitors and locals to share their own stories and experiences of the Southern Highlands region to other current and potential visitors in return for holiday prizes.



Figure 12: Southern Highlands Branding

#### Case 2 – Ballina Coast & Hinterland

- Likewise, Ballina’s AVIC has adopted a similar strategy in the form of the Locals Rewards Campaign in which both locals and visitors are given the chance to win one of four holiday packages in the Ballina region simply by filling out a form on the AVIC website explaining why they love Ballina. Loyalty Rewards Cards have been given out

to locals, via the AVIC or in the mail, with the Ballina Shire Council's Community Connect Newsletter. Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) is 40 % of the market.



- These Loyalty Cards allow the user to receive special offers and discounts from participating businesses and are a fantastic way to, not only encourage locals to stimulate the local economy by taking their visiting friends and relatives out and about in the Ballina region, but also encourage people to call into the AVIC to collect their Loyalty Card.
- A similar strategy could be easily adopted by the entire Northern Rivers region in view of the high number of visitors to the region who identified their reason for visitation as 'visiting friends and relatives'.
- The implementation of an  Welcome Card in the Northern Rivers which offers the visitor across-region redeemable offers that can be obtained from the AVIC, promotes the Northern Rivers, the  brand, and encourages visitors to call into to each AVIC along their journey to collect special offers and deals.



Figure 12: Ballina mobile capable website



Figure 14: -welcome you, concept

#### *Recommendation 9:*

*That an  Welcome Card be implemented in the Northern Rivers by the TMG and delivered through the AVICs*

## STRATEGY 2 - CLICKS

This section of the Report includes research into online technologies and services, as well as a review of all destination websites (AVICs) within the Northern Rivers including a web review summary.

- As part of the AVIC online strategy, the AVIC websites must also be continually optimised through search engine optimisation (SEO) and Google analytics and regularly measured against Best Practice models, to ensure maximum user exposure, as well as effective layout and branding consistency.
- Liaison has occurred with the TMG team (Grafton and the Clarence Valley Council) to determine the most appropriate protocols and installation. Wi-fi protocols (Best Practice) and information memorandum appear as an attachment to this Report.



Figure 15: app-n-go screenshot

- RVSS Hot-Spot Survey results show that, being able to access wi-fi or the internet in an AVIC, is the second highest response with regard to what types of services would attract visitors to use an AVIC whilst travelling. This question was an open-ended response question and yet 13% of RVSS 150 Hot-Spot visitors (Figure 16) suggested, of their own accord, that wi-fi would be a service which would attract them to using an AVIC.

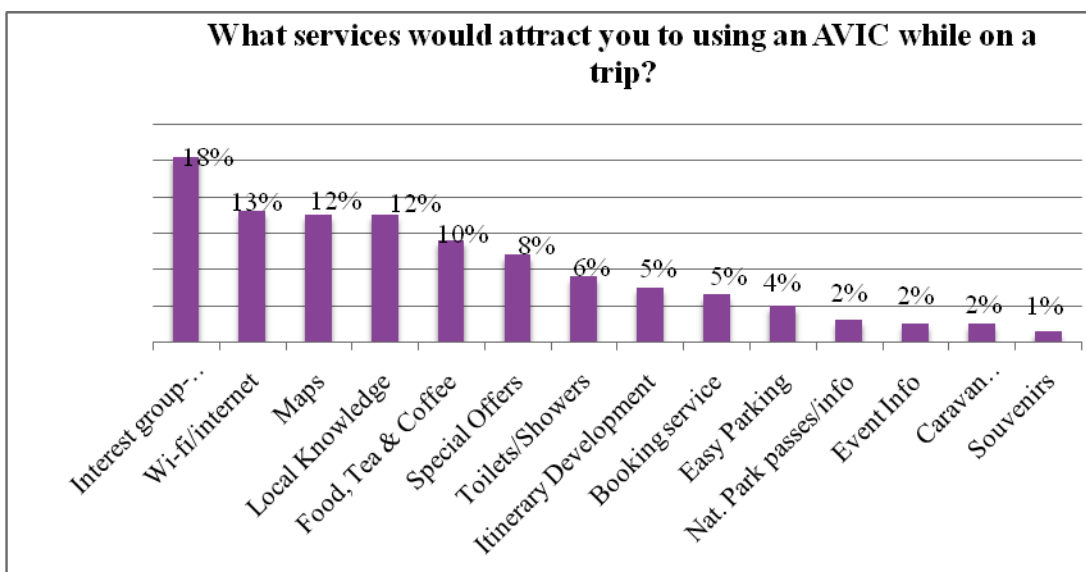





Figure 16 - Hot-Spot Survey Data

Considering that 32% of RVSS Hot-Spot respondents have not visited an AVIC in the last 3 years there is significant potential to build a new, much larger and more diverse customer base simply by having  wi-fi installed in each AVIC.

**Recommendation 10:**

*All AVICs be wi-fi enabled ( wi-fi) as this will, not only attract more users to the AVIC, but also enable users to easily download the AVIC Apps for both smart-phones and tablets. Wi-fi is cost-effective and the  wi-fi service will contain a ‘Net Nanny’ type filter to ensure only identified and appropriate websites are able to be accessed by the visitor, or anyone who comes into contact with the wi-fi network.*


What will be critical in the development of the wi-fi strategy is to ensure that every sign (directional signage, point of interest signage, AVIC signage, etc.) displays the (new)  wi-fi logo.



Figure 17:  wi-fi logo

**Recommendation 11**

*All marketing mediums and collateral will need to carry the  wi-fi logo to raise awareness of this added service found in AVICs.*

- Social Media websites such as Twitter, YouTube, MySpace, Blogs and Facebook, etc. provide a unique means for businesses to engage with consumers like never before. RVSS research reveals that 55% of the Hot-Spot Survey respondents are active users of social media while the Pre and Post Surveys of AVIC visitors show that 52% of respondents are active social media users. Considering that there were officially 10,659,580 Australian Facebook users in the month of November 2011 (Cowling, 2011), these Survey results accurately reflect this wider trend, just for Facebook users alone.

**Recommendation 12:**

*The TMG implement a social media page collectively and harness the significant potential for AVICs to actively engage with an enormous current and potential customer base simply by having, and frequently updating, at least one or two of these social media pages (focused on regional experiences).*

It is important to note however that simply having a Blog, Facebook or Twitter page (for example) and not regularly updating it with images, interesting status updates or 'tweets', or asking your followers questions and inviting them to actively participate in conversation with your organisation, will result in a very unsuccessful social media strategy.


People use social media as it allows for a new level of networking and interaction with organisations, businesses and other social media users. By encouraging the social media community to become part of your strategy and/or product development by offering input, ideas and feedback, users will feel they are a valued stakeholder and are therefore more likely to continue conversations and use your products or services.

Websites, such as YouTube, offer a completely different realm of social media interaction in which anyone, including businesses, can create an account and upload videos for free. This is a fantastic way for AVICs to promote their products and services at minimal cost, to a far-reaching and active public.

Like other social media sites, YouTube users can engage in conversations with the creator of the video, as well as other YouTube users, by commenting on their videos or even sharing them with others on their other social media pages. Both Brunswick Heads and the Tweed have effectively used YouTube to advertise the beauty and unique qualities of their regions. When combined with another social media page such as Facebook, as well as the AVICs website to cross-promote these social media platforms, the potential to gain significant viewer attention is enormous.

Social media websites, such as Facebook and web blogs, also offer a range of other 'company-specific' features targeted at improving organisation 'visibility' and user-interaction. Such features include the 'check-in' and 'check-in deals' features which encourage users to 'check-in' to a participating business, e.g. an AVIC, to reveal special offers to that user, whilst also publicising to their network of friends that they are currently visiting your business – a form of free advertising in a sense.

Facebook and many other social media sites also offer specific advertising features to improve an organisation's visibility outside of their current user community, whilst giving the advertiser accurate feedback and statistics on viewer numbers and interaction levels.

As an experiment, the AVIC Network Program advertised on Facebook from 1 November to 31 December, 2010 for just \$400 resulting in 1 in 4,500 impressions receiving a 'click through' or 9 per day. This is a positive result, considering that the brand was in front of 2,334,603 potential customers (Australia only) and just a click away. The Facebook advertisement was successful in demonstrating that the  brand is catching people's attention whilst allowing for more expansive brand recognition at a relatively low cost.



**Recommendation 13:**

*Every AVIC in the Northern Rivers has its own Facebook page, which is actively and regularly updated on a weekly basis (focused on local experiences).*

Additionally, at least one other social media platform, e.g. Twitter or YouTube should be used to complement the messages and discussions which are present on the Facebook page. The AVICs website should promote all its social media activity and also display a 'button' which directs users directly to the official AVIC Facebook page and, if applicable, it's YouTube and/or Twitter pages.

All Facebook pages in the Northern Rivers should be updated and managed by one AVIC staff member (or outsourced), who has had vast experience and been fully trained with regard to social media usage and administration across a range of platforms. This will ensure consistency in messaging, branding and updates for the entire Northern Rivers Region, whilst also avoiding confusion and taking the pressure off staff at AVICs with regard to who manages these pages, and how frequently.

**Recommendation 14:**

*There be a designated Social Media person from within the TMG (an AVIC staff member) who will be in frequent contact with each AVIC, advising on content and strategy.*

This will assist with consistency of product descriptions and offers and allow AVICs to cross communicate, with messages and updates on each location prior to updating their Facebook pages. More information about staff training and designation of whole-region duties is explained later in this Report.

Consumer research undertaken, together with RVSS Secret Shopping Program, has revealed that not all AVIC staff are confident using online and electronic services to provide information to customers. A higher level of efficiency needs to be established for all AVIC staff with regard to the delivery of information via electronic and online mediums. It is fundamental that all staff, across the Northern Rivers, has a thorough understanding of how to utilise these online and electronic mediums to service visitors to the region more consistently and efficiently, whether it be by using social media sites effectively, making online bookings, responding to or making email enquiries, updating the AVIC website or being able to create and upload electronic itineraries onto a visitor's mobile device. It will become apparent, by the strategies being proposed in this Regional Visitor Services Strategy, that all



team members within each AVIC will have to be trained in the effective delivery and upselling of the new visitor digital solutions.

The new digital tools, including Apps, e-brochures and digital itineraries, will allow for significant enhancement of a visitor's experience if they are developed and upsold to the AVIC customers. Therefore it will be critical that proper protocols and upselling methodologies are developed and implemented with all team members across the Northern Rivers AVIC Network so that they understand how the modern consumer interacts in the new digital setting.

Some volunteer staff may struggle in the new digital visitor servicing paradigm and a medium to long term strategy should be that professional staff be employed across all AVICs, as a preference to volunteers, so as to maintain the highest level of service consistency using all the available technology tools.

***Recommendation 15:***

*All AVIC staff (including volunteers) across the Northern Rivers undertakes further training with regard to the development of skills related to the online and electronic delivery of visitor information.*

- As part of the research for this Report a review of web, smart-phones and tablets was conducted. It is Aurora's view that it is not an 'either/or' strategy but rather, about utilising a suite of digital assets which will enhance the visitor experience at various points of their journey. Traditionally, visitor-searching via websites was undertaken via a desktop computer. However, the introduction of smart-phones and tablets has enabled a high level of mobility and immediacy with regard to visitor information retrieval.
- AVICs have traditionally been seen as a place where consumers receive information on arrival at a destination. However, the success of the internet, via both computer and its increasing accessibility on mobile devices, has seen so much more information provided to visitors well before they leave home.
- These mediums and the growing popularity of online services such as email, social media websites, blogs and online bookings have allowed visitors to interact with AVICs before arriving at their destination. This needs to be encouraged to ensure that visitors feel a connection to the AVIC, inspiring them to visit the physical Centre on arrival, with the hope of enhancing their visitor experience. This further enhancement is tied up in the Bricks and Clicks Strategy discussed below.

## TOUCH SCREENS AND KIOSKS

A number of AVICs are currently using touch screens as a means of providing 24 hour information. However, there are also a number of other options for AVICs to provide a similar service without being reliant on any third party to update the information on the touch screens, etc. Touch screens come in a wide range of sizes and formats and can be used in an array of ways. Tablets, such as the iPad, are also touch screens and can be updated by AVIC staff, with the added benefit of having internet access and a much greater operating capacity than traditional touch screens. Considering that a touch screen kiosk, such as those used in Newcastle, New South Wales, can cost approximately \$15,000 and tablets costs well under \$1000, there is a much greater advantage in utilising tablets, such as iPads and Android tablets, as they can perform more functions than a traditional kiosk and be moved and updated easily, while having a 'bank' of tablets will allow several users to access information at the same time.



Figure 18 -  branded tablet stand –  Go Mini



**Figure 19 - Concept Kiosk/Information Panel**

Tablets have become fully immersive and interactive deliverers of content through their ability to display high definition images and films. They also allow users to download and use Apps of their choosing with the added benefit of being able to organise their day-to-day lives through full email access and calendar synchronisation.

***Recommendation 16:***



*It is recommended that each AVIC in the Northern Rivers has at least one tablet to use as a new way of being able to interact with visitors and have them engage with the region on a new multi-media level (housed in a distinctive 🇺🇸 branded cabinet).*


As the tablet can be so easily operated and moved around the AVIC it has a multi-function appeal for both staff and visitors.



The tablet can also be used to allow visitors to have access to the AVIC App and Interactive Digital Publication (IDP) and staff could give them visual directions on how to download these and access their e-passport from the App store on their own tablets or smart-phones. Another option is to have the tablet on display at the front counter so visitors can browse the full IDP, or simply have rolling images or video of the region playing, to act as a source of inspiration for visitors.

**Figure 20: 🇺🇸 Go mini mock-up**

-Go Bollards (see concept -Go bollard design image developed by Aurora at Figure 21) have a number of visitor servicing uses and can be placed almost anywhere.

The  Go Information Bollard Strategy is about providing visitor and consumer engagement in Visitor Hot-Spots and high traffic flow areas, i.e. indoors and outdoors, with a quick reference point of things to see and do in the immediate area. It also provides a call-to-action to drive visitors back to the AVIC with visitor enhancement services; itineraries and offers (e.g. enhance their holiday experience through the range of services provided by AVICs and also gain access to the Loyalty Rewards Program).

### **Recommendation 17:**



These -bollards should be placed at key Visitor Hot-Spots around the Northern Rivers Region which are identified by the Tourism Managers in each region.



Figure 21 – Concept  -Go Information Kiosk

The -bollards will contain basic information about the point-of-interest in which they are located as well as a reminder to the travelling public to visit the nearest AVIC to unlock special offers and become part of the Loyalty Rewards Program. A QR Code will also be placed on the information panel, that visitors can scan, which will direct them to a website with all the details of the nearest AVIC as well as any current offers or specials the AVIC is promoting.


The information panel on the -bollard can also be easily replaced as needed if any contact details change or if the information becomes difficult to read due to wear and tear over time.



Figure 22- -Go Information Kiosk in situ on beachfront

## PLINTHS







Blue Mountains have installed  plinths in their high foot traffic areas, which display directional maps to the AVIC plus a map of the region and local precinct information. Part of the signage audit across the Northern Rivers areas should be to identify where  plinths could be placed to enhance the visitor experience, providing art and/or architecture as a unique point of difference.


Figure 23 - a plinth in Katoomba

### **Recommendation 18:**

*That -plinths in the Northern Rivers Region be developed and QR Codes be added to these plinths, which will add to the overall visitor experience. It will also provide a call-to-action to the visitor to call into the nearest AVIC to redeem any other services that are on offer.*

Many signs that exist throughout the Northern Rivers currently have no  branding, or any detail or contact details in relation to the closest AVIC.

### **Recommendation 19:**

*A comprehensive signage audit should be undertaken across every LGA to identify signs that could be re-born with a new call-to-action promotion,  branding and QR Codes that would fit into the AVIC Consumer Interface Network.*



## MOBILE AVICS



Figure 24 – -van concept

Aurora worked with Wollongong to develop their MyGong mobile AVIC. This has enabled Wollongong Tourism to gain a much greater reach and range of visitor services than a traditional bricks and mortar centre can often allow, in view of its high level of mobility and the ability of services to be tailored around specific events or holiday periods in order to cater for the visitors' more specialised needs during these times.






The implementation of an -van could provide a service of a similar spread throughout the Northern Rivers for visitor information delivery. The -van would complement the bricks and mortar AVIC services to regions, both within the Northern Rivers, as well as elsewhere in New South Wales or Australia when attending conferences or events, or undertaking a marketing and promotion campaign to neighbouring regions to promote the Northern Rivers region and its AVICs, to potential visitors.



Figure 25 - Mobile, trailer-mounted AVIC concept, interior and exterior



There is also a variety of other ways in which visitor information can be delivered by mobile means. Aurora has developed two concept mobile -kiosks. One kiosk is based on a trail-able model and the other, based on a transportable building, delivered by tilt-tray that can have either stand-alone services or be connected to main services. Each kiosk has varying capacity for staff and equipment, as well as a visitor-friendly meet and greet area, which can provide  wi-fi, interactive screens and full digital technology. These kiosks also have the provision for paper-based maps and/or collateral as required. This  mobile servicing would be particularly relevant for servicing visitors during events and sporting activities.

During field work across the Northern Rivers it was noted that a 'mobile library' service was being utilised in the Nimbin region via a Richmond-Tweed public library truck (Figure 26). The mobile library visited these regions on a regular basis and offered the same services, albeit on a smaller scale, as a bricks and mortar library such as internet/computer access and free borrowing of books. The major point of difference to a traditional library is that this service allowed these facilities to be accessible to a much wider range of people who perhaps did not have a library in their local town or were unable to travel to their regional library. It is highly likely that the Tourism Management Group could place regional visitor information and Rewards Programs within this Library facility, which could engage both the local communities and the visiting friends and relatives market effectively.



