

# Casey Cardinia Visitation Strategy 2017-2020

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for Cardinia Shire Council and the City of Casey

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## CONTEXT

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The original Cardinia Shire Tourism Strategy was commissioned by the Cardinia Shire Council and formally adopted in May 2013. (See Appendix 1: Cardinia Shire Tourism Strategy).

In the past two years, Cardinia Shire Council and the City of Casey Economic Development teams have collaborated on an informal basis towards developing the Casey Cardinia region as a visitor destination. As a result, the two Councils have determined that the Cardinia Shire Tourism Strategy (CSTS) should be reviewed and updated to reflect the Casey Cardinia regional approach.

From a tourism perspective, the inclusion of the City of Casey is very important, as it contains a large number of the region's significant activities and attractions. The City's attributes both complement and enrich the traditionally more rural-based Cardinia Shire. Their combined products and experiences offer particular appeal to families and considerable potential for a strong visitor market.

*The Casey Cardinia Visitation Strategy (CCVS) is not intended as a whole new tourism strategy.* It builds on the information in the previous document, much of which is still highly relevant, and most importantly, updates it to include the City of Casey. The CCVS includes Recommendations to 2020, and a Marketing Plan for the next 12 months, as well as a staged succession plan for the Casey Cardinia Tourism Advisory Committee to evolve into a regional tourism organisation.

The development of the Casey Cardinia Strategy is particularly timely. Recently, it was announced that Gumbaya Park has been purchased by a consortium, that will build a large-scale family adventure park on the site. This provides an extraordinary tourism opportunity for the region, and will strengthen its growing reputation as 'Melbourne's playground'.

Additionally, two of the region's most significant visitor experiences, Puffing Billy and the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria's, Cranbourne Gardens are currently completing Master Plans for their respective businesses and the Federal Government has pledged a \$6.5m upgrade to Puffing Billy including a new Discovery Centre. It has also promised a \$1m extension of the Emerald-Cockatoo bike and pedestrian trail to Gembrook.

The Cardinia Shire Council and the City of Casey's combined focus on building a regional tourism industry suggests an optimistic future. Aside from this Visitation Strategy, both Councils are advocating for significant public infrastructure, including an airport in Melbourne's south east, improvements in public transport, for example, an express lane from Pakenham to Melbourne's CBD and additional railway stations to accommodate the growth corridors at Clyde, and those beyond Pakenham.

The City of Casey has commenced construction of the Casey Cultural Precinct, which will be officially known as Bunjil Place. At a cost of \$125m, Bunjil Place is the Council's largest ever infrastructure project, and will complement existing, established assets and strengthen the region's tourism offering.

The inclusion of the City of Casey will strengthen the role of local government in leading and nurturing the region's fledging tourism industry. Ultimately however, Councils are limited in their ability to affect industry success and a strong partnership with private enterprise is necessary to maximise the benefits of tourism for local communities.

The two Councils' policy towards tourism continues to be one of supporting the industry, with the industry taking the lead. (This policy complements Cardinia Shire's Tourism Policy 2015.) Specifically:

Councils' primary roles in tourism are:

- Provision of leadership and strategy development
- Facilitating appropriate tourism development through the planning permit process
- Brand development, marketing, promotions and information provision, in partnership with industry
- Investment attraction
- Business support via:
  - Business training, networking forums and awards programs, advice and guidance to Local Tourism Associations
  - Quality presentation and maintenance of Council-owned facilities, attractions, venues and infrastructure (e.g. trails, toilets, roads, signage)
  - Advice and guidance to businesses and the community who provide tourism information services
  - Provision of base tourism data so informed decisions can be made.

# 1. STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

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*Melbourne 2030 – Planning for Sustainable Growth* identified the Casey Cardinia region as one of five growth corridors in metropolitan Melbourne. These areas are driven by the need for affordable housing, proximity to Melbourne and other regional locations, their capacity for residential development (greenfield sites) as well as adequate land for industrial use, and other lifestyle and amenity choices, particularly for young couples and families.

As the second fastest growing region in Australia, Casey Cardinia represents a new frontier for business growth; its population is expected to reach more than 650,000 by 2036, making it greater than Hobart, Darwin and Geelong combined. The Casey Cardinia region will in fact, become larger than some other major cities in Australia.

Such exponential growth however, presents considerable challenges for the Casey Cardinia region.

The region has fewer jobs than residents. This has resulted in a high proportion of local resident workers (70%) leaving the region every day to work. Continued job creation is required to improve employment self-containment in the region...Areas with low self-containment have a tendency to become dormitory suburbs. The Casey Cardinia region is no exception. Targeted economic development is required to support economic expansion and resultant job creation. **Source:** Casey Cardinia Economic Development Strategy, 2016

While planning requirements ensure that the region's hill towns will remain small, urban areas will continue to expand; tourism offers a significant opportunity for job creation and broader economic development including local workforce participation. In recognition of the industry's potential, Cardinia Shire Council adopted a Tourism Policy in April 2015 'to encourage the sustainable growth of tourism in the Shire'. **Source:** Cardinia Shire Council, Tourism Policy, April 2015

Neither the City of Casey nor Cardinia Shire however, is currently perceived as a tourist destination. According to Tourism Research Australia (2014), *Visits per Capita Victorian Municipalities 2009–2014*:

## Visits per capita average 2011/2012 – 2013/2014

Casey	7.6 visits
Cardinia	11.4 visits

However the region's strategic location to Melbourne's south east, (e.g. Melbourne is no more than an hour away by car), and its close proximity to established tourism regions like the Yarra Valley, Gippsland and the Mornington Peninsula, brings a distinct advantage. When these factors are combined with a rapid growth in population, they provide a strong basis for future visitation – particularly the Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) market.

