

THE OTWAYS



Destination Action Plan 2015-2017

December 2014



GREAT OCEAN ROAD
REGIONAL TOURISM LIMITED



Image: Robert Blackburn



Acknowledgments

The development of the Otways Destination Action Plan has been facilitated by Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd.

The process brought together representatives from all stakeholder groups that benefit from the visitor economy; local government, state government agencies, industry and the community to develop a plan. This Plan seeks to identify the challenges and opportunities facing the Otways and to establish achievable affordable priorities that if delivered would increase the Otway's competitiveness.

Specifically we would like to thank the individuals that participated in the plan development process:

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Image: Mark Watson



Introduction

Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd is undertaking the preparation of a Tourism Strategic Master Plan for the Great Ocean Road region which extends from Torquay in the east to the South Australian border in the west.

A core strategy is to recognise that visitors to the region are primarily attracted to destinations and experiences. Therefore the development, marketing and management of the regions destinations are pivotal to the success of the whole region.

This Destination Action Plan for the Otways identifies priority strategies and actions that if implemented over three years will enhance the competitiveness of the Otways as a primary visitor destination of the region. These strategies will also be reflected in the Tourism Strategic Master Plan for the region to facilitate regional collaboration and cooperation.

The Plan has been prepared by a facilitated workshop process involving business and community representatives who considered and reached consensus on tourism development, marketing and management opportunities and challenges. The group then identified and agreed on the key priorities and actions that would make a positive difference to the growth and sustainability of the Otways visitor economy and experience. There is a strong synergy between the Otways Destination Action Plan and the Apollo Bay Destination Action Plan and a collaborative approach should be taken where possible to achieve the actions within each Plan.



Image: Mark Watson

The visitor economy

Visitors to the Otways are major contributors to the strength of the local economy. The visitors may be leisure travellers (domestic and international), visitors to friends and relatives, holiday residents, business visitors, students or day-trippers.

Their expenditure is 'new money' contributed to the local economy which supports jobs, real estate value and the provision of services, facilities and activities in the community.

The total tourism contribution to the Great Ocean Road region is \$1,832 million, 20,000 jobs, 11.1% of Gross Regional Product and 11.6% employment share.

Source: Victorian Regional Satellite Accounts 2011-12 produced by Deloitte Access Economics.

Objectives

The common objectives for tourism are:

1. To increase visitor numbers
2. To increase visitor length of stay
3. To increase visitor expenditure
4. To increase visitor dispersal (geographically and seasonally)
5. To increase visitor satisfaction.

All of these objectives are important for the Otways with particular challenges in maximising visitor expenditure, seasonal dispersal and satisfaction.



Image: Ken Stepnell

Success factors

Industry research has established that the following factors are present in successful destinations that are achieving the objectives. The workshop participants considered these factors relative to the Otways in reaching consensus on the priority strategies and actions. A focus on continuous improvement of all these factors will contribute to the competitive growth and sustainability of the visitor economy of the Otways.

1. Strong local tourism organisations focussed on their core role of visitor servicing
2. Strong regional tourism organisations focussed on their core role of regional marketing and development
3. Local government support
4. Strong, consistent and effective leadership by individuals and/or organisations
5. Strategic planning for the economic, social, environmental and cultural objectives supported by local destination plans
6. Consistent visitor service excellence
7. Research driven cooperative marketing
8. A breadth and depth of tourism infrastructure, products and events matched to market demand
9. Risk management plans
10. Supportive communities which understand and value tourism.

