Southern Highlands
NEW SOUTH WALES

Tourism Strategy
2012 – 2017

Overview

Detailing the Strategic Approach to Maximising Tourism's Contribution to the Southern Highlands' Economy over the period 2012 – 2017

1.   INTRODUCTION

1.1   Importance of Tourism in Southern Highlands

Tourism has long been recognised as an extremely important element of the economy of the Southern Highlands. Each year the Southern Highlands host an average of 1.3 million visitors that spend approximately $200 million during their stay on a wide range of goods and services. It is estimated that this expenditure supports somewhere in the order of 2,300 full time equivalent jobs (which means the total people that have jobs dependent upon tourism expenditure is higher). Around one-third of these jobs are indirectly dependent upon tourism expenditure and in many cases this dependence will not be recognised.

Tourism is highlighted as an important contributor to the Southern Highlands Shire in Council's 'Economic Development Strategic Plan 2008 – 2016' and more recently in 'Southern Highlands 2031+ our future our choice' Community Plan. The latter, which included significant input from the community, identifies tourism as a sector with significant employment and economic benefits. Specific goals related to tourism in the economic theme is one of the key building blocks for this strategy:

"Goal 5.2 - The 'Southern Highlands' is a recognised tourist destination throughout Australia.

5.2.1 Develop and implement a compelling and competitive brand identity for the Southern Highlands, based on our distinctive lifestyle factors of climate, horticulture, recreation, landscape and heritage

5.2.2 Develop and implement a comprehensive Tourism Strategy for the Southern Highlands, based on the unique Southern Highlands brand of climate, horticulture, recreation, landscape and heritage" (p26)

Tourism is not just important from a expenditure and jobs perspective. Tourism – both the experience of visiting a place and distributing messages about it – influences a place's overall image. In other words, the experience of visiting for tourism purposes and the act of distributing tourism-related messages not   only   influences   the 'destination image' (i.e. place image from a tourism perspective) but also influences the image of a place in general. The marketing of Tourism Southern Highlands, for example, influences people's overall image of the Southern Highlands – irrespective of whether or not this relates to tourism. Image plays a fundamental role in the 'place - buying' decision making process – be it tourism related or for other reasons. Examples of other decisions influenced by the image of the Southern Highlands include those related to establishing or relocating a business and choosing a place to live.

The word 'place' and phrase 'place image' are used throughout this document despite the tourism focus. This not only reflects the overlap and relationship that exists between destination and place image but in itself is a contribution to this strategy. Place image influences destination image; and destination image influences overall place image. Both influence decisions relating to whether people choose the Southern Highlands over other places. Tourism is the only sector that can be utilised to influence broader place image.

Tourism also has the potential to contribute to an extremely important and valuable community asset: "local pride". Whilst very difficult to measure in dollars and cents terms, local pride clearly contributes to the overall wellbeing and functioning of a place. Its importance is perhaps best seen when it is absent. The benefit of contributing to local pride is particularly evident when a destination is successful – a concept central to this Strategy.

Destination success, however, and the benefits that come with it, does not come without investment. This Strategy recognises the fiscal pressures faced by Local Governments across Australia and that Council cannot do and pay for everything. This reality highlights the importance of a Strategy such as this.

1.2   Strategy Purpose & Context

This Strategy is **NOT** a Masterplan, marketing strategy, 'wish-list' or industry plan. It does **NOT** deal with Land Use or cover the Local Environment Plan (LEP) issues. It is a Strategy designed to play a significant role in contributing to the success of tourism in the Southern Highlands and covers a range of subject areas that relate to this. It aims to increase focus, clarity, consistency and understanding and in doing so help decrease conflict and confusion. Although the Strategy timeframe is the next five years, it has been developed to address both this period and beyond with the view to the Southern Highlands being a successful destination over the long term.