**Figure 26 - Richmond - Tweed Mobile Library**

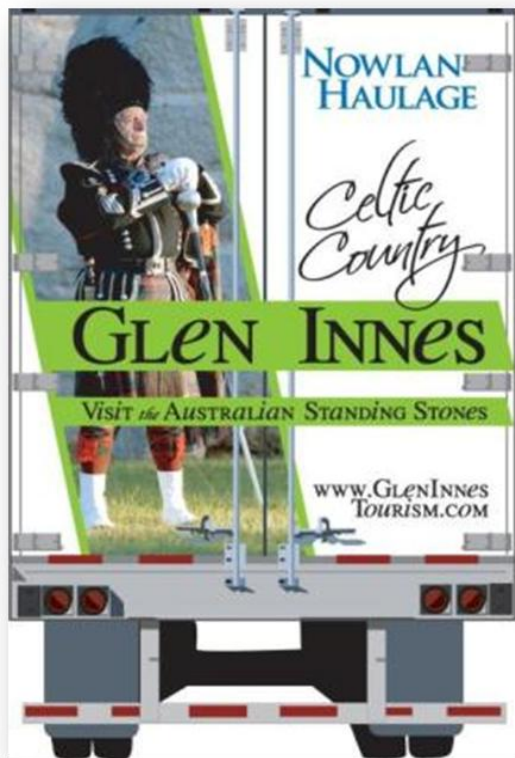


Figure 27 - Glen Innes truck

Glen Innes AVIC in northern New South Wales has their mobile advertisement spread across the entire trailer of a local Transport Company's truck (see Figure 27). This truck is driven all around New South Wales, from top-to-bottom each week, with the advertisement receiving enormous public exposure across the State. If the Northern Regions AVICs could form a partnership with a regional transport provider to carry out a similar exercise, there is significant potential for the Northern Rivers 'brand' and 'image' to become a major talking-point amongst all types of visitors.



Figure 28 - Glen Innes truck enthusiasts

On seeing such an advertisement, current or previous visitors to the region would be immediately prompted to tell potential visitors of their Northern Rivers 'story' which, in turn, may arouse the interest of these visitors to experience the Northern Rivers Region for themselves. A similar promotion is also undertaken by Dubbo.

Dubbo has also recently launched its 'truck banner'.



Figure 29: Dubbo truck banners

## AVIC APP AND IDPs

Successful visitor orientation is one of the keys for enhancing in-area experiences. The more the visitor can be orientated to what is available and how to access it, the greater the level of visitor satisfaction. Inserted below are screen shots and methodology of the app-n-go AVIC App currently being developed, which forms an example of the proposed Bricks and Clicks Strategy to be implemented across all Northern Rivers AVICs.

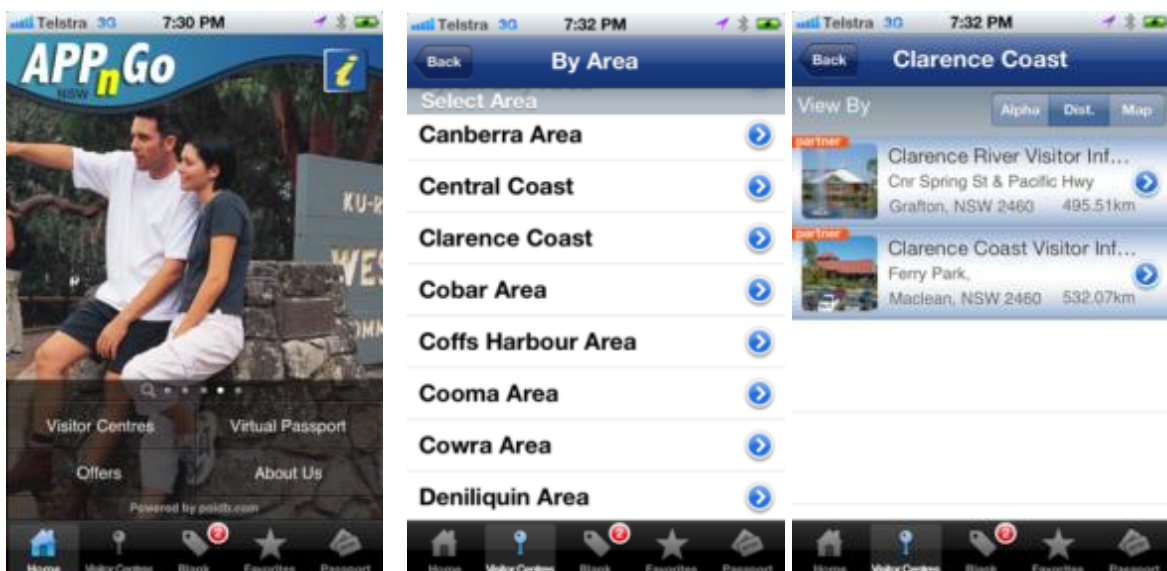


Figure 30 - Concept App Screenshots

The use of mobile devices such as smart-phones and tablets has grown at an incredible rate in recent years. The increased adoption of the smart-phone, in particular, with its touch screen user-friendly interface, is seen as a key driver in encouraging mobile phone users to utilise their handsets for a broader range of activities. These devices allow their users to connect, engage with and retrieve information in more ways and more immediately than ever before.

From the consumer's perspective, mobile devices are fundamentally re-shaping the way the travel marketplace operates. Consumers are increasingly using wireless devices for, not only searching and booking travel, but also exploring locations in a much deeper and richer way and now expect to be able to access their travel information and make enquiries and bookings while 'on-the-go'. AVICs must keep abreast of these changes and trends if they are to have any relevance in the future of tourism and visitor information services.

One way in which **AVIC Consumer Interface Networks** will ensure they are able to cater for the growing demands and expectations of visitors is through the adoption of the AVIC App. By offering this App option to tourists, AVICs have given visitors yet another reason to continue using their services, as consumers will feel a sense that AVICs have made a conscious effort to, not only understand the growing and changing needs of their users, but also deliver on their promise of quality visitor servicing.

The App allows visitors to have the benefit and comfort of being able to access all the information they want regarding attractions, accommodation, events and services while on-the-go and in any place they choose. They will also be able to find the nearest AVIC on arrival at their destination, and be encouraged to do so because of the offer of the Loyalty Rewards, special deals and the personalised itinerary development service which can be accessed only by visiting an AVIC. In this way the AVIC App is going to help people have a richer, more personal travel experience because of its unique ability to link 'bricks and clicks' that is, not only offering a digital and mobile visitor information solution, but also being able to 'back it up' with the 'emotional interface' that can only be provided by real people at physical AVICs.

It is interesting to note that the South Australian Destination Visitor Survey conducted in April 2011, stated that when visitors were asked about their use of a touchscreen whilst at an AVIC, 97% said that they would prefer to speak to a person rather than use an information portal within an AVIC. The RVSS Hot Spot and Pre and Post Surveys both confirm that face-to-face contact is important to the visitor experience, with friendliness and local knowledge of staff ranking as the highest attributes in things visitors like about AVICs.

The Bricks and Clicks Strategy links people with technology via this emotional interface. People still want to talk to people, and the technology enhances the ability for visitors to take the inspiration given to them away with them. This is why the ability to inspire and build itineraries for visitors and packaging with technology is the best outcome.



Likewise, the Interactive Digital Publication (IDP) offers this same 'bricks and clicks' connection. However, it also allows users to be able to fully immerse themselves in the images, stories and videos of each region through the captivating high-definition quality that tablet or smart-phone viewing allows.

The IDP also has the added benefit of 'share-ability' where visitors can pass their IDP on and show others the beauty and experiences they too could have if they were to visit the Northern Rivers. IDPs are much more than simply an e-brochure. Where they differ is through their ability to provide rich, immersive content which users can fully engage with on any level they choose – whether it be zooming in and out of images, watching footage or 'tagging' events, attractions and activities which they can then take to the AVIC and have 'itinerated' for them on the spot.

Near Field Communication (NFC) is widely believed to become a replacement technology for many existing data transfer techniques. These existing methods include barcodes, magnetic strips, RFID (Radio Frequency Identification), Bluetooth and the more recent QR (Quick response) Codes. Some makers of smart-phones are already producing phones with NFC capability and Apple is rumoured to be including it in their new iPhone, to be released late 2012.

The impact this technology could have on the tourism industry could be significant, and it is important for key operators to be aware of developments. The table below shows where NFC is already being used. The usage described in the table below is relevant, particularly the store and theatre applications.

Area	STATION AIRPORT	VEHICLE	OFFICE	STORE RESTAURANT	THEATER STADIUM	ANYWHERE
Usage of NFC Mobile Phone	Pass gate Get information from smart poster Get information from information kiosk Pay bus/taxi fare	Adjust seat position Open door Pay parking fee	Enter/exit office Exchange business cards Log in to PC; Print using copier machine	Pay by credit card Get loyalty point Get and use coupon Share information and coupon among users	Pass entrance Get event information	Download and personalize application Check usage history Download ticket Lock phone remotely
Service Industries	Mass Transport Advertising	Public Transport	Security	Banking Retail Credit Card	Entertainment	Any

Figure 31: NFC Applications (Source: [http://www.nfc-forum.org/aboutnfc/nfc\\_in\\_action/](http://www.nfc-forum.org/aboutnfc/nfc_in_action/))

Augmented reality (AR) works by overlaying information on an image of the real world, essentially augmenting reality. Most smart-phones are capable of basic augmented reality, with more and more Apps with AR capability being released all the time.

Google Glass is potentially the next step in mobile communication. It is a head mounted display that allows the user to augment their surroundings.

The Bricks and Clicks Digital Strategy could be further enhanced by the utilisation of these technologies in the future.




The Bricks and Clicks Strategy is broken down into seven distinct areas:

1. **WI-FI ENABLEMENT OF ALL ACCREDITED VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRES** (📶-wi-fi) - in the Hot-Spot Survey, wi-fi and internet accessibility available at the AVIC was the third highest service (Hotspot Survey) which would attract people to using an AVIC while on a trip.
2. **WEBSITE ENHANCEMENT AND OPTIMISATION** including smart-phone and tablet compatibility (the web provides information and a call-to-action)
3. **DEVELOP A SUITE OF OFFERS** around rewarding visitors to the Northern Rivers region via a Loyalty Rewards Program, 📇 Welcome You card, coupons, deals, discounts, bundling and itinerary management – the majority of which will be available only after visiting a Northern Rivers AVIC.
4. **DEVELOP A RANGE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS** e.g. Interactive Digital Publications (IDP) and mobile Apps for both smart-phones and tablets which can be downloaded prior to visiting an AVIC (via an iPhone or Android App store) or whilst visiting an AVIC. Drive 'in area visitors' to the AVIC by enabling them to utilise their Apps or IDPs to their full potential by being able to redeem their rewards and personalised itineraries.
5. Once a customer has been acquired through the web, digital platforms or front-of- house, the opportunity then arises to **PUSH FUTURE MARKET OFFERINGS** based on their visitor profile (which is created when a visitor downloads an App or IDP).
6. **DEVELOP A UNIQUE QR CODE PLATFORM** via LGA areas which will be highly visible at any point-of-interest on interpretive panels and static information boards, participating accommodation provider or business. When scanned, the QR (Quick Response) Codes direct the consumer to a website with more information or even video links.  
An interesting example is where QR Codes have been used in Australian wineries. QR Codes were placed on bottles of wine which allowed the customer to scan the labels and be directed to a video link showing footage of wine being made in the actual winery, giving the consumer a closer and participatory experience with the winery and its products.

For demonstration purposes, Aurora created a QR Code which links to the Heritage Trail web page on the Grafton website. This Code could be placed on interpretive panels, or a street map showing the path of the Heritage Trail. Either way, visitors have access to quick and direct information about the building/site/area that the visitor is in, via a mobile phone.



Figure 32 - Sample use of a QR Code, leading to more information on the Grafton Heritage Trail


According to 'Vizibility' (an online branding business), "People are more likely to remember who you are if they can associate you with a unique experience. QR Codes may be that unique experience". In the case of visitor information delivery, QR Codes, (which can be scanned by smart-phones or tablets) located on in-area signage or -bollards, will create a direct call-to-action and allow visitors to access information about an experience, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

QR Codes quickly direct the consumer to information through a direct link, which could be via text, audio or visual means, about that particular point-of-interest.

QR Codes can also give consumers a direct link to the AVIC website or specific pages within it, taking them to the What's On section, or deals and offers, etc. or how they may be able to redeem special offers and Loyalty Rewards by visiting the local AVIC.

Attached in the Appendix is an article entitled, 'Help Track your QR Code with Voice-Activated Interfaces', which further explains the many ways in which QR Codes can be used.


#### 7. INFORMATION BOLLARD STRATEGY

From the Hot-Spot Surveys undertaken, over 97% of respondents confirmed that they recognised the accredited  logo/brand, but 34% had not visited an AVIC in the last three years, and over 76% had not visited an AVIC on this particular trip.

The Surveys also showed that a high proportion of visitors were unaware of where AVICs are located.

This Bricks and Clicks Strategy includes the need to review current marketing and promotional collateral, including signage, and plan for an overall Northern Rivers approach updating and identifying signage gaps and enhancing signage at



Figure 33 - Concept image of -Go bollard in situ on a walkway to beach

Hot-Spots, participating businesses (shopping centre car parks) and important cultural or recreational areas, where interpretive explanation is lacking. QR Codes can be added to existing signs.

***Recommendation 20:***

*A detailed analysis of tourism product throughout the Northern Rivers be determined as a base to work on for **market development**.*

The above Recommendations will form the basis of aligning future consumer offers via a Loyalty Rewards Program, coupons, deals, discounts, bundling and itinerary management which will form part of the Bricks and Clicks Strategy.

## **B. EXPLORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR LINKAGES AND RESOURCE SHARING ACROSS AVICS**

There are numerous opportunities for linkages and resource-sharing across Northern Rivers AVICs, some of which have been touched on in Sections 1C and 2D of this Report. Currently, there are already a number of initiatives which have been undertaken by the Tourism Management Group, such as the Northern Rivers Scenic Drive brochure, as well as between LGAs, the combined Richmond Valley and Clarence Valley Visitor Guide. Such initiatives make it very easy for the visitor to identify linkages between AVICs and be therefore comforted by the fact that the service and information delivered by any AVIC in this region will have consistency in standard.





The adoption of personalised itinerary development services across all Northern Rivers AVICs is one way in which linkages between AVICs can be formed and maintained, particularly with regard to the development of inter-regional itineraries which allow for bookings to be made and activities organised across LGA boundaries. These inter-regional itineraries could be developed based around the personal preferences of the visitor. They also present an opportunity for Northern Rivers AVICs to come together to develop a series of pre-made 'experience' itineraries categorised by time and theme/interest group, e.g. 4 day Adventure or 3 day Hinterland. These itineraries could be linked on each AVIC website for users to download and print or download to their smart-phone or made available on the AVIC app-n-


go. They could also be available in a brochure format for collection at all Northern Rivers AVICs, of which the cost of printing could also be shared across the entire region.

A whole region Interactive Digital Publication (IDP) should also be developed on a cost-share basis in which certain video and image highlights taken from the individual IDPs of each region could be used as a 'teaser' to draw visitors in, by providing just a 'snapshot' or 'glimpse' into the vast experiences that can be had when holidaying anywhere in the region.

The Loyalty Rewards Program is another way in which linkages between AVICs can be easily established, whilst still ensuring that the individual stories and experiences on offer in each LGA are not lost to regional generalisation. The consistent branding, structure and messaging of the Loyalty Rewards Program has the ultimate goal of primarily increasing expenditure in each of the Northern Rivers LGAs, by encouraging AVICs to give out special offers and discount coupons to local participating businesses with the hope of encouraging the locals to take the large visiting friends and relatives market out and about in their local region – whether it be to visit an attraction, event or simply dine out in a nearby restaurant or café.

In this way the deals and offers are specific to each region and can only be obtained from a visit to the AVIC of each LGA. The costs of implementing and advertising this campaign will be shared amongst the Northern Rivers and, in view of the large geographical spread, the Loyalty Rewards Program will be implemented in, the awareness of this campaign will be increased dramatically.

The placement of -bollards around identified Visitor Hot-Spots will also help visitors to establish linkages between Northern Rivers Regions as the branding, look and messages presented on the -bollard will be consistent and recognisable across the region. Visitors will know that if they are looking for information all they have to do is look for the large yellow italicised  logo, wherever they are in the Northern Rivers, whether it be on an AVIC building, bollard or information board, together with the '...will take you there', which obviously compliments the logo and branding used by the AVIC Network in New South Wales.

The potential also exists for these -bollards to be purchased on a bulk scale by the Tourism Managers in order to save the costs on individual AVICs. This will also allow for the bollards to be implemented across the region at the same time, rather than LGA by LGA, which again will help to link the Northern Rivers Region, from the visitor's perspective, as a collaborative and unified holiday destination.