The following Strategy will build on the intent of the Cardinia Shire Tourism Strategy (CSTS) (2012):

To provide a framework through which the [Casey Cardinia region] and its tourism industry may focus on the best opportunities to align this growth with the development of complementary tourism product and experiences to establish the [Casey Cardinia] region as a competitive and sustainable tourism destination. **Source:** CSTS p.1

## 2. METHODOLOGY

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The development of the Casey Cardinia Visitation Strategy has been guided by a best practice destination management planning framework, which was also utilised in the development of the Cardinia Shire Tourism Strategy. It includes the following:

- Desktop research and review of strategies, policies, plans and data related to tourism in the Casey Cardinia region
- Consultation and engagement with key industry stakeholders including representatives from the respective Councils, tourism and business groups and individual tourism operators
- A ‘familiarisation’ tour of the region, including accommodation properties and attractions and activities.

### **Casey Cardinia Visitation Strategy Objectives**

- Increase visitor numbers, visitor dispersal, length of stay and visitor expenditure
- Provide a credible, evidence-based case for more funding for the region’s tourism industry
- Identify a sustainable governance model with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, to ensure effective collaboration between the region’s Councils and its tourism industry stakeholders
- Increase industry ownership and leadership within the key tourism precincts
- Provide a 12-month Marketing Plan that will attract the Visiting Friends and Relatives market to the Casey Cardinia region
- Provide a practical way forward for tourism in the region that is also aspirational for the future of the Casey Cardinia visitor economy.

### 3. A REGIONAL SNAPSHOT

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The Cardinia Shire Tourism Strategy reiterates a range of competitive advantages, most significantly the Shire's close proximity and access to Melbourne, and its 'booming residential growth' (p.8). The City of Casey shares the same advantages, as well as the greater level of services and facilities that are typically available in a more urbanised environment.

Stakeholder workshops and individual interviews to inform the current Visitation Strategy, largely endorsed the challenges/weaknesses that were articulated in the CSTS (p.7) including:

- The absence of cohesive and accessible visitor information
- An unreliable mobile network, a poor tourism profile and identity
- Strong competition from well-known neighbouring destinations
- The lack of a regional tourism organisation and the continuous need to improve the service culture.

Regional opportunities included the continuous growth in new residents and their capacity to attract visitors to a destination with cross-generational appeal, the need for a major new event to 'sell' to Visit Victoria, given that events are their key focus, and the Puffing Billy Discovery Centre. For the 'hills villages'; the Cockatoo – Gembrook walking trail, the upgrade of the trail between Emerald Lake Park and Cockatoo, and the further development of Gembrook as the new events hub for Puffing Billy railway. Stakeholders also underscored the importance of leveraging key assets – e.g. the City of Casey's 'Fountain Gate' Shopping Centre which is one of the largest retail complexes in Australia, and the area's considerable range of leisure facilities.

The Casey Cardinia region has a significant and timely opportunity to embed its fledgling tourism industry in the respective Councils' strategic planning processes. As the industry develops, it will require a holistic and collaborative approach that is underpinned by clear and agreed policy.

### 4. REGIONAL PRODUCTS AND EXPERIENCES

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*Unless a visitor destination is 'product-ready', no amount of marketing and promotion will ensure a sustainable tourism industry.*

#### EXISTING AND EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES

The Cardinia Shire and the City of Casey have a diversity of tourism assets that are highly complementary, providing a potentially rich, regional experience for both residents and visitors.

The Cardinia Shire has some well-established tourism assets, most notably Emerald Lake Park (Emerald Lake Park Strategic Plan 2013 - 2018) and Puffing Billy railway, both of which are popular family attractions. Puffing Billy is the Shire's highest profile attraction and has been described by Tourism Victoria as one of the State's 'key visitor economy entities'. Recent Federal Government funding will assist in enhancing the Railway's core product. There are plans for Puffing Billy to grow its capacity along the Cardinia Shire route, which is currently under-utilised.

Cannibal Creek's new architecturally designed Cellar Door and Restaurant (Tynong) is an excellent example of the type of experience that will attract additional visitors to the region.

The hills villages of Emerald, Cockatoo, Gembrook and Upper Beaconsfield provide scenic, rural landscapes, and lend themselves to specialty experiences, including cafes, shopping, markets and art galleries in an attractive, relaxed environment.

The further development of food and wine offerings as well as on-farm experiences and quality local produce will boost visitor appeal.

The Shire also offers a range of nature-based activities, e.g. walking and cycling trails, camping and outdoor education/adventure in the Bunyip State Park. The Cardinia Shire Council currently has a draft Pedestrian and Bicycle Strategy with a view to connecting its townships through a network of off-road/on-road opportunities. This is in keeping with an increasing number of visitor destinations that enable alternative access to areas of interest, without having to rely on a motor vehicle.

The Cardinia Shire has substantial equestrian facilities including 11 publicly accessible centres as well as recreational trail riding opportunities. As noted in the original Cardinia Shire Tourism Strategy, ‘close proximity to the Melbourne East population creates an opportunity for families to participate in horse-riding activities and events catering for all levels of competencies’ (CSTS p.19).

The Pakenham Racing Club hosts more than 50 race meetings a year including popular night races. The course includes hospitality venues for both corporate and private events, and has recently introduced twilight Trackside Cinema nights during the summer.

The City of Casey enhances and strengthens the region’s positioning as an appealing, new visitor destination. Its core assets include Cranbourne Gardens and Moonlit Sanctuary, which like Puffing Billy, have a significant international profile.

The Gardens incorporates the award-winning Australian Garden showcasing Australia’s remarkable plants and landscapes, as well as the Boon Wurrung Café, Gardens Shop and a range of walking and bicycling tracks and picnic facilities in natural settings, making it a family-friendly destination as well as a horticultural highlight.

Moonlit Sanctuary enables close-up encounters with Australia’s most fascinating and popular animals as well as being an award-winning wildlife conservation park. Its lantern-lit evening tours offer visitors a very special experience. The park includes a café, shop and picnic areas. It also offers a strong education program for students of all ages.

The City of Casey has a diversity of leisure facilities, e.g. Casey Fields, which the Council has developed as the premier outdoor sports facility in Melbourne’s south east; The Shed Skate Park, which is the largest indoor skate facility in the southern hemisphere and the Casey Recreation and Aquatic Centres located in Narre Warren and Cranbourne East which attracted more than two million visitors combined.