Our values

Our people

Strong community pride, action oriented, respectful

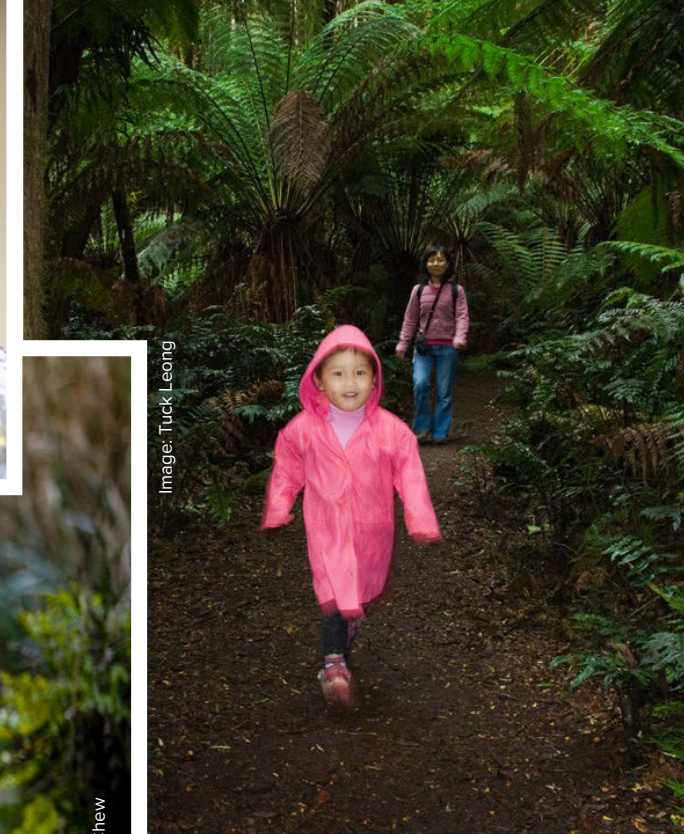
The Otways 'personality'

Creative, culturally aware, natural

Our environment

Natural beauty, awareness, sustainable.

The Otways is a unique and stunning destination with a great diversity of villages and where one can immerse oneself in harmony with the world-class natural beauty whilst having 'fun' engaging in a diverse range of quality experiences including visiting producers, events, mountain biking, bush walking or simply enjoying the wonderful beaches and rugged coastline.




Our collective strengths

- Our stunning natural setting
- A breadth and depth of diverse experiences – something for everyone
- Our people have great pride in the Otways
- Diverse quality events
- A family friendly destination
- Outdoor active recreation
- Proximity to Western Melbourne growth area.

What we do well

- Natural experiences
- Authentic produce offerings
- Diverse events
- Mountain biking
- Outdoor active/recreation.

A wide-angle photograph of a coastal landscape. On the left, the ocean has white-capped waves breaking onto a rocky shore. A paved road curves along the right side of the image, following the coastline. The road is bordered by lush green vegetation and hills. A small white car is visible on the road. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. In the bottom left corner, there is a dark rectangular box containing the text 'Our challenges'.

Our challenges

- Closure of key assets
- Lack of transport links
- Seasonality – busy Summer, quiet Winters
- Pricing of accommodation – ensuring value for money
- Communication issues – mobile and broadband
- Developing and maintaining a strong service culture
- Inconsistent existing brand
- Rules and regulations for events are too onerous for event organisers
- Lack of marketing dollars for promoting the Otways
- Businesses remaining open during winter periods, seven days a week, evenings
- Education of business owners and staff in whole of region knowledge
- Skill (staff) shortages
- Collaboration between operators
- Statutory planning policies
- Conservation vs recreation – maintaining a balance ensuring the feel of the Otways is maintained – sustainable planning – working closely with Parks Victoria, Department of Environment and Primary Industries and State Forests to ensure sustainable, sympathetic development
- Land owners and farmers with resistance towards some new projects
- Lack of public and private investment in the Otways and whole of region – often due to restrictions and changes in planning.
- Perception of distance from Melbourne and distance between towns and villages
- Acknowledgement of business and community needs by state government agencies (VicRoads, Parks Victoria, Department of Environment and Primary Industries, State Forests)
- Maximising existing opportunities e.g. building other activities around key events
- Signage – improved way finding, business signing and promotional signage
- Road infrastructure – maintenance and upgrading of hinterland roads – impact from growth of numbers
- Stagnant development of mountain biking assets in the Otways
- National Parks camping fees – management and administration – pricing structure/inconsistency is having an impact on visitor experience and therefore impacting on the destination brand and having an impact on the community including risk management and safety issues.

Our opportunities

Develop the Otways as a destination of all seasons:

- Growing business in shoulder and off peak periods
- Experience development and enhancement to attract visitors and to increase their length of stay and fulfilment
- Increased variety of accommodation offerings
- Visitor friendly hours of operation by businesses and/or collaboration between businesses to direct visitors where they are open
- Increase the whole of region knowledge by local businesses (including knowledge of other businesses) – set up an Otways free day (familiarisations)
- Improved public transport options e.g. partnership with V/Line, etc.
- Grow the food and wine experiences available – ‘Meet the producers’
- Create a reason for tour operators/Great Ocean Road traffic to explore the Otways
- Improved infrastructure and amenities
- Further develop the Forrest Mountain Bike product in the Otways to further enhance its reputation domestically and to make it the number one destination for international cycling visitors
- Visiting Friends & Relatives Strategy – educate local community including farmers, utilise assets, familiarise with experiences on offer.