AVICs are often purchasing goods from the same or similar suppliers and it is worthwhile investigating whether joint purchasing arrangements between all Northern Rivers AVICs could provide some economies of scale. Resource-sharing initiatives can also include the bulk purchasing of merchandise, whole or inter-regional maps, guides and brochures, as well as

media and, as recommended previously, the Tourism Management Group should establish a 'buying group' for the Northern Rivers in order to share the costs of those products which are needed for all AVICs. This will greatly reduce the time and money spent on each individual AVIC having to carry out their own separate orders for these products, or even for stationary, office supplies and equipment. Group procurement of these products will be much cheaper than what the average consumer pays, which may result in valuable cost savings.

***Recommendation 21:***

*Group procurement should be considered by the TMG to reduce costs and duplication.*

The recommended implementations of a mobile 🚐-van and Northern Rivers regional advertising via signage on a truck owned by a local transport provider, or on some other mobile means, are some of the most important resource-sharing initiatives the region could participate in because of the significant shared opportunities they would bring to the region and its AVICs.

The cost of purchasing and setting up an 🚐-van, in particular, would be substantial for an individual AVIC. However, when the cost is shared, so are the benefits? The 🚐-van, when operated and purchased on a cost-share basis, will be able to have much better facilities and offer a much greater service than would be possible on the smaller or miniscule budget which an individual AVIC may be able to spare for their own implementation of such a project. The shared 🚐-van has numerous and significant benefits as it will allow for a much greater reach of potential visitors across the Northern Rivers Region, whilst the consistency and messaging of any Northern Rivers AVIC branding will also be able to gain greater coverage, as the van will be able to travel throughout key locations and be posted at specific events in all the Northern Rivers LGAs, rather than being just focused on one specific region's own attractions and activities.

Added to the above is the role of a **dedicated Promotion Officer** to service all TMG/Northern Rivers AVICs to develop these ideas and partnerships, which may also include a Product Development role.

## C. OPPORTUNITIES FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION

Building on the great work of the Tourism Management Group to date, there is an obvious need for a stronger and more coordinated approach to tourism across the Northern Rivers

Region. Significant opportunities exist for the TMG to participate in a much greater level of regional cooperation and resource-sharing across LGAs than is currently being carried out.

Regional cooperation will significantly reduce the cost of activities such as marketing, training and infrastructure, where the costs of these can be shared by all LGAs and the needs of further development in each of these activities is relevant across the entire region.

By sharing the costs of the above activities, opportunities can be opened up for inter-regional tourism experiences for visitors across LGA boundaries.

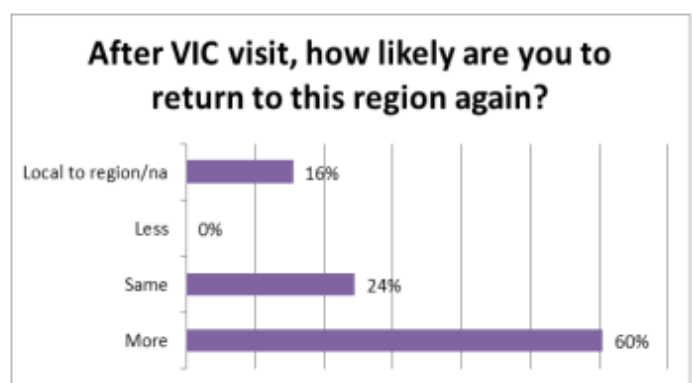
The branding of the Northern Rivers Region as the ultimate, complete tourist destination will be much easier and more cost effective for the Tourism Managers to develop and manage if resources, skills and ideas are increasingly shared in this way.

The Richmond Valley Economic Strategy 2009 - 2014 highlights the need for regional collaboration by emphasising that, ‘... the strength of a single economy depends on the economic strength of surrounding areas’. In this way, the stronger and more defined the Northern Rivers collective tourism brand is, the better each economy within the region will be, as visitors will be encouraged to stay longer and spend more in the entire region, as opposed to just one area, or elsewhere in New South Wales.

Our Pre and Post AVIC research indicates that tourism is already bringing an obvious present and potential economic benefit to the region as 54% (Figure 34) of those visitors to an AVIC in the Northern Rivers responded that, after visiting an AVIC, they would be participating in more activities in the region, while 60% (Figure 35) would be more likely to return to the region again after their AVIC experience.



**Figure 34 – Northern Rivers visitor data capture on activities**




**Figure 35 - Likely return visits**

There is significant potential for AVICs to further enhance these numbers, particularly with regard to the amount of time visitors spend in the region after visiting an AVIC. Survey results indicate that 11% of respondents said they would spend more time in the region after their



AVIC experience, while 74% said they would spend the same amount of time (for further detail, see Pre and Post Visit and Hot-Spot Survey Reports attached). It is important to note however that the respondents who said they would be spending the same amount of time in the region overwhelmingly stated that this was due to time constraints and pre-booked commitments, rather than a negative AVIC or holiday experience.

Despite the reality of time constraints for many visitors, the positive results of the first two graphs regarding activities and visitor return numbers emphasises that there is significant potential for AVICs to inspire visitors to, not only return to the region, but also influence them to stay longer and spend more money than their previous trip.

If there is collective and distinctive regional brand management around the accredited  brand, AVICs will be able to offer greater consistency in message delivery while also emphasising the unique qualities of their own LGA which help to make up just one part of the 'ultimate holiday destination' that is the Northern Rivers. In this way, each region will not lose its own distinctive brand, but rather use their individual brand to become part of the entire Northern Rivers story and experience.

"Successful regional tourism has no place for 'island or peninsula'-style thinking. Regions need to work together with adjoining regions to develop packages that combine complementary products and experiences for visitors. Itinerary-based information allows people to choose products that deliver the experience they are seeking." (Clare Valley and

***Recommendation 22:***

*All AVICs will need to conduct a thorough product audit (by category) of 'fully developed', 'under-developed' and 'needing development' tourism products.*

Inter-regional itineraries will allow AVICs to become a one-stop-shop for any visitor to the region where they can call into any AVIC in the Northern Rivers, have a personalised itinerary developed for them, there and then, and downloaded straight to their smart-phone, sent to their email address or printed within the AVIC. These itineraries will be based around the experiences the individual is seeking and can be programmed as inter-regional, with bookings made across LGA boundaries to make the visitor's experience as easy and enjoyable as possible.

***Recommendation 23:***

*The addition of a whole region Loyalty Rewards Program, similar to the Locals Rewards Campaign currently being used in Ballina, be adopted by all AVICs which will act as a call-to-action for visitors to continue to visit each AVIC as they work their way through the region.*

The primary focus for such campaigns is to engage with the visiting friends and relatives market via the community of each LGA area initially.

- The Loyalty Rewards Program is also aimed at all other visitors within an LGA but the first campaign with visiting friends and relatives, provides a wonderful opportunity for community-wide awareness which would also help in the overall delivery of the tourism experience in the Northern Rivers.

As part of the Bricks and Clicks Strategy, a Loyalty Rewards Program can be offered through all marketing mediums and form part of all marketing collateral offers.

***Recommendation 24:***

*To link Loyalty Rewards with itinerary development and special offers so that, once an education of the travelling and touring public gains some traction, visitors will be driven to the 'Bricks and Clicks' portals of the AVICs.*

From Aurora's research, creating usable itineraries and special offers via the internet for the Northern Rivers is just about impossible. If a visitor wants to travel overseas by using the services of a travel agent, complete itineraries and offers can be created for any overseas destination of their choosing.

The current consumer view of AVICs as merely 'information libraries' must be changed in order for the travelling and touring public to regard AVICs as the 'must-go-to' experience to enhance their holiday to the 'max'.

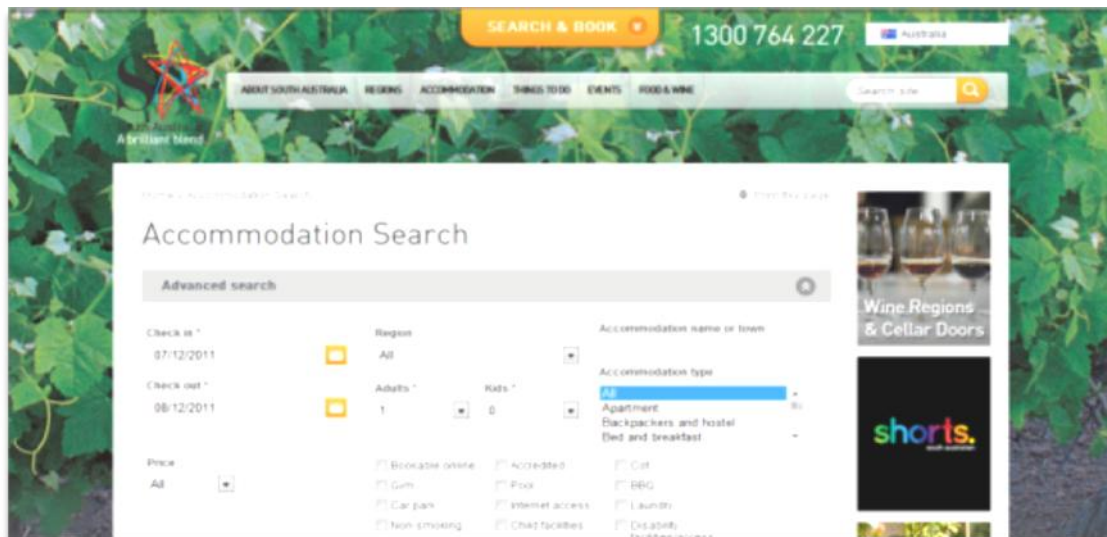
This proposed campaign will be a whole Northern Rivers Region strategy to ensure its branding is consistent and implementation costs are shared. It is proposed that each time a visitor enters a region, they will receive their new 📧 Welcome You Card for that region from the local AVIC in order to unlock and have access to the discounts or specials on offer in that particular LGA. In this way, if a visitor had their whole holiday itinerary made up in one region, they will still be encouraged to utilise the services on offer in the AVICs of the other regions.

***Recommendation 25:***

*The Tourism Management Group adopt a unified booking platform approach for accommodation and tours within the Northern Rivers Region.*

- It is proposed that this could be done either through the AVIC app-n-go App or via an i-visit concept website which would allow visitors to use just one website to make all their Northern Rivers holiday bookings instead of having to find each AVIC website for each LGA. A portal of each AVICs current booking system, allowing it to be aggregated to one site, could be set up so all commissions still flow directly to the individual AVIC that controls the inventory. The i-visit site could also allow for those AVICs, which do not currently have an online accommodation or tour booking service, to be able to have access to this facility.
- The proposed i-visit site could allow for greater consistency in style which again, will help reiterate the Northern Rivers Region branding. An i-visit website would make it much simpler for visitors to make their bookings when planning a holiday by being able to access all bookable product options for the entire region (or selected regions) from just one web-platform, much like the way Wotif and Last Minute operate.
- The i-visit website could be active for the whole of New South Wales and direct visitors to all New South Wales AVIC websites which would assist visitors in finding further information on each LGA in the State. Visitors would be able to search for accommodation and information by region or locality and the site would contain a call-to-action for visitors to get in touch with AVICs, both prior to, and during their trip in order to have their itineraries developed. This would also allow them to receive any specials or deals which may be on offer in that region.

An example of an excellent unified booking platform which is currently being used in South Australia is SA Connect (Figure 36). Visitors can search and book accommodation anywhere in South Australia through a single, easy-to-use website: <http://www.southaustralia.com/search/booking-search.aspx>. This site is an extension of the official South Australian Tourism website and a similar strategy could be adopted for the Northern Rivers Region.



**Figure 36 - South Australian booking website**

- The region would benefit immensely from having an increased level of group-buying, collaborative marketing, a cross-selling approach and packaging of products to appeal to specific markets.
- The Hot-Spot Surveys revealed that 18% of respondents stated that having 'special-interest' information would attract them to use an AVIC while on a trip (Figure 37). This number is significant as this question was open-ended. The fact that so many visitors identified this as being an attractive service at AVICs demonstrates that, had the respondents been given a list of answers to choose from with this option included, the number of visitors who selected this response is likely to have been even higher.

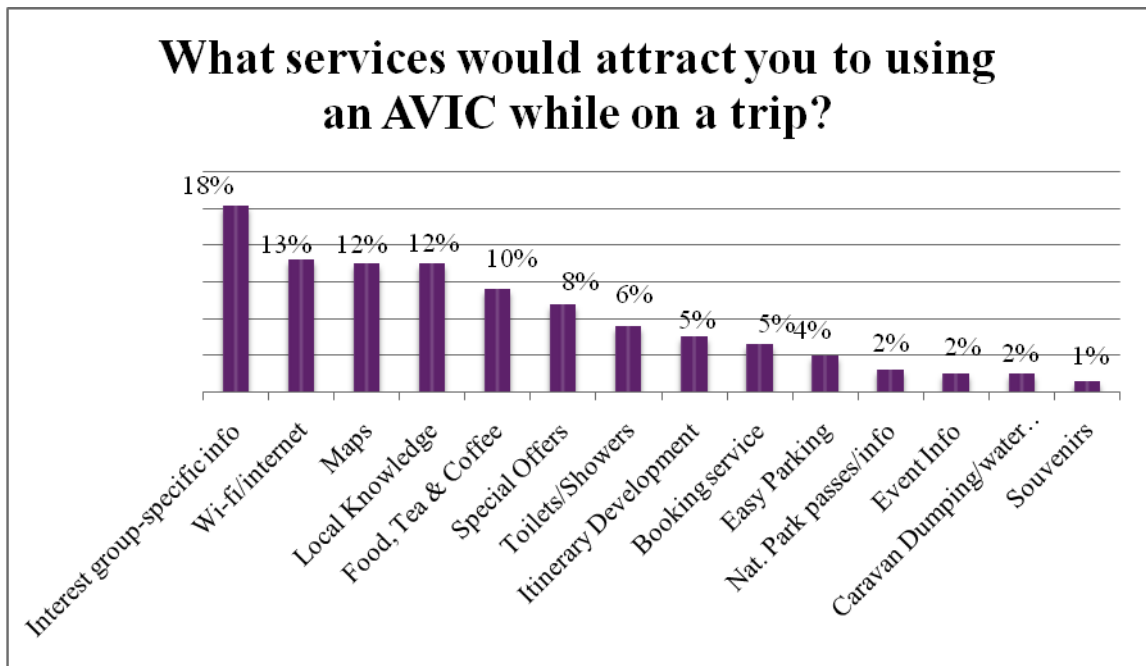


Figure 37 – Hot-Spot data

- Special-interest group information provides a unique opportunity for the Tourism Management Group to work together to develop collaborative marketing collateral and tourism experience opportunities via 4WD, bushwalking or cycling trails, scenic drives, bird watching and fishing hot-spots in the region; the best beaches for surfing or best river areas for white-water rafting , kayaking and canoeing, etc.

Information on these areas could be broken down and packaged into printed collateral to be shared among all the Northern Rivers AVICs, as well as being placed on the AVIC app-n-go App, [i](#)-visit and AVIC websites for download. Identifying the unique attractions of the region and the range of experiences on offer will also help with the inter-regional itinerary building strategy, as AVIC staff will be able to easily narrow down the visitor's likes and dislikes and preferred holiday experiences to create a fully transferable and functional, personalised holiday itinerary.

#### **Recommendation 26:**

*A full suite of tourism experiences based around individualised, unique and frequently requested, special-interest information packages be created.*

These should provide both cross-regional and local experiences to ensure that visitors with special interests make the most out of their stay in the Northern Rivers Region. The success of this plan will depend on cross-regional implementation.

- A joint Training Program would be beneficial for the continued success and relevance of AVICs in the future. The Secret Shopping Program revealed some obvious gaps in the level and consistency of AVIC staff training.
- This Training Program should incorporate training via webinars and online learning in order to improve training accessibility, reduce travel costs and encourage more frequent training sessions for staff members. It is recommended that a joint Training Program for the Northern Rivers Region be undertaken to address skill issues in relation to areas such as customer service, itinerary development and social media.

**Recommendation 27:**

*A joint Training Program will need to be conducted to explain and teach staff how to use the new digital media assets proposed for deployment across all AVICs including, but not limited to, the 📱-visit website and unified booking system, the AVIC App and the use of QR Codes for information and itinerary transfer.*

- Staff training recommendations will be further explained in the Professional Development section of this Report.

**📱-VAN COOPERATION**

Aurora worked with Wollongong to develop the use of the 'MyGong' mobile AVIC, which is aimed at reaching a greater number of visitors, in ways and locations that traditional bricks and mortar centres cannot offer. Information about the MyGong van (Figure 38), taken directly from the Tourism Wollongong website, can be found below:



Tourism Wollongong's Mobile Information Service MYGONG will provide visitors with an experience similar to one they would obtain when visiting an accredited fixed address Information Centre.



A full range of Information Services will be available from MYGONG including:

- ❑ Experience Visitor Information Staff – Face to face local knowledge and advice
- ❑ Computer based Internet access – Includes Wotif accommodation booking service
- ❑ A selection of local printed materials including - Wollongong Pocket Guides, Grand Pacific Drive, Tourism Passport and Wollongong Maps
- ❑ Assortment of Tourism Wollongong Partner materials
- ❑ Give-away Promotional Items – Grand Pacific Drive Caps, Drink Bottles etc




**Figure 38 - MyGong Van**

Analysis of the Wollongong MyGong experience shows that the MyGong mobile information delivery serviced 68,000 visitors in its first 12 months of operation. With establishment and running costs of \$120,000 per year, (which includes staff costs, lease payments on van, ipads, printer and collateral), it has been an extremely cost- effective channel to engage with visitors who may not have been serviced through the traditional AVIC. This strategy has not been about replacing the bricks and mortar, but engaging with a broader cross section of visitors who are, not only educated on the value of Accredited Visitor Information Centre servicing by this exposure, but are also influenced to stay longer and increase the financial returns to the region.

