

**Submission  
No 17**

## **INQUIRY INTO TOURISM IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

**Organisation:** Gunnedah Shire Council

**Date received:** 27/06/2013

---

## **NSW Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee No.3**

### **Inquiry into Tourism in Local Communities**

#### **Gunnedah Shire Council Submission**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission into the 'Inquiry into Tourism in Local Communities.' This submission is submitted on behalf of Gunnedah Shire Council as per a resolution of Gunnedah Shire Council on 19 June 2013.

**Gunnedah** is a town and local government area in north-eastern New South Wales, Australia. At the 2011 Australia Census the town recorded a population of 7,888. The larger local government area had a population of 12,066.

Gunnedah is located on the Oxley and Kamilaroi Highways providing road links to the state capital Sydney at a distance of 475 kilometres and the nearest regional centre and airport is Tamworth which is 75 kilometres away. It is also linked to Sydney by rail. The town is served by the daily CountrylinkXplorer service between Sydney and Moree.

The major industry is agriculture, with 80% of the shire area devoted to farming. Gunnedah's primary exports are cotton, coal, beef, lamb and pork, and cereal and oilseed grains. Gunnedah is also home to AgQuip, Australia's largest annual exhibition of agricultural equipment.

Gunnedah is also located on one of Australia's richest mineral seams.

It claims the title "Koala Capital of World" due to a large and healthy koala population.

Tourism whilst not a major economic contributor to the area is however important and it is estimated to bring in approximately \$26 million per annum. Gunnedah has a Visitor's Information Centre (VIC), which is Level 2 accredited meaning that it must operate a minimum of 43 hours per week. The VIC is open from 9am to 5pm weekdays and 10am to 3pm weekends and public holidays.

The tourism budget is approximately \$270,000 per annum.

Gunnedah Shire attractions include:

- Koalas
- Waterways Wildlife Park
- Week of Speed
- Lake Keepit
- Poets Drive (the Plains inspired Dorothea Mackellar to write My Country)
- The Rural Museum
- Watertower Museum
- Porcupine Lookout
- Pensioners Hill Sculpture Park
- Namoi River
- Bindea Walking Track
- Natural attractions such as the Breeza Plains
- Ag-Quip



consultant to research and audit the Aboriginal product along the highway and to identify and evaluate opportunities for the development of Aboriginal and nature-based products, experiences and businesses along the Highway.

- **Digital Travel Guide**

The Kamilaroi Highway Group is embracing the ever growing need for information to be delivered digitally. Rising print cost and the expenses associated in updating old or out of date materials in a world that is becoming increasingly personal, instantaneous and mobile are challenges which the Tourism Industry is facing at the present time. The Kamilaroi Highway Group has embarked on producing a high quality digital publication that has added significant value to each local government's tourism collateral.

The Group now have a rich, beautiful, interactive publication with transactional capabilities within one digital magazine which will engage travellers and therefore promote the highway as well as towns and localities like never before. The digital magazine was launched early in 2012 at the first Caravan & Camping Show in Newcastle.

- **Rebranding & Brochure Reprint**

The Kamilaroi Highway Group rebranded the groups logo and updated the Style Guide for the new iPad App and have just produced 50,000 new travel guides using this same creative styling which matches the iPad App.

- **Product Development Funding (Inland NSW & DNSW)**

The Kamilaroi Highway Group was successful in receiving Product Development Funding through Inland NSW and DNSW. This funding totalled \$18,000 and will be used to help fund trade stands at Maitland, Newcastle, Penrith and Canberra Caravan & Camping Shows as well as funds to help produce and print the Kamilaroi Highway Travel Guide, Redeemable Vouchers, and revamping trade show displays.

### **Newell Highway**

No membership fees, over 25 members. The Newell Highway Group has been successful in receiving \$20,000 towards creation of an iPad App for the highway in 2012/2013. The group has commenced the production of the Newell Highway Guide 2012 to 2014. Gunnedah has purchased 1 page in the new guide, with the option of purchasing another page in 2013 before the guide goes to print.

### **Consumer Shows**

Part of the commitment to NENW/Inland NSW, Kamilaroi Highway and Newell Highway groups is that Gunnedah shares the load of manning industry trade stands.

The table below shows the consumer shows attended by each group and Gunnedah's commitment.

The Kamilaroi Highway Group's trade stands are funded through the Product Development funding from Inland/DNSW received by the group to attend travel shows in 2012.

	NENW/In land	Kamilaroi Highway	Newell Highway	Gunnedah Presence
Sydney	•		•	•
Adelaide	•		•	
Melbourne	•		•	•
Gold Coast	•		•	
Canberra		• Product Development funding to attend (Kam Hwy).	•	• 2012 only
Penrith	•	•	•	•
Toowoomba	•		•	
Maitland	•	•	•	•
Newcastle	•	•	•	•
Dubbo	•		•	
CentralCoast	•		•	
Brisbane	•		•	•

### Visitor Target Markets

The information on visitation to Gunnedah Shire is based largely on discussions with the Tourism Managers and VIC staff in Gunnedah and the surrounding region, Tourism NSW Regional Manager and local accommodation, attraction and business operators. The information is qualitative and should be regarded as indicative only.