1.3   How the Strategy was developed

The Southern Highlands Tourism Strategy 2012-2016 has not followed the 'standard' and has included a stage that is not a part of the 'standard' tourism strategy development processes. The standard approach involves consultants following a brief - typically written by one person. Stakeholders are consulted in the standard approach – but this activity relates to the subjects identified in the brief.

The development of Southern Highlands Tourism Strategy – is a logical yet innovative approach -provided a project executive and a range of other stakeholders with the opportunity to indicate what they believed to be essential strategic subject areas that should be included in a five year tourism strategy. Stakeholders were given the opportunity to shape the brief. A summary of the elements of the Strategy Development Process is shown below in Table 1.

PROCESS ELEMENT	OVERVIEW
Preliminary	• Top line review of various aspects including past strategy, organisational approach, outcomes, past and current tourism issues, internal and external relationships, finance, visitor profile, assets • Discussions with project executive relating to the planned approach including the involvement of stakeholders in contributing to the Strategy scope • More detailed discussions with Tourism Manager concerning the above
Defining Strategy Scope	• Opportunity for stakeholders to "define the brief" by nominating subject areas that should be addressed in a 5 year tourism strategy. This included the project executive, the Economic and Tourism Development Working Group (ETDWG) and members of the tourism industry • Assembly and assessment of above views and comparison against consultants recommended topics • Release of both stakeholder compilation and consultants recommendations (the latter in the form of proposed 'Table of Contents'). • Discussion relating to variations and rationale for consultant recommendations with the view to equalising these views (ie attempting to establish as high a level of agreement and understanding as possible) • Finalisation of Table of Contents which formed the Strategy scope
Research, Analysis & Diagnostics	• More detailed review of the range of elements considered at a top line level in the preliminary stage. Discussion with individuals relating to specific issues (including Tourism Manager, other Council personnel and stakeholder(s) that raised the issue • Expanded discussion with tourism industry members via telephone, face to face (group and one-to-one) and email (dedicated strategy input email address provided) including the opportunity to both offer and consider strategy coverage.
Major Determination Short-listing	• Drafting strategic options and recommendations related to major components of the Strategy • Discussion related to recommendations and in-depth consideration by consultants of responses. Adjustment as deemed appropriate.
Strategy Expansion	• Expansion of Strategy detail • Addition of priority actions • 'Back-checking' against defined scope and research/analysis • Review and discussion with Project Executive. Final adjustment.
Confirmation	• Final Review by Project Executive

The following process element is an integral part of the overall process although is not accommodated in the strategy development budget.	
Adoption & Understanding	Communication efforts to maximise the level of genuine strategy understanding by as many stakeholders as possible. This is seen as a constant requirement across the five year 'life' of the Strategy.

Table 1 – Overview of the Strategy Development Process

1.4 Tourism Market Context

This Strategy has specifically avoided the 'copying and pasting' of the wide range of readily available general market research. It has not attempted to cover the vast range of market research and analysis that would be required to consider the equally wide range of opportunities and possibilities for the Southern Highlands. This doesn't suggest that this research and investigation is unimportant. On the contrary, research and analysis is recognised as a vital component of detailed consideration and assessment of opportunities and ideas.

Following the strategic foundation and direction set out in the Strategy document, detailed research and analysis should be included as a part of both an Annual Operating Plan and on a case by case basis as ideas and opportunities are identified by Council and stakeholders.

It is considered far more important for a five year Strategy to create awareness and understanding of the research and data that is available and the fact that customised 'data-mining' of relevant data- bases is possible and affordable. Custom data-mining is considered particularly important given its power to increase the level of relevance to the Southern Highlands. The primary databases referred to include the National and International Visitor Surveys administered by Tourism Research Australia. These surveys cover a vast range of detail relating to domestic and international travellers and their trip behaviour. Given the long time series available and consistency over this timeframe, valuable trend analysis is possible.

Details of the current market to the Southern Highlands are outlined in the full Tourism Strategy. It is also envisaged that several customised data-mining efforts will be undertaken in the course of the preparation of the Annual Operating Plan and as they arise throughout the strategy.

