


May 14, 2025

MRT Quarterly Forum | IN PERSON

Attended: Cameron Sutton Emily Jones Kaylee Whitfield Kristy Hayes
lklint@moira.vic.gov.au marcia.pollington@swanhill.vic.gov.au Pamela Canavan
Merran Socha Georgia Homer-Osborne Cassandra Miller Steve Colombo (Swan Hill Inc.)

Attachments  MRT Quarterly Forum | IN PERSON

Summary

Kaylee Whitfield from Murray Regional Tourism led a forum with various Tourism Managers. Key discussions involved Tourism Research Australia (TRA) data updates, the expansion of the Localis Destination dashboard, the launch of the "Mates with the Murray" campaign featuring Norm and Katrina Myers, Social Media performance, updates on successful tourism projects, and presentations from Sam Campi on MDBA's role, Holbrook Hotel on Agri-tourism, working with Community and sustainability and Sarah Rhodess from Plastic Free Sea on integrating sustainability into tourism, with participants sharing initial thoughts and discussing various challenges and successful initiatives.

Details

- **Meeting Start and Introductions** Cameron Sutton welcomed everyone to the tourism managers forum, acknowledging the traditional owners of the land ([00:06:48](#)). Kristy Hayes joined online, mentioning travel constraints due to upcoming destination marketing and a local government event ([00:01:24](#)).
- **Meeting Recording and Notes** Lousie (Visit Sun Country) inquired about recording and notes. Kaylee Whitfield confirmed the session was being recorded and notes would be distributed ([00:05:33](#)).
- **Tourism Research Australia (TRA) Data** Cameron Sutton provided an update on TRA data, stating an email with information would be sent early next week. He mentioned improvements to report visualisation were planned following a meeting ([00:06:48](#)). Fundamental changes to TRA data were also noted, and

MRT is working with other regional tourism boards to ensure the best possible presentation ([00:08:06](#)).

- **Localis Destination Dashboard** Cameron Sutton announced the expansion of the Localis destination dashboard, which is free for all council partners, to include Visa spend data within the next seven days. This initiative is a result of collaboration among Victorian Regional Tourism Boards, Localis, and Visa ([00:08:06](#)). While valuable for tourism insights, it is not a replacement for REM plan or Spendmap ([00:09:33](#)).
- **Mobility Data via Localis** Cameron reminded council partners that free mobility data is already available within their Localis dashboard. He also highlighted a substantial discount available to MRT council partners for geo-fencing smaller areas for more specific mobility data reports, useful for grant applications and addressing local concerns ([00:09:33](#)).
- **Digital Research Report** Cameron thanked council partners for their participation in the digital research report ([00:11:02](#)). The report aims to identify how to collectively improve digital content across all platforms to benefit visitors. The report is expected within one to two weeks and will go to the MRT board to decide how it will be distributed to council partners ([00:12:15](#)).
- **Tourism Budgets** Cameron acknowledged the stress on council budgets and offered support for budget bids or addressing council concerns related to tourism funding. He noted that overall tourism budgets across the Murray seem likely to increase, pending formal council endorsements ([00:13:25](#)).
- **Destination Management Plan (DMP)** Cameron emphasised the critical role of the cross-border DMP for funding opportunities. A DMP review is planned to commence within the next six and a half months to assess performance, noting the Murray region's positive visitor and spend figures compared to declining premium destinations ([00:14:32](#)).
- **Councillor Presentations** Cameron updated attendees on presentations being given to councillor cohorts, explaining that these are primarily educational about MRT, the role of tourism, and visitor economy partnerships ([00:15:49](#)). These presentations are generally the same, with a few slides referencing the specific LGA ([00:16:54](#)).
- **Annual Business Plan** Cameron announced that the MRT annual business plan is under development and will be sent to council partners for feedback around mid-June for one to two weeks. This plan is directly linked to the

agreed 2024-2027 strategic plan and the destination management plan ([00:18:02](#)).

- **Sustainability Initiatives with Sarah Rhodess** Cameron introduced Sarah Rhodes, who will speak about sustainability. He encouraged feedback on sustainability and eco elements, noting their critical importance for the health of the river and communities, as well as alignment with government concerns about climate change. MRT aims to explore potential actions in this area over the next 12 months, focusing on larger operators like houseboat cruises and big clubs ([00:19:17](#)).
- **Murray Darling Basin Authority Update with Sam Campy** Cameron mentioned that Sam Campy from the Murray Darling Basin Authority would be presenting interesting information ([00:20:47](#)).
- **Georgia's Leave and Coverage** Georgia announced their last day at MRT would be the upcoming Friday. Shari Butcher will be coming on board one to two days a week to monitor emails, liaise with the digital agency (Next Level) for ad updates, and work on the Visit the Murray website projects ([00:21:56](#)). Pamela Canavan and Shari will work closely on general reporting and presentations ([00:25:22](#)).
- **Website and Reporting Updates** Georgia mentioned moving to HubSpot for the website and is building monthly dashboard reports for each destination page, with options for holistic overviews ([00:24:17](#)). Pamela Canavan will continue organic socials and take on more comms, media, and PR ([00:25:22](#)). Kaylee will take over the industry newsletter ([00:26:30](#)).
- **Social Media Performance Update** Pamela Canavan provided an update on social media platform performance, noting a slight dip in Facebook followers likely due to significant previous growth ([00:28:16](#)). Instagram and LinkedIn are performing well, with increasing engagement and followers. Itinerary and experience-based content continues to perform strongly, with videos showing better performance on Facebook recently ([00:29:01](#)). Facebook audience engagement differs significantly from Instagram, with an older demographic sharing past experiences ([00:29:59](#)).
- **Tourism Australia Share and Content Trends** Pamela Canavan highlighted a recent share of a Mungo National Park reel by Tourism Australia, noting the success of outback nature content ([00:29:59](#)). Tagging Tourism Australia in posts is encouraged. Interactions with consumers are increasing on both organic and paid posts. Top-performing posts, like a reel from Adam Edwards shared by Tourism Australia, achieved significant reach ([00:31:44](#)).

