

# **SUBMISSION TO the TOURISM STRATEGY FOR HAWKESBURY – GROWING VISITORS TO THE HAWKESBURY LGA**

**By Robin Woods, on behalf of Hawkesbury Environment Network Inc.[HEN].**

**About us:** HEN is a non-government, not-for-profit network of affiliated groups and individuals for environmental information, advocacy and action in the Hawkesbury region. Website at [www.hen.org.au](http://www.hen.org.au)  
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**Introduction:** Our region is under enormous pressure to provide more space for housing and employment lands, more water for infrastructure, greater road links between Sydney and the western regions of the State. These pressures impact on many attributes which attract a vast number of tourists: our rivers, creeks and wetlands which support a myriad of fauna including migratory bird species; and on our bushlands which encompass fertile agricultural and lifestyle properties; and our townscapes and European and Aboriginal heritage places which increasingly give way to ‘modernisation’ or urbanisation.

Our interest in tourism is as a community group which seeks to share the benefits of sustainable living, healthy environments, rural and bushland amenity, and to hold onto our history and biodiversity. See section on our website <http://www.hen.org.au/about-us/connectivity>.

Tourism in particular can suffer if the environment that attracts national and international attention is neglected and degraded. At the local economic level, the Hawkesbury has much to gain through recognition and protection of its diverse bushland, scenic outlooks and healthy waterways.

**The following is a short list of assets which can illustrate these points:**

- Scenic diversity and seasonal changes
- Ecological diversity and wildlife
- National Parks, Nature Reserves, public bushland parks and riverside sites
- Wildlife support and study groups eg Cumberland Bird Observers, Hawkesbury Herpetological Society, Wildlife Information and Rescue Service (WIRES), National Parks and Wildlife Service,
- Heritage sites such as Australiana Village, the Five Towns, churches and cemeteries, Scheyville Park Migrant Camp.
- Sport and leisure activities which can be informal or organised: Bushwalking, fishing, swimming, canoeing, kayaking, horse-riding and cycling: many groups involved.
- Native plant and garden study groups including Tomah Botanic Gardens (which is outside of the LGA but mostly reached through it).
- Landcare and Bushcare groups
- Educational institutions for Environmental Education: University of Western Sydney Hawkesbury Campus, including the EucFace Site which is the biggest carbon capture experiment in the world: WSI TAFE and its large area of grounds shared with UWS. Hawkesbury Earthcare, Greening Australia, and the Secret Garden located within those grounds.
- Tourism planning, conservation of cultural and natural heritage, and impact management are taught within UWS Dept of Tourism and Heritage Studies at Kingswood Campus.

## How to capitalise on these assets for tourism at all levels from local to international:

The portals to the area such as websites and publications need to be of the highest quality in line with the expectations of visitors who would be comparing destinations. From examination of surveys it appears that only a small percentage of visitors would be aware of the extent of what is available. There is only one visitor centre (VIC), which is not located at the entry point to the region. The websites on Council's site and the VIC website are lacking interest and can benefit from upgrading. Maps and other publications can be vastly improved. The focus appears to be on commercial viability, which is a genuine need; ***however, HEN feels there are large numbers of visitors who can learn a great deal about the region with little cost, and importantly will then return again and bring their friends.***

## How information is made available:

- HCC website, links to VIC
- Visitor Information Centre at Clarendon
- Links to tourism providers.
- Maps of walks and sites online and at the VIC.
- Some publications at news agents and travel centres
- Specific publications at some of the commercially operated sites.
- No or little information is available about the non-commercial or informal activities and public sites, apart from the built heritage sites.
- There is a need for improved 'branding' at entrances to the area: Bells Line Rd, Blacktown Rd, Wisemans Ferry Rd etc.

***Hawkesbury Harvest and the Farm Gate Trail are excellent models of the type of activities which showcase our heritage and rural lifestyle. The website is excellent and the cartography and interactive maps are superb. [http://www.hawkesburyharvest.com.au/farm-gate-trails/map/?map\\_no=1](http://www.hawkesburyharvest.com.au/farm-gate-trails/map/?map_no=1) This is an ideal model to showcase the cultural and natural environment.***

## Other opportunities for tourism about the natural and heritage qualities of the region:

- Development of cycle trails and walking trails to cater for the increasing number of cyclist tour groups and others who actively travel between areas eg a River Walk/ Trail, and Floodplain Trail.
  - A program which encompasses local food and beverages, local music and art, local produce on a seasonal basis.
  - Commercial operators could provide picnic hampers for low-key tourism.
  - Apps on phones can be developed to guide and inform visitors.
  - Maps of smaller public sites for picnics, bird-watching, artists could be developed similar to the Farm Gate Trail. Bush Regeneration sites could be assisted with signage to show changes.
  - Inclusion of eco-tourism and farm helper sites to attract seasonal workers and Woofers: Willing Workers on Organic Farms <http://www.woof.com.au/> would attract many young international tourists and enliven the culture especially for our local youth. Low cost residential accommodation such as YMCA hostels would provide opportunities for employment in this sector of our population also.
  - Scheyville and other sites have the capacity to operate as camping sites for large events.
  - ***Finally, although this is a very competitive enterprise with many operators dependent for their livelihood on success for their own business, there is a need for more collaboration between nfp and commercial stakeholders for the benefit of all, and especially to protect the values of the environment, on which we all depend.***
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