1.5 Tourism Assets

The Southern Highlands has a range of tourism - relevant assets. From a marketing and product strategy perspective the challenge is to identify those assets, in relation to specific markets and competitors, so that Southern Highlands can claim some form of competitive advantage. In addition to this basic context, three other considerations need to be included in this assessment:

1.   The assets used cannot breach the values of those who live and work in the Southern Highlands
2.   The affordability of communicating effectively with related target markets
3.   The impact upon the resource allocation balance

As this Strategy aims to contribute to the Southern Highlands's competitive advantage by tackling strategic subjects at a deeper level than the 'average' tourism strategy, it is recognised that asset strengths are subjective assessments made by the market. This Strategy therefore recognises that whether or not an asset is regarded as a strength will vary depending upon:
1.   The target market
2.   The trip type
3.   Competitor standing

Utilising existing assets and not depending upon other assets becoming a reality should be a strong focus of the Strategy development. This does not mean that additional assets should be ignored or discouraged. On the contrary, additional assets should be a key activity over the course of the next five years.

'Pairing' of target markets with assets needs to be undertaken on a case by case basis alongside the target market and product selection criteria to determine if the asset is a usable strength..

A range of destination assets stand out as potential sources of actionable points of difference and competitive advantage. These have been listed in the Strategy. A destination asset list should be undertaken as part of the Annual Operating Plan.

1.6   Organisation & Structure

From the local government perspective the tourism function rests within the Corporate and Strategic Division structure of Wingecarribee Shire Council. An Executive Manager has the responsibility for destination marketing and promotion, product development, visitor information centre and events among other things. The day to day interaction with the tourism industry is conducted through a Council business unit – Tourism Southern Highlands (TSH).

Tourism Southern Highlands operates with a membership structure such that tourism operators pay a fee to access a range of benefits. It is necessary to pay the "membership" fee and agree to pay commission in order to enable that operator's product can be booked through the Southern Highlands Visitors Information Centre (VIC) at Mittagong. The VIC is a Council asset operated by the business unit. Income from the activities conducted by the business unit contributes to the tourism funding base.

Furthermore a Committee of Council, the Economic Development and Tourism Advisory Committee, has been formed to provide guidance to Council. Council has sought to recruit external stakeholders for the Committee that can assist with the following:

- Provide industry advice to Council on Economic Development and Tourism related issues;
- Assist Council to achieve its Economic Development objectives;
- Inform industry of Council's Economic Development and Tourism plans/actions;
- Provide a forum for discussion of local Economic Development and Tourism related issues;
- Encourage the development of a positive investment climate in the Shire.

Tourism Southern Highlands maintains an active working relationship with a range of industry bodies, chambers of commerce and peak tourism bodies such as Tourism Australia and Destination NSW. TSH actively participates in the NSW regional tourism structure and is a member of the Inland NSW region (formerly Capital Country). From time to time TSH also partners with neighbouring tourism bodies.

1.7   Strategic Foundations & Directions

Roles & Responsibilities - Clear roles and responsibilities are essential for a destination to be successful. The Strategy has focussed on the roles & responsibilities of Council and the private sector. Areas where Council responsibilities have been highlighted include: Strategic Leadership, Destination Decision Making, Place Image, Research, Communication, Destination Marketing, Information Servicing, Product & Asset Marketing, Asset & Product Identification, Product Approval, Amenities, Evaluation.

Structure & Relationships - Ensuring the tourism structure and relationships in the Southern Highlands are clearly defined and logical, in the context of the travel decision-making process, will maximise the conversion of potential to actual visitors. The full Strategy deals with "Internal" (Council) & "External" (Other Government, Associations & Private Sector) relationships and priorities of these structures.

Market Communications - Choices related to marketing strategy should consider the full range of strategic options available. Marketing decisions then must be ultimately guided by the potential benefit to the destination as a whole. Similarly product development must be assessed and considered as a part of the overall "marketing statement".