- Shift in Consumer Preferences** Georgia noted a shift in consumer preferences towards family-friendly, affordable, and authentic experiences, with content featuring aspirational or luxury products performing less well currently ([00:33:33](#)). Consumer comments reflect personal connections and family experiences, aligning with the focus on relatable content, especially with upcoming "mates" content featuring smaller towns ([00:34:47](#)).
- LinkedIn Strategy and Performance** Pamela Canavan briefly discussed LinkedIn, stating the strategy of team and people-focused posts continues to gain traction, citing examples like Kaylee's road trip ([00:35:33](#)). Follower numbers are increasing, and top-performing posts included Anzac Day commemorations and the announcement of funded projects under the Victorian Government's Regional Tourism Investment Fund ([00:36:23](#)).
- Successful Projects under Regional Tourism Investment Fund** Pamela Canavan listed the successful projects that received funding: Kyabram Fauna Park, PS Australian Sky, Yorta Yorta Cultural Connection Centre, Nirebo Motel in Echuca, and All Seasons Holiday Park in Mildura ([00:37:22](#)).
- Mates with the Murray Campaign Launch** Georgia announced the launch of the "Mates with the Murray" campaign, with the paid campaign starting recently and showing strong initial impressions. The campaign features individuals like Norm from Droger Hotel and Katrina Myers from Baron Avocados, focusing on smaller towns and sustainability ([00:38:22](#)). Media releases have been sent, and collaboration with journalists is underway to amplify the campaign and the featured "mates" ([00:39:30](#)).
- Campaign Schedule and Content** Georgia shared the schedule for the "Mates" videos, which include a variety of operators. Bloopers will also be released. Pamela Canavan emphasised the unifying and connecting nature of the campaign, highlighting the authentic feel and the "mates" ability to evoke emotion and showcase the beautiful people along the Murray ([00:40:30](#)).
- Unification and Sustainability Focus of the Campaign** Georgia elaborated on the campaign's focus on unification across different-sized towns and the promotion of sustainable and responsible tourism ([00:41:37](#)). The "mates" share their perspectives on what it means to be a "mate" of the Murray, promoting the right type of visitor who spends money, stays in the region, and cares for the area ([00:42:51](#)).
- Campaign Support and Engagement** Georgia encouraged partners to support the campaign by sharing content and engaging on social media ([00:44:46](#)). Actively commenting and highlighting local "mates" can increase visibility

(00:45:49). Partners were reminded not to announce upcoming "mates" before the official launch (00:47:02).

- **Behind the Scenes of Mate Selection** In response to a question, Georgia and Pamela Canavan described the robust discussions involved in selecting the "mates," highlighting the abundance of fantastic people across the Murray (00:49:07). The authenticity of the selected individuals as genuine Murray characters was emphasised (00:52:20).
- **Future of Mates with the Murray** Regarding future series, Georgia indicated that the success and learnings from the current campaign, along with feedback on the annual business plan and changing economic conditions, would inform future decisions, not ruling out another series (00:50:20). Data-driven considerations and value for money will be critical in future planning (00:51:21).
- **ATDW Event Listings Reminder** Pamela Canavan reminded everyone that ATDW event listings are free and should be created as soon as an event is confirmed. Late or missing listings impact marketing efforts, EDMs, social media, and submissions to Visit Victoria and Destination New South Wales (00:54:14). Collaboration is needed to encourage timely listings from all event organizers (00:55:21). Support for creating listings is available through VICs, council contacts, Kaylee from MRT, and resources from Visit Victoria and Destination New South Wales (00:56:27).
- **Digital Asset Feedback** Pamela Canavan requested better digital assets for event promotion. Georgia echoed this, encouraging feedback to organisers on poor assets and offering MRT's assistance if needed (00:58:24).
- **Georgia's Contributions** Cameron thanked Georgia for their hard work and positive impact on MRT's online and offline operations (00:59:24).
- **DRM Project Update** Shari Butcher provided an update on the Destination Riverina and Murray (DRM) projects, including the Murray Tourism PR accelerator program and the First Nations content creation project (01:01:37).
- **PR Accelerator Workshops** Shari Butcher detailed the four PR accelerator workshops held, covering media engagement, brand storytelling, and social media, with positive feedback on the content and workbook provided (01:02:46). The most well-received module was brand storytelling, and attendees wished the sessions were longer (01:05:01).
- **Operator Confidence and Feedback** Shari Butcher reported that 77% of workshop attendees felt confident in implementing the learned strategies and

tools ([01:06:58](#)). Feedback highlighted the value of learning how to better pitch stories and gaining practical PR tools ([01:07:59](#)).