Thanks to the recent \$18M redevelopment, the City of Casey’s state-of-the-art Casey stadium is considered one of the best stadium facilities in Victoria. To accommodate growing demand, it features ten courts (including a show court), spectacular seating for 1,500 people, multiple large-scale screens, a multi-purpose / function room and café / piazza. In addition to hosting national level sporting events, the stadium is also home to popular basketball and netball associations. Future development are to continue with a large dedicated gymnastics space, five indoor cricket courts and more multi-purpose rooms expecting to open mid-2018.

The Cranbourne Racing Precinct provides the largest entertainment facility in the City of Casey. It is a premier night racing venue including combined thoroughbred, harness and greyhound racing, hospitality services and capacity for a range of corporate, public and private events.

The Old Cheese Factory, owned by the Council and located in Berwick, is a popular place to relax and enjoy the landscaped gardens, playground, cafe and heritage displays. Its historic buildings provide an attractive setting for weddings, and it has a number of rooms available for birthday parties and other celebrations.

The Council also owns Myuna Farm, which includes hands-on interaction with farm animals for people of all ages and abilities, native wildlife viewing, a café, venues for hire, playground and BBQ facilities and a children’s train ride around the property.

In addition, Council also owns Wilson Botanic Park, which attracts both local and international visitors to its



100 acres of beautifully landscaped gardens, lakes, recreation areas and playgrounds. Originally a quarry until the late 1970's, the park is a popular venue for weddings, as well as scientists given various fossils (some of which are 22 million years old) have been discovered on its grounds.

Due for completion in late 2017, the City of Casey's Bunjil Place will provide an exciting and unique facility for arts and culture, and leisure and entertainment. It will include an 800-seat theatre, a regional art gallery and a large function centre, amongst a range of other community and civic facilities.

Bunjil Place will enable an extensive program of national and state touring performances, art exhibitions and both corporate and community events. As one of the largest projects undertaken by local government in Australia, it will significantly strengthen the region's positioning in the visitor market and assist in consolidating and refreshing arts and cultural tourism.

The development of Bunjil Place provides the impetus to investigate the regional opportunities for potential/existing arts and cultural experiences including Emerald's Performance, Arts and Visual Entertainment (PAVE) event. Consideration should also be given to indigenous tourism experiences. This is the traditional land of the Boon Wurrung and Wurrundjeri people where these groups have had a long history of activity, and the name, 'Bunjil' Place draws on Casey's Aboriginal heritage.

Casey Cardinia's critical mass of products and experiences is primarily orientated toward the family market – those making day trips from Melbourne for a change of scenery and an enjoyable day out and those visiting their friends and relatives who live in the region. While Puffing Billy is the iconic intergenerational family activity, the majority are smaller operations. The Cardinia Shire Tourism Strategy identified the development of a *major family attraction* as the most important project for the Shire (and now the region). (CSTS p.22)

In August 2016, the first steps were taken toward the realisation of that priority project, with the sale and imminent redevelopment of Gumbuya Park (Tynong) into a state-of-the-art family adventure park; such an exciting and significant attraction will raise Casey Cardinia's profile and change consumer perceptions towards a region that to date, has not been viewed as a 'must see and do' visitor destination.

The redevelopment of Gumbuya Park inevitably provides both challenges and opportunities for tourism in the Casey Cardinia region. While it will have the capacity to propel the region faster and more effectively than has been the case in the past, it will be important for other tourism businesses to leverage off its marketing and publicity campaigns to spread the benefit more widely. A sustainable destination and a viable tourism industry cannot be built on one, single attraction. Collaboration is the key!

Hopefully, such a project will also encourage existing businesses to enhance their offerings, as well as the emergence of new products and experiences.

Beyond a redeveloped Gumbuya Park and several other higher profile attractions, the challenge is to increase visitor dispersal across the region. Many lesser known experiences can enrich a day out or a weekend away, but it is often quite challenging to persuade visitors to get 'off the beaten track'. Ultimately there is a need to make the region's attributes accessible in the broadest sense; if it's in any way difficult to find out what's on offer or how to get there, it is very easy for potential visitors to go somewhere else!

Casey Cardinia can address this through several different strategies, for example:

- **Product 'packaging':** This works well when a higher profile business or event is positioned as the key attractor and other accommodation and activities nearby are included and promoted as part of the 'package' for a day trip or a short break.

- **Touring routes/themed trails:** Second only to the recommendation regarding a major family attraction, the original Cardinia Shire Tourism Strategy (CCTS) proposed the development of touring routes throughout the region (p.23). These can be presented on a broader scale where locations of interest are mapped along and around the route, and/or they can be organised thematically; these are often referred to as ‘trails’ – e.g. a food trail might include fresh asparagus, a farmers’ market, bush tucker, Cranbourne Gardens and a café serving local produce; outdoor activities (walking/cycling trails, fishing, visiting farms/animals); family fun and hills villages (CCTS p.23).

The Official Holiday Website of Tourism Ireland ([www.ireland.com](http://www.ireland.com)) includes itineraries with some helpful detail, and Taste Trails – Australia ([www.tastetrails.com.au](http://www.tastetrails.com.au)) provides a useful example of trail ‘design’.

While there is no suggestion that these are particularly appropriate for Casey Cardinia, they do include some noteworthy elements.

Evening attractions and activities – e.g. star gazing at the Mt.

Burnett Observatory or a lantern-lit tour at Moonlit Sanctuary should be included where possible, to encourage overnight stays.