Product Development - Destinations are continually under pressure to develop new tourism product. Addressing the supply side of tourism should principally be an issue for private sector investment and stimulating and demonstrating a growth in demand for tourism product will inevitably lead to those investment decisions. New tourism product should be consistent with community values (social, cultural, environmental & economic) and local government has a critical role to play in that respect.

Resource Allocation - The failure to allocate resources appropriately can undermine a strategy without it being obvious. As with the other Strategic Foundations, this is a subject that needs to be brought 'out in the open' and discussed among a wide range of stakeholders. Although almost all destination stakeholders acknowledge that resources – especially financial – are limited and finite, this doesn't prevent discontent when available resources are allocated in a manner that doesn't fit with individual stakeholder opinion, despite being designed to maximise the benefit to the destination overall. The Strategy deals with this important pillar.

Research & Knowledge - Strategic decisions (and tactical decisions) in tourism, ranging from target market selection, marketing choices to asset & product decisions need to be based on reliable and relevant information and market intelligence. The Strategy deals with the importance of this activity to the success of a destination and the role & responsibilities of Public and Private sector in research & data awareness and availability to obtain destination competitive advantage.

Evaluation - It is essential for a destination to use appropriate evaluation methods and performance indicators for the various elements of the tourism effort. Destinations, and their stakeholders, typically fail to break their evaluation efforts down and restrict the efforts to a small number of indicators. These may, or may not, be relevant and the effects of this can have serious negative consequences. This Strategy identifies the various elements of the tourism effort and recommends appropriate evaluation approaches to them. The Strategy also introduces models for tourism product evaluation and target markets.

2. PRIORITY STRATEGY RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 ENGAGEMENT & PARTNERSHIPS

OVERALL GOAL

Achieve awareness and genuine understanding of the Tourism Strategy across as many Southern Highlands stakeholders as possible to maximise engagement, support and participation.

"Stakeholders" are not limited to direct tourism industry operators only but includes those organisations for which tourism accounts for a portion of their business and the Southern Highlands community.

Recognise that this strategy is a change to the traditional/typical approach to tourism strategy and will require a concerted effort to engage stakeholders in understanding change.

MAIN DESIRED OUTCOMES:
• Deeper awareness and understanding of the Strategy and rationale – especially relating to roles and responsibilities
• Greater focus on significant strategic decisions
• Grow support for tourism across the community
• Increased engagement and involvement of tourism-dependent industry organisations and individuals
• Reduction in conflict and confusion via increased understanding
• Contribute to an increase in tourism assets
• Contribute to increased community involvement in providing tourism product and experiences
• Increased utilisation of locally produced and provided products and services
• Build the appreciation of local residents of their role as "tourism ambassadors"

KEY ACTIONS

Overall Strategy Understanding
• Ongoing explanation, through audience-appropriate communications methods, of the Strategy - especially the strategic foundations and directions.

Strategy Component Understanding
• Focussed communication about critical elements of the Strategy to key stakeholders – again using audience-appropriate methods.
• Compilation and communication of further relevant information to support key decisions – especially if stakeholder influence and issue is significant.
• Ensuring Council departments functionally align/recognise tourism in their annual plans.

Organisational
• Review the current membership-based model to confirm the logic and viability of moving towards a non-membership based model. This should consider the quantitative and qualitative aspects of a membership vs non-membership model and include the placing of a value on levels of engagement, fragmentation, assets utilisation and leakage to other destinations.
• Change the name of Tourism Southern Highlands to Destination Southern Highlands to align with a broader role that incorporates promotion for economic development purposes.

Stakeholder Communications
• Maintain a program of stakeholder communication to highlight progress and successes.
Particularly, reporting to the community on the Annual Operating Plan and its outcomes.

Services
• Expand the range of stakeholder-relevant services that have the potential to broaden engagement, increase existing engagement and strengthen the engagement bond. These can include a mix of user-pays and generally available services. These may require a 'trade-off' against existing services.