- **One-on-One Mentoring** Shari Butcher announced the completion of the workshops and the ongoing one-on-one mentoring with Georgie for selected operators, focusing on business assets and brand story development ([01:08:47](#)).
- **First Nations Content Creation** Shari Butcher provided an update on the First Nations content creation project with EGI Media, outlining the objectives to enhance First Nations tourism and showcase cultural offerings. Four businesses are participating and will receive high-res images and short and long-form videos ([01:11:09](#)). Cameron Sutton praised the quality of the initial video produced ([01:14:51](#)).
- **Workshop Attendee List** Marcia Pollington inquired about obtaining a list of attendees for the Euston PR accelerator workshop. Shari indicated this should be possible after checking with DRM ([01:14:05](#)).
- **MDBA's Role in Water Management** Sam Campi from the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) introduced their role in overseeing the basin at a strategic level and engaging with various stakeholders ([01:17:33](#)). He explained that while states own the water, the MDBA is involved in operational aspects, particularly regarding the Murray River ([01:19:42](#)).
- **Event Registration and River Information** Sam Campi emphasised the importance of registering events with the MDBA via operations.mdba.gov.au and highlighted resources like the annual community events calendar and weekly river reports for event planning ([01:22:47](#)). This information can help event managers be aware of potential river level issues ([01:24:55](#)).
- **Communication and Planning for River Events** Merran Socha raised concerns about low river levels impacting events and the need for better communication. Sam Campi acknowledged these challenges and expressed a commitment to improving communication and proactive engagement with the tourism industry ([01:29:13](#)) ([01:31:50](#)).
- **Reputational Impact of River Issues** Merran Socha stressed the reputational damage caused by unreliable river conditions during peak tourism periods like Easter ([01:31:50](#)). Cameron added concerns about dam levels affecting river activities and the critical need for safe and healthy river levels during key holiday periods ([01:33:40](#)).
- **MDBA's Willingness to Engage** Sam Campi, drawing on their experience in local government and tourism, expressed understanding of the tourism

sector's perspective and offered to engage further at the LGA level to discuss river management ([01:34:43](#)).

- **Simplifying Technical Information** Merran Socha suggested creating resources to explain technical water management documents in layman's terms. Sam Campi agreed on the need for better "water literacy" and committed to researching and sharing more accessible information ([01:37:15](#)).
- **Inconsistencies in Flood Management** Pamela Canavan raised concerns about inconsistencies in how flood levels are measured and communicated across state borders, recalling the 2022 floods ([01:39:51](#)). Sam Campi acknowledged the complexity of flood management with multiple agencies involved and the need for better communication, especially regarding tourism impacts during flood events ([01:40:50](#)).
- **Basin Plan Review** Sam Campi mentioned the ongoing Basin Plan review and encouraged the tourism sector to actively participate to ensure tourism is considered in the new plan ([01:44:47](#)). Merran Socha highlighted the historical exclusion of tourism in these discussions but acknowledged the importance of engaging ([01:45:33](#)).
- **Agri-Tourism at the Hullbrook Hotel** Dee, Shane, and Annabelle from the Holbrook Hotel introduced themselves and their roles, stepping in for the owner, Bill Warren, to discuss their approach to agri-tourism ([01:48:57](#)).
- **Bill Warren's Vision** Shane explained Bill Warren's background as a local farmer who initially aimed to open a butcher shop to showcase his farm's produce ([01:50:59](#)). This vision evolved into the Hollbrook Hotel and Motel, emphasising a "paddock to plate" philosophy, strong local partnerships through "Eight Families," and consistent quality and storytelling ([01:51:49](#)).
- **Sustainability and Community Focus** Dee highlighted Bill Warren's passion for sustainable farming and supporting local farms, aiming to reduce food mileage. The "Eight Families" collective shares this ethos of sustainability and community support ([01:53:04](#)).
 - **Revitalisation of the Hullbrook Hotel** Annabelle, a local, shared the community's anticipation and positive reaction to Bill Warren's acquisition and extensive three-year renovation of the Holbrook Hotel in 2019 ([01:54:21](#)). The reopening transformed it into a vibrant hub while preserving its architectural charm, becoming a cornerstone of the local community by hosting events and boosting the social fabric ([01:55:29](#)).