A strategy such as this could easily be adopted within the Northern Rivers, ensuring maximum branding and AVIC exposure, at shared cost to the Tourism Managers. Purchasing and setting up an -van will be much more affordable and effective when the cost is shared among all ly exposed

***Recommendation 28:***

*It is recommended that each LGA of the Northern Rivers pool their funding and resources to purchase and set up a shared -van which can provide visitor information across the whole region during events or peak holiday periods.*

**D. PRODUCTION OF MULTI-MEDIA COLLATERAL BOTH REGIONAL AND LOCAL**

DEFINITION: *Multi-media*

1. *the combined use of media such as television, digital, print, etc.*
2. *of or relating to the use of a combination of media*

- There is a significant opportunity for the production and utilisation of multi-media collateral at both a regional and local level. Statistics on printing numbers of print collateral have revealed a steady decline in the numbers of brochures and guides being printed at each AVIC over the last few years.
- AVICs can no longer rely on print medium to meet the information and experience expectations of the travelling and touring public. Instead, AVICs must adopt a multi-media approach to visitor information delivery by offering a suite of options to their customers in the form of traditional printed collateral, website, You-tube and social media services, smart-phone and tablet App products plus fully immersive Interactive Digital Publications (IDPs).

Technology has allowed for the development of much more cost-effective, engaging and distributable information product than previously available by traditional mediums. While undeniably still being relevant in tourism and visitor information delivery, the traditional brochure or regional tourism guide is not as appealing or useful as it was once considered.

The **AVIC Consumer Interface Network** allows 'printed collateral' to be printed instantaneously ('just-in-time'), while websites and digital publications will have the benefit of instant updates, a far greater reach, new income generating opportunities and the addition of booking services and itinerary development options which can all be reviewed and managed by the AVICs. When coupled with these traditional mediums, AVICs have the capacity to engage with a much wider range of visitors by offering an information-delivery broadcast zone reachable by anyone and everyone and allowing information to be downloaded in real-time from any Northern Rivers AVIC.

Local multi-media collateral must emphasise the unique offerings and experiences of the LGA, whilst also making an obvious connection to the wider Northern Rivers Region brand. Currently most of the official visitor guides for the region contain the contact details and addresses of each of the other AVICs in the Northern Rivers, which is an effective way of creating a sense of collaboration and connectivity between AVICs.

As mentioned previously in this Report, special interest information is another way in which LGAs can both differentiate themselves from one another and also offer inter-regional experiences by advertising those assets and activities which are unique to certain regions, e.g. historical walks or markets, as well as those activities which can be carried out across LGA boundaries, such as scenic drives or perhaps river-based activities.

***Recommendation 29:***

*Each AVIC utilise the many multi-media options available in order to deliver effective, interactive, immersive and accurate local visitor information.*

The Tweed region currently uses YouTube to publicise a series of 'TV-like' series of commercials advertising The Tweed. Brunswick Heads also has a clip on YouTube which has since been shown on Prime Television as a TV commercial, created by the Brunswick Heads community. YouTube is an extremely cheap and effective way in which other local areas could 'show off their assets' in a video medium to a far-reaching potential audience and, like Brunswick Heads, may be an opportunity for AVICs to get their local community involved. These videos could also be embedded in the AVICs websites to provide people with a visual experience of the region prior to their visit.

Whole-region adopted strategies such as 'bricks and clicks' allow for consistent Northern Rivers AVIC messaging and branding, whilst also allowing AVICs to tailor their information, unique tourism experiences and products to suit their own LGA.

***Recommendation 30:***

*Each LGA should continue to have their own unique visitor guide (whilst new digital assets are developed) which can be downloaded from the AVIC website or retrieved from the physical AVIC (until the demand subsides for hard copy information).*

The printed version will continue to decline over time, but research is still showing a demand at present and, as the uptake of intuitive mobile technology increases and people are educated to the benefits, it is predicted that the decline of visitor guides will be much quicker.

***Recommendation 31:***

*AVICs should also continue to stock the official tour guide of the other LGAs in the Northern Rivers Region which encourages inter-regional visitation.*

Over time, an IDP should be made available for the Northern Rivers which will provide a much richer and more fully-immersive experience than the traditional visitor guide will allow.

***Recommendation 32:***


*Like the local region visitor guides, a whole region IDP should also be developed which contains some of the video highlights, as well as an interactive list of inter-regional attractions and activities visitors might like to participate in, such as the scenic drives already created*

The IDP will also contain high-definition videos and images to bring-to-life chosen highlights of the region. Attractions, activities and events will also be listed within the IDP, making it easy for users to select and plan their time in the local area. The content within the IDP can also be tailored to a 'loop' format to be used for display on digital screens within each AVIC, as well as kiosks, information boards or any other type of call-to-action medium, giving a consistent look and feel to each area's tourism product. An IDP of the Clarence Valley is currently being developed and included in this Report are screen shots of this product.

***Recommendation 33:***

*The app-n-go AVIC App should also be implemented by each AVIC in the Northern Rivers Region.*

This strategy will form a whole Northern Rivers multi-media approach. However, the content and information found within each AVICs App will be tailored to their individual LGA. The advantage of this App is that the interface will remain the same for each AVIC to ensure that the Northern Rivers brand and the App layout remains consistent and user-friendly (geo-mapping). However, the AVICs can manage and update the information held within the App via a content management system (CMS).

Like the IDP, the App will also contain information regarding activities, events and attractions in the local area. Users will receive discounts and offers and will be able to share their Northern Rivers experiences via an e-passport, an included function of app-n-go or  Welcome Card functionality. A booking engine can also be included in the future which will allow users to book their accommodation while 'on the move'.

Having a consistent brand and multi-media approach, which is accessible and user-friendly, is imperative to improving the visitor experience in the Northern Rivers Region. Regional collateral should utilise those methods of information delivery which may be too expensive for LGAs to produce or participate in when operating from their own budgets, e.g. TV commercials. By sharing the costs of production for this type of collateral, a higher-quality marketing product can be created and shown in the households of potential visitors all over New South Wales (or Australia). The Legendary Pacific Coast television commercials currently

being shown on TV are a good example of what can be achieved when resources, funds and ideas are pooled together.



## E. ACHIEVE CONSISTENT BRANDING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Consistency in the branding and ‘look and feel’ of all Northern Rivers AVICs and their communication, collateral, signage and infrastructure is key to the success of this Project.

The  logo is a nationally recognised and respected brand which represents the provision of good quality, reliable and accurate tourist information resources and visitor information delivery services. It is an integral part of the accreditation process that all Accredited Visitor Information Centres in New South Wales display the  logo clearly on all websites, communication material and marketing collateral, infrastructure, social media pages, information boards and kiosks in order to promote the high quality and reliability of the service and products found within the AVIC.


In addition to displaying this logo is the need for all Northern Rivers AVICs to have consistency and visibility of the Northern Rivers brand on all collateral, communication, infrastructure, websites and other digital platforms which are relevant across the whole of the Northern Rivers Region, as well as any locally-specific information and services provided in AVICs. This will ensure that visitors are constantly reminded they are still experiencing the Northern Rivers Region, despite perhaps being in a different Northern Rivers LGA.


### **Recommendation 34:**



*The Northern Rivers Region, and all of its LGAs, market themselves using a catch-phrase identifier – ‘... will inspire you in the Northern Rivers’ should be used for locality-specific information, individual AVIC websites, local marketing collateral and any communication and information kiosks, -bollards and information boards found within a specific LGA.*

Local branding is also important to ensure that each area of the Northern Rivers Region does not lose its individual identity and integrity as tourist destinations in their own right.


### **Recommendation 35:**


*Each level of branding ( logo, Northern Rivers and local) should also be clearly visible on any digital platforms used for local visitor information e.g. the AVIC App and Interactive Digital Publications (IDPs).*









Again, it is very important that both the  logo and the Northern Rivers brand always be clearly visible on these local-level products and services in order to convey a consistent whole-region message to the visitor, whilst the presence of any local branding will help the visitor identify that particular LGA as a unique and important part of their Northern Rivers experience.

As the website analysis has revealed (see attached analysis), many of the Northern Rivers AVIC websites inadequately or completely fail to display the  logo. Likewise, there are a number of marketing collateral products such as visitor guides, produced by Northern Rivers AVICs, which also fail to display the  logo in a highly visible or clear location.





**Recommendation 36:**


*The  logo should be prominently displayed on the front or back cover of any AVIC-printed collateral and act as a call-to-action to drive visitors to the nearest AVIC in order to gain greater insights and information about the region.*

Most of the official visitor guides of the region do display this logo prominently. Currently, the collateral which is lacking or absent of the  logo includes, but is not limited to:

- Evans Head and Surrounds 2011: no  logo displayed despite L.J. Hooker (Level 3 AVIC) advertisement being present
- AVIC-created Richmond Valley Village Information Sheets - no  logos visible, map on each Information Sheet contains Roman-style  logos
- Lismore/Nimbin 'More Than You Can Imagine' AVIC postcard-style information card - no  logo
- Lismore/Nimbin paper information brochures e.g. Rotary Park rainforest walk; Lismore, Bexhill, Clunes and Eltham Tourist Drive; market guide; vintage, retro and antique trail, etc. - no  logos present
- Clarence Valley Official Visitor Guide -  logo visible within Guide but not on back or front covers
- Clarence Valley Invention of Hang Gliding brochure - no  logo
- Clarence Valley Holidaying with Pets Guide - no  logo



- Street Trees of Grafton booklet -  logo only visible on internal map
- Byron & Beyond the 2011 Visitor Guide: AVIC advertisements inside - no  logo visible on back or front covers
- Brunswick Heads brochures – Accommodation Guide – ‘101 things To Do in Brunswick Heads and Simple Pleasures of Brunswick Heads’ - no  logos
- Tweed 2011 Visitor Guide -  logos visible inside but not on back or front covers

This  logo, as previously mentioned, is a nationally recognised brand for quality and reliable visitor information services and therefore it is vital that this logo be prominently displayed on any AVIC website or marketing product.

There are still a number of Roman-style white i logos being used in the Northern Rivers for, not only directional signage, but also being displayed on Accredited Visitor Centres.

This diminishes the AVIC branding and is confusing for visitors as, although the Roman-style white i may be recognised as a source of tourist information, it is not recognised as a place of accredited, reliable and trustworthy visitor information resources and service delivery.

Some examples of these Roman-style white i's were found on Woodburn AVIC (see Figure 39) and on the signage around the Maclean AVIC vicinity (see Figure 40) and should be removed from these Centres in order to ensure that a consistent branding style and message is being conveyed to visitors.


Likewise, the use of the  logos on both directional signage and buildings which are no longer accredited also need to be removed so that visitors are not being directed to non-existent or non-accredited Centres.



Figure 39 - Woodburn white i sign



Figure 40 - Maclean (Ferry Park) grounds


An example of a directional sign showing the  logo appears in Figure 41. This sign was located in Pottsville in The Tweed region and directs visitors to a community centre facility which is no longer an AVIC. It is extremely important



Figure 41 - Pottsville cluttered signage (no AVIC there)

for



**Figure 42 - Lismore roundabout signage**

the consistency and branding of the Northern Rivers region and its AVICs that incorrectly placed signage, including both AVIC and Roman-style white i logos, be removed or amended as soon as possible.

Field work in the Northern Rivers has also revealed a lack of  logos present on locality and regional 'welcome' signage, as well as directional signs to the AVICs.

Lismore region has some very effective signage with regard to providing a number of calls-to-action around the region.

An example of this is on their 'Welcome to Lismore' signage around the town (Figure 42), the AVIC info flags around the town (Figure 43), as well as the AVIC sign on the rubbish bin outside the Nimbin AVIC (Figure 44).


Ballina also uses AVIC info flags effectively to remind visitors to call into the AVIC for all their holiday needs. Similar strategies to these should be adopted across the whole Northern Rivers to remind visitors constantly that, if they visit any Northern Rivers AVIC, they will have access to special offers, loyalty rewards, reliable visitor information, itinerary development service and consequently, an enhanced holiday experience.



**Figure 44 - Nimbin street furniture**

**Figure 43 - Lismore CBD signage**

**Recommendation 37:**

*Points of Interest -bollards, information kiosks and touch-screens, if used, should always include consistent AVIC, regional and local branding and QR Codes to direct visitors to further information.*

Consistent signage, interpretive panels and branding messages, etc. will encourage visitors to scan the QR Code to see (and hear) for themselves why the Northern Rivers is the ultimate holiday destination.


There are a number of ‘Welcome to...’ regional signs which also need to be re-branded or altered in order to more accurately and consistently capture the unique ‘themes’ and ‘experiences’ of their LGA as they relate to the Northern Rivers brand.




**Figure 26 - Welcome signage in Grafton and Northern Rivers**

These signs are often out dated and/or fail to give any insight into the region or what it can offer its visitors. Examples of some of these signs can be seen around the Northern Rivers region. ‘Welcome to ...’ regional signs should contain images and text that accurately reflect the stories of the region and the Northern Rivers brand. This will help orientate the visitor and give them some insight into the types of experiences and stories they will be able to have and create as a guest in that LGA, and in the wider Northern Rivers Region.

**Recommendation 38:**

*To also aid visitor orientation, all ‘Welcome to Region/ Gateway /in-area’ signage should prominently display the  logo, telephone number and/or address of that LGAs AVIC(s), as shown in the Lismore signage (Figure 43).*



As discussed in Section 1D, Orange in New South Wales, has some very effective ‘Welcome to....’ signage which really epitomises the ‘Orange experience’ through a series of beautiful images placed on a sign to tell visitors the region’s unique story (see Figure 45). This sign also delivers a clear call-to-action through the prominent display of the  logo and the Orange AVIC telephone number. The sign is also completely interchangeable during events and lit up at night via solar lighting.

The Welcome to Orange signage creates a more dynamic welcome to the city and gives the visitor so much more to look forward to. It orientates the visitor so that they are immediately engaged.



Figure 45 - Orange Welcome signs

### 3. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

As part of visitor centre accreditation, all AVIC Supervisors / Managers and Tourism Managers are expected to undertake assessment and/or training within 3 years of Accreditation being granted. Where changes of personnel occur, the 3 year period will be effective from the date of commencement of employment. Evidence of progressive action will be required through annual reporting.

Within each AVIC, 60% of Information Officers and Information Assistants are expected to undertake assessment and/or training within 3 years of accreditation being granted. Evidence of progressive action will be required through annual reporting.

#### **This approach:**

- provides a framework for excellence within which all AVICs can seek to upgrade management and staff skills over time
- takes into account the difficulties in accessing training especially for those in geographically isolated areas
- allows those who already possess the skills to gather supporting evidence
- allows for situations where new personnel are employed who need time to upgrade or acquire new skills, e.g. a new Tourism Manager may have extensive general management experience but need to acquire tourism specific skills
- allows time for the assessment process to take place

#### **ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The second component of the AVIC Professional Development Program relates to the need for involvement in ongoing professional development activities.

Participation in a program for a minimum of 30 hours professional development activity per year is required for all Tourism Managers and Information Centre Supervisors / Managers.

Note that activities undertaken to meet the skills requirements component of the Professional Development Program will also qualify under ongoing professional development.

Professional Development Activities may include:

- face to face education / training in tourism and related disciplines
- distance education / training in tourism and related disciplines
- participation in industry committees and associations
- attendance at conferences related to tourism
- presentations at industry or related forums
- acting as a mentor to less experienced industry colleagues

Each AVIC is required to complete an Annual Report detailing professional development activities undertaken by staff as part of their Accreditation renewal process.

## A DEVELOP STAFF TRAINING

All Tourism Management Group AVICs are staffed using different models of both paid and volunteers. Research indicates that the travelling and touring public make no distinction between paid or volunteer staff within AVICs. Their expectation is that their needs will be met by professional staff offering reliable and trustworthy information, free assistance with travel and accommodation enquiries with a consistent level of customer service. The public is not aware of different funding models, the mix of volunteers and paid staff, the variability in operation models or the amount of work that has gone on behind the scenes preparing with reporting, planning and documenting all the information that sits within the AVIC Network and online. Visitors today have high expectations of AVIC services, facilities and information delivery.

The Pre and Post Visit and Hot-Spot Surveys looked at the factors which influenced satisfaction of service quality and the type of service encounters expected by visitors.

This research has categorised the **five essential elements** for visitor satisfaction.

1. **Inspiration**
2. **Professionalism**
3. **Personality**
4. **Passion**
5. **Consistency**

All Accredited Visitor Information Centres continually share and service the same consumers.

The Tourism Management Group AVICs presently share many of the same consumers and, with the implementation of the Regional Visitor Services Strategy; there will be an opportunity to increase the sharing of consumers across all LGAs. In doing so, it is paramount to understand in visitor servicing that **your service will be forever judged by your customer's last great experience.**

Therefore there is a shared responsibility to be assumed by the Tourism Management Group that the delivery of all services fits within the five elements of visitor satisfaction. One of the most telling outcomes of the Secret Shopping Program conducted within AVICs is the consistency of the inconsistency of service.

The Secret Shopping was conducted during the week, on weekends, in the morning, at lunch time and at the end of the day, to try and establish the measure of the service delivery. Those who conducted the Secret Shopping encountered many different staff and many different experiences.



**Recommendation 39:**

*A Professional Development Strategy be implemented to focus on inspirational visitor servicing, providing the TMG with the highest level of consumer satisfaction, a significant point of difference in the crowded tourism space, and a continuing and growing economic contribution to both local and regional economies.*

This will be achieved by the re-alignment of visitor information services as outlined throughout this Report.