• Priority examples for consideration are social media content syndication hubs and the use of an accommodation/tour meta-search engine.

Management
• Destination/place related strategic decisions and actions will be facilitated and managed by Council. A representative panel should be maintained that is separate from but influences Council to lead the destination. In parallel with the goal of increasing engagement, consultation and communication across the range of stakeholders, such a panel should not be at the expense of broader communications.

Opportunity Identification
• Prepare and deliver information in relation to the tourism market including that which relates to niche/specialist market segments that could utilise existing skills/assets with low/modest investment.
• Prepare specific communications approaches for the above that relate existing and potential tourism industry members.
• Respond to requests for information and assistance that relate to the tourism market – particularly where they relate to a potential expansion in tourism assets.

Funding Assistance
• Subscribe to appropriate grant-monitoring services and channel those identified as relevant to appropriate stakeholders.
• Assist and guide in grant application where possible and refer to appropriate specialists as required to assist securing funding.

Information Services
• Expand the options available for stakeholders to convey their information to the market (user pays and non-user pays options/levels)
• Change the name of the Visitor Information Centre to Southern Highlands Information
Centre and encourage its use by industry and residents as well as visitors.
• Expand the information available beyond tourism to include that related to economic development.

Local products and services
• Develop a register of relevant local product and service providores and make this information available to tourism sector organisations and individuals. Similarly, develop a register of potential tourism sector users of local products and services and make this available to suppliers.

2.2 MARKETING & RELATED COMMUNICATIONS

OVERALL GOAL

Undertake market-specific, destination level communications to ensure the foundations for product-specific communications efforts are in place.

MAIN DESIRED OUTCOMES:
•   Building destination image is central to all marketing activity
•   Target market selection is determined utilising a selection criteria
•   Marketing decisions are based on sound research and market knowledge
•   An annual marketing plan outlines focus and resource allocation for the upcoming period
•   Marketing partnerships are formed with a target market alignment

KEY ACTIONS

Image
• Undertake internal audience-appropriate communications efforts to explain the importance of the image of the Southern Highlands to tourism, business and residential decision making.
• Undertake efforts to make overall place image a high priority ongoing Council agenda item.

• Formally assess the image of the Southern Highlands in the two most significant domestic source markets to clarify what "the market" thinks of the destination.
• Use this research to shape messaging.
• Create an inventory of "image influencers" (such as media) and undertake efforts to bring these more in line with the desired image – subject to the ability to control changes, the significance of the source and the cost to achieve the change.
• Create an image and content 'bank' which is made freely available to image influencers

Market Intelligence
• Provide relevant market research for main source markets to industry on a regular and ongoing basis to increase their awareness and understanding of tourism trends related to these markets assist them with decision-making.
• Keep industry informed on a regular basis of the Southern Highlands's visitor profile (eg origin, purpose, activities etc) broken down by domestic overnight, domestic day and international overnight visitors.
• Process ad-hoc requests for information relating to subjects not covered in the regular market or destination communication efforts.
• Maintain a high level of awareness of relevant research and data and where appropriate either obtain or refer industry to these resources.

Target Markets
• Undertake a detailed assessment of current target markets and determine if the current role of Council and the private sector in relation to them is appropriate.
• Identify other target markets that align with the target market selection criteria
• Undertake an assessment of the target market penetration levels and consider implications/opportunities acting upon these where appropriate.

Positioning and Branding
• Determine desired positioning for each key target markets and segments
• Develop a brand style guide that includes guidelines and collateral with appropriate market variations

Resource Allocation
• Review the current resource allocation relating to marketing and evaluate to increase alignment with the resource allocation criteria. Specifically, ensure resources are not spread across too many markets.