- **Community Expectations and Impact** Annabelle noted the various speculations before the hotel's reopening, with the result exceeding expectations. The hotel aims to preserve its local pub feel while offering diverse spaces like a bistro and beer garden to cater to different groups and positively impact the community ([01:56:42](#)).
- **Current Business Management** Dee provided context on the current management of their business, which includes the Holbrook Hotel, Holbrook Motel, and the Woomargama Hotel, all under the same company and experiencing a staffing overhaul. Dee and Shane are jointly managing the business in the interim, overseeing a large team across the three locations with varying features like room numbers and pet-friendly options ([01:57:30](#)).
- **Farm-to-Table Concept** Shane explained the initial intention of the business was to be a farm-to-table experience, which has presented challenges in terms of collaboration with Bill, organising freight, and processing meat ([01:58:37](#)). He noted the involvement of Wolki Farms, a sustainable company using wild-sourced meats, aligning with their ethos but creating complexities in using the whole animal and managing associated costs ([01:59:35](#)).
- **Challenges of Local Sourcing and Cost** Shane highlighted the difficulties in balancing the desire for a farm-to-table approach with logistical issues, quality control, and keeping prices affordable for the local community ([02:00:24](#)). He mentioned using various local producers, where owners personally deliver produce, emphasising the effort involved compared to using larger retailers ([02:01:30](#)).
- **Community Engagement and Events** Dee discussed their efforts in community involvement, including wine dinners collaborating with local wineries, which have been successful ([02:02:25](#)) ([02:05:02](#)). She also touched on the challenge of appealing to both locals and travelers, trying to balance pub meals with more elevated dining experiences ([02:05:52](#)).
- **Adapting Business Strategy** Dee noted that the business initially invested heavily but is now focusing on essential aspects and what works best, including staffing and sourcing ([02:09:03](#)). She emphasised the value of local staff with community connections, while also having a mix of staff from various backgrounds ([02:10:03](#)).
- **Staffing and Retention Challenges** Dee acknowledged the difficulties in staffing and retention in the hospitality industry, highlighting the cost of staff turnover and the need to build a positive work environment ([02:10:56](#)). She mentioned efforts to provide career progression opportunities but the time constraints in hospitality make formal training challenging ([02:11:46](#)).

- Balancing Customer Needs and Business Viability** Annabelle discussed the constant balancing act of meeting customer expectations while ensuring financial viability, especially with varying demands between busy and quiet periods ([02:12:50](#)). Shane elaborated on the challenges of utilising a whole animal when customer demand is focused on specific cuts, impacting menu planning and affordability ([02:14:00](#)).
- Menu Adaptation and Customer Feedback** Shane explained that menu planning is seasonal and they partner with businesses like Wolki Farms to utilise different cuts of meat ([02:15:50](#)). Annabelle noted the challenge of catering to a limited local population and the feedback received regarding menu changes, such as the removal of fish and chips or the availability of specific items like barramundi ([02:16:43](#)). They recognised the need to better communicate the reasoning behind menu changes to gain community support ([02:17:28](#)).
- Integration of J&M's Cafe** Dee mentioned the acquisition of J&B's Cafe and the initial challenges in integrating it with the hotel, including staffing, ordering, and menu alignment ([02:18:16](#)). She stated that after six months, the integration is feeling more positive and manageable ([02:19:04](#)).
- Strategic Vision and Future Opportunities** Dee discussed the ongoing process of recalibrating their shared vision and identifying realistic goals amidst staffing changes and innovative ideas ([02:20:03](#)). She mentioned opportunities such as wine dinners and a potential food and wine festival to showcase the region and attract more visitors ([02:20:59](#)).
- Impact of the Business on the Community** Dee highlighted the positive impact of Bill's vision on the community and the regional economy, turning Hullbrook into a day trip destination ([02:24:31](#)). She expressed their eagerness to collaborate more and welcomed feedback ([02:25:38](#)).
- Visitor Demographics and Marketing Insights** Merran Socha inquired about the ratio of local to traveling diners, to which Dee admitted the need for more effective market research, providing a rough estimate of 60% locals and 40% travelers, varying seasonally ([02:26:39](#)). Merran Socha reviewed their website and suggested emphasising their "paddock to plate" principle more prominently to attract visitors seeking that experience ([02:28:53](#)).
- Feedback and Future Engagement** Dee and Shane appreciated the feedback on their website and recognized the need to better communicate their sustainability story both online and within the venue. Pamela Canavan commended them for their presentation and highlighted the importance of storytelling, mentioning a recent workshop and the appetite for industry

training in this area ([02:29:49](#)) ([02:31:33](#)). Pamela Canavan also congratulated Shane on winning the regional award and encouraged them to promote this achievement ([02:33:43](#)). Dee expressed the importance of the entire pub experience, not just the food ([02:34:46](#)). They acknowledged the value of connecting with other businesses and mentioned attending a brands and marketing seminar ([02:35:35](#)). Pamela Canavan introduced the "Mates of the Murray" storytelling campaign as a source of inspiration ([02:36:28](#)).