‘Packaged’ products, touring routes and themed trails should be promoted via a new regional website and printed collateral. To maximise both visitor and business opportunities, a database of tourism products and experiences will be required across the region. Such a database should extend beyond the region’s higher profile tourism products and include lesser known, quality offerings. Criteria for inclusion should be established in consultation with the TAC. This process can bring additional benefits - e.g. raise the Committee’s profile, as it engages more broadly with those who may currently see themselves as unconnected to the industry.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Regional Products and Experiences

- Continue supporting the region’s major attractions, particularly in relation to their business development programs - e.g. Puffing Billy railway and the Emerald Discovery Centre and the extension of its business to Gembrook, and the Cranbourne Gardens
- Investigate how Casey Cardinia tourism can capitalize on the new facilities at Bunjil Place and other arts and cultural experiences in the region, including indigenous tourism
- Provide broadly-based support to the Gumbuya Park redevelopment as a highly significant, new regional tourism experience
- Develop a touring route/s, themed trails and product packages which will appeal to the region’s ‘Visiting Friends and Relatives’ and other identified markets
- Encourage additional cafes, retail, attractions and activities in the ‘hills villages’ that retain their intrinsic character, encourage longer stays and an increased spend
- Foster brand-related products and other existing and potential experiences that build on the region’s assets, align with key markets and create a point of difference for Casey Cardinia in the tourism market place
- Build a regional database of tourism products and experiences to maximize visitor and business opportunities.

## SERVICES AND AMENITIES

Successful destination development requires a holistic approach, and the independent audit of 19 towns across the region in 2015, provides some crucial insights. While some aspects scored quite well, a substantial lack of visitor information, and 52.9% of toilets that were not clean or appropriately serviced, is cause for concern.

There is no second chance to create a first impression! As the region attracts stronger interest, the chances of repeat visitation will quickly diminish if basic services and amenities do not meet visitor expectations.

A town is often measured by the standard of its public toilets; particularly those that wish to attract the family market.

Research shows that in almost every focus group, especially those with seniors and families, toilets come up as a reason for travellers stop at a destination. They don't just visit the toilet; they have lunch, fill up on petrol, buy supplies and may even spend a night or two in the place.

Source: <http://www.mytravelresearch.com/toilet-tourism-make-a-marketing-splash/>

There is a high risk that visitor disappointment will be quickly reflected via social media and shared with the world at large! (The Belfast City Council approach sets a benchmark and interestingly, includes its public toilets under 'tourism venues'.)

<http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/tourism-venues/publictoilets/publictoilets.aspx>



'A must visit'

Reviewed 5 February 2014 via mobile

Kawakawa is an off-the-main road, 'one horse' town in Northland, New Zealand. Its great claim to fame are the Hundertwasser toilets. Hundreds of tourists visit (and use them) daily. If visiting, take time to look at the shops, especially the gift, Tshirt, Hundertwasser art shop near the Trainspotter Café... Visited February 2014

Source: [https://www.tripadvisor.com.au/ShowUserReviews-g2093681-d2078409-r193120845-Kawakawa\\_Public\\_Toilets\\_by\\_Hundertwasser-Kawakawa\\_Northland\\_Region\\_North\\_Island.html#](https://www.tripadvisor.com.au/ShowUserReviews-g2093681-d2078409-r193120845-Kawakawa_Public_Toilets_by_Hundertwasser-Kawakawa_Northland_Region_North_Island.html#)

The lack of variety in accommodation styles was also perceived as an issue with a 73.3% negative score – i.e. the percentage of 'mystery shoppers' who believed this to be the case.

### RECOMMENDATION

#### Services and Amenities

- Continue addressing issues arising from the Mystery Visits program and work towards enhanced customer service throughout the region

## EVENTS

Events can be a major visitor attraction for an emerging destination like Casey Cardinia, and provide a significant opportunity to showcase the region. Initially, there is considerable scope to further develop existing events, which can provide an immediate benefit to the visitor economy. Some key examples include:

- Puffing Billy's Great Train Race: attracting more than 2700 participants in 2016, a new, additional run from Belgrave to Gembrook is under consideration for 2018, with a plan to conduct it on the same day as the popular Belgrave to Lakeside race.
- The Cranbourne GP Run attracts approximately 10,000 spectators annually in October. The City of Casey should continue to work with the local community to activate further opportunities around this popular event.
- The Doveton Show is a very successful community-driven event, which attracts between 20,000 and 30,000 attendees every year. It is viewed as a more affordable alternative to the Royal Melbourne Show and a family draw card. Such an event provides a great opportunity to encourage the VFR market. Building awareness of the region's other exciting activities and attractions will motivate them to extend their stay and/or return at a later date to explore further afield.
- The Pakenham Racing Club is one of only two metropolitan clubs in Victoria that hosts a stand-alone Saturday meeting, including the Pakenham Cup on the last Saturday in November; the Cup attracts between 10,000–12,000 race-goers and provides a good opportunity for packaging a 'weekend away'.

The City of Casey is proud to host one of the largest and most exciting events in Victoria, as thousands of motorcyclists gathered in Cranbourne to travel en-masse to Phillip Island for the 2016 Australian Motorcycle Grand Prix.

Source: <http://www.casey.vic.gov.au/arts-leisure/events-activities/cranbourne-gp-run>

The Cardinia Shire Events Strategy is now outdated, and should be replaced by a regional plan that recognises the economic benefits of both existing and potential events, maximises the opportunity to develop and promote key events as significant visitor (and local) attractions, and incorporates the recommendations in the Visitation Strategy.

A coordinated calendar of events is an important first step and should be included on the new regional tourism website as a matter of priority. To raise awareness amongst local residents, Councils could include a printed calendar and/or the web address in other communications with ratepayers. An events calendar will also enable better planning so that events can be spread across the year, particularly during the quieter months. In addition, the calendar will provide a broader view of the range and type of events, reflecting further opportunities for the future. Similarly, there should be a database of events venues including their capacity, indoor/outdoor and other related information. This will assist in better planning, and promotion of the region's facilities.

The current and most significant challenge is the lack of regional event coordination, development and marketing.

The City of Casey has a Community Life Division, which includes an Events team of five staff; however the Department's role is to focus on the compliance issues related to community events. The Council also has an Arts and Cultural Development Department including 15 personnel, none of whom are specifically dedicated to activating Bunjil Place. It is recommended that discussion is initiated between the Councils to explore the possibility of the City of Casey providing a more expansive role in relation to regional events, particularly those that have the capacity to increase visitation. The development of a major, signature event for the region, should be included as a priority.

