

An aerial photograph of a river bend. The river is calm, reflecting the sky and the surrounding dense green forest. On the left bank, there is a wide, sandy area. A dark-colored 4WD vehicle is parked on the sand, with a white canopy tent set up behind it. Two people are sitting on a white picnic blanket on the sand near the vehicle. The sky is overcast with soft, grey clouds.

Murray Regional Tourism Strategic Plan 2021-2024

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The River Strengthening the Visitor Economy

Message from the Chair

Murray Regional Tourism (MRT) has launched an ambitious plan to grow our region's visitor economy by 2024 despite an extremely uncertain and disruptive environment with the current global pandemic.

Our 2021-2024 Strategic Plan, developed in consultation with stakeholders, provides a practical roadmap for action over the next three years and builds on the past year's COVID-19 recovery plan and prior five-year strategy.

Collaboratively, our ongoing commitment is to rebuild a vibrant and sustainable visitor economy as we continue to respond to COVID-19, drought and bushfires with new thinking, flexibility and strong decision making needed.

Despite the enormous challenges presented to the visitor economy at this time there are unique strengths too, with the opportunity to increase visitation largely from the self-drive and younger markets and grow visitor spend from intrastate day trips as well as boost overnight stays.

Importantly, the plan is also aligned to ensure we deliver on both the New South Wales and Victorian governments Visitor Economy regional strategies along with our own Destination Management Plan that provides a long-term blueprint for the Murray region.

Key targets over the next three years are to attract 7.3 million visitors, generate \$2.25 billion in visitor expenditure and critically to support 22,500 jobs.

We are optimistic that the visitor economy will rebound stronger in time and together with stakeholders in our cross-border river communities strive to return to the record levels of visitation that was previously enjoyed and again deliver against the long-term objectives to make the Murray region visitor economy strong and sustainable.

The plan is built on five strategic pillars and key initiatives that will be regularly reviewed and adjusted to reflect the ongoing environment and emerging priorities and aspirations of our region. Actions we deliver over the next three years will restore confidence in the visitor economy and provide a roadmap for navigating these challenges together.

We are extremely proud of what our region has to offer and recognise the importance of the visitor economy as a key pillar in the regional economy to create jobs, boost investment and infrastructure and build prosperity and a sustainable future for everyone.



Wendy Greiner

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wendy Greiner'.

Chair
Murray Regional Tourism
September 2021

Road to Recovery



The Murray region has been decimated by bushfires, blue green algae outbreaks and now the long-term and ongoing relentless impacts of COVID-19.

Prior to these catastrophic events the visitor economy was a large economic contributor to the region with over \$2 billion in direct expenditure, attracting 6.5 million visitors and supporting over 18,000 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs. It will take a collective effort with strong leadership to ensure that we are in a good position to rebound when the environment improves in response to market conditions where the majority of Australians are fully vaccinated and Australians can again travel.

The region today is vastly different with the current visitor economy effectively reduced by 50 per cent across the three key measures. Visitation is currently 3.5 million, the economic value generated at \$1 billion and employment estimated to be 8,000 FTE jobs.

Our cross border communities span 13 Local Government Areas (LGAs) along both Victoria and NSW and to reboot the visitor economy we need a mix of supply and demand driving programs, industry development and infrastructure projects. Collectively we must be agile with our plans, ensure we have long-term goals and aspirations and seize opportunities to ensure the region's visitor economy recovers and importantly builds back better and stronger.

We have prioritised key areas of focus and actions that share the goal to restore the visitor economy for the benefit of our river communities for the decades ahead.

The reality is the impacts associated with crisis events will have long-term strategic implications and will inevitably result in permanent changes in consumer behaviour along with business operations.