- **Murray Regional Tourism Updates** Kaylee Whitfield provided updates on the Regional Strengthening Program, including the AI program, revenue and accommodation management workshops, and an upcoming industry survey to gather feedback on current needs and desired development ([02:39:36](#)). She also mentioned updates to the corporate MRT website and highlighted partnerships with Employment Hero and Rezdy as potential software solutions for operators ([02:42:08](#)). Kaylee congratulated Wentworth on being a finalist in the Tiny Towns tourism awards and encouraged participation in the open awards ([02:43:22](#)).
- **Regional Tourism Initiatives and Concerns** Merran Socha reported on a joint winter promotion involving Federation Council and Moira, led by Moira with funding secured for the campaign ([02:44:39](#)). However, Merran Socha expressed disappointment in the low attendance at the meeting, emphasizing the need for greater commitment from tourism managers, especially for in-person meetings held every six months ([02:46:43](#)). Georgia echoed this disappointment, noting the efforts put into planning the meeting based on previous feedback, while acknowledging valid reasons for absence but also stressing the value of both in-person and online participation ([02:48:29](#)).
- **Gannawarra Tourism Update** Gateway to Gannawarra reported on the development of their visitor guide, planned for an October release with an open day at the visitor center. They shared the sad news of Murray River Adventures closing down, impacting their bookable experiences, and mentioned operating with a reduced team ([02:50:51](#)). Kristy Hayes inquired about a past live music event, suggesting collaboration for future promotion ([02:52:34](#)).
- **Greater Hume Tourism Strategy** Emily Jones from Greater Hume discussed a return to basics in their tourism strategy, focusing on signage, website, and social media, alongside developing their IPNR delivery program for the next ten years ([02:53:44](#)). She highlighted the sustainability focus in Hullbrook and the flourishing tourism operators in Greater Hume, with visitor numbers exceeding pre-COVID levels, necessitating strategic planning for continued growth ([02:54:44](#)).

- **Silo Art Campaign Update** Kristy Hayes provided an update on the silo art campaign, stating that four water art silos are finished in Moama, Mthara, Mullellamine, and Barum. The sculpture in Tulibuck is expected to be completed in the next month, after which marketing will commence, with total costs estimated around \$1.2 million due to a grant ([02:56:49](#)). Tiana, the grants officer currently on leave, will prioritize the marketing strategy upon their return ([02:57:56](#)).
- **Social Media Promotion of Silo Art** Pamela Canavan inquired about getting images of the completed silo art for social media posts to promote the new artwork and create itinerary ideas ([02:59:32](#)). Kristy Hayes confirmed that professional photos have been taken, but Tiana wants to wait until all are finished to launch a comprehensive campaign. Kristy Hayes agreed to send the photos to Pamela Canavan once they are available ([03:00:18](#)).
- **Echuca Moama Brand and Marketing Strategy** Kristy Hayes discussed ongoing work with Capacity on the Echuca Moama brand, given the discontinuation of Echuca Moama tourism. They are currently developing the marketing and destination strategy, which is scheduled to begin the following morning ([03:00:18](#)). Destination store will handle the marketing and strategy execution once the initial groundwork is completed ([03:01:02](#)).
- **Updated Visit River Country Guide and Other Marketing** Kristy Hayes announced the completion of an updated Visit River Country guide featuring the art trail and new images. This refreshed guide will soon be distributed to visitor centers, and a similar update for the Chukima guide is planned for later in the financial year ([03:01:02](#)).
- **Barum World Bowls Event** Kristy Hayes reported that Barum will host the World Bowls in September, expecting 90 participants from 90 different countries ([03:01:02](#)). Efforts are focused on creating itineraries and brochures to showcase the region and encourage return visits ([03:01:52](#)).
- **Autumn/Winter Campaign and Tourism Trends** Kristy Hayes mentioned the ongoing autumn/winter campaign and noted strong summer visitation, with Easter caravaners arriving earlier than usual. Favorable weather conditions have also contributed to steady tourism ([03:01:52](#)).
- **TikTok Training and Upcoming Events** Kristy Hayes has been undertaking TikTok training to enhance social media engagement. Several events are planned, including Autofest in October (expected to attract around 300 people) and a live music event in November, aiming to boost visitation during quieter periods ([03:02:41](#)).