Image: Mark Chew

Our opportunities cont.

Continue to build the 'Otways' brand through:

Events

- Development of a strong and consistent brand for the Otways that is used by all businesses – utilise the unique village offerings to create a cohesive village destination – Birregurra, Deans Marsh, Forrest, Beeac, etc.
- Improved marketing including social media and digital presence
- Development of an Otways food brand
- Further development of the strong arts sector
- Development of an interactive map for the Otways
- Greater penetration into the Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat and South Australia market
- Deliver the promise – strive for service excellence
- Develop a strong service culture:
 - Educate business operators and develop clear communication to educate their staff.

- Cultural and adventure events:
 - Create a fully integrated events calendar
 - Ensure professional coordination and management of events
 - Capitalise on regional events i.e. Amy Gran Fondo – how do we maximise repeat visitation, how do we leverage length of stay
- Manage and protect the natural environment
- Government collaboration and understanding – synergy of vision and proactive responses
- The Otways to be a trend setter – out of the box lateral thinking – do it differently
- Arts – although currently not well coordinated
- Adventure trails
- Embed the plan direction into a succession plan.



Image: Mark Chew

Diagnostic rating

Characteristics		Rating	Comments
1.	Strong local organisations focused on their core role of visitor servicing	6.5	More information flow is required
2.	Strong regional organisations focused on their core role of regional marketing and development	5	Jury is out
3.	Local government support	6	Opposition to tourism by some councillors, Visitor Information Centre service strong, marketing of Otways very poor—inconsistent
4.	Strong, consistent and effective leadership by individuals or organisations	7	Left to a minority of people to carry the load, needs to be shared and succession planning
5.	Strategic planning for the region with economic, social, environmental and cultural objectives supported by local destination plans	5	Currently being developed
6.	Consistent visitor service excellence	7	Some doing this very well, others poor, needs more consistency with service and trading hours
7.	Research driven cooperative marketing	5	Inconsistent, looking to Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd for leadership with this
8.	A breadth and depth of tourism infrastructure, experiences and events matched to market demand	8.25	Need more winter experiences and events. Refinement of existing experiences and events. More emphasis on tourism infrastructure required
9.	Risk management plans in place	5.3	Plans in place but low awareness across industry
10.	Supportive communities that understand the value of tourism.	5.75	Region needs to continue to build the community understanding of and support for tourism.



Action Plan implementation

The following Action Plan outlines priorities and actions as a guide for Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd, Otways Tourism Advisory Committee and the Colac Otway Shire Council to collaboratively and cooperatively implement the Plan. To facilitate this, an Implementation Leadership Group of representatives will be formed. While the Plan identifies primary organisational responsibilities and in many cases joint responsibility, it is reasonable to expect that the Implementation Leadership Group will consider and review this progressively. One key consideration will be the availability and securing of resources to progress the implementation of the Plan in a timely manner. It may also be appropriate and necessary to involve other organisations and to seek funding for specific projects.

The Plan does not commit any organisation to the actions proposed but is a guide to pursuing priorities and actions which will make a positive difference to the achievement of the tourism objectives noted above.

The priority actions have been assigned a KPI priority rating as a guide. These ratings are:

- HIGH within the first year
- MEDIUM within one to two years
- LOW within three years.

Progress of implementation of the Plan will be undertaken annually by Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd in consultation with the Implementation Leadership Group. This may result in a revision and updating of the Plan. Regardless, a new plan will be prepared in three years.

The Destination Action Plan will provide input to the preparation of a Strategic Master Plan for the Great Ocean Road region.

PRIORITY 1

Develop and consistently promote a unique market positioning and brand identity for the Otways based on:

- Ensuring the Otways as a natural asset remains true to the essence of the region
- The Otways as an integral part of the Great Ocean Road region that offers a diversity of high quality food, produce, agri-business, nature, adventure, outdoor recreational activities and arts experiences.