For the Murray region the challenges ahead include:

- Ongoing COVID compliance and long-term impediments particularly on events
- Access to finance to drive investment in future infrastructure and experience development
- Border closures and restrictions in key source markets
- Competition from other destinations
- Skills training and labour retention
- Loss of consumer confidence
- Brand damage
- Industry fatigue

Key Milestones on The Road to Recovery

Within each of our five pillars there are measures to assist the region as it works through these challenges. These include:

Regional Marketing

- Exceed pre COVID-2019 visitation and expenditure levels targeting 7.3 million visitors by 2024 as tracked by Tourism Research Australia NVS and IVS data
- Expand the road trip program to deliver increased cross promotion of destinations, operators and bundling of experiences
- Increase brand awareness of the Murray region through cooperative campaigns delivered in partnership with state and industry partners
- Strengthen digital assets to increase site visitation and leads to operators from these channels

Product Development

- Tracking new investments in visitor experiences and infrastructure in private and public sectors
- Strengthen the experience for visitors of our unique offerings including nature, first nation, history and heritage, arts & culture, road and river experiences
- Increase Australian Tourism Data Warehouse listings by 25 per cent

Leadership and Advocacy

- One of the leaders in regional tourism in Australia and a strong advocate
- Maintain number one ranking for the Murray region of economic importance of tourism by inland regions in NSW and Victoria measured by Gross Regional Product, Employment and Consumption
- Build a resilient sector that enables the long-term growth of our visitor economy

Industry Development

- Increased destination appeal and satisfaction through the delivery of quality visitor experiences
- Improved perception of tourism as a career pathway and stronger attraction and retention and better skills level
- Training programs delivered to strengthen and rebuild industry.

Governance and Sustainability

- Strengthen cross border communities of interest with strong collaboration between industry, local and state governments
- Transparent priority setting, with strategy and advocacy that reflects our river communities
- Long term funding commitments maintained with State and Local Government partners



Our Vision, Mission & Philosophy

Our Vision

The Murray River region, Australia's most iconic and vibrant cross border regional tourism destination.

Our Mission

Strengthen the region's visitor economy by building tourism product, industry resilience, developing quality and inspirational visitor experiences and promoting the region in partnership with both the public and private sector.

Strategic Pillars

1. Regional marketing
2. Product development
3. Leadership and advocacy
4. Industry development
5. Governance and sustainability

Targets by December 2024

- Attract 7.3 million visitors
- Generate \$2.25 billion in visitor expenditure
- Support 22,500 jobs in the Murray region