- **Sandstorm Events Collaboration** Kristy Hayes mentioned a collaboration with Sandstorm Events, known for sandcastle creations, for an event in Echuca Moama, partnering with Cheryl from Campaspi and the Port of Echuca due to the expense ([03:03:40](#)). The aim is to create a trail, and more information will be provided at the next meeting ([03:04:25](#)).
- **ATDW Listings for New Silo Art** Pamela Canavan suggested creating ATDW listings for each of the new water art silos. Kristy Hayes agreed to add this to their list to avoid manual work for Shari ([03:05:17](#)).
- **Swan Hill Tourism and Cultural Hub Development** Marcia provided an update on the Swan Hill tourism and cultural hub, which is under construction and scheduled to open in December. A walkthrough for staff who may be based there is being organised for the following week ([03:06:03](#)).
- **Art Gallery Redevelopment and Flying Boat Museum Upgrades** Marcia reported that the art gallery redevelopment is also underway and expected to open in December. The flying boat museum at Lake Boger has received funding for bunker repairs and upgrades, with work anticipated to start soon ([03:06:03](#)).
- **Growing Regions Fund Projects in Swan Hill** Marcia detailed projects funded by the Growing Regions Fund, including the pedestrian bridge to Pentle Island at the pioneer settlement (currently in the design stage). Plans for Pentle Island include indigenous activation with boardwalks and information boards, in collaboration with a new rap group. Redevelopment of the 10 steps in Riverside Park and a new boat mooring in the same park are also planned, with the mooring's specific location yet to be determined ([03:06:58](#)).
- **CBD Redevelopment and Railway Overpass** Marcia mentioned ongoing planning for the CBD redevelopment and the long-discussed railway overpass in Swan Hill. There is hope that progress is being made on the overpass ([03:08:03](#)).
- **Monash Drive Re-zoning for Tourism** Marcia stated that the old grain site on Monache Drive has been rezoned for commercial purposes, with the aim of attracting a tourism operator and/or accommodation due to its riverside location ([03:08:03](#)).
- **Upcoming Events in Swan Hill** Marcia highlighted upcoming events, including the June racing carnival (King's birthday long weekend), River Lights 2025 (mid-July), Silver Circus (end of July/August), and the Mallee Almond Blossom Festival in Robinvale (August). River Lights will incorporate the Pyap and offer a premium cruise experience ([03:08:52](#)).

- New Playground in Robinvale and Business Openings in Swan Hill** Marcia announced the completion and opening of a \$1.5 million playground in Robinvale, which is very popular. In Swan Hill, a Hungry Jacks is currently under construction and expected to open after the school holidays, with Zambberos and Smoking Joe's also opening soon, and Spec Savers having opened recently ([03:09:55](#)).
- Robinvale Pub Status Unknown** Pamela Canavan inquired about the status of the pub in Robinvale, but Marcia was not up-to-date and referred to it as a "can of worms". Marcia offered to investigate and provide more information later ([03:11:42](#)).
- Swan Hill Incorporated Budget and Marketing Strategy** Swan Hill Incorporated reported finalising their annual budget, destination marketing strategy, and strategic plan within the next two weeks. Editorial work has begun for their OVG, expected to be around 80-84 pages and launched in approximately six weeks ([03:12:14](#)).
- Ice Skating Activation and Winter Campaign** Swan Hill Incorporated announced an ice skating activation to complement River Lights, planned for July in the McCallum Street car park, featuring entertainment and food ([03:12:14](#)). They are in the early stages of their "no matter the season" winter campaign, with design complete and shooting commencing soon ([03:13:19](#)).
- Melbourne Cup Tour and Food & Wine Rebranding** Swan Hill Incorporated mentioned the successful application for the Melbourne Cup tour, expected in August. They are in the final stages of their food and wine rebranding, with new designs anticipated within two weeks ([03:13:19](#)).
- Afternoon Break and Upcoming Sustainability Presentation** Kaylee concluded the updates and announced a 15-minute break before Sarah Rhodess's presentation on sustainability at 3:30 PM. Merran Socha informed the group they would need to leave and would catch up on the notes ([03:14:32](#)). Pamela Canavan informed Suzy about the break and the upcoming sustainability talk ([03:15:25](#)).
- Introduction to Sarah Rhodess and Plastic Free Sea** Kaylee Whitfield welcomed everyone back and introduced Sarah Rhodess from Plastic Free Sea, who would be presenting on integrating sustainability. Sarah Rhodess expressed their pleasure to be there and shared that they would be presenting some slides ([03:33:40](#)).
- Sarah Rhodess's Background in Tourism and Sustainability** Sarah Rhodess provided background information, starting with their career in events and

hotels, followed by studying tourism management. Their interest in sustainable tourism grew during their studies, leading them to work at South Australia Tourism in digital marketing ([03:35:22](#)).

- **Shift to Sustainable Tourism and Work in Cambodia** Sarah Rhodess recounted their move towards focusing on sustainable tourism around 2012, which led them to work with an organization in Cambodia in 2014 focusing on communities, environment, and responsible tourism ([03:36:45](#)). In 2015, they began working on plastic-free initiatives, now known as PFC, providing training and consulting in Southeast Asia and Australia ([03:38:07](#)).
- **PFC's Scope and Philosophy** Sarah Rhodess detailed PFC's work, including training, consulting, strategy development, behavior change, policy certification, awards, and a course for sustainability managers ([03:38:07](#)). They emphasized the importance of taking action on environmental issues, regardless of the scale, and asked attendees about their initial thoughts on sustainability ([03:39:23](#)).
- **Initial Thoughts on Sustainability** Pamela Canavan from Murray Regional shared "care" as their first thought on sustainability ([03:42:41](#)). Swan Hill Incorporated contributed "longevity". Emily Jones from Greater Hume Council thought of "eco-friendly" ([03:43:41](#)). Georgia from MRT mentioned "preservation (of land, water)". Kaylee, also from MRT, said "recycling". Cass from Ganawara submitted "eco practices" in writing ([03:44:39](#)).
- **Importance of Starting and Collective Action** Sarah Rhodess acknowledged the diverse perspectives on sustainability and emphasized that all contributions are important ([03:45:55](#)). They shared a personal story from their early work in Cambodia, highlighting how small beginnings can lead to significant broader impacts, such as national anti-littering campaigns and climate change conferences ([03:47:17](#)). They encouraged adopting a beginner's mindset, being curious, and reaching out to connect with others who share an interest in sustainability, noting the strength in collective action ([03:49:36](#)).
- **Sarah Rhodess's Philosophy of Sustainable Tourism (PEEC)** Sarah Rhodess outlined their philosophy of sustainable tourism, breaking it down into four interconnected components: Environment, Economy, People, and Culture (PEEC). They explained that these are interwoven and should not be seen as separate pillars ([03:50:57](#)).
- **Environmental Sustainability** Sarah Rhodess discussed environmental sustainability, focusing on environmental impact, land, water, biodiversity, and the duty to protect these resources, particularly the Murray River. They