The completion of Bunjil Place will be a catalyst for larger business events, which can also provide an impetus for partner delegates, pre/post conference touring and return visitation. Other niche events, for example those connected to arts and cultural tourism will require separate planning in order to measure their potential.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Events**

- Initially focus on existing events as an important impetus for new and repeat visitation
- Undertake a new, regional Events Strategy
- Develop a coordinated, regional calendar of events to promote on the regional tourism website and directly to residents
- Build a database of significant events venues including their capacity, indoor/outdoor and other related information for improved planning
- Explore the possibility of the City of Casey providing a more expansive role in relation to regional events, particularly those that have the capacity to increase visitation
- Development of a major, signature event for the region, once resourcing is in place.

## 5. MARKETING

Casey Cardinia falls outside the regions included in Victoria's long-running and highly successful Jigsaw campaign. However a Greater Melbourne Marketing Plan to be developed by Destination Melbourne in 2017 will see Casey Cardinia and Dandenong combined as a single entity for marketing purposes.

The City of Casey has previously partnered with Destination Melbourne for the Discover Your Own Backyard (DYOB) campaign. 'The main objective of the program is to assist local councils in increasing residents' awareness of the visitor-related products and experiences in their region and encourage them to act as local ambassadors'. **Source:** Destination Melbourne website.

To this end, the City of Casey was showcased through the popular television program, 'Postcards' and several professionally produced YouTube videos focusing on the key themes of the Great Outdoors; Sport and Leisure; Food and Dining; and Family Fun. These will be very useful for future promotion as well.

Generally however, there is very limited information for potential visitors to the Casey Cardinia region. The Cardinia Shire website includes a list of 'Places to Visit' and a downloadable map/brochure, which is now several years old. A web search for 'Casey Cardinia Tourism' leads to a series of error messages. Tourism businesses have their own marketing collateral and there are individual brochures for some attractions and activities – e.g. Emerald Lake Park and the Emerald Heritage Walk. 'What to See & Do in Emerald on Foot' is also a useful guide. The Eastern Dandenong Ranges Visitor and Information Centre located at the Emerald Railway Station provides a range of brochures, and is staffed by volunteers.

Tourism is a highly competitive industry and consumers are spoilt for choice. Visitor destinations must provide easy access to information regarding their products and experiences from the planning stage – i.e. prior to potential visitors leaving home. With the exception of the DYOB campaign, visitor information for the Casey Cardinia region is geared exclusively towards those who have already arrived in the region.

Workshop participants confirmed the findings of the original Strategy in terms of the region's primary target markets – Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) and 'day trippers', particularly from Melbourne, which can clearly provide a very substantial 'feeder' population. (It is also understood that some of those who are initially part of the VFR market, return as independent travellers to explore the region further.) However, the most successful destination marketing is based on a deep understanding of the desired targets markets.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH

Effective marketing must be based on rigorous research; it is the foundation on which to identify and confirm the region's target markets and their preferences and expectations regarding leisure activities. Research is a core concept in Destination Management Planning (CCTS, p.17). The CCTS also noted the absence of tourism research applicable to the Cardinia Shire (p.13) and the need to undertake it (p.33). The Casey Cardinia region has a significant opportunity to build a vital understanding of its target markets at a critical juncture in its development as an emerging visitor destination.

The one thing that matters to your destination more than anything else is word of mouth from friends and family; locals, visitors and your tourism industry. Nothing else matters as much as that.

Source: Rodney Payne, CEO Destination Think! (A company internationally recognised for thought leadership in destination development, management and marketing).

Sound research will enable all tourism stakeholders to better understand their markets, provide for those markets appropriately and enable them to specifically focus their limited resources on the region's most profitable prospects. It must also continue beyond the initial recommendations in this Strategy. Ultimately, social media can be one of the most useful, measurable sources of consumer engagement with a particular destination.

Central to this process is a strong understanding of local residents and their communities. For the VFR market, they are the 'key influencers' so it is equally important to understand what they currently enjoy, and the kind of leisure activities that they would like to see in the future. By extension, they will encourage their friends and relatives to participate in the same activities.

The increasing numbers of local residents have a secondary opportunity to promote the region. The majority of those in work are employed outside the region; therein lies the additional prospect of encouraging their colleagues to visit Casey Cardinia.

Future success for the region requires both internal and external marketing:

- Encourage residents/locals to visit and support the diversity of family experiences within the region as well as any other preferred tourism activities noted in the research
- Develop a recognisable and consistent brand identity for Casey Cardinia tourism
- Develop a suite of marketing tools that raise awareness and provide tangible information for visitors before, during and after their visit
- Build collaborative partnerships between tourism stakeholders to leverage marketing opportunities
- Build a social media strategy (which will include local participation).

For a great example of involving residents in a marketing campaign, see what Destination Cleveland did to change the negative perceptions around its city and encourage community pride

<https://destinationthink.com/destination-cleveland-shifting-perceptions-mobilising-locals/>

Please refer to the **Marketing Plan 2017-2018**, p.24 for further details.

## 6. GOVERNANCE

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*Strong and effective governance is a core concept in best practice destination management.*

### TOURISM ASPIRATIONS FOR THE CASEY CARDINIA REGION

- Healthy, sustainable and profitable tourism industry
- Strong leadership
- Community engagement
- Coordinated, collaborative approach
- Attractive, differentiated and accessible experiences
- An effective industry voice to Government
- Great reviews on Trip Advisor
- A clear and marketable identity
- Excellent customer service and products
- A tourism industry that is recognised
- Appropriate communication
- Tourism that is integrated with other activities for mutual benefit.

**Source:** Stakeholder Workshops June/July 2016

Following a recommendation from the Cardinia Shire Tourism Strategy, a joint independent Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC) was formed to lead the implementation of that Strategy, and subsequently the Casey Cardinia Visitation Strategy 2017–2020.

The Cardinia Shire Tourism Strategy addressed the role and function of those organisations that typically embody the structural elements of a regional tourism industry (p.8, pp.24-25). This information remains highly relevant and should be reviewed by way of background to further discussions.

The current Committee comprises 10 industry and two Council representatives from Cardinia Shire Council and the City of Casey, respectively. The Committee is well balanced and includes representatives from the region's higher profile attractions – e.g. Puffing Billy railway, Moonlit Sanctuary and Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria. Membership is voluntary and inevitably, it is challenging to maintain the necessary momentum.