Actions		Responsibilities	Priorities
1.	In collaboration with key stakeholder organisations and local operators, undertake a destination positioning process that provides clarity on the unique features of the Otways	Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd, Colac Otway Shire Council, Local tourism associations, Tourism Victoria, Otways Tourism Advisory Committee	High
2.	Develop a new strong brand and style guide for the Otways that will be used by all businesses	Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd, Colac Otway Shire Council, Local tourism associations, Tourism Victoria, Otways Tourism Advisory Committee	High
3.	Target growth in awareness and appreciation and ease of access in the Melbourne, Geelong and Ballarat markets through: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Focussed media campaigns e.g. Otways is the 'Park' for Melbourne, Geelong and Ballarat▪ Co-ordinated approach to familiarisations for decision makers in the target audience▪ Sharing of event information to maintain a co-ordinated and up-to-date events calendar	Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd, Colac Otway Shire Council, Visitor Information Centres, Local operators, Otways Tourism Advisory Committee	High

PRIORITY 1 cont.

Actions		Responsibilities	Priorities
4.	<p>Create a reason for tour operators/Great Ocean Road traffic to explore more of the Otways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact tour operators utilising the Great Ocean Road Understand the traffic patterns and routes taken Include in familiarisations Maintain a co-ordinated and up-to-date events calendar Hold a mid-year Otways familiarisation activity Create a group bookings offer for the Otways and encourage group bookings 	Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd, Colac Otway Shire Council, Local operator, Otways Tourism Advisory Committee	High, ongoing
5.	<p>Educate business operators of the other businesses within the region to enable operators to be able to educate their staff (and visitors):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collate and share useful data to benchmark the Otways against other destinations in the Great Ocean Road region Co-ordinate a brochure exchange between all operators Create a DVD on the Otways to increase staff knowledge and consumer interest Develop a co-ordinated communication process between all businesses e.g. Spread the word to all operators to keep everyone up-to-date on unique happenings in the region – events, wildlife, etc. Hold a bi-annual Otways Open Day 	Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd, Colac Otway Shire Council, Local operators, Otways Tourism Advisory Committee	Medium
6.	<p>Ensure adequate educational and experience material is available for schools and consumers about the Otways and Great Ocean Road tourism industry:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop some education material about the Otways suitable for education groups. 	Colac Otway Shire Council, Local Operators, Otways Tourism Advisory Committee	Medium

PRIORITY 2

Develop the Otways product.

Actions		Responsibilities	Priorities
1.	Develop the Otways product in off-peak and shoulder seasons to attract visitors year round and increase their length of stay	Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd, Colac Otway Shire Council, Otways Tourism Advisory Committee	High, ongoing
2.	Enhance existing experiences through: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Building experience packages between operators in the Otways and within Great Ocean Road region▪ More strategic collaboration between operators▪ Highlighting pre-existing activities – i.e. Trails brochure▪ Ensuring that we are highlighting the things that people want to do and catering to the visitor needs. i.e. Maits Rest, Great Ocean Walk, etc.	Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd, Colac Otway Shire Council, Local operators, Otways Tourism Advisory Committee	High, ongoing
3.	Develop a Visiting Friends & Relatives strategy: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Encourage more operators to participate and share analytics – feed in business testimonials▪ Measure the return of investment▪ Familiarise residents and local businesses on existing experiences utilising local assets	Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd, Colac Otway Shire Council, Otways Tourism Advisory Committee	Medium, ongoing
4.	Continue to improve infrastructure and amenity through the following processes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ A more coordinated approach to the awareness and messaging of activities in the off-season – feed experiences back to feed out. Need to know what there is to see and do	Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd, Colac Otway Shire Council	Medium, ongoing

PRIORITY 2 cont.

Actions	Responsibilities	Priorities
<p>5. Establish strategic partnerships with other Great Ocean Road destinations for mutual cooperation to encourage visitor dispersal – Strategies include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mutual sharing of information ▪ Awareness of business activities ▪ More networking opportunities – provide opportunities for businesses to share experiences ▪ Familiarisations ▪ Local organisations are too small to have serious marketing effect but need to consider and discuss how we better coordinate this through smaller organisations all banding together for improved results 	<p>Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd, Colac Otway Shire Council, Otways Tourism Advisory Committee</p>	<p>Medium, ongoing</p>
<p>6. Produce and communicate a seasonal report card on the performance of the visitor economy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a What's On guide ▪ Build communication with the industry ▪ Focus on what is working and what's not working and create a culture of measurability and accountability ▪ Share information ▪ Understand our marketing ▪ Develop some case studies – business sharing ▪ Hold a tourism conference – educational, awards, business sharing. 	<p>Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd, Colac Otway Shire Council, Otways Tourism Advisory Committee</p>	<p>Medium, ongoing</p>

PRIORITY 3

Develop a seamless visitor service excellence culture, capacity and capability.