Partnerships
• Identify and form relevant destination marketing partnerships with other Local Government Areas and Associations irrespective of partnerships that may be formed at a Regional or State level. These partnerships will be based on the relevance of destination partner and target market pairing. A clear example of this is the partners marketing under the Grand Pacific Drive initiative.
• Establish and maintain strong working relationships with public and private organisations where there is a mutual benefit from doing so. These partnerships should extend beyond traditional tourism partners to include organisations with a clear interest in Southern Highlands being a successful place.
• Identify and alert industry to potential B2B partnerships, particularly with relevant organisations in the distribution channel (for example technical/agri tourism wholesalers, or industry associations).

Communication Channels
• Monitor and report on the usage of existing communication channels and the emergence of new ones as they relate (separately) to destination choice and specific tourism product choice. This annual compilation should be used to help shape Council's Annual Plan and should be circulated to tourism organisations and individuals.
• Explain how various communications channels are being used by existing and potential visitors

Marketing Options
• Prepare a consolidated register of marketing and communication opportunities that include those organised by Southern Highlands and other organisations such as Regional Tourism Organisations.
• This 'prospectus' should include a range of no cost, co-operative and full user pays options.

Program
• Continue to develop the visit friends and relatives and local community program "My Southern Highlands" as a community pride, buy local/shop local and ambassador program
• Continued execution and evolution of the integrated local resident program.

Destination "App"
• Develop a destination application suitable for all major smart-phone operating systems aimed at visitor trip planning and in-destination information provision

Devices - GPS and POI
• Provide guidance and assistance to maximise the inclusion of tourism and tourism-related assets in Global Positioning System (GPS) point of interest (POI) databases and other location-based mapping tools.
• Google Places is a primary example however assistance should be provided to ensure maximum inclusion in other major POI databases (eg those used by Garmin, TomTom etc)

2.3 PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT & MANAGEMENT

OVERALL GOAL

Encourage the appropriate growth and utilisation of the Southern Highlands's tourism asset base.

MAIN DESIRED OUTCOMES:
• Create an environment that encourages investment in tourism assets
• Council is not an investor in tourism product but is investor ready
• Ensure that existing tourism assets are effectively packaged to create new product offerings
• Appreciate the value of intangible assets in attracting visitors to the area
• Encourage partnerships among products to align offers with target markets

KEY ACTIONS

Inventory
• Expand the current asset inventory via a detailed product audit to include niche and special-interest assets, intangible assets, non-commercial assets irrespective of the current level of utilisation. The inventory should be 'graded' with reference to the target market criteria.
• Council will facilitate asset development where multiple organisations are involved, are on Council managed land or where they do not lend themselves to private investment.

Market Research
• Assist existing and potential asset owners or proponents in obtaining research and data to aid in the assessment of market demand.
• Monitor key source market activity uptake on a regular basis and share with industry

Suitability Guidance
• Provide proponents of suggested assets with clear and basic guidelines summarising the characteristics that would be more likely to be assessed favourably (eg: alignment with resident values, dispersal of benefit).

Council Assessment
• Play an active role in Council's assessment of asset development initiatives particularly via the assembly of relevant research and data in relation to the levels of demand.

Impact
• Consider, monitor and manage the impact of visitor activity upon residents from both a positive and negative perspective

Funding Assistance
• Subscribe to appropriate grant-monitoring services and channel those identified as relevant to appropriate stakeholders.
• Assist and guide in grant application where possible and refer to appropriate specialists as required to assist securing funding.

Events
• Events have a significant capacity to contribute to the image and awareness of a destination as well as repeat visitation. Identify the key events that contribute to destination image and develop a marketing plan to leverage destination marketing around those core events in the Annual Operating Plan. Given resource constraints focus on 2 – 3 key events each year.
• Develop an event strategy for Southern Highlands.

Packaging
• Encourage operators to work together develop product packages based on knowledge of market trends and that contribute to destination image.
• Bring together operators to market under a destination banner for a particular target market. As an example, stakeholders identified opportunities in nature, health/wellbeing, business tourism, food and wine, agriculture and arts/culture. These decisions require detailed and specific due diligence.