While recognising the important work of the TAC to date, key industry stakeholders, including members of the Committee, are of the view that its' terms of reference are too limited. Ultimately the Committee's role is 'to provide advice to the City of Casey and Cardinia Shire Councils' (CCTAC 2016-2018, Expectations and Guiding Principles). There has been an understanding that over time, the TAC may transition to a regional tourism organisation.

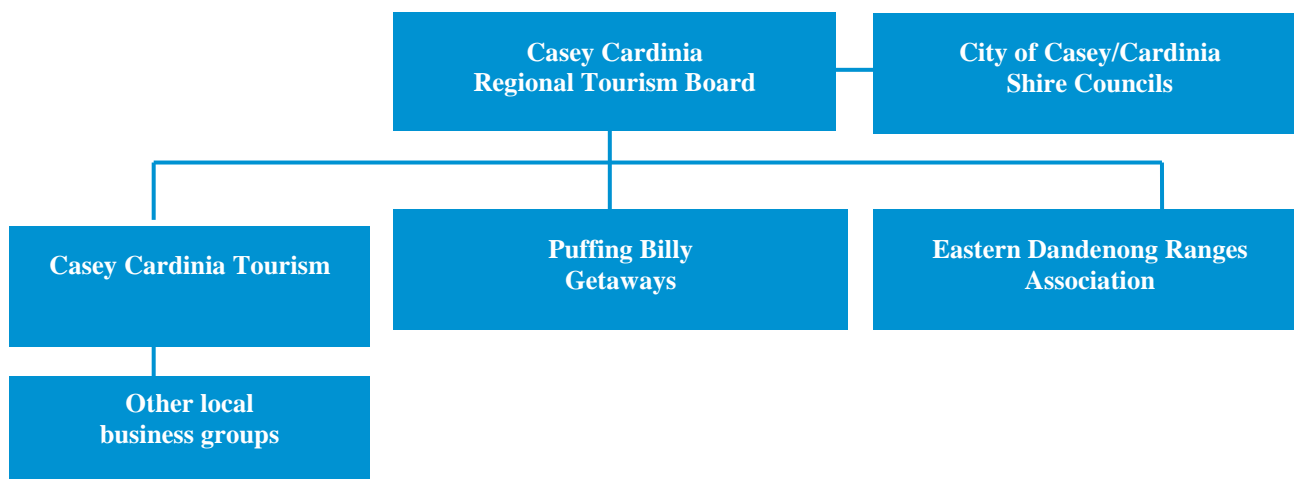
Workshop participants were of the strong view that the industry should move towards an organisational structure that is capable of 'doing', rather than simply advising, and that the current arrangements could not take the region 'to the next level'.

The following diagram represents the preferred option. However the group endorsed this structure on the basis that it was important to consider a range of potential partners as required. Casey Cardinia is already a sub-region



of Destination Melbourne, and as such it should work closely with that organisation to leverage further marketing opportunities, including a revised Melbourne and surrounds map. Neighbouring, more mature tourism bodies – Destination Gippsland, Yarra Ranges Tourism and the Mornington Peninsula Regional Tourism Board can provide mentoring and marketing leverage on a ‘needs’ basis.

### Preferred model: Regional Tourism Board (RTB)



**Potential scenario:** The RTB consists of a skills-based board with nine members, including two Council representatives, one from the Cardinia Shire and the other from the City of Casey. It includes representation from local business and tourism associations. (Other local business groups may become involved over time.) This is similar to the TAC structure and would assist towards a balance of interests and a sufficient number of members to cover the range of necessary tasks. RTB structures across Victoria vary considerably, according to their respective circumstances.

In some regions, Councils have opted out of the RTB, but given that Casey Cardinia is an emerging visitor destination with, potentially, a new industry structure, it is very important to maintain a close partnership with the Councils. To date, Councils have provided industry leadership, so the RTB structure will require the industry to step up and take ownership and responsibility.

A Casey Cardinia RTB structure can offer the region several key advantages:

- An independent organisation, which can be agile and opportunistic in accessing benefits from larger, more developed RTBs
- The ability to grow as the industry grows – flexibility is important, particularly in a region undergoing such expansion and change
- Better value than buying into a neighbouring RTB, where proportional representation could be problematic
- Opportunities to share the workload – e.g. Yarra Ranges Tourism includes several working groups with specific interests/specialist skills.

Casey Cardinia tourism stakeholders can shape their industry structure in a way that best suits the environment in which they operate; it is not necessary, or advisable, to develop a prescriptive approach. As one workshop participant noted, ‘don’t limit the vision; industry may look very different over the next three-five-ten years’.

Ultimately it will be the people, not the structure that will make the RTB work effectively.

However, there are some aspects of a successful Casey Cardinia governance structure that are essential, including:

- Industry leadership ‘on the ground’
- Clear roles and responsibilities
- An Annual Plan
- Funding (monetary and in-kind) from Councils to support the RTB’s operational/administrative requirements and assistance with the fulfillment of the marketing plan
- Tangible benefits for members, encouraging ‘buy-in’
- Measurable outcomes (KPIs/accountability) – industry will be looking for a direct link between the activities of the RTB and their business success, and Council need clear evidence that their resources are being well spent
- Appropriate representation particularly given the diversity of the region
- Succession planning
- A strong and continuous dialogue with all key stakeholders.

## THE TRANSITION FROM TOURISM ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO REGIONAL TOURISM BOARD

The following time frames for the potential shift from TAC to RTB are not mandatory; they are simply offered as a guide.

### Key Actions

Immediately:

- TAC lobby Councilors for industry support

Short term (within 6 months/early 2017):

- The TAC seeks Council agreement for an initial transition from an advisory group to a working group structure (current members and volunteers)

Medium term (within 12 months):

- Assuming that agreement will be forthcoming, TAC expands its operating model to accommodate increased responsibility – e.g. introduce working sub-committees and consider appointing a Deputy Chair.