highlighted the importance of education in visitor custodianship and addressed the challenge of environmental issues not always being a high priority ([03:52:15](#)). Topics such as international vs. domestic travel, single-use plastics in river systems, and the impact of climate change on seasonality and natural disasters were also mentioned ([03:53:29](#)).

- **Cultural Sustainability and Local Vibe** Sarah Rhodess introduced the concept of cultural sustainability, defining culture as the ideas, customs, and social behavior of a people or society. They emphasized that this aspect is often overlooked in sustainability discussions and inquired about the "vibe" and local culture of each area represented, including any local heroes or groups active in sustainability or community work ([03:54:36](#)).
- **Community Care and Sustainability** Georgia highlighted that their campaign filming in smaller towns revealed a strong community focus on caring for both people and the land. Examples included a land care group planting native trees and individuals emphasizing regional sustainability and responsibility. Sarah Rhodes acknowledged the power of these local actions ([03:55:57](#)).
- **Varying Stages of Sustainability** Sarah Rhodes noted that different communities are at various points in their sustainability journey. Swan Hill Incorporated felt they were behind in actively championing the topic but saw potential to start the conversation. Sarah Rhodes emphasized that regardless of the stage, there are existing active groups and opportunities for progress ([03:57:07](#)). Emily Jones observed that the diverse communities within Greater Hume have different focuses, making a unified council approach interesting. Sarah Rhodes highlighted the learning potential in peer environments with diverse approaches ([03:58:10](#)).
- **Individual Impact and Local Heroes** Pamela Canavan shared an example of Murray Off-Road Adventures in Mildura, a tour company educating guests about the environment and leading by example in picking up litter ([03:59:33](#)). This inspired guests to do the same, demonstrating that small actions matter ([04:00:32](#)). Pamela Canavan also recounted a story of the operator's wife, Jeanie, encouraging proper clean-up at a local spot ([04:01:40](#)). Sarah Rhodes emphasized the behavioral science aspect, noting the difficulty many people have in speaking up, and the importance of awareness ([04:02:31](#)). Pamela Canavan stressed that leaving rubbish is not excusable due to the lack of bins ([04:04:21](#)).
- **Economics and Sustainability** Sarah Rhodes challenged the perception that sustainability is always more expensive, suggesting it often leads to long-term savings and benefits like improved staff retention and longer visitor stays

(04:05:15). She emphasized taking a big-picture view and noted that for-purpose businesses with sustainability in their core tend to perform better. Sarah Rhodes highlighted that people are fundamental to this as staff, visitors, and operators. Swan Hill Incorporated focuses on business support and visitors, while also engaging with the community (04:06:19). Georgia stated that MRT provides education and resources to LGAs to facilitate their growth at their level, working with operators and visitors across all tourism aspects (04:07:47).

- **Integrated Approach to Sustainability** Sarah Rhodes emphasized that when culture, environment, economics, and people integrate harmoniously, the overall impact is greater than the sum of its parts (04:09:02). This integration can lead to new cultural norms that drive progress towards a shared vision. Using the example of hotels in Southeast Asia, Sarah Rhodes illustrated how educating and empowering staff on sustainability can lead to sustainable procurement, better visitor engagement, and positive ripple effects in their communities (04:10:17) (04:13:26).
- **Challenges in Implementing Sustainability** Sarah Rhodes summarized challenges identified in a survey, including litter, printed brochures, wildlife protection, waste minimization, river protection, support for tour operators, innovation, single-use plastics, sustainable sourcing, climate change adaptation, paper use, the perception of optionality, staff turnover, and a lack of urgency (04:14:42). Swan Hill Incorporated found the list comprehensive (04:15:53). Georgia noted that operators focused on day-to-day business may not see the marketing opportunities in sustainability (04:17:05). Marcia Pollington added that time constraints can make sustainability a lower priority (04:18:06).
- **Priorities in Sustainability** Sarah Rhodes pointed out that sustainability priorities will vary among different segments, operators, and community groups (04:19:02). These priorities could include education, certification, minimizing impact, stakeholder engagement, new staff induction, and waste management in sensitive areas. Understanding these diverse priorities can help leverage existing interests (04:20:36).
- **Examples of Successful Sustainability Initiatives** Sarah Rhodes shared examples of effective sustainability initiatives, including bans on single-use coffee cups, the community-owned Hepburn Energy renewable energy project, Sydney by Kayak's sustainable practices and harbor clean-up tours, Sierra Escape's off-grid glamping with a focus on zero waste and local suppliers, and Potato Head Bali's plastic-free hotel with transparent recycling tours (04:23:17) (04:26:52). Georgia mentioned Soneva Fushi in the Maldives, a

luxury resort with on-island food production and transparent waste management ([04:28:09](#)). She also highlighted a Sunny Coast cafe offering discounts for bringing rubbish and the "Take Three for the Sea" campaign ([04:30:16](#)).

