

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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# **In the hunt for the tourism dollar**

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Towong Shire Council has given its in-principle support to a new strategy that could establish the Shire as a one of Victoria's leading recreational hunting destinations.

In 2016 the Upper Murray 2030 Vision Plan was finalised following an extensive community consultation process. The growth of hunting in the area and the opportunities it presented were identified, along with the community's desire to see hunting tourism developed in a safe and controlled manner.

The Mitta Valley community has also identified hunting tourism as an opportunity with a small number of businesses already operating in this space.

The Draft Towong Shire Hunting Tourism Action Plan, developed in partnership with Tourism North East, outlines a range of recommended actions that would bolster Towong Shire's ability to attract recreational hunters and significantly expand its tourism economy.

A Hunting Tourism Working Group will now be established and will be charged with developing a business plan, timelines and priority actions. Anyone interested in participating as a member of the Working Group is encouraged to contact Towong Shire Council's Economic Development Officer, Kerissa Heritage on 02 6071 5100.

Following the formation of the Hunting Tourism Working Group, broad community consultation will be undertaken.

Towong Shire is home to a range of pest animals including deer, foxes, rabbits and wild dogs. Pest animals have a serious impact on the Shire's local environment, as well as impacting surrounding farming properties.

The Draft Plan identifies taxidermy, 4WD hire, hunting supply stores and kennels as opportunities for growth. Guiding, meat processing and land access rights could also be future income streams for local businesses.

Towong Shire Council Mayor Cr David Wortmann said recreational hunting had the potential to be a major component of the Shire's tourism economy.

"Whilst there is still a lot of work to be done, this is a clear step forward in exploring the possibilities," he said. "Input from key industry groups, private businesses and the broader community will be obtained to comprehensively review this opportunity."

"Towong ranks 13th in the list of local government areas relative to yield associated with deer hunting, attracting \$1.5million in annual spend. Yet our area is considered a relatively untapped recreational hunting market, and the report indicates that there may be scope to increase that figure significantly."

"It's early days but the ideas and actions suggested in the plan are very exciting and this has the potential to play a significant part in the future of our tourism economy."

#### **Editor Notes**

- There are now more than 50,000 licensed game hunters in Victoria, which is an increase of about 8,000 hunters in the last five years, and a 186% increase across the last decade.
- According to research commissioned by the Victorian Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI), the total expenditure of game hunters - those who have a firearm for the purpose of recreational hunting rather than pest control - is estimated to be worth \$282 million per year to the Victorian economy.
- Of the \$138million spent on deer hunting each year, 40% can be attributed to items that visitors purchase while on their hunting trip like transport, ammunition, accommodation, meals and tours. In this way, the 'on trip' spend of hunters can be likened to tourism expenditure.
- Towong Shire as a locality boasts a reliable and accessible mass of deer both on public and private land. A good proportion of the deer population is considered to be of trophy status, with the area having not been over hunted and hence, an abundance of older stags obtainable.

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