The TMG RVSS can only be implemented by harnessing the best of systems, technology and people. The TMG needs to aspire to deliver these three elements to provide inspirational visitor servicing to the travelling and touring public

The best of systems can be developed and the best of technology can be bought but people need to be trained, encouraged and empowered to deliver inspirational visitor servicing. Identifying your staff/volunteer skills and any training gaps is the first step in developing inspirational visitor servicing.

An example of Aurora's **Skills Matrix** is shown below which can be used as a starting point.

**When developing your skills matrix you will need to do the following:****1. Clearly identify the job responsibilities of your staff and volunteers. What is it exactly that they do?**

In this first important step, refer to their job description and define roles and responsibilities. Remember to include required codes of practice and relevant quality standards that are a requirement of what they do and most importantly, performance standards or key performance indicators (KPIs). If you can't measure it, you can't manage it!

Include any pre-requisites for each role and if the employees do not match these, this will be your first training requirement!

Also include any required licensing or qualifications (preferred or otherwise) for each role.

From the job descriptions you can now list the skills (training) requirement now and ongoing. You will use the employee skills matrix to do this.

The skills matrix clearly shows the skills held by individuals and any gaps that need to be filled.

You are building a process of continual quality improvement and, over time, a possible competitive advantage that will improve service delivery for your AVIC and your customers! This will assist in your staff thinking how each person's role dovetails into the bigger picture of

the AVICs goals and objectives. These 'cascading goals' for the overall business are achieved across the various units/teams/locations of the business.

**2. Write down all the tasks required to operate your AVIC, e.g. counter sales, brochure management, Customer Service, administration, keyboarding, computer operation, (email, web, scanning, etc.) telephone technique, merchandising, sales reconciliation, cash register/point-of-sale operation, etc.**

The matrix uses an easy-to-understand visual coding system to see who has the skills required and who requires training. The skills matrix may also identify those staff and/or volunteers who are capable of training others. (This is very important). The skills matrix should be reviewed on a regular basis and updated as required to maintain a comprehensive picture of the skills required to perform the key functions within your AVIC operation.

**3. List your staff and/or volunteers**

Determine who has what skills at present and determine your Ideal Capacity Level against each skill.

One by one observe the skills of your staff and/or volunteers and tick the box which relates to each skill they currently demonstrate. This will clearly show who has what skills and where the gaps are.

Example of setting up your Skills Matrix

Supervisors Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Reviewed: \_\_\_\_\_

**Procedure**

- 1 List Task Headings
- 2 List staff/volunteers
- 3 Decide Ideal Capacity
- 4 Tick Capabilities
- 5 Decide on who to train, on which tasks, when, etc.

**Task Headings**

Personnel	Counter Sales	Customer Service	Merchandising/ Display	Accomm Bookings	Telephone	Brochure Management	Customer Enquiries response (email, web, etc.)	Admin	Statistics	Marketing, Events, etc.	Remarks
<b>Ideal Capacity</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	
Helen	✓							✓	✓		
George			✓	✓						✓	
Marie	✓					✓			✓		
Joe					✓		✓				
John		✓	✓			✓					
Sally		✓			✓	✓	✓			✓	

***Recommendation 40:***

*To successfully implement the Regional Visitor Services Strategy and the inspirational visitor servicing it's important that the TMG and all the staff and volunteers across all the LGAs are 'on the same page at the same time'. A schedule of Management and Staff Training cooperative workshops could be delivered after the adoption of the Regional Visitor Services Strategy by the TMG.*

The training would be carried out over a three to six month period and refresher courses provided twice annually. In the future, all new staff who have not undertaken the Schedule, would be directed to online and webinar training so they could quickly integrate with their work peers in relation to *inspirational visitor servicing*. *Inspirational visitor servicing* also provides the ability for the Tourism Management Group to benchmark staff and/or volunteer performance by Secret Shopping, Pre and Post Visit Surveys, (customer satisfaction), direct sales and itinerary development.

The staff and volunteer training will be conducted in three phases –

Phase 1 - Personal Effectiveness (optional for volunteers)

Phase 2 - AVIC Specific Volunteer Training (including Ambassador Training Program)

Phase 3 - Inspirational Visitor Servicing for both staff and volunteers

This approach will allow Tourism Managers to identify training and skill gaps amongst their staff and volunteers and to put in place an all-of-region Training Mentor Program where a staff member with excellent ***inspirational visitor servicing*** skills can continue to monitor and develop staff and volunteers.

## A. TOURISM MANAGERS MANAGEMENT ESSENTIALS PROGRAM

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### Day 1: Motivation and Influence

- Dealing with diversity
- Giving effective verbal recognition
- Making the link between effort and valued rewards
- The 6 principles of influence
- Using the 5 types of influence currency

### Day 2: Managing Teams

- Using a RACI (responsible, accountable, consulted, informed) chart
- How and what to delegate effectively
- Delegation of responsibility, accountability and authority
- Team and individual performance goals
- Running effective meetings
- 5 conflict resolution styles

### Day 3: Managing Performance

- Performance appraisals and reviews
- Measuring subjective objectives
- Outcomes, measures and indicators
- Listening and asking good questions
- How to use a coaching model
- Giving and receiving feedback

### Day 4: Leading Teams

- 5 stages of team development
- Creating a culture of teamwork
- How to empower a team
- Understanding the 6 leadership styles
- Lifting workgroup climate

### Day 5: ***Inspirational Visitor Servicing*** Management

- Resource-sharing
- Training
- Engagement
- Fulfilment
- Experience
- Promotion
- Marketing
- Analysis

## B. AVIC PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS PROGRAM

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### Day 1: Excellent Customer Service

- Customer satisfaction versus customer loyalty
- Attitudes and skills for good customer service
- Capturing sales and the next sale
- Communication skills for customers
- Dealing with difficult customers

### Day 2: Time and Stress Management

- Prioritising – 4 principles
- How to schedule your time
- Time saving techniques
- Recognising stress symptoms and patterns
- Building your stress resistance
- Stress relief techniques

### Day 3: Effective Communication

- How to overcome communication barriers
- Active listening and asking effective questions
- How to build and repair trust
- Communicating to the 4 personality types
- Understanding non-verbal communication
- Understanding emotional reactions

### Day 4: Personal Productivity

- Understanding your work objectives
- Understanding your work strengths
- Understanding your organisation's values and culture
- Setting SMART career goals
- Effective development plans

### Day 5: ***Inspirational Visitor Servicing***

- Local and regional up-selling skills training (including visitor orientation)
- Adapting to new technology
- Consumer knowledge building
- Itinerary development
- Retail strategy and development (including point-of-sale)
- AVIC Best Practice Management (both front-of-house and back-of-house)

### Day 6: ***Inspirational Visitor Servicing***

- Social Media and Marketing
- High level visitor customer servicing  
(How to manage special-interest groups)
- Leadership and community engagement
- Local and regional asset and product development
- Understanding consumer research (how are you judged?)
- Developing a culture of continuous improvement (*inspirational visitor servicing*)



## B. LOCAL AND REGIONAL FAMILIARISATION PROGRAM

Whilst undertaking the Regional Visitor Services Strategy many staff and volunteers were interviewed over the course of AVIC primary research. One of the questions posed was with regard to local and regional Familiarisation (famil) Programs and what the participants took away from the famils. All enjoyed them, but in answer to the question, "... what did they take away from them?" The standard response was "... a great cup of coffee!" For a famil program to really work for the benefit of visitors, you need to take much more than 'a cup of coffee' away from the famil experience.

Aurora has developed, for a number of AVICs, a Famil Program which is based on '**consumer knowledge building**'.

### **Recommendation 41:**

*That the Famil Program takes on a consumer knowledge building process where participants start to focus on what the visitor experience could be and how they can translate what they have seen, on the famil, into an up-selling proposition to the travelling and touring public.*

Taking this **consumer knowledge building** approach assists greatly in itinerary development /management and delivery to special-interest groups' needs.

### 1. CONSUMER KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

**Consumer knowledge building** is more than just saying that a place is nice. Moreover, it is about the whole value proposition a consumer will derive from the experience and how, as **inspirational visitor servicing** professionals, the AVIC staff and/or volunteers can articulate and inspire engagement with that product.

## 2. FAMILIARISATION PROGRAM

### *Recommendation 42:*

*That the following Familiarisation Program be adopted:*

1. Categorise all products by each region
2. Develop accumulated categories across whole-of-region
3. Develop commonality pathways (based on different metrics, i.e. price, quality, distance, etc.)
4. Develop a famil quantified index (based on identified consumer metrics)
5. All famil participants conduct an individual famil quantified index
6. At the completion of the famil, a Summary Famil Workshop is conducted where participants present their famil quantified index, their consumer value proposition and their up-selling strategy.

## 3. INSPIRATIONAL VISITOR SERVICING

The AVIC staff and/or volunteers who have attended the Famil Workshops Aurora has run in the past have, not only had lots of fun, but also came away with some very useful insights that could provide a significant knock-on effect for ***inspirational visitor servicing***.

At the end of these Workshops, a 'Celebrity Heads' competition is held where a point of interest, a site, or some significant tourism spot, is written out on a sticky note, placed on the head of a participant and that participant has to guess what they are, while asking the other participants questions.

It is understood that Famil Programs are presently run throughout the Tourism Management Group but this Famil Strategy works hand-in-hand with the ***Inspirational Visitor Servicing Strategy***. It is important that the famils be seen as part of Professional Development for all staff and volunteers and that recognition and some type of reward be built into the Famil Program.

One simple reward adapted by other AVICs was the 'Chocolate Frog' Award for the famil participant who had prevailed with the best value proposition and up-selling strategy.

It would be beneficial that famils are organised by a staff member or volunteer on a rotational basis, within an AVIC, to ensure that a staff member or volunteer be responsible in developing a **consumer knowledge building** process right at the coal face. This process could then be

overseen by an AVIC Manager on a rotational basis so the best family outcomes are generated and would represent a Familiarisation Program across the entire region.

Past experience shows that the initial families that were run using this strategy were quite daunting to participants but, once they understood the process and enjoyed it, significant **consumer knowledge building** outcomes eventuated.

To get the best out of families, consistency of approach is critical. It's just not a day out of the office!

## C. DEVELOP REGIONAL POLICY FOR THE RECRUITMENT, RETAINMENT AND TRAINING OF VOLUNTEERS

We applaud the many volunteers across New South Wales who provide great assistance in delivering visitor servicing at Accredited Visitor Information Centres. Many AVICs would not be able to operate without the assistance of their volunteers. Volunteers will need to undertake new and more distinct training and skill development in electronic visitor servicing. In the development of a regional policy for recruitment, retainment and training of volunteers, a standard should be established which clearly articulates the requirements and skill level required for visitor servicing that has been identified throughout this Report. Also a **Volunteer Inspire Accreditation Program** could be established whereby volunteers are participants through a region-wide structured process so that volunteers, across the region, can be engaged and their contribution, skill sets and visitor information delivery can be reflected throughout the entire region.

### 1. THE VOLUNTEER /INSPIRE ACCREDITATION PROGRAM

The **Volunteer Inspire Accreditation Program** would consist of the following elements for the Northern Rivers:

A volunteer call-to-action - Expression of Interest for volunteers (advertising for volunteers) in Northern Rivers visitor servicing (this would also include Volunteer Ambassador Program) would be uniform across the Northern Rivers.

This document would be uni-laterally used across the Northern Rivers for those AVICs required to engage volunteers to assist in visitor servicing.

It would clearly set out the requirements that volunteers would need to bring to the **Volunteer Inspire Accreditation Program** and that, apart from the volunteers having passion and enthusiasm, they will be provided with the training and skill development to be able to 'inspire'

visitors to the region and service those visitor needs at the highest professional level possible. This mirrors the professional development being undertaken with the paid professional staff within the Northern Rivers AVIC Network.

All volunteers, as part of the volunteer training, would need to be included in the Famil Program as recommended in this Report. This again would be one of the cornerstones of their product knowledge development.

All volunteers would undertake a structured training program to develop the required skills to assist in the AVIC operations. The volunteers would receive a Certificate of Attainment once the training has been completed. There would also be **Volunteer Refresher Courses** conducted to continually keep volunteer skills current.

There would be a **Volunteer Mentor Program** developed where senior and experienced volunteers (and Management) could assist new volunteers to provide both knowledge and insight as to the requirements of volunteers assisting in visitor servicing. Part of this Mentor Program would be to identify, very early, those volunteers who would not fit the modern AVIC visitor servicing model. Often volunteers have been engaged with very little training and, as a consequence, bad visitor servicing habits can be developed. The right volunteers need to be retained so that the visitor experience is as uniform across the Northern Rivers as possible.

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## 2. VOLUNTEER REWARDS PROGRAM

Volunteer Rewards Program – A successful volunteer program is created when volunteers are both recognised (and retained) and provided with some reward for their contribution. This can take different forms but it is usually never of a monetary fashion but more of a peer and community acknowledgement or, as one volunteer program that Aurora has set up, the volunteers were given ‘The Chocolate Frog Award’ every month for their contribution to tourism within the AVIC. It must always be recognised that volunteers are giving of their time freely and it is therefore incumbent on Management to make the volunteers’ experience a fun one and their efforts recognised but, there must be much more structure in the new visitor servicing paradigm.

## D. DEVELOP REGIONAL POLICY FOR THE RECRUITMENT, RETAINMENT AND TRAINING OF PAID STAFF

Aurora has developed, in consultation with the other accreditation bodies in Australia, a policy for the recruitment, retainment and training of volunteers and paid staff. This is located in the

annexures of this Report. Aurora has also developed a Volunteer Induction Management and Training Guide which is annexed in this report.

Discussions were held with Lismore AVIC management with regard to their Internship Program which has been working very successfully within their AVIC service delivery. A partnership with Southern Cross University that provides a scholarship for selected final year intern tourism students could be expanded across the other Northern Rivers AVICs, as well as developing pathways with TAFE providers across the Northern Rivers.

This will allow for the continual development of tourism professionals who can, in the future, possibly make a contribution to the Northern Rivers or national tourism sectors. Also there is an opportunity to develop coordinated, integrated traineeship programs across the AVICs of the Northern Rivers, which could provide both training and alleviate staffing issues, both on the weekdays and weekends, in some Centres.

***Recommendation 43:***

*That a detailed examination be undertaken on different visitor servicing models for weekends and public holidays.*

From research and discussion with some AVIC Managers, it is believed that a new operating model is possible. An independent visitor labour hire company could provide visitor servicing on a contract basis to AVICs on an agreed fixed cost basis. This would allow for AVICs to have greater flexibility for manning and budgetary levels within the Centres. This proposal would obviously have to work hand-in-hand with the contracted staff being appropriately trained in operating systems and, particularly, the delivery of *inspirational visitor servicing*. New AVIC solutions could be provided by having a mixed model of internship, trainees and weekend-specific labour hire staff.

1. **STAFF SKILL AUDIT APPRAISAL**

***Recommendation 44:***

*It is recommended that a **Staff Skill Audit Appraisal** be set up by the TMG to clearly identify the present skill sets across all the LGAs to identify any gaps that may exist within the skill base.*

The Audit will also fulfil another function by clearly analysing present staff delivery, knowledge and methodologies, so that a Professional Staff Manifesto can be developed, shared by all Northern Rivers AVICs which would clearly articulate what is required for professional visitor servicing for the Northern Rivers Region.

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## 2. PROFESSIONAL STAFF MANIFESTO

The **Professional Staff Manifesto** could be used as the underlying tool for staff recruitment whereby the position descriptions and identification of skill sets required for any job can be clearly articulated. This, once again, will provide professional development uniformity across the Northern Rivers. Whether it be for trainees or senior staff, a well-defined recruitment process should be developed in agreement with the Tourism Managers, implemented by the Tourism Managers and coordinated by the TMG to effectively look for continual improvement within the paid professional staff of the AVICs.

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## 3. REGIONAL PROFICIENCY

***Recommendation 45:***

*That staff be inter-regionally trained so that they gather a greater regional product understanding.*

This will also give them the opportunity to work with other tourism professionals to, not only further develop their skills, but also develop a Northern Rivers visitor servicing team mentality. Again, this strategy will assist in much more uniformity of service delivery and provide for a greatly expanded knowledge base across the Northern Rivers. All recruitment for any identified positions within the Northern Rivers should initially be advertised internally, before going out to an open 'positions vacant'. Again, this will provide for the spreading of skills and creation of career pathways which can be valued by professional AVIC staff.



#### 4. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT POINT SYSTEM

As with the Volunteer Program, a structured Reward Recognition Program of professional (and Management) staff contribution needs to be recognised and a **Professional Development Point System** be created which would identify skill levels within the visitor servicing arena. Once a staff member has undertaken structured training, the successful attainment and knowledge of those skill sets should be recognised.

***Recommendation 46:***

*We recommend setting up a Northern Rivers Professional Development Visitor Servicing Program whereby staff members would be expected to take on a level of training and skill development in line with their respective job descriptions and duties.*

As with the Volunteer Program, refresher courses should be undertaken regularly to keep all skills current and up-to-date. As part of the Inspire Program already recommended in this Report, this can be, not only for the service delivery platform, but with Secret Shopping and staff appraisals, used as a tool to benchmark performance and assist with continual improvement of visitor servicing across the Northern Rivers.