Our Philosophy

Focus

Visitor needs will be at the heart of every decision and action

Knowledge

Understanding our region, our tourism industries and our stakeholders

Excellence

Allocation of scarce resources based on sound research and collaboration

Accountability

Responsible and independent decision-making

Collaboration

Success through working with industry and government stakeholders

Innovation

Creative thinking encourages and seizes opportunities

Leadership

Taking a proactive leadership role to ensure success



Strategic Pillar 1

Regional Marketing



Strategic Priorities

REGIONAL MARKETING

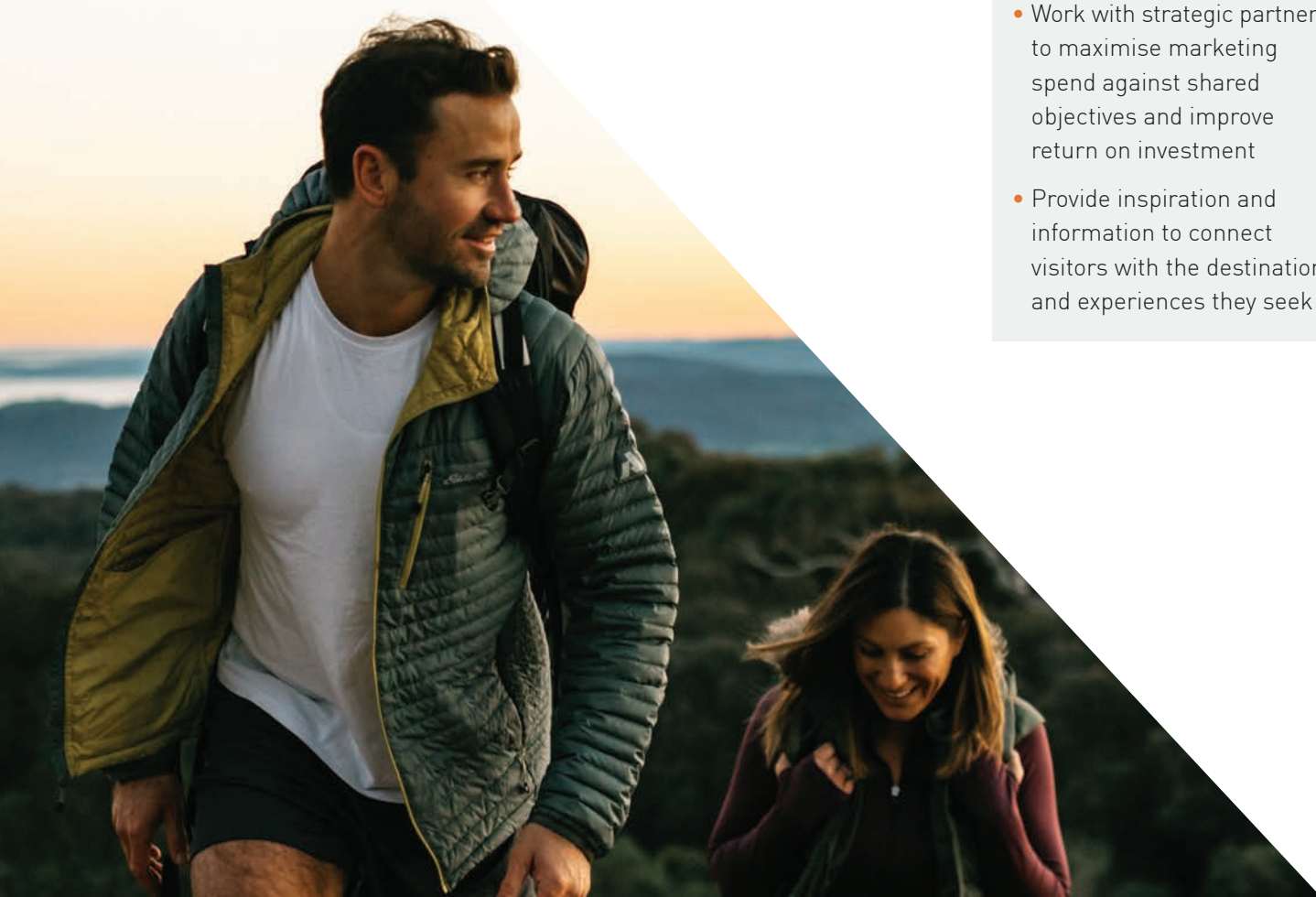
Lead and support the Murray region in the development of collaborative marketing programs

Strategic Focus

- Managing and building the Murray brand
- Ensuring all marketing decisions are based on sound research
- Maximising return on marketing spend
- Continuing to ensure the Murray region is included in NSW and Victorian state government marketing activities
- Developing key partnerships to promote the region and sub-regions
- Leveraging the use of best practice digital technology

Key Initiatives

- Lead the review, update and implementation of the Strategic Marketing Plan
- Refine the Murray Brand, to strengthen promotion of cross-region initiatives
- Facilitate access to timely consumer research to assist industry to make informed business decisions
- Development of a region-wide program to support Murray region touring and road trips
- Implement seasonal-based marketing, heroing key experiences relevant to the seasons
- Work with strategic partners to maximise marketing spend against shared objectives and improve return on investment
- Provide inspiration and information to connect visitors with the destination and experiences they seek



Strategic Priorities

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Facilitate investment in infrastructure, new products and experiences that revitalise the region's tourism offer