As the TAC transitions, there will be an additional workload (endorsed Recommendations, new Marketing Plan, a potential change in organisational structure, a new Council) and the need to build capacity at both an operational and strategic level. A Deputy Chair can provide assistance to the Chair during this dynamic period of change, and decrease operational risk during any unforeseen absence by the Chair. Many organisations fail to consider the future until it is almost upon them. A Deputy Chair can also be a knowledgeable successor to the Chair, enabling a smooth handover and continuous stability.

- It will be particularly important to address the issue of industry membership in the first instance; membership of the existing business and tourism associations is very low, and it is crucial that the Council/industry relationship is based on a tangible and mutual commitment.
- Industry (through the TAC) works with Council to develop a funding model to enable the Marketing Plan and Recommendations (where specific funding is required), and commence discussions regarding the longer term resourcing requirements for a new regional organisation.
- Industry (through the TAC) and Council commence the implementation of the Action Plan and the Marketing Plan subject to funding availability

Destination Southern Highlands (NSW) extends its membership beyond the tourism industry and has made a strong and successful bid for membership from the wider business community. This is based on an understanding that 'tourism is everybody's business'. Casey Cardinia's regional tourism organisation will need to work hard, over time, to build a broader understanding of the importance of the visitor economy to regional development.

Longer term (within 18 months):

- Reconsider the preferred RTB model, ensuring that it is 'fit for purpose' and that an appropriate level of funding is secured. If there is broad support for the original option (illustrated on p.17), a full transition should commence towards a membership-based regional tourism association, supported by Council. (This will include a Communications Plan, recruitment of Board members, determination of administrative/operational requirements and governance and alike, specifically relating to the RTB.) It will be important to remember however, that **the first task of a destination management organisation is to build that organisation.**

## RECOMMENDATION

### Governance

- Establish a governance structure for tourism in the Casey Cardinia region that is viable, resilient and 'fit for purpose'

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The original Cardinia Shire Tourism Strategy (CCTS) incorporated a series of recommendations, which has been updated annually by the Council’s Business Development Officer. *The following plan addresses the recommendations based on the current, revised Visitation Strategy, including the City of Casey, and also acknowledges any outstanding recommendations from the previous Strategy. Key recommendations also include those identified directly through the consultation process.*

### PRODUCTS AND EXPERIENCES

**INDEX** **High** = within 12 months **Medium** = next 2-3 years **Low** = 3 years + **WCB** = within Council budget

**Recommendation 1** Build a regional database of tourism products and experiences

Priority	Responsibility	Cost
High	Lead: Councils Support: Industry  Note: ‘Councils’ refers to both Cardinia Shire Council and the City of Casey unless otherwise specified.	WCB

**Recommendation 2** Develop a touring route/s, themed trails and product packages

Priority	Responsibility	Cost
High/Ongoing	Lead: Industry Support: Councils	N/A

**Recommendation 3** Encourage additional cafes, retail, attractions and activities in the ‘hills villages’

Priority	Responsibility	Cost
High/Ongoing	Lead: Industry Support: Cardinia Shire Council	N/A

**Recommendation 4** Foster brand-related products and experiences that specifically build visitor appeal

Priority	Responsibility	Cost
Ongoing	Lead: Industry Support: Councils	N/A

**Recommendation 5** Investigate how Casey Cardinia tourism can capitalise on the new facilities at Bunjil Place and other arts and cultural experiences in the region

Priority	Responsibility	Cost
Ongoing	Lead: Councils Support: Industry	N/A

**Recommendation 6** Provide broadly-based support to the Gumbuya Park redevelopment

Priority	Responsibility	Cost
Ongoing	Lead: Councils Support: Industry	WCB

**Recommendation 7** Continue supporting the region's iconic attractions particularly in relation to their business development programs

Priority	Responsibility	Cost
Ongoing	Lead: Councils Support: Industry	WCB

## CUSTOMER SERVICE

**Recommendation 8** Continue addressing issues arising from the Mystery Visits program and work towards enhanced customer service throughout the region

Priority	Responsibility	Cost
Ongoing	Lead: Industry Support: Councils	Variable

## EVENTS

**Recommendation 9** Build the potential of existing events to drive new and repeat visitation

Priority	Responsibility	Cost
High	Lead: Councils Support: Industry	TBC

**Recommendation 10** Explore the possibility of the City of Casey providing a more expansive role in relation to regional events

Priority	Responsibility	Cost
High	Lead: Councils Support: Industry	WCB

**Recommendation 11** Develop a coordinated, regional calendar of events

Priority	Responsibility	Cost
High	Lead: Councils Support: Industry	WCB

**Recommendation 12** Build a database of significant events venues in Casey Cardinia

Priority	Responsibility	Cost
High	Lead: Councils Support: Industry	WCB

**Recommendation 13** Undertake a regional Events Strategy

Priority	Responsibility	Cost
Medium-High	Lead: Councils Support: Industry	\$5,000 - 10,000

**Recommendation 14** Develop a major, signature event for the region

Priority	Responsibility	Cost
Medium	Lead: Councils Support: Industry	WCB

## INDUSTRY SUPPORT

**Recommendation 15** Utilise the programs delivered by Victorian Tourism Industry Council (VTIC), Destination Melbourne and neighbouring regional tourism associations, including tourism business skills and social media

Priority	Responsibility	Cost
Ongoing	Lead: Industry Support: Councils	Variable

## COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

**Recommendation 16** Strengthen relationships with appropriate State Government departments/authorities at a strategic level - e.g. Regional Development Victoria, Infrastructure Victoria, Visit Victoria and State Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources

Priority	Responsibility	Cost
Ongoing	Lead: Councils Support: Industry	WCB

**Recommendation 17** Continue liaising with neighbouring regional tourism organisations with a view to potential joint activities and information sharing

Priority	Responsibility	Cost
Ongoing	Lead: Councils Support: Industry	N/A

**Recommendation 18** Build stronger collaboration between industry stakeholders - e.g. Casey Cardinia Tourism Day, 'familis' and other networking opportunities

Priority	Responsibility	Cost
Ongoing	Lead: Industry Support: Councils	Variable

## GOVERNANCE AND POLICY

**Recommendation 19** Establish a governance structure for tourism in the Casey Cardinia region that is viable, resilient and ‘fit for purpose’.