Partnerships
• Investigate and identify potential destination grouping/market combinations
• Identify a range of logical potential partnerships (including the option of other LGAs) that 'match' with particular source markets and trip types. Increase the level of detail of these potential 'matches' to include more detail in terms of target segment and messaging with the view to creating a list of viable destination and target market pairings.

Investor readiness
• Develop support material to assist those seeking to invest in tourism in the Southern Highlands with detail of market and visitor trends. Provide a designated point of contact within Council's tourism business unit to coordinate and facilitate interaction with council, access to relevant personnel and information

Review of the issues relating to Local Environment Plan (LEP)
• Engage an appropriate specialist to investigate the issue related to what were described 'obstacles' with the current LEP.

2.4 RESEARCH & KNOWLEDGE

OVERALL GOAL

Contribute to the competitive advantage of the Southern Highlands by establishing, maintaining and communicating and providing tourism research and data to the tourism industry, Council staff, Councillors and potential industry members.

MAIN DESIRED OUTCOMES:
• Marketing and resource allocation decisions are based on the best available information
• Develop the understanding of tourism, its associated economic and social benefits with Councillors and Council staff
• Provide quality information to support the Council assessment process
• Ensure tourism operators have access to current market and visitor trends to inform decision making.

KEY ACTIONS

Visitor Volume Monitor
• Engage an appropriate tourism data specialist to monitor visitors to the Southern Highlands on a rolling 12 month basis, to be updated quarterly. Known secondary sources should be used.
• Compare outcomes on the same timescale against a benchmark group of other Local Government Areas, and mainland regional NSW. Percentage share comparisons should be included
• Limitations associated with the survey data should be considered and distribution limited given the explanation required to accompany such data. Audience-specific communication should be compiled as needed.

Visitor Profile Monitor
• Require the same specialist to produce an annual visitor profile in a format suitable for distribution to a wide range of stakeholders.
• Profile variables should include travel party type, purpose of trip, activities undertaken, accommodation used, information sources used, use of the internet, length of stay, age, lifecycle segment

Market Monitors
• Require the same specialist to compile relevant source market monitors utilising data filters that increase the relevance to the Southern Highlands. These will focus on source market changes irrespective of destination to keep stakeholders informed of how the markets are changing. It will also allow a degree of business performance benchmarking.
• These should be broken down into three visitor categories: 1.domestic overnight 2. Domestic day and international overnight work
• Seek data to support the target market selection process. Utilise this information to determine product and market fit. It should also be used in determining positioning decisions for target markets.

Share the knowledge
• Identify the information needs of key stakeholders and supply in a readily consumed manner on a regular basis.
• Develop an increased understanding of relevant source markets within tourism operators.
• Conduct an annual industry briefing to disseminate information and insight. Utilise a range of communication methods to disseminate information.

2.5 INFORMATION SERVICING

OVERALL GOAL

Ensure the availability of quality destination and product information, meeting the needs of the individual visitor for their purpose of visit, when, where and how it is most useful.

MAIN DESIRED OUTCOMES
• 	Provide ease of access to information about products and services
• 	Maximise the conversion of consumers from interest to booking
• 	Maximise the economic value of a visit to the Southern Highlands by providing information and offers in a range of formats and locations
• 	Support marketing campaigns with provision of quality information tailored to the objectives of the campaign
• 	Monitor information provision and consumer behaviour to improve visitor information collateral and distribution

KEY ACTIONS

Best Practise information delivery
• The provision of visitor information is likely to continue to change dramatically over the next 10 years. Information will be communicated to visitors in many different ways. Analysing consumer behaviour and providing intelligence to operators and understanding visitor information needs will enable the Southern Highlands to adapt and respond to these changes.
• Utilise appropriate and cost effective technologies (such as smart phone applications) to build length of stay and maximise visitor spending.