Strategic Focus

- Encouraging investment in new or renewed experiences along the Murray with high quality product aligned to the Destination Management Plan (DMP)
- Linking key product within the region to create touring experiences
- Identifying international-ready product
- Coordinating the management of the digital program to ensure a visitor focused, whole-of Murray experience
- Optimising the benefits of natural and cultural sites

Key Initiatives

- Review, refresh and implement the Destination Management Plan in partnership with both private and public stakeholders
- Undertake a regional product gap analysis
- Partner with state and local governments to establish a region wide approach to experience development and investment attraction
- Oversee the implementation of Stage 1 of the Murray River Adventure Trail along with the continued development of future stages
- Facilitate the development of touring routes aligned with key experiences and visitor demand
- Maximise the opportunities from new and emerging visitor markets, through a focus on visitor experience
- Facilitate opportunities to strengthen Aboriginal Tourism experiences
- Work in partnership with key agencies to map and develop natural and cultural site experiences



Strategic Priorities

LEADERSHIP & ADVOCACY

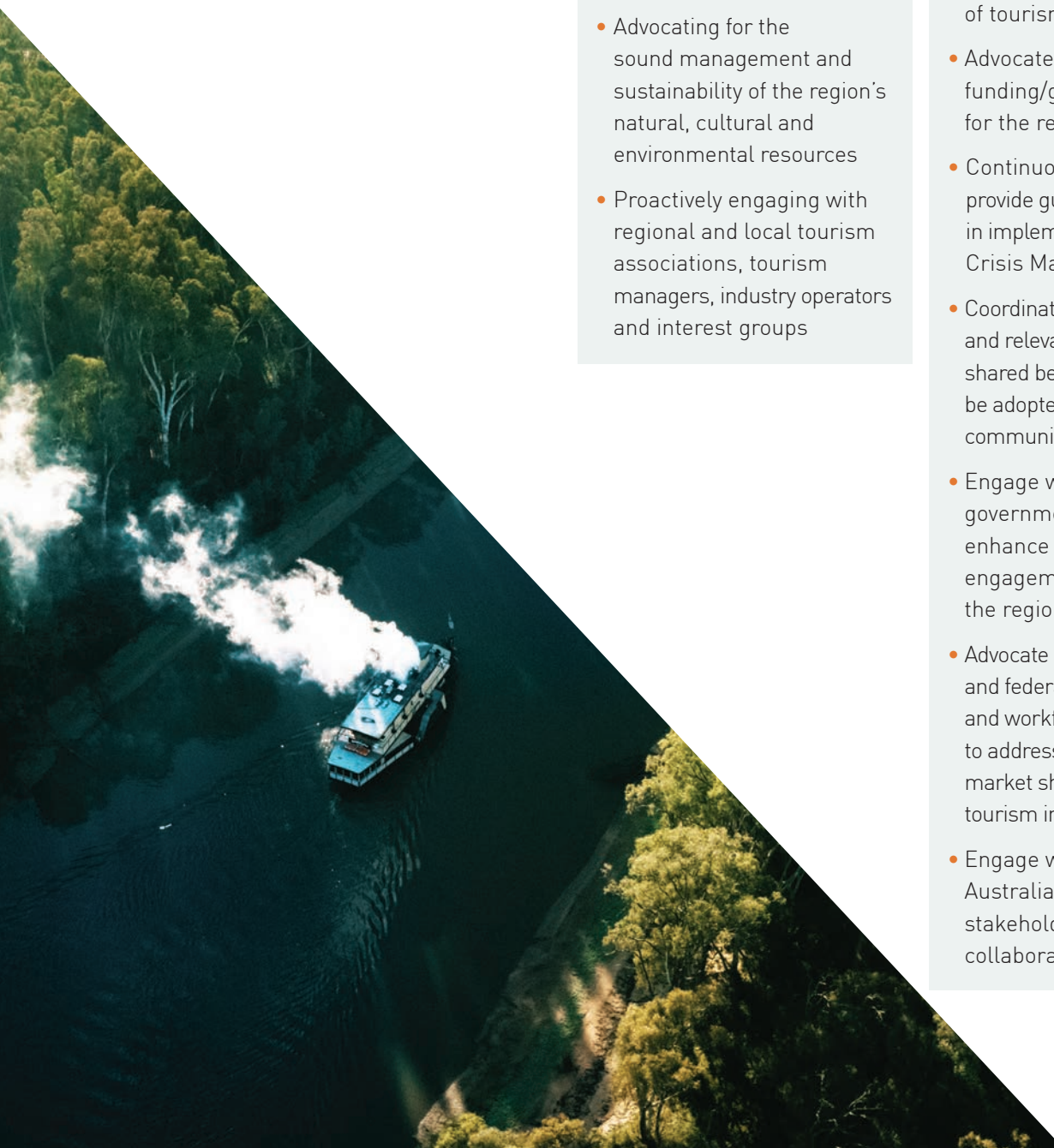
Leading the growth and development of the Murray region through expert knowledge, advocacy and industry engagement