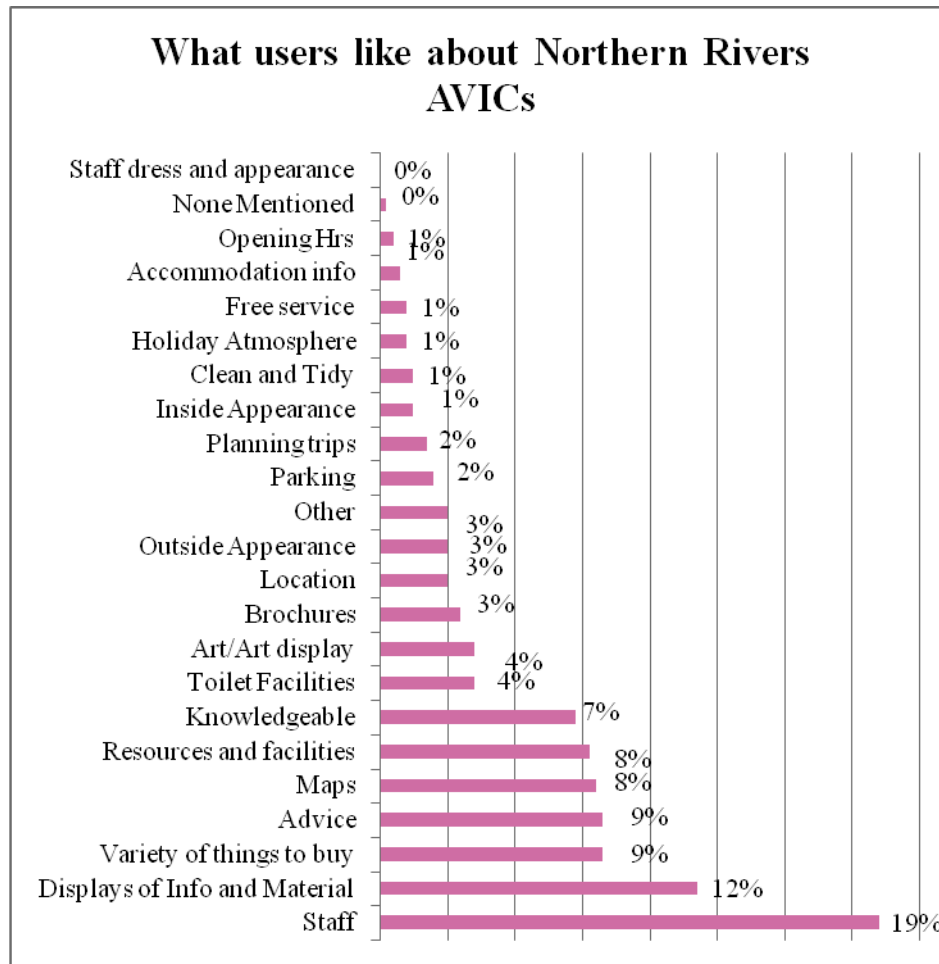
## 4. REVENUE GENERATION OPPORTUNITIES

### A. RETAIL OPPORTUNITIES

Merchandising is used as an income-generating activity in all Northern Rivers AVICs and more often than not visitors, in return, expect souvenirs and local goods to be sold at AVICs. The merchandising strategy that is best applied to all retail zones regardless of size or financial investment, is one that is designed to create and maintain the presence of a retail concept and able to glean inspiration from the surrounding environment - the distinct, unique appeal that is synonymous with the Northern Rivers Region. AVICs need to define the selection of merchandise to complement the Northern Rivers Region. Products that value-add to the experience of the local area could include:

- Postcards, books, posters
- Craft products made by local artisans
- Food, confectionary, tea, condiments produced in the local area
- Focus on displays that will enhance the product and reflect the region/area
- Encourage local artists to display their work in the retail space
- Set up a local arts and craft register along with other local attractions and points of interest

The Pre and Post AVIC Visit Surveys revealed that 9% of respondents noted the 'variety and selection of things to buy' as something they liked most about Northern Rivers AVICs, the third highest response (see Graph a). Only 7% of respondents noted this same answer for AVICs in general, which emphasises the value that visitors place on the quality of retail goods they have found in Northern Rivers AVICs.



**Figure 46 - What users like about Northern Rivers AVICs**

Research also shows that the presence of local merchandise, particularly food and wine, plays an important role in enticing visitors to stay longer in an area (*Deery, Jago & Dougherty, 2004*). In addition, visitors often share the local products they have purchased with friends and/or relatives who can serve as effective marketing tools for the local area – particularly for a region like the Northern Rivers, which is renowned for its high quality local produce. It is therefore essential that all retail opportunities be fully explored as there is a significant opportunity to, not only provide a source of income for the AVICs, but also to deliver another means of drawing visitors into AVICs. Retail opportunities particularly relevant to the Northern Rivers include, but are not limited to:

#### **1. ONLINE SHOPPING**

Each AVIC should have, as part of their AVIC website, an online shopping page which allows users to purchase selected souvenirs, merchandise and local produce items while browsing the AVIC website. This allows potential visitors to get a taste for the quality of products they are

able to purchase from each AVIC. This will also allow those visitors who have returned home to purchase a souvenir or gift which they did not get the chance to do while away, or perhaps replace any favourite local produce they may have run out of since returning home, e.g. a locally made relish or jam, etc.

A number of AVICs in the Northern Rivers currently already have an online shopping platform.

***Recommendation 47:***

*That an audit be performed in every AVIC of the most successful products being sold, both in the physical AVIC and, if applicable online, to determine which products are most popular and should perhaps be 'pushed' for online selling.*

Other AVICs in New South Wales have found that if a customer likes a product they will want to come back for more. Therefore it is an opportunity to be able to easily 'push-market' to customers via online or digital means. Online buyers are also often given the opportunity to receive updates on current specials, new products or seasonal offers which could not be accessed elsewhere. This makes a significant point of difference for AVICs.

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## **2. SOUVENIRS**

Each AVIC should stock a range of souvenirs for both the Northern Rivers Region and their local area. These could range from postcards to clothing or even plush toys and should be of a good quality, while accurately reflecting the region's culture, themes and scenery. It is also important that these souvenirs be available at a range of price points so that visitors feel there is 'something-for-everyone'. A range of Australian-made souvenirs should also be made available for purchase as it, not only supports Australian Industry, but has also been a common request during field work activities in both the Northern Rivers and elsewhere in New South Wales.

Brunswick Heads AVIC has some fantastic souvenirs on offer and involved the local community in the design and making of the majority of these souvenirs (see Figure 47). A local photo competition involving the community were asked to take photos which they felt represented the 'simple pleasures' of Brunswick Heads. The chosen images were then placed on postcards, calendars and other merchandise for purchase in the local AVIC.

The feedback with regard to these products during the Pre and Post Surveys was very positive and it was observed that these locally-inspired items were among the most popular purchases. A similar strategy could be adopted across the Northern Rivers to make local communities feel

that they are an important part of the region, particularly in relation to the shaping of a visitor's tourism experience.

It is also a very cost-effective way of providing quality souvenirs which accurately reflect the people, culture and themes of the region.



Figure 47 – Souvenirs – Brunswick Heads

### 3. LOCAL PRODUCE

The majority of Northern Rivers AVICs already stock a range of good quality local produce items. These locally-made food-based items such as preserves, relishes and confectionary are popular sellers among AVICs as they allow visitors to take a 'taste' of the region home with them. As previously mentioned, quality local produce bought from an AVIC can also act as an effective marketing tool for the region when visitors take these products home and share them with friends and relatives.

A positive experience such as this may even help to drive online sales where the friends and relatives may be prompted to purchase their own 'taste' of the region directly from the AVIC website. The newly renovated Lismore AVIC has a vast array of high quality local produce available for purchase and it should be noted, during field work, that a large number of Lismore 'locals' were visiting the AVIC simply to purchase these products either for themselves or as gifts for friends and family.

#### **Recommendation 48:**

*Bulk purchasing of local produce in the region as it has become evident, during recent field work, that many of the Northern Rivers AVICs stock a number of the same locally produced products.*

This will help to cut costs for individual AVICs and the stocking of a few similar product lines will also help to keep consistency and build linkages between the AVICs. Bulk purchasing of food products may also be advantageous during peak holiday and seasonal periods, such as

Christmas, where many of the AVICs produce hampers (see Figure 48 in Lismore AVIC) from their local produce product lines to sell to visitors. There is a great amount of time, effort and often expense that goes into making these hampers and therefore joint purchasing arrangements would be valuable to help minimise some of these costs.

There is also the opportunity for AVIC staff and volunteers to meet and make some of these hampers in groups so they can be distributed to all Northern Rivers AVICs as a whole-region product line during peak holiday periods.



**Figure 48 - Local Produce**

#### **4. ARTS AND CRAFTS**

There is a very diverse range of arts and crafts for purchase among Northern Rivers AVICs. The Clarence Valley AVICs have a large amount of 'knick-knack' and Art and Craft Society pieces on display and for sale in their Grafton (see Figure 49, left) and Maclean AVICs. On the other hand, AVICs such as Casino, Lismore and Murwillumbah (see Figure 49, right) have become somewhat an attraction in their own right due to their gallery-style fine art displays created by local artists. These art and craft products, can provide another source of income for AVICs, and also create a talking point within the display area of the AVIC.





**Figure 49: Sample Arts (Artist in residence) and Crafts at Northern Rivers AVICs**

Art and craft can enhance the experience of the visitor by giving them the opportunity to take home a ‘piece’ of the region, as created through the eyes of a local – a much more valuable souvenir in terms of the experience and memories that can be aroused as opposed to the perceived ‘meaning’ given to a ‘mass-produced’ item.

Both art and craft products have a valuable place within AVICs, particularly when they have been produced by members of the local community. It would be appropriate for all AVICs to engage with the community and any art and craft societies, indigenous art groups or local artists to promote the enormous creative industry of which the Northern Rivers has become renowned. These groups and artists should be encouraged to partner with the AVICs to help ‘tell’ the story of the Northern Rivers through artistic means and perhaps, even given the opportunity to carry out workshops or artistic demonstrations within the AVIC, such as those which take place in Casino and Murwillumbah. These are a great opportunity to get the community involved in tourism in the region whilst drawing visitors into the AVIC and inspiring them to explore their own ‘creative-side’ when travelling in the region.


## 5. INDUSTRY OPPORTUNITIES

With the development of new consumer information channels such as app-n-go, the opportunity presents itself to AVIC Managers to develop a new marketing opportunity to operators across their tourism landscape.

Currently the marketing opportunities presented to operators are generally confined to websites and printed collateral (i.e. tourism information guides). App-n-go provides the opportunity to offer an interactive marketing interface that can be controlled through a content management system to provide any operators with greater inter-activity with potential visitors. This creates new revenue streams for AVIC Managers whereby operators can engage at many levels in real time that is not available in any other medium. It also provides push-marketing opportunities for those operators wishing to engage with visitors when new marketing campaigns present themselves. App-n-go provides Tourism Managers with a new revenue stream that has significant development opportunities into the future.


## B. WHOLESALING OPPORTUNITIES




A large range of wholesaling opportunities exist for AVICs in the Northern Rivers. Some of these opportunities have currently been taken up by a number of Northern Rivers AVICs in a variety of ways and at varying levels of success. However, through the partnerships that will evolve through a greater capacity to share resources, funds and skills, there is an even greater prospect for these AVICs to benefit significantly from the adoption and/or development of certain wholesaling strategies. These strategies include, but are not limited to:

- the provision and development of a unified platform in which to make accommodation and tour bookings via an -visit website
- the ability for AVICs to partner with local attractions and event/festival organisers to become ticketing agents
- the opportunity to further develop marketing services and opportunities for local businesses via online advertisements, App participation and the more traditional brochure and poster displays
- the need for AVICs to look into the development of a 'corporate gifts/merchandise' partnership with local accommodation providers or the conference market

### 1. ACCOMMODATION AND TOUR BOOKINGS VIA THE I-VISIT WEBSITE

Although many AVICs in the Northern Rivers already have a booking service for tours and accommodation it has become apparent that there is little consistency between these AVICs with regard to the level of service provided in terms of online booking facilities.

As discussed in an earlier section of this Report, the adoption of a unified booking platform via an -visit website would provide significant wholesaling opportunities for the region's AVICs where the booking process is made much simpler for visitors and AVICs alike, and the costs of implementation and the resulting positive outcomes can be shared by all AVICs.

Likewise all AVICs should utilise the -visit website to make any face-to-face or over-the-phone bookings for visitors as this will make it much easier for staff to learn and operate the booking system. It will also allow staff to make inter-regional bookings which is particularly advantageous for itinerary development purposes and similarly, users are able to search for accommodation and tours in the entire region, from one website, rather than having to make bookings or search on separate AVIC websites, as is currently the case. There is a large potential then for visitors to use the -visit website in preference to other booking platforms such as Wotif or Last Minute as, unlike these websites, -visit can be backed up by quality 'bricks and mortar' service on arrival at the destination. This service has the potential to result in a far greater income stream from online bookings for all Northern Rivers AVICs.

## 2. TICKETING SERVICES FOR ATTRACTIONS, EVENTS AND FESTIVALS

A number of AVICS currently offer some form of ticketing services for certain events, festivals and attractions within their locality, e.g. Tweed Heads sells tickets for some Queensland Theme Parks such as Dream World. There is the potential for all AVICs to build on industry partnerships and offer ticketing services for not just local attractions, but also for any events and festivals which may be held within their region. The potential also exists for the implementation of a Northern Rivers Redemption Card which would have all the events, festivals and attractions included on it which could be paid for either on line or in a Northern Rivers AVIC. This Redemption Card could also be used to gain entry to the various event, etc.

Ticketing services offer a great opportunity for AVICs to build stronger relationships with their local attraction managers and event organisers by emphasising that ticket sales will have a mutually beneficial outcome for both the AVIC and the event or attraction.

AVICs welcome a large number of visitors through the doors who may not originally have intended on going to or even known about a certain event or attraction in the region. If they had the capacity to offer a ticketing service, it is likely that the uptake would be quite significant and therefore the event or attraction would reach a much larger market than would be otherwise possible.

There is an opportunity for utilisation of event management apps. These apps can be provided to any event or conference organiser, regardless of size, and is a complete tool for the running of the event, providing ticketing, mapping venues, programs and agendas and creates databases of delegates for future push-marketing. These apps could assist AVICs in capturing more ticketing and event revenue, whilst providing a unified management system.

## 3. TRANSPORT TICKETING SERVICES

The staff at Tweed Heads and Byron Shire AVICs are regularly asked for local bus information and timetables. If these AVICs had the provision for selling tickets for some of these services, this would perhaps present, not only another income opportunity, but also provide another drawcard for visitors and locals alike to utilise the wider range of services provided at these AVICs. It must be stated however that such a service could only be provided at those AVICs where there is enough obvious 'demand'. Therefore further research to determine the level of need would have to be undertaken in each LGA.

Glen Innes AVIC, in northern New South Wales, has a Countrylink ticketing service available for both visitors and locals to utilise. The AVIC receives a commission of \$5.00 on each and every booking made for this service at their Centre and, in view of Glen Innes' close proximity to the Northern Rivers and its isolation from any passenger train services, the Countrylink Bus Service is very popular, particularly for older travellers and backpackers who need to travel north to Brisbane or south to Sydney. Such a service could be utilised very effectively by AVICs in the

Northern Rivers as they are similarly isolated from any passenger rail services which travel between Brisbane and Sydney.

#### 4. MARKETING SERVICES

Marketing services provide another wholesaling opportunity for the Northern Rivers AVICS. A great deal of marketing activity via local business poster and brochure displays, online advertising and membership programs have brought significant income into the AVICS and allowed them to carry out a range of services that would otherwise not be possible.

However, the new suite of digital assets proposed to be introduced to the Northern Rivers AVICS, e.g. AVIC App and Interactive Digital Publications will allow for the development of other new marketing opportunities which AVICS can use to fund the purchase of these assets, and the services to complement them.

#### ***Recommendation 49:***

*That AVICS encourage local business to 'buy-in' to their Apps in order to have their details placed in the App content management system ... so that visitors will be able to 'look' them up while browsing the App, e.g. accommodation providers listed will be those who have chosen to participate and paid money to do so.*

A Marketing Case Study showing how simple window and poster displays can bring significant income into AVICS was recorded in a 2009 English Report by Holmes titled, '*TIC Income Generation Toolkit: A Practical 'self-help' Guide to income Generation*'. The Case Study explains, "Weston-super-Mare's Tourist Information Centre (TIC) in England is located on the busy seafront and is often the first stop for those arriving in the town. It receives around 120,000 visitors each year, with thousands more passers-by. The TIC promotes an annual "marketing opportunities" guide to local businesses which includes internal and external poster and window displays. The guide provides a very attractive promotional tool but follow-up phone calls are essential to secure bookings. In 2008, the TIC received a significant income from display sales for the use of their window space for local business and event promotion".

This Case Study demonstrates that there is a large variety of ways in which AVICS can enhance their marketing strategies simply by developing some of the methods they currently have in place, e.g. brochure and poster displays. Southern Highlands offer the same service with two areas in the AVIC provided to members and others as marketing and promotional areas. Simply adding different lighting or moving displays to window areas to make different 'focal points' for visitors can often promote new marketing interest and opportunities from local businesses, with the outcome of driving up membership and therefore income for the AVIC.