This priority requires a shift in focus to position the region as a great place to live and work.

We also need to address the challenge that we can't attract staff and staffing is so seasonal – challenge of accommodating staff in peak season, training difficult to put in place when we don't have the staff. Are there longer-term programs that can be put in place with some of the hospitality institutions i.e. William Angliss, Gordon TAFE. Lack of transport links is a key factor also.

Actions		Responsibilities	Priorities
1.	Implement and communicate a 'visitor service excellence' training program for business: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Familiarisation for staff within businesses in the region – a love my region card is an opportunity Training in how to tell the story – how to make it interesting Capacity for an accredited Visitor Information Centre within the area Coordinating opening hours – annually and weekly – have a centralised place to promote what's open and what's on 	Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd, Colac Otway Shire Council, Local operators, Otways Tourism Advisory Committee	Medium, ongoing
2.	Explore ways to survey and benchmark visitor satisfaction. There is concern that a mystery shopper program is not a good use of resources because without addressing ability to attract staff and retain staff we are measuring something we know is not currently working.	Otways Tourism Advisory Committee, Local operators	Medium, ongoing
3.	Increase capability: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the opportunities working with local schools and VCE students to implement a co-ordinated work placement program for local businesses Investigate the extension of the working holiday visa (beyond 6 months) and how this could benefit the local region Investigate a coordinated approach to accommodation of staff during the peak season. e.g. Partnerships with hospitality institutions, etc. 	Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd, Colac Otway Shire Council, Local operators	Low, ongoing

PRIORITY 4

Improve the overall benefits from events in the Otways.

Actions

Responsibilities

Priorities

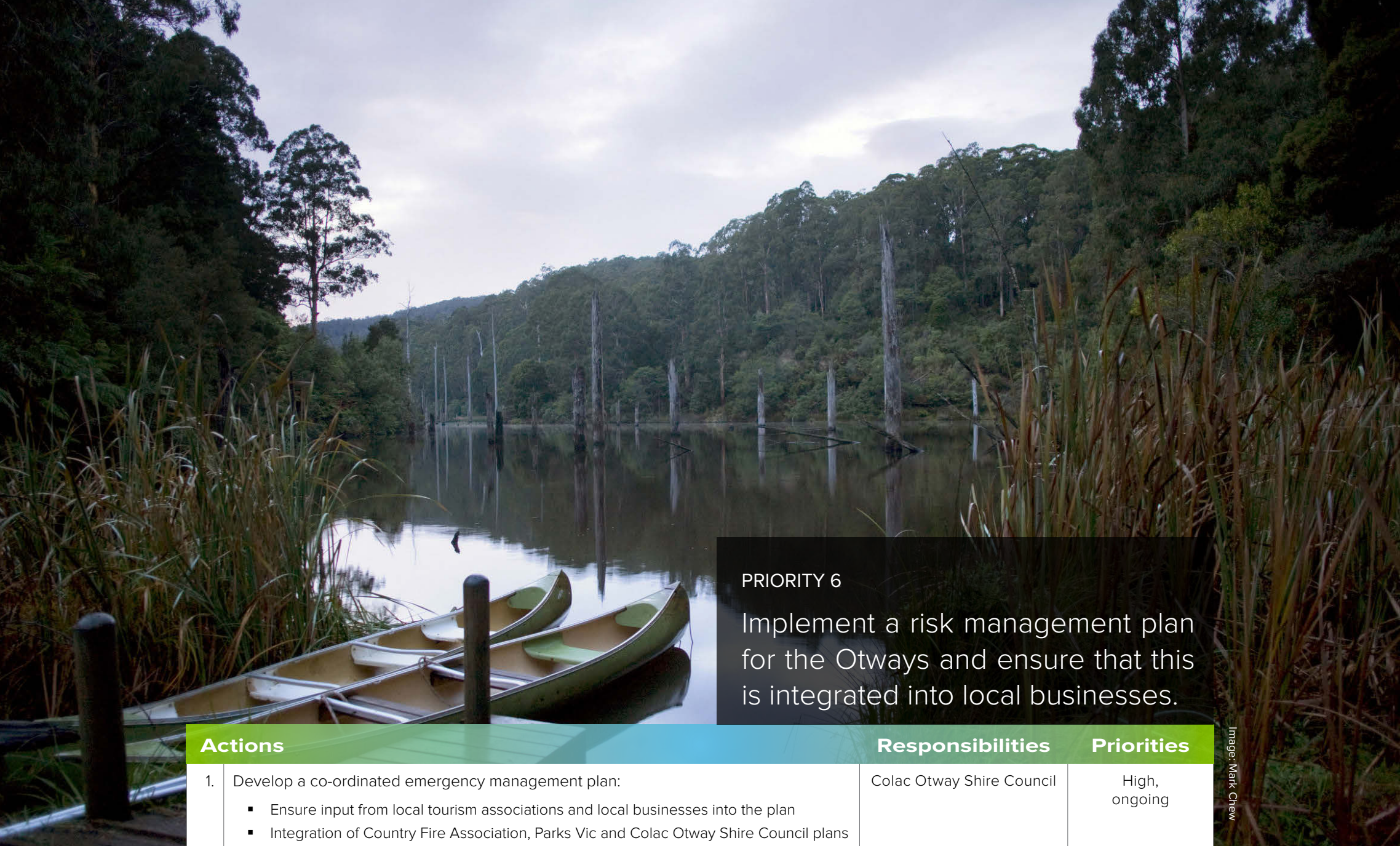
1.	Create a balanced and comprehensive events strategy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the opportunities for local businesses to leverage off key events Analyse the events that have the ability to grow and results in significant economic benefits for the region and put a priority on these events Highlight event gaps and new opportunities for additional events, particularly in off-peak times 	GORRT, Colac Otway Shire Council, Event organisers, Otways Tourism Advisory Committee	Medium, ongoing
2.	Ensure coordination and professional management of key events: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore training opportunities for event organisers Ensure all events are listed with Events Victoria (Tourism Victoria) Provide a checklist for events on key marketing opportunities (low cost/free) 	GORRT, Colac Otway Shire Council, Event organisers	Medium, ongoing
3.	Opportunities for integration between events and businesses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop packaging training for businesses Provide communication for businesses about all local events Link events to other relevant websites e.g. Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd Improved content sharing of events on social media 	GORRT, Colac Otway Shire Council, Local operators	High, ongoing
4.	Develop a strategic events calendar highlighting the key events in the region and communicate this: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify marketing opportunities/cross promotion opportunities for events Develop a strategy to ensure that the Forrest Mountain Bike product has at least one new tourism offering each and every year in order to continue to attract participants back to the same event year on year. 	Colac Otway Shire Council, Event organisers, Local operators	Medium, ongoing