Strategic Focus

- Developing a strong and mutually supportive relationship with stakeholder councils, state governments and federal government
- Actively advocating to state tourism bodies to increase awareness of the unique opportunities and challenges of remote and more diverse regions
- Advocating for the sound management and sustainability of the region's natural, cultural and environmental resources
- Proactively engaging with regional and local tourism associations, tourism managers, industry operators and interest groups

Key Initiatives

- Position Murray Regional Tourism (MRT) to be the leading cross border resource for growing the visitor economy, advocacy, research and support
- Implement the Communications and Engagement Plan to support industry and highlight the importance of tourism to the economy
- Advocate for government funding/grants assistance for the region
- Continuously evolve, and provide guidance and support in implementing the region's Crisis Management Plan
- Coordinate access to timely and relevant research, with shared benefits that can be adopted widely by the community
- Engage with local and state government partners to enhance and align industry engagement activities in the region
- Advocate to relevant state and federal bodies on skills and workforce development to address regional labour market shortages for the tourism industry
- Engage with South Australian tourism stakeholders to explore collaborative opportunities



Strategic Priorities

INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

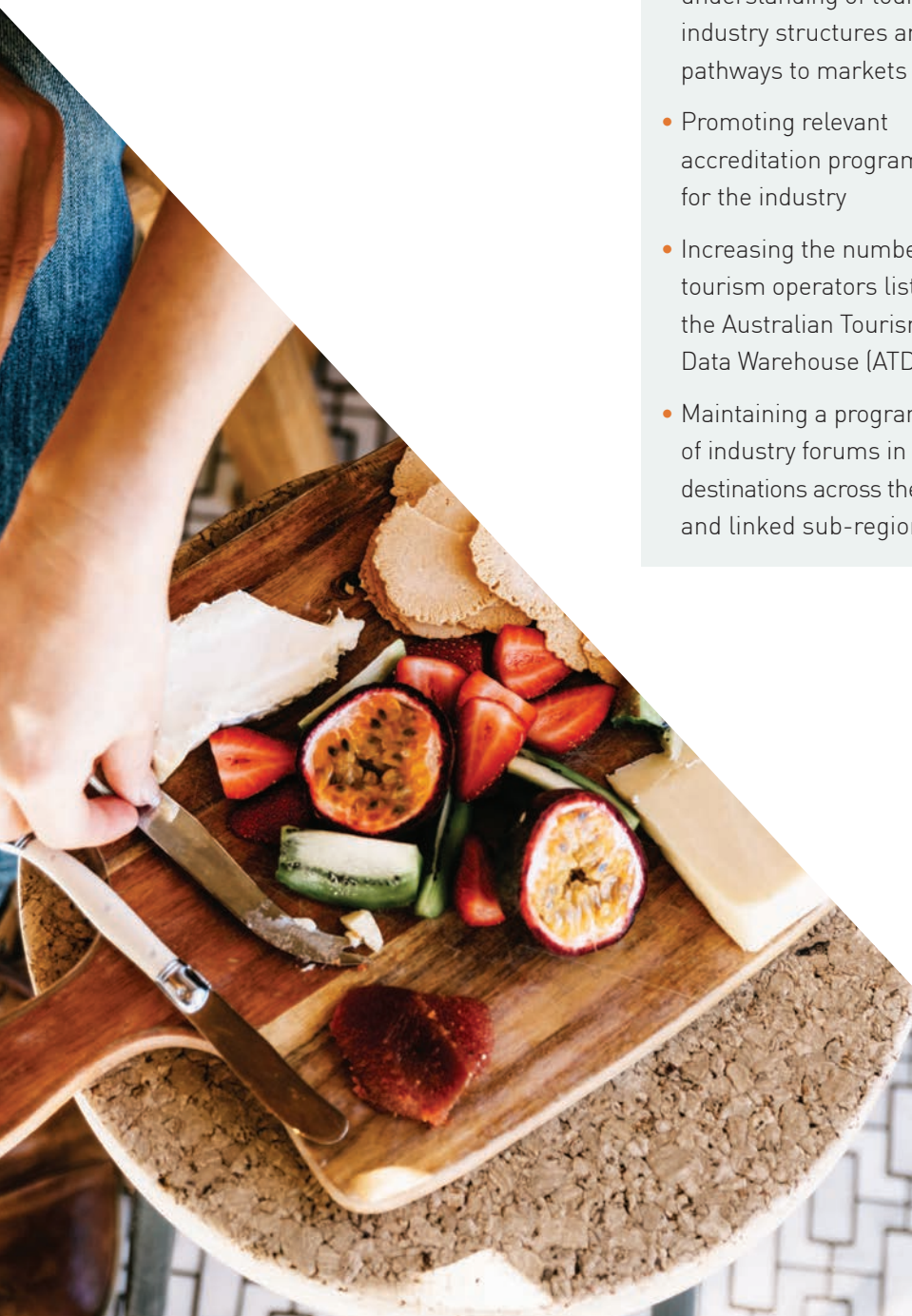
Improving the quality of tourism experiences in the region through industry education and support

Strategic Focus

- Focusing on a region-wide educational program
- Developing the leadership capacity of industry
- Promoting regional and state tourism awards programs