## 5. CORPORATE GIFTS/MERCHANDISE

AVICs should identify demand from local businesses for locally-branded gifts, e.g. for accommodation providers or the growing conference markets. The supply of such merchandise to large businesses and market opportunities such as these can be a valuable top-up to retail sales. The main markets are likely to be larger local hotels and conference organisers with a need for gifts as delegate souvenirs or for basic things such as quiz and competition prizes. This helps the venue to promote a 'sense of place' and will also ensure that the Northern Rivers brand is being pushed to a greater potential audience.

Consideration should be given to a region-wide branding promotion suitable for the conference and event market (MICE) where a sense of the Northern Rivers can be taken away by delegates. This is a new and under-developed marketing channel whereby delegates can be offered, as a result of the Event App delegate data, future deals and holiday offers if they return to the Northern Rivers.

As with retail merchandise for in-house and online AVIC selling, distinctive local merchandise and destination-branded goods will sell best as they allow the visitors to take home with them a physical reminder of their time spent in the region. It is also suggested that AVICs provide a USB stick to delegates containing information about their region for quick, easy access to more information. AVICs should also provide a QR Code link to a page on their websites which contains special offers, discounts and extended itineraries for delegates to utilise while in the region, and perhaps before or after their conference.

For any corporate buyers, presentation is particularly important and lack of presentation will reflect badly on the AVIC and may deter future corporate or business dealings. AVICs should work with and through their local destination and Northern Rivers regional partnerships as well as their current conference strategies, contacts and partnerships, so the correct contacts can be easily identified.

## C. OPPORTUNITIES FOR COOPERATIVE MERCHANDISING


Cooperative Merchandising could be developed and adopted in the Northern Rivers region in a number of different ways. As with the proposed resource- sharing initiatives, cooperative merchandising is another opportunity for the Northern Rivers AVICs to collaborate in terms of thinking, resources and joint-funding strategies. This may help to relieve some of the pressures faced by AVICs when constantly trying to develop their own separate retail and product lines. Cooperative Merchandising can be adopted through means such as:


## 1. DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONAL-THEMED SOUVENIRS/ LOCAL PRODUCT

These could include all forms of traditional merchandising such as clothing and apparel, postcards, plush-toys, etc. but should emphasise Northern Rivers branding as opposed to local branding. These should be available for purchase in all Northern Rivers AVICs to emphasise the linkages and experiences on offer between all LGAs in the Northern Rivers.

The cost of design, purchase and promotion of these products should also be shared and the development of product ideas and concepts should be a collaborative effort to ensure that the AVIC staff (and even the communities) in each LGA have been heavily involved in their region's branding and saleable product activity. Blue Mountains implemented a clever line for children, eg. placemats, mugs, pencils, rulers, etc. all with native animals sitting on The Three Sisters. These items 'walk out the door'!

## 2. NORTHERN RIVERS MERCHANDISE AND PRODUCT WEBSITE

There is potential for the Northern Rivers Region to have their own merchandise and product website which sells both the regional merchandise products found in all Northern Rivers AVICs, as well as a range of local-produce items sourced from all Northern Rivers LGAs. This could be linked either through the Northern Rivers page of the -visit website or developed as an entirely separate site.

A significant amount of content can also be found on the Rivers of Life website. However, this website is ineffective at taking the consumer to the point of purchase. Since the -visit website will already have booking capabilities, it would be much easier to have a retail page and 'shopping cart' worked into this website so that visitors can purchase their merchandise and bookings from one convenient location. It would also be a much cheaper option and much easier to maintain in terms of style, consistency and to upload and update products and prices.

Online and mobile inter-regional 'activity' packages could also be developed to encourage visitors to purchase entrance into the most popular attractions in the region. These could be targeted at different price points so that there is a package that would suit all visitors, regardless of their budget. An audit of the most popular attractions should be carried out to determine the addition of these attractions into different packages.



## D. COMMERCIAL ALLIANCES AND FEE-FOR-SERVICE ACTIVITIES

There are a wide range of opportunities available to AVICs in the Northern Rivers to develop commercial alliances and offer fee-for-service activities. Commercial alliances, such as partnerships with transport operators or other businesses within the region, can have mutually beneficial outcomes for both the AVICs and for the 'partner' organisation.

These commercial alliances may also be in the form of fee-for-serve activities such as the CountryLink bookings undertaken at both the Glen Innes and Port Macquarie AVICs. This is mutually beneficial relationship for both the AVICs and CountryLink as CountryLink is reaching potential new customers which they may have not been able to access without the AVIC, and the AVIC is able to benefit by making a \$5.00 agent's commission for any bookings they make.

A similar strategy could be adopted for the Northern Rivers AVICs as passenger train access is very limited/non-existent for the majority of regions in the Northern Rivers. A CountryLink booking service would allow customers to receive accurate information about bus services as well as be able to book CountryLink buses both locally and interstate.


If Northern Rivers AVICs were recognised as being CountryLink ticketing agents, this would be another way for linkages to be made between the AVICs in the region as, those areas which do not have a CountryLink service, could refer the customer to the nearest AVIC offering this service or perhaps the AVIC staff could even call that AVIC and make a booking for the customer over the phone. This service will also provide another visitor draw-card and income stream for the AVICs.

There is also potential for Northern Rivers AVICs to utilise van rental hire companies such as Hertz or Britz (or perhaps a local Northern Rivers van hire company) to provide a van to be used as the mobile 🇺🇸-van, or perhaps even act as a sponsor for the 🇺🇸-van. In exchange for this service, the 🇺🇸-van could have an advertisement displayed on it such as, 'When planning your road-trip in the Northern Rivers use....'. Such an alliance would help severely to cut the costs of purchasing and/or setting up and running the 🇺🇸-van for the AVICs, while the chosen hire company would benefit from the wide audience viewing the advertisement as the van travels throughout the entire Northern Rivers Region.

AVICs such as Byron Bay, which receives a huge number of overseas travellers and little/no Council funding, may benefit from partnering with a foreign currency exchange company, by letting out a small portion of their AVIC to such a company or employing staff trained to operate foreign currency exchange. This would bring extra income into the AVIC through commission of currency sales or rental. This needs to be examined further as the current Byron Bay AVIC would not be big enough to have this service operating.

There is opportunity for AVICs to build a stronger alliance with National Parks NSW through the sale of National Parks passes at all Northern Rivers AVICs. This would be an ideal way for AVICs to encourage longer stays in the region through visitation to the vast number of National Parks in the Northern Rivers region, whilst also acting as another draw-card for visitors to come into the AVICs. Likewise, fishing licenses could be sold at all Northern Rivers AVICs, as is already done in some AVICs such as Kyogle, in order to maintain a sense of service consistency between the AVICs.

Other commercial alliances have been considered which could be developed with large commercial operations that have a footprint across the entire Northern Rivers Region.

Aurora accompanied the AVIC Manager – Lismore VIC, to the Metro Shopping Centre in Lismore where locals and visitors are to be found. As with most large supermarkets, there is an extensive amount of blank wall space, particularly in car parks, up and down travellers, toilets and throughout the shopping mall. This blank wall space provides huge opportunities to present the local tourism products across a new landscape. It could also provide an opportunity to have an -bollard kiosk installed in these major traffic areas in the shopping mall which would also work very effectively with a Loyalty Rewards Program and other strategies mentioned in this Report. These commercial alliances could be developed on a Northern Rivers-wide basis.

***Recommendation 50:***

*That a real estate audit of businesses operating across the Northern Rivers be undertaken to explore new commercial alliances.*

One other strategy that works well is the use of the exterior of vacant commercial premises with various vibrant regional tourism points-of-interest, images and call-to-action. In Wellington, NSW, a very ‘unloved’ building has been transformed into an incredibly vibrant-looking billboard showcasing the local tourism industry.



**Figure 50: Billboards at Wellington, NSW**

Likewise, in Dubbo City Regional Airport, typical images of the Central West Region have been placed across the walls of the Arrivals Entrance and Lounge to entice visitors to explore the region and all it has to offer its visitors (Figure 50). A similar strategy could be implemented in the airports of the Northern Rivers, including Ballina and Lismore, to make these spaces more welcoming, interesting and ‘inspiring’ to visitors.



Figure 51: Wall images in Dubbo Airport

## E. INDUSTRY COOPERATION

The Northern Rivers Region is renowned for some of its flourishing industry sectors and their positive impacts on both the regional economy and on tourism, particularly those of the creative and Agricultural/food industries, which have seen a surge in the number of tourists wanting to experience the art, culture and tastes of the region. We suggest that AVICs could perhaps organise into their famil programs to meet with and experience these various tourism industry ventures across the Northern Rivers to have a better understanding of how these businesses operate whilst also encouraging tourists to visit these places and have their own unique tourism encounters e.g. an art work-shop with a local artist, visiting a local fruit or dairy farm and undertaking a cooking class, etc. Also tied to this is that, cooperation with the Agricultural/food and art and culture tourism industries will result in the mutual benefits of AVICs being able to offer to sell more local food produce and arts and crafts in their merchandise range, which is beneficial for the AVICs while also creating good publicity and sales for local businesses.

The adoption of a Loyalty Rewards Program is another opportunity for AVICs to gain greater industry cooperation by encouraging local retailers, accommodation and tour providers to offer discounts and specials to customers with Loyalty Rewards vouchers. This will allow AVICs to network better with their local business community by engaging with them on a more regular basis and getting direct feedback on the success of the Loyalty Rewards Program plus

gauge how it is helping the local economy. The Loyalty Rewards Program also encourages cross-LGA industry cooperation as the Program is region-wide and therefore businesses will receive greater promotion throughout the entire region because of this.

- Close relationships with Chamber of Commerce and other industry sectors are extremely important, and if all AVIC Managers work closely with their industry and develop the opportunity for cross-LGA industry cooperation there could be greater opportunity for tourism generally.

## F. OPPORTUNITIES FOR CULTURAL COOPERATION

There is evidence of cultural cooperation already occurring within some Northern Rivers Regions e.g. Casino has a rich Indigenous history and as such has an art gallery display, and sometimes workshops, carried out by local Aboriginal artists. Lismore's newly renovated AVIC also contains an art gallery as well as light-boxes which include information and stories about the local Aboriginal people and their history.

- Northern Rivers Arts and Craft Society to have products for sale in AVICs
- Aboriginal corporations, e.g. Arakwal, to conduct workshops or offer tours of their studios or even bushland, e.g. casino platypus artists
- The 📌-bollards could also contain a link to the 'Aboriginal' story of certain Hot-Spots
- Rotate indigenous member of cultural attraction through AVIC or have a funded trainee position for Aboriginal person to provide assisted cultural awareness in each AVIC
- A cultural audit in cooperation with the identified cultural custodians should be undertaken so as to develop further tourism opportunities around indigenous tradition and culture.

## 5 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF STAKEHOLDERS IN THE DELIVERY OF VISITOR SERVICES

*“Successful Regional Tourism has no place for island or peninsula-style thinking”.*

*(Ashley Brilliant- Cartoonist)*

In the Northern Rivers Region there are a number of key stakeholders, providing key inputs and actions. These stakeholders assist in the delivery of tourism outcomes for the travelling and touring public and it is important to recognise that the delivery of visitor services is not limited to any defined area. Some stakeholders may operate in relative isolation, while others can only be effective through collaboration and cooperation. From an AVIC perspective, visitor centres will continue to require ongoing annual support in the short and long term even with improved operating efficiency, resource sharing, collaboration and commercial opportunities. This is in recognition of the public good in servicing local businesses, sporting groups, community groups and residents, providing a promotion/marketing and development service for the local community benefit and the need for increased staffing to meeting growing visitor demands.

The Northern Rivers Regional Visitor Services Strategy has been developed for implementation by the Tourism Management Group (TMG). This Strategy also recognises that collaboration with key stakeholders will see a much more effective delivery of outcomes if natural stakeholder partnerships can be developed.

The Regional Visitor Services Strategy Map and Table clearly articulate a detailed Activity Program which should be read in conjunction with the list of recommendations that have been prioritised for the implementation phase. There is an opportunity to engage with a number of stakeholders who will clearly have both an interest and a role to play given the breadth of recommendations contained within this Report.

### A. STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders are wide and varied across the Northern Rivers. We have captured key stakeholders in the following pages.

#### 1. TOURISM MANAGEMENT GROUP

The Tourism Management Group (TMG) is made up of local Councils and local Tourism Associations in the Northern Rivers. The Group is a coalition of Tourism Officers and Managers from the Ballina, Byron, Clarence Valley, Kyogle, Lismore, Richmond Valley and Tweed Local Government Areas, which oversees the development and implementation of tourism projects in destination management, development, advocacy and marketing. The Tourism Managers

Group provides both effective and efficient destination management within and across Council boundaries to create economies of scale for a variety of tourism projects. The Tourism Management Group was set up to provide the LGAs with a competitive advantage by creating improved local tourism management within and across Council boundaries.

In view of the TMG being across all the Northern Rivers LGAs, the TMG is representative of all the communities of the Northern Rivers and as such, is the most significant stakeholder within the tourism sector. The TMG, because of this cross-LGA boundaries operation, is in a unique position to both lead and consolidate the visitor servicing in the Northern Rivers. All the LGAs of the Northern Rivers make significant financial contributions to visitor servicing and with the creation of the TMG, a greater synergistic relationship has been built between Councils that can provide more efficient use of resources and a unified visitor servicing platform that has far greater benefits to both the community and visitors alike.

The Regional Visitor Services Strategy (RVSS) has provided the TMG with new visitor servicing innovation that can be used effectively to engage with all the identified stakeholders at different levels. The following list categorises the relationships between the TMG and the stakeholders.

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## 2. COUNCILS

The Regional Visitor Services Strategy can be implemented by the TMG (as lead agency with other participating stakeholders) to provide to Councils:

- Identified resource sharing opportunities (and cost savings)
- New, more efficient and immersive technology (new visitor servicing)
- Greater consistency in visitor servicing across the Northern Rivers
- New training and staff skill development
- Product development
- Cooperative relationship development
- New staffing service models
- Cooperative and bulk purchasing of inputs
- New commercial partnerships
- New revenue opportunities
- New community buy-in (Northern Rivers Rewards Program)

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## 3. INDUSTRY (TRADITIONAL TOURISM OPERATORS)

- New technology adaptation, marketing and promotional opportunities
- New consumer research and information platforms to assist business
- New region-wide Famil Program
- Training and information sharing
- Product development



- Itinerary development and management across region
- /Inspire Program
- More comprehensive visitor servicing
- New industry buy-in (Northern Rivers Rewards Program)

#### 4. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Chambers of Commerce across the Region offer a gateway to non-traditional tourism businesses (including tourism businesses) that are part of the visitor servicing economy within the local communities of the Northern Rivers. All of the identified industry opportunities can translate to affecting cooperative relationships with the Chamber of Commerce that could provide a value-add to their members, through a developed relationship with the TMG and the RVSS.

- New technology adaptation, marketing and promotional opportunities
- New consumer research and information platforms to assist business
- New region-wide Famil Program
- Training and information sharing
- Secret Shopping
- Business development and Best Practice
- Product development
- /Inspire Program
- New industry buy-in (Northern Rivers Rewards Program)

#### 5. ACCREDITED VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRES

The RVSS recognises that the AVICs are still the primary focus and platform for visitor servicing across the Northern Rivers. The RVSS has focused on taking this platform and enhancing it to deliver greater efficiency and new service delivery platforms. In the Surveys undertaken by Aurora during the RVSS, 99% of people interviewed recognised the  logo and AVICs as a highly recognisable brand within the tourism landscape. The AVIC management and staff will play a significant role in implementing the recommendations of the RVSS and are in the best position to adapt to the new tourism servicing landscape.

- Identified resource-sharing opportunities (and costs savings)
- New, more efficient and immersive technology (new visitor servicing)
- Greater consistency in visitor servicing across the Northern Rivers
- New training and staff skill development
- Product development
- Cooperative relationship development
- New staffing service models
- Cooperative and bulk purchasing of inputs
- New commercial partnerships

- New revenue opportunities
- New community buy-in (Northern Rivers Rewards Program)
- /Inspire Program
- New Famil Program
- New technology adaptation, marketing development and promotional opportunities

## 6. AURORA RESEARCH

Aurora Research is the author of the RVSS and has undertaken both primary and secondary research, Secret Shopping, stakeholder interviews and surveys, Pre and Post Visit interviews and Tourism Hot-Spot interviews. Aurora can provide implementation guidance for the RVSS and any project implementation if required.

Aurora also provides the accreditation platform on behalf of Destination NSW for all AVICs. Aurora can provide advice and support for any of the recommendations that fall within the areas of accreditation, auditing, training, marketing, signage or 🚩 branding or AVIC re-development and service delivery.

## 7. PRIVATE INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS

These fall in the same categories for roles, responsibilities and opportunities as industry and Chamber of Commerce and should all be developed along similar lines.

## 8. INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS THAT HAVE A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) WITH COUNCILS

A number of members of the TMG are Local Tourism Organisations (LTOs) that presently have MOUs with Councils. The RVSS provides opportunities to re-define those MOUs to engage with the LGAs on new visitor servicing strategies. All the recommendations have been broken down into:

9. Short term strategy for implementation over the next 12 months
10. Medium term strategy for implementation over the next 12 - 24 months
11. Long term strategy for implementation over the next 36 - 60 months

The respective Boards of the Local Tourism Organisations will, no doubt, consider the RVSS and then make the appropriate recommendations to their respective LGA.