Information Centre
• Face to face information and advice will continue to be important to visitors once in the destination. Maintain a network of information nodes that aid a visitor's knowledge of available experiences.
• Reposition the VIC as the Southern Highlands Information Centre and broaden its purpose to support information provision for a range of needs including business, visitors and community.
• Develop the understanding that the key currency of an information centre is information.
• Upgrade facilities and systems to keep pace with new technology and information services.

Product information
• Analyse consumer usage of visitor information and monitoring the rate of adaption of the sector.
• Provide guidance on best practice in product information for tourism operators.

Partnerships
• Identifying opportunities to collaborate with partners in the private and public sectors to deliver economies of scale benefits
• Ensure the development/availability of information as fulfilment for marketing campaigns. The aim is to drive bookings.

Online
• Improve the Southern Highlands online presence with fresh and up to date content that contributes to destination image and aligns with the needs of selected target markets.
• Implement an online strategy that includes multiple domain names and landing pages specific to the activity/lead assets.
• Integrate marketing activities to drive traffic to online information.

My Southern Highlands
• Ensure the provision of information into the hands of community members and ambassadors in support of the VFR based program.

2.6 FUNDING TOURISM IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS

OVERALL GOAL

Establish a broad base of funding that will support the continuing growth in the range and value of tourism activities undertaken by Southern Highlands Shire Council.

MAIN DESIRED OUTCOMES:
• Increase the resources available for tourism marketing
• Expectations of community and stakeholders to match the resources available
• Leverage local funding commitments by seeking grants from other levels of government
• Budgets for core activities are detailed in the Annual Operating Plan
• Seek industry investment in destination marketing projects
• Build on the fee for service offer to tourism operators and organisations with a place interest – grow the number of organisations and businesses that are investing in tourism
• Shift focus from membership to customers
• Continue to operate with a prudent and responsible approach to the management of tourism funding

KEY ACTIONS

Council budget
• Appreciating the resource allocation challenges of Council generally, develop an annual submission for Council funds based on the Annual Tourism Action Plan. Report against the plan to demonstrate effective management of funds and return on investment for the community.
• Encourage Council business units to identify their role in tourism and allocate resources accordingly.

Funding assistance
• Foster and develop relationships with local state and federal members and government agencies. Access regional state and federal programs in support of the projects identified in the Annual Operating Plan.
• Identify and explore new funding sources as they emerge.

Fee for service
• Provide valued destination management and marketing services that are beyond the scope of individual operators. Maintain a commission based booking system that can be accessed by those operators willing to participate.
• Develop economies of scale benefits that can be accessed by operators for a fee - such as tourism research.
• Position WSC's tourism unit as the key marketing agency for the Shire and provide opportunities for "non-tourism" organisations to participate in marketing activities for a participation fee.

Partnerships
• Leverage Council's investment in tourism by partnering with the private sector and appropriate other partners (eg Inland NSW RTO, Tourism Wollongong, South Coast RTO etc) to build scale into marketing and promotion activities where target markets align.
• Identify organisations not traditionally seen as tourism businesses that benefit from marketing of the destination and provide opportunity to participate in activities that will benefit them.

3.   NEXT STEPS

By creating and adopting a tourism strategy that is distinct from the traditional model the Southern Highlands has the opportunity over the five year life of the strategy to make maximum effect of resources available for implementation.

Committing to the course of the strategy is essential. The key next steps are outlined below:

5.1 IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

The project executive group should continue to have carriage of the project through this period.

5.1.1 Strategy adoption and engagement
•   Communicate with the community and stakeholders
•   Build coalitions of support
•   Build strategy appreciation
•   Production and distribution of a 'public' version of this strategy that is specifically designed and has the aesthetics to assist with the adoption objective.

5.1.2 Development of the Annual Operating Plan

The Annual Operating Plan (AOP) will include specific detail relating to the operating activities of Tourism Southern Highlands and the linkages to this Strategy. It is important to note that in the context of available resources the prioritisation of activity is critical.

The AOP is the annual control document and is in an action plan format. It can include: objectives, actions, budget (where appropriate), resource, timing, responsibility, measures of success.