- Raising the awareness and understanding of tourism industry structures and pathways to markets
- Promoting relevant accreditation programs for the industry
- Increasing the number of tourism operators listed on the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW)
- Maintaining a program of industry forums in key destinations across the region and linked sub-regions

Key Initiatives

- Facilitate a tourism education program to address the identified gaps and develop the capability and competitiveness of the industry
- Engage with employment and industry stakeholders to support the growth of tourism and hospitality careers in the region and address labour and skills gaps
- Facilitate the implementation of the recommendations of the Visitor Engagement Strategy
- Provide opportunities for industry to enhance leadership skills
- Facilitate Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW) education and training in collaboration with our state agencies to support industry



Strategic Pillar 5

Governance & Sustainability



Strategic Priorities

GOVERNANCE & SUSTAINABILITY

**A sustainable, transparent
and effective organisation
focused on making a
difference**

Strategic Focus

- Reviewing governance structures
- Maintaining sound financial management and building innovative revenue streams
- Focusing on contemporary and effective collaboration processes with our stakeholders
- Ensuring an internal workforce that is stable, skilled and adaptable to our changing environments

Key Initiatives

- Develop and implement a transition plan in response to the Victorian Visitor Economy Reform and Recovery plan and NSW 2030 Visitor Economy Strategy
- Seek opportunities to diversify our revenue streams
- Investigate and implement industry advisory committees or focus groups on key projects
- Review and update our Risk Management Plan



Murray Regional Tourism Board

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