Gunnedah Shire attracts a very diverse range of markets, with the market mix varying in the different localities throughout the Shire. The primary markets are:

- Highway traffic and touring traffic - mainly retirees and semi-retirees, many in caravans and motor-homes
- Regional residents
- People visiting friends and relatives (VFR)

- Business and work-related travellers - sales representatives, tradesmen, professionals, government officers, contractors and rural workers

**Secondary and minor markets include:**

- MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions)
- Coach tour groups
- Technical tours / research related travel
- Bird watchers
- Sporting event attendees
- Anglers
- Car clubs
- 4WD clubs

The market mix varies across the Shire, with the key primary and secondary markets in each area summarised in the table below:

**Primary and Secondary Markets – Gunnedah Shire**

Locality	Primary Markets	Secondary / Minor Markets
Gunnedah	Highway travellers / passing traffic  Business and work-related travellers / itinerant workers  Visiting Friends & Relatives (VFR)  Regional residents - primarily day trippers	Coach tour groups  MICE  Caravanners / Motorhomes  Event attendees  Sporting competitors and spectators  School groups  Car & 4WD groups / clubs  Technical / research travellers  Truck drivers

The main market segments are discussed below.

## ***Primary Market Segments***

### ***Highway Travellers / Passing Traffic / Touring Traffic***

Tourism in the Shire is highly dependent on highway travellers and passing traffic. The main feeder routes into the Shire are the Oxley and Kamilaroi Highways, with most of the tourist traffic coming off the Kamilaroi Highway.

On both the Oxley and the Kamilaroi Highway, the main visitor markets are:

- 'Wanderers' most of whom are retirees and semi-retirees. This is predominantly a long haul market with the main direction of movement being south to north. This market has a number of sub-segments which include caravanners and motorhomes, the touring market that is exploring North Western NSW. and long-haul through traffic: Victoria - Queensland; Sydney / Hunter - Queensland; Central and South Western NSW - SE Queensland.
- Regional traffic, primarily passing through Gunnedah Shire to other localities in the region.

Families (compatriots) are the main secondary market with travel concentrated during school holiday periods. The primary reasons for visiting the Shire appear to be to visit friends and relatives and/or passing through on-route to other destinations.

Touring travellers also arrive in the Shire from the south via the Kamilaroi Highway coming predominantly from Sydney, Central Coast and Hunter regions, with an increased number of visitors travelling from Melbourne up the Newell Highway and then coming to Gunnedah from the south to cross over to the mid north coast, as well as traffic coming down from both south east Queensland and Brisbane areas travelling to the Hunter Valley, Sydney, and Melbourne, preferring to travel inland rather than down the coast.

As a result of both coal mining in the Gunnedah Basin and the promotion of the Kamilaroi Highway as a touring route, traffic on the Kamilaroi is increasing. The main visitor markets are:

- Coal related travellers, with this traffic concentrated and focused on Gunnedah and Boggabri.
- Travellers, primarily from the Hunter Valley, Central Coast and northern areas of Sydney using the Kamilaroi to access the Newell Highway when travelling through to Far North Queensland, the Outback and Gulf Country.
- Travellers touring North Western and Outback NSW, with Lightning Ridge and Bourke being popular destinations.
- Travellers coming from the south and travelling along the Darling River Run are now picking up the Kamilaroi Highway at Bourke and travelling a full circle back along the highway to either Sydney, Canberra or Melbourne areas.

The HunterValley (Muswellbrook to Maitland corridor) and Lithgow areas have been designated by the State Government as major population growth centres. As the population in these areas increases, people will be looking to the areas to the west for recreation and shortbreaks. While increase in visitation from this source will not be realised within the timeframe of this Tourism Strategy, the future growth potential should be taken into consideration in infrastructure planning.

For touring travellers from the Hunter and CentralCoast areas the 'logical' pit stop locations on the Kamilaroi Highway are the larger towns of Gunnedah and Narrabri. Travellers will probably not plan to stop in Boggabri (too close to both towns), with any stop being more an impulse decision.

### **Visitors to Gunnedah**

- Visitor numbers to Gunnedah were down in 2011/2012 due to several external factors, such as the flooding in Queensland, Northwest NSW and Outback regions, and bushfires throughout country VIC. Significantly travellers unfamiliar with flooding in general have very little concept of how long a flood may occur and quite often phone calls are received requesting flood information long after life in Gunnedah and district has returned to normal. The VIC plays an important role in providing information that the shire is 'open for business'.
- Gunnedah usually sees a large number of southern NSW and Victorian travellers heading north travelling through Gunnedah to Queensland's warmer climate during the cooler months (April through to September/October).
- Traditionally Gunnedah's busiest period is between March and September.
- Strategically, Gunnedah is ideally located on the intersection of the Kamilaroi and Oxley Highways. Although not ideally located for both highways, the VIC is highly visible for the abundant Oxley Highway traffic.

### **Summation**

Whilst Gunnedah recognises the value of participating in regional consortiums, Gunnedah is also cognisant of the need to maintain a tourism presence that is operated from Gunnedah as opposed to a regional centre. If tourism was solely run out of Tamworth for example, Gunnedah would anticipate that local features would not receive the prominence they deserve. Regional partnerships do however provide opportunities to collectively market the region.

Gunnedah notes that funding from Destination NSW can be given only if it is matched by \$50,000 which can be pooled by cooperating bodies. Gunnedah as mentioned is supportive of regional cooperation and understands the intention but notes that this in general precludes smaller councils with smaller budgets from applying as an individual and as such Gunnedah recommends that this be revisited.

Tourism is important to Gunnedah and Gunnedah Shire Council believes that the area has a lot to offer in terms of natural beauty, location and facilities. There is even the possibility that tourism could be grown via the right combination of private and council initiatives. For example given the richness of the agricultural sector combined with the natural beauty of the Shire, the area could be promoted as a food destination. This could be linked to great outdoor activities in neighbouring



shires (such as Narrabri's Mount Kaputar National Park) and the emerging well-being sector in Moree Plains Shire.