- Identified resource sharing opportunities (and costs savings)
- New, more efficient and immersive technology (new visitor servicing)
- Greater consistency in visitor servicing across the Northern Rivers
- New training and staff skill development

- Product development
- Cooperative relationship development
- New staffing service models
- Cooperative and bulk purchasing of inputs
- New commercial partnerships
- New revenue opportunities
- New community buy-in (Northern Rivers Rewards Program)

## 9. DESTINATION NSW

As the lead agency for tourism within the great State of New South Wales, the RVSS presents new visitor servicing strategies that could well be of interest to Destination NSW as applicable across the State. The RVSS should be presented to Destination NSW by the TMG, particularly with regard to co-marketing and business development opportunities, especially with operators. A partnership with Destination NSW could also be developed for the training and technology found within the RVSS.

## 10. REGIONAL TOURISM ORGANISATION

Aurora believes that there will be a need for open discussion with regard to how the TMG sees the implementation of the RVSS with the new combined RTO (North Coast Destination Network). The purpose of the new RTO is to create collaborative capacity across the Mid North Coast and Northern Rivers Regions in which multiple stakeholders have agreed to join together around shared tourism objectives to create a self-sustaining regional tourism model. This new entity's objective is to provide a roadmap to grow the visitor economy to assist meeting the Government's target of doubling of overnight visitor expenditure to State of NSW by 2020. The TMG needs to work cooperatively with the North Coast Destination Network.

## 11. NSW NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) protects landscapes, from rainforests and rugged bush to marine wonderlands and outback deserts and, as such, are custodians and managers of a significant suite of Northern Rivers physical assets. Aurora appreciates that NPWS has been investing time and effort into working within the tourism sector and has specialist tourism personnel across the State. The RVSS identifies that there is a significant amount of natural product within the Northern Rivers region, some which is developed, much of which is undeveloped and yet to reach its potential. A product development Memorandum of Understanding should be developed between the TMG and the NPWS to build a collaborative and cooperative approach, so those natural assets can be sustainably managed.

- New technology adaptation, marketing and promotional opportunities
- New consumer research and information platforms to assist business
- New region-wide Famil Program

- Training and information sharing
- Product development
- Itinerary development and management across region
- Inspire Program
- More comprehensive visitor servicing
- Cooperative relationship development
- Identified resource sharing opportunities (and cost savings)

## 12. ROADS MARITIME SERVICE

The Roads Maritime Service (RMS) (previously RTA), is a significant stakeholder in visitor service delivery. Its primary function is the maintenance and development of the main road infrastructure in the Northern Rivers. There has been significant road works completed recently and a major dual carriage program for the Pacific Highway is being undertaken over the next ten years. From Aurora's extensive research over the last 15 years, one of the greatest challenges for the travelling and touring public visiting any area is their personal orientation. Even in the age of GPS, visitors still commented to Aurora, during the RVSS visitor research, that they were confused and disorientated by signage and there needed to be more effort to orientate the travelling and touring public. The TMG is well versed in understanding tourists' orientation needs and needs to be able to provide input to the RMS, not only through TASAC, but also through any strategic planning process with regard to the roads controlled by the RMS in the Northern Rivers.

Ballina Bypass Ready Taskforce (formal committee of Council including RTA, Councillors, Chambers of Commerce, and Community Service Organisations) has the Tourism Coordinator from Ballina Shire Council as a member. Her involvement provided input from a tourist's and tourism perspective.

### **Recommendation 51:**

*That a representative from the TMG representing all the LGAs should be formalised with the RMS to provide appropriate input.*

There is also a program run by RMS for 'entry signage' which is called Location Markers, whereby the RMS will consult with bypassed towns and communities and work to signpost them on the new bypass. The TMG should also be seeking to provide input into this Location Markers Program.

The RMS plays a significant role in contributing to the visitor experience in the Northern Rivers and a collaborative approach with the TMG representing all LGAs may reach the best outcomes for both visitors and communities.

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### 13. TRADE AND INVESTMENT NSW

Trade and Investment NSW (T&I NSW) is a co-funder of the RVSS, with the LGAs of the Northern Rivers, through the TMG. T&I NSW have regional specialist skills in tourism management by having a dedicated manager with extensive tourism experience across all sectors. Many of the strategies contained within the RVSS could be development projects that may be considered for both financial and implementation support. The TMG has a well-established working relationship that should continue through the development/implementation phase over the next 5 years.

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### 14. THE COMMUNITY

The community is a very significant stakeholder in the benefits to be derived from an economic and service sense. Aurora's research has shown that the visiting friends and relatives (VFR) market is very significant - 36% - in the Northern Rivers. This provides a major opportunity for engagement with the wider community. The Ballina Rewards Program is a very good example of how to make tourism everyone's business and benefit (see Case Study in this Report). The TMG should have a regional Prospectus for the communities of the Northern Rivers which articulates what tourism means to the Northern Rivers, in contribution terms, at both a social and financial level. The Prospectus and 'Tourism Fast Facts' could be included with LGA community mail-outs or Rate Notices which would make the community more aware of the value of tourism.

## 6. PROSPECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

### **Recommendation 52:**

*It is recommended that a real estate audit of the physical businesses and organisations that operate across the Northern Rivers be undertaken to explore new commercial alliances and prospective partnerships. To engage with any identified businesses and organisations from the audit it is recommended that an Engagement Prospectus be developed, similar to the Community Prospectus, but with a greater commercial proposition, which can deliver financial and corporate value.*

Once the audit is completed and the organisations can be quantified, an analysis of their prospective engagement for alliances and partnerships can then be determined. These strategies should categorise those businesses and organisations that are:

- Local LGA-area specific
- Multiple LGA-area specific
- Whole of Northern Rivers-specific (State-based and national organisations)

It should not be limited to established tourist-only businesses but the 'net should be cast wide' to include a vast cross-section of businesses and organisations.

With the development in the RVSS of significant digital, technological and Broadcast Zones, there is a greater opportunity for revenue creation given the nature of capturing visitors (customers) right across the Northern Rivers. With the ability to create new immersive content generation and capture visitors like never before, the TMG has an opportunity, over the next two years, to reposition itself with business and organisations who have seen the bricks and mortar of the Accredited Visitor Information Centre in one dimension, whilst the new consumer information network through 'Bricks and Clicks' will provide a far greater commercial dynamic situation.

### **Recommendation 53:**

*An application be made for T-Qual funding to assist in the implementation of the RVSS. There are a number of strategies which could be developed into a case for funding through T-Qual, particularly with regard to training, famils, Inspire Program and technology adaption.*



## I. LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS






### Recommendation Listing, ranked by implementation stage






#### KEY to IMPLEMENTATION





A – short term, for implementation over the first 12 months

B – medium term, for implementation over the next 12 - 24 months

C – long term, for implementation from 36 months - 60 months

Grade	Number	Recommendation
A	4	Macleans AVIC precinct requires work to be able to provide enhanced visitor services.
A	5	All white i logos should be removed from any directional signage, buildings, fixtures and information board signage on or around the grounds of any Northern Rivers AVIC.
A	8	AVICs need to look at ways to integrate mobile technologies to respond to the new consumer paradigm, both for their present customer base and to attract those segments that are currently under-represented as customers.
A	9	That an  Welcome Card be implemented in the Northern Rivers by the TMG and delivered through the AVICs
A	10	All AVICs be wi-fi enabled (  wi-fi) as this will, not only attract more users to the AVIC, but also enable users to easily download the AVIC Apps for both smart-phones and tablets. Wi-fi is cost-effective and the  wi-fi service will contain a 'Net Nanny' type filter to ensure only identified and appropriate websites are able to be accessed by the visitor, or anyone who comes into contact with the wi-fi network.
A	11	All marketing mediums and collateral will need to carry the  wi-fi logo to raise awareness of this added service found in AVICs.
A	12	The TMG implement a social media page collectively and harness the significant potential for AVICs to actively engage with an enormous current and potential customer base simply by having, and frequently updating, at least one or two of these social media pages (focused on regional experiences).
A	13	Every AVIC in the Northern Rivers has its own Facebook page, which is actively and regularly updated on a weekly basis (focused on local experiences).
A	14	There be a designated Social Media person from within the TMG (an AVIC staff member) who will be in frequent contact with each AVIC, advising on content and strategy.
A	15	All AVIC staff (including volunteers) across the Northern Rivers undertakes further training with regard to the development of skills related to the online and electronic delivery of visitor information.
A	19	A comprehensive signage audit should be undertaken across every LGA to identify signs that could be re-born with a new call-to-action promotion,  branding and QR Codes that would fit into the AVIC Consumer Interface Network.

A	20	A detailed analysis of tourism product throughout the Northern Rivers be determined as a base to work on for market development.
A	21	Group procurement should be considered by the TMG to reduce costs and duplication.
A	22	All AVICs will need to conduct a thorough product audit (by category) of 'fully developed', 'under-developed' and 'needing development' tourism products.
A	27	A joint Training Program will need to be conducted to explain and teach staff how to use the new digital media assets proposed for deployment across all AVICs including, but not limited to, the  -visit website and unified booking system, the AVIC App and the use of QR Codes for information and itinerary transfer.
A	29	Each AVIC utilise the many multi-media options available in order to deliver effective, interactive, immersive and accurate local visitor information.
A	30	Each LGA should continue to have their own unique visitor guide (whilst new digital assets are developed) which can be downloaded from the AVIC website or retrieved from the physical AVIC (until the demand subsides for hard copy information).
A	31	AVICs should also continue to stock the official tour guide of the other LGAs in the Northern Rivers Region which encourages inter-regional visitation.
A	33	The app-n-go AVIC App should also be implemented by each AVIC in the Northern Rivers Region.
A	34	The Northern Rivers Region, and all of its LGAs, market themselves using a catch-phrase identifier – '  ... will inspire you in the Northern Rivers' should be used for locality-specific information, individual AVIC websites, local marketing collateral and any communication and information kiosks,  -bollards and information boards found within a specific LGA.
A	35	Each level of branding (  logo, Northern Rivers and local) should also be clearly visible on any digital platforms used for local visitor information e.g. the AVIC App and Interactive Digital Publications (IDPs).
A	36	The  logo should be prominently displayed on the front or back cover of any AVIC-printed collateral and act as a call-to-action to drive visitors to the nearest AVIC in order to gain greater insights and information about the region.
A	39	A Professional Development Strategy be implemented to focus on inspirational visitor servicing, providing the TMG with the highest level of consumer satisfaction, a significant point of difference in the crowded tourism space, and a continuing and growing economic contribution to both local and regional economies.
A	45	That staff be inter-regionally trained so that they gather a greater regional product understanding.
A	47	An audit be performed in every AVIC of the most successful products being sold, both in the physical AVIC and, if applicable online, to determine which products are most popular and should perhaps be 'pushed' for online selling.
A	49	That AVICs encourage local business to 'buy-in' to their Apps in order to have their details placed in the App content management system ... so that visitors will be able to 'look' them up while browsing the App, e.g. accommodation providers listed will be those who have chosen to participate and paid money to do so.

A/B	53	An application be made for T-Qual funding to assist in the implementation of the RVSS. There are a number of strategies which could be developed into a case for funding through T-Qual, particularly with regard to training, famils, Inspire Program and technology adaption.
A/B	40	To successfully implement the Regional Visitor Services Strategy and the inspirational visitor servicing it's important that the TMG and all the staff and volunteers across all the LGAs are 'on the same page at the same time'. A schedule of Management and Staff Training cooperative workshops could be delivered after the adoption of the Regional Visitor Services Strategy by the TMG.
A/B	41	That the Famil Program takes on a consumer knowledge building process where participants start to focus on what the visitor experience could be and how they can translate what they have seen, on the famil, into an up-selling proposition to the travelling and touring public.
A/B	42	That the following Familiarisation Program be adopted : <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Categorise all products by each region</li> <li>2. Develop accumulated categories across whole-of-region</li> <li>3. Develop commonality pathways (based on different metrics, i.e. price, quality, distance, etc.)</li> <li>4. Develop a famil quantified index (based on identified consumer metrics)</li> <li>5. All famil participants conduct an individual famil quantified index</li> <li>6. At the completion of the famil, a Summary Famil Workshop is conducted where participants present their famil quantified index, their consumer value proposition and their up-selling strategy.</li> </ol>
B	1	It is recommended that similar signage to the Orange 'Welcome to ...' Gateway signs be considered as a priority to assist the travelling public across all LGAs in the Northern Rivers linking the  and tourism products available in the area.
B	3	In the medium to long term, major gateway signage be installed north and southbound on the Pacific Highway and Bruxner Highway.
B	7	That all Northern Rivers AVICs adopt AVIC Best Practice Operational Guidelines in order to achieve greater consistency in the servicing of visitors to the Northern Rivers, consequently improving the quality of their tourism experience in the region.
B	16	It is recommended that each AVIC in the Northern Rivers has at least one tablet to use as a new way of being able to interact with visitors and have them engage with the region on a new multi-media level (housed in a distinctive  branded cabinet).
B	17	These  -bollards should be placed at key Visitor Hot-Spots around the Northern Rivers Region which are identified by the Tourism Managers in each region.
B	18	That  -plinths in the Northern Rivers Region be developed and QR Codes be added to these plinths, which will add to the overall visitor experience. It will also provide a call-to-action to the visitor to call into the nearest AVIC to redeem any other services that are on offer.
B	23	The addition of a whole region Loyalty Rewards Program, similar to the Locals Rewards Campaign currently being used in Ballina, be adopted by all AVICs which will act as a call-to-action for visitors to continue to visit each AVIC as they work their way through the region.
B	24	To link Loyalty Rewards with itinerary development and special offers so that, once an education of the travelling and touring public gains some traction, visitors will be driven to the 'Bricks and Clicks' portals of the AVICs.

B	25	The Tourism Management Group adopt a unified booking platform approach for accommodation and tours within the Northern Rivers Region.
B	26	A full suite of tourism experiences based around individualised, unique and frequently requested, special-interest information packages be created.
B	28	It is recommended that each LGA of the Northern Rivers pool their funding and resources to purchase and set up a shared 🚐-van which can provide visitor information across the whole region during events or peak holiday periods.
B	32	Like the local region visitor guides, a whole region IDP should also be developed which contains some of the video highlights, as well as an interactive list of inter-regional attractions and activities visitors might like to participate in, such as the scenic drives already created by the TMG.
B	37	Points of Interest 🚐-bollards, information kiosks and touch-screens, if used, should always include consistent AVIC, regional and local branding and QR Codes to direct visitors to further information.
B	38	To also aid visitor orientation, all 'Welcome to Region/Gateway /in-area' signage should prominently display the 🚐 logo, telephone number and/or address of that LGAs AVIC(s), as shown in the Lismore signage (Figure 23).
B	44	It is recommended that a Staff Skill Audit Appraisal be set up by the TMG to clearly identify the present skill sets across all the LGAs to identify any gaps that may exist within the skill base.
B	46	We recommend setting up a Northern Rivers Professional Development Visitor Servicing Program whereby staff members would be expected to take on a level of training and skill development in line with their respective job descriptions and duties.
B	48	Bulk purchasing of local produce in the region as it has become evident, during recent field work, that many of the Northern Rivers AVICs stock a number of the same locally produced products.
B	51	That a representative from the TMG representing all the LGAs should be formalised with the RMS to provide appropriate input.
B	52	It is recommended that a real estate audit of the physical businesses and organisations that operate across the Northern Rivers be undertaken to explore new commercial alliances and prospective partnerships. To engage with any identified businesses and organisations from the audit it is recommended that an Engagement Prospectus be developed, similar to the Community Prospectus, but with a greater commercial proposition, which can deliver financial and corporate value (branding and community corporate
C	2	A Gateway AVIC be constructed, either at Halfway Creek or Glenugie, where there is the opportunity for visitors travelling north and south to access the Gateway Visitor Information Centre.
C	6	That a stand-alone Accredited Visitor information Centre be constructed within Yamba (which could be a transportable AVIC structure), co-located with an existing business or organisation, or a mobile AVIC for peak periods.
C	43	That a detailed examination be undertaken on different visitor servicing models for weekends and public holidays.
C	50	That a real estate audit of businesses operating across the Northern Rivers be undertaken to explore new commercial alliances.

## II. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATDW	Australian Tourism Data Warehouse
AVIC	Accredited Visitor Information Centre
CMS	Content Management System
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
DNSW	Destination NSW
Famil	Familiarisation
GPS	Global Positioning System
IDP	Interactive Digital Publishing
Inspire	Aurora's Inspiration AVIC Training Program
LGA	Local Government Area
LTA	Local Tourism Association
LTO	Local Tourism Organisation
LPC	Legendary Pacific Coast
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NPWS	National Parks & Wildlife Service
NR	Northern Rivers
PR	Public Relations
QR	As in QR Code - (Quick Response Code)
RACI	Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed
RMS	Roads & Maritime Service
RTO	Regional Tourism Organisation
RVSS	Regional Visitor Services Strategy
SMART	Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Realistic, Time Framed
T&I NSW	Trade and Investment NSW
TASAC	Tourist Attraction Signposting Assessment Committee
TMG	Tourism Management Group
TRA	Tourism Research Australia
UGC	User Generated Content
VFR	Visiting Friends and Relatives
VIC	Visitor Information Centre
WOM	Word of Mouth

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#### IV. LIST OF ATTACHMENTS

1. Pre and Post Visit AVIC Report
2. Hot-Spot Visitor Survey Report
3. Website Review
4. app-n-go AVIC application development presentation
5.
  - a) Best Practice Online Social Media Policy and Procedure Development
  - b) Facebook triggers holiday bookings
6.
  - a) Best Practice – Inspirational Visitor Servicing
  - b) Best Practice – Managing Visitor Centre Volunteers
7. Quick Response (QR) Codes Fact Sheet
8. Near Field Communication Fact Sheet