- **Engaging Future Generations** Georgia emphasised the importance of engaging children in sustainability through campaigns and education. Marcia Pollington shared an anecdote about a school trip to a recycling plant that positively influenced a young student's recycling habits ([04:32:58](#)). Georgia also described a First Nations-led cultural tour educating school children about native and invasive plants ([04:34:03](#)). Georgia mentioned a council partnership with Half Waist, using a costumed "organics fairy" to teach young children about recycling and organic waste ([04:35:51](#)).
- **Co-creation and Awareness in Sustainability** Sarah Rhodes stressed that co-creation is key to achieving desired sustainability outcomes and finding innovative solutions ([04:36:51](#)). She advised against trying to solve problems alone and emphasised the importance of involving people from the start to gain their investment ([04:37:49](#)). Normalising positive behaviors and making systems easy and appealing are crucial ([04:38:42](#)). Sarah Rhodes differentiated between education and awareness, noting that education doesn't always lead to action, and highlighted the need to boost awareness, considering people's busy lives ([04:40:08](#)). She suggested tactics like informal "water cooler chats" and dedicating five minutes in regular meetings to start conversations about sustainability ([04:42:20](#)).
- **Tactics for Promoting Sustainability** Sarah Rhodes suggested various tactics to initiate sustainability conversations and actions, including WhatsApp/Teams group chats, lunch and learns, dividing and conquering tasks, goals tracking posters, and community challenges/competitions ([04:43:24](#)) ([04:45:35](#)). She prompted participants to consider easy, immediate actions they could take. Georgia proposed MRT taking a lead role in marketing sustainability efforts regionally and disseminating information about initiatives like "Take Three" ([04:46:42](#)). Pamela Canavan added that industry training sessions could incorporate sustainability and facilitate peer learning ([04:48:03](#)).
- **Collaborative Regional Efforts** Pamela Canavan mentioned Visit the Murray's "Mates of the Murray" campaign, showcasing individuals' connection to the region and their sustainability efforts ([04:49:56](#)). She expressed a desire to develop a regional promise for visitors to care for the area, similar to initiatives in New Zealand ([04:50:54](#)). Swan Hill Incorporated emphasised the importance of inclusive newsletter content and social media posts, along with

simple conversations with business owners, to foster collaboration and best practice sharing. Pamela Canavan highlighted the power of rewarding positive behavior by recognizing operators doing well in sustainability at local and regional levels ([04:51:49](#)).

- **Continuing the Sustainability Journey** Sarah Rhodes summarised the discussion, emphasising the value of social media, newsletters, and face-to-face interactions in generating conversation. She highlighted the importance of ownership, inclusion, and pride in the region for the success of sustainability initiatives. Sarah Rhodes encouraged participants to connect with her on LinkedIn to share their experiences implementing these ideas ([04:53:53](#)). Pamela Canavan shared Visit the Murray's social media details and mentioned an upcoming video related to sustainability. Sarah Rhodes concluded by offering a planner document to help organise sustainability ideas ([04:54:58](#)).
- **Concluding Remarks and Sharing of Resources** Sarah Rhodes inquired if there were any further questions before considering a video. Swan Hill Incorporated expressed that Sarah had offered a different thought perspective and thanked them for sharing. Sarah thanked everyone for the session, hoping it was the start of a conversation, and mentioned that their contact details were available, with Kaylee able to provide more if needed. Sarah then stopped screen sharing so Pamela Canavan could share a video ([04:55:47](#)).
- **Sharing of Planning Document and Appreciation** Sarah Rhodes shared a link in the chat to a sustainability planning document ([04:58:09](#)). Pamela Canavan confirmed the link was sent and reiterated that everyone could watch the video in their own time, finding it really lovely. ([04:59:25](#)). Kaylee thanked Sarah for coming in, noting that even from their Regional Tourism board perspective, Sarah provided ideas for easily implementing sustainability measures, despite the smaller group size ([05:00:14](#)).
- **Gratitude and Meeting Adjournment** Kaylee Whitfield and others expressed their appreciation to Sarah Rhodes for their time and presentation. Sarah thanked them and mentioned it was great to meet everyone ([05:00:14](#)). Kaylee thanked everyone for staying until the end of the meeting and announced an early two-minute release. Marcia Pollington apologised for briefly leaving the meeting a couple of times. Pamela Canavan and others acknowledged Marcia's presence and commitment. Various attendees thanked the organisers and each other as the meeting concluded ([05:00:58](#)).