Priority	Responsibility	Cost
High	Lead: Councils Support: Industry	WCB

**Recommendation 20** Encourage Councils to include tourism in their respective strategic plans in recognition of its importance to the region’s visitor economy

Priority	Responsibility	Cost
Ongoing	Lead: Industry Support: Councils	N/A

**Recommendation 21** Update the Cardinia Shire’s Tourism Policy to include the City of Casey and a regional approach

Priority	Responsibility	Cost
High	Lead: Councils Support: Industry	WCB

## 8. MARKETING PLAN

The Marketing Plan acknowledges that the Casey Cardinia region is a largely undiscovered part of Victoria from a tourism perspective. The next 12 months will require some fundamental activities to ensure its recognition as an exciting, emerging visitor destination. Clearly these activities will not occur without appropriate resourcing.

The Plan focuses on a combination of necessary ‘first steps’ and a series of cost-effective, achievable recommendations to understand key target markets, develop a brand identity, build accessible visitor information including social media, and leverage the value of collaboration with industry partners. Some recommendations are inevitably ongoing and responsibility may change over time, depending on governance arrangements.

\*In some areas of the Plan, suggestions have been made regarding individuals/companies who have the capacity to carry out particular recommendations on behalf of Casey Cardinia and whose work is known to Sarah Lebski & Associates.

Action	Priority	Responsibility	Cost
<b>RESEARCH</b>			
1. Undertake professionally designed research and analysis of local tourism stakeholders (survey + interviews) to build a profile of existing visitation including information sources and demographic data	Within 3 months	Lead: Councils Support: Industry	\$11,000 (inclusive of Recommendations 2 & 3) Dr Meredith Wray, Wray Sustainable Tourism and Research
2. Undertake a community-based survey and analysis to ascertain VFR visitation, and resident/visitor needs and expectations regarding leisure activities	Within 6 months	Lead: Councils Support: Industry	\$11,000 (inclusive of Recommendation 2 & 3 as noted above)
3. Develop a standard survey enabling operators to consistently collect visitor data	Within 6 months	Lead: Industry Support: Councils	No direct cost (developed by TAC)
4. Undertake external tourism research specific to the Casey Cardinia region to gain a better understanding of both current and potential visitor markets	Within 12 months	Lead: Councils Support: Councils	To be negotiated *Dr Joseph Cheer, Monash University, Australia and International Tourism Research Unit
<b>BRAND</b>			
5. Develop a regional brand identity and communication plan For more information: CCTS pp.31-33	Within 12 months	Lead: Councils Support: Industry	\$10,000 Tania Farrelly, I Spy
6. Build an image library and video footage that can be submitted to Visit Victoria and utilised for other marketing and promotion	Ongoing	Lead: Industry Support: Councils	Variable



Action	Priority	Responsibility	Cost
<b>VISITOR INFORMATION</b>			
<p>7a. Commence the development of a high quality regional web site, which can be easily enhanced over time and managed internally. Key features should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ mobile-friendly</li> <li>▪ easily accessed using appropriate keywords on search engines</li> <li>▪ built on best practice content management</li> <li>▪ simple transfer of administration rights.</li> </ul>	Within 6 months/ Ongoing	Lead: Councils Support: Industry	Between \$3000 - \$10,000 depending on the level of sophistication
<p>7b. Develop and promote quality printed/downloadable maps for residents and visitors, that include major attractions, activities, accommodation and touring itineraries, and incorporate the website address on all printed material</p> <p>7c. Include a calendar of events on the website as a key priority</p> <p>7d. Develop a distribution plan for printed collateral</p>	Within 6 months	Lead: Councils Support: Industry	Variable
<p>8. Create a regional Google Map, highlighting key points of interest; this will not only provide a PDF map, but also an interactive one that visitors can access via their mobile phone for navigation and touring</p>	Within 6 months	Lead: Industry Support: Councils	No cost
<p>9. Develop a social media strategy (possibly a staged approach), but will initially include acquiring appropriate social media @handles and URLs, plus domain names (if required), advice regarding content, suitable channels, maximising social sharing, analytics etc.</p>	Within 12 months	Lead: Councils Support: Industry	\$1,500 - \$6,000  Rebecca King, Kingthing Marketing

Action	Priority	Responsibility	Cost
<b>COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS</b>			
10. Partner with residents/locals/, ensuring they have all the information required to promote the best of the Casey Cardinia tourism region, and ensure they are active participants in the region's social media strategy	High/ Ongoing	Lead: Councils Support: Industry, Residents/Locals	Variable/WCB
11. Develop a partnership with Destination Melbourne to leverage their marketing capacity in favour of the Casey Cardinia region	Ongoing	Lead: Councils Support: Industry	Variable and dependent on available opportunities
12. Promote touring/special interest itineraries and packaging ideas in print and online, to showcase regional diversity, encourage visitor dispersal and increase spend - e.g. cycling, food/farm gate, family fun	Ongoing	Lead: Industry Support: Council	Variable
13. Develop a strong collaboration with Visit Victoria to encourage inclusion in visiting journalist's itineraries, internal 'famils' and other related opportunities	Ongoing	Lead: Industry Support: Councils	At cost
14. Build active relationships with neighbouring Regional Tourism Boards - e.g. Destination Gippsland and the Yarra Ranges RTB for potential or specific partner opportunities in appropriate tactical marketing campaigns.	Ongoing	Lead: Industry Support: Councils	Variable and dependent on available opportunities

## 9. APPENDICES

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- Appendix 1 Cardinia Shire Tourism Strategy 2013–2018
- Appendix 2 Developing the Casey Cardinia Visitation Strategy:  
Workshop 1 Summary Notes (June 2016)
- Appendix 3 Developing the Casey Cardinia Visitation Strategy:  
Workshop 2 Summary Notes (July 2016)
- Appendix 4 Five Criteria for ‘Best Practice’ Destination Websites