PRIORITY 5

Manage for longer-term visitor growth to provide for a sustainable destination.

Actions		Responsibilities	Priorities
1.	Provide adequate parking and visitor amenities at key visitor nodes and precincts (e.g. beaches, villages, picnic areas and foreshore areas)	Colac Otway Shire Council, Parks Victoria, Local tourism associations	Medium, ongoing
2.	Leverage partnerships with Government and key stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parks Victoria ▪ VicRoads ▪ Department of Environment and Primary Industries ▪ Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd 	Colac Otway Shire Council, Local tourism associations	Medium, ongoing
3.	Partnership opportunities between local tourism associations and Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd Board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore increased collaboration between local tourism associations for a more co-ordinated approach to marketing and visitor servicing ▪ Ensure a collaborative approach to working with Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd as a key destination in the region ▪ Invest in Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Ltd cooperative marketing programs 	Colac Otway Shire Council, Local tourism associations, Otways Tourism Advisory Committee	Medium, ongoing
4.	Establish a collaborative and strategic leadership model to develop a consistent leadership approach for the Otways through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Leadership training and workshop opportunities for local businesses and individuals ▪ Develop a succession planning approach to leadership in the Otways ▪ Identify opportunities to share the workload and accountability across the region. 	GORRT, Colac Otway Shire Council, Local tourism associations, Otways Tourism Advisory Committee	Medium, ongoing



PRIORITY 6

Implement a risk management plan for the Otways and ensure that this is integrated into local businesses.

Actions		Responsibilities	Priorities
1.	Develop a co-ordinated emergency management plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Ensure input from local tourism associations and local businesses into the plan▪ Integration of Country Fire Association, Parks Vic and Colac Otway Shire Council plans	Colac Otway Shire Council	High, ongoing
2.	Implement a communications plan to educate all businesses regarding the coordinated risk management plan.	Colac Otway Shire Council, Local tourism associations	High, ongoing

Image: Mark Chew