

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

Visitor Information Service

Service review- 2016-17



**Visitor
Information**

OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

JANUARY 2017



*South Gippsland
Shire Council*



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1. Introduction

South Gippsland has approximately one million visitors to the region with an average annual expenditure of \$123 million. Overnight visitors spend an average of 3.3 nights in South Gippsland and peak visitation occurs between October and April.

There has been a strong commitment to develop tourism infrastructure in South Gippsland. Increased government tourism investment has led to the development of The Great Southern Rail Trail (\$4.1 million) and future re-development of The Long Jetty (\$10 million) leading to a focus on increasing visitor experience and expenditure in the shire. Visitor Information Services are also considered a vital part of tourism investment.

Key natural attractions include:

- Wilsons Promontory
- Agnes Falls
- Cape Liptrap
- The lime kilns at Walkerville
- Shallow and Corner Inlets
- Sandy Point, Waratah Bay, Venus Bay and Walkerville beaches
- The rolling hills of Loch, Bena, Poowong and surrounds
- Mirboo North's Lyrebird Forest Walk

The Great Southern Rail Trail allows visitors to meander throughout the shire and experience the delights of boutique shopping and eateries in South Gippsland's small towns and villages. Visitors to Coal Creek Community Park and Museum can enjoy a step back in time by experiencing the coal mining history of Korumburra and surrounds.

Visitors to the region enjoy a nature-based experience with scenic drives, pristine beaches, and breath-taking hiking and biking experiences. South Gippsland's growing tourism offering continues to entice increasing numbers of visitors to the region.



Norman Bay, Wilsons Promontory

2. Strategic context

Council resolved to conduct four periodic service reviews as part of its annual review plan. The Visitor Information Services Review was identified as part of the annual review plan to be undertaken in the 2016/17 financial year. The purpose of the review is to consider the current situation and identify the most suitable service profile which offers the best value and is consistent with visitor needs and current trends.

The *2013-17 Council Plan* places strong emphasis on providing integrated services and infrastructure, with the objective of “delivering affordable modern community services and facilities through an integrated approach to planning and infrastructure development”.

Council’s *Economic Development and Tourism Strategy* highlights the economic value of tourism in South Gippsland, underlining the need to increase both visitation and yield.

This report provides a summary of the preliminary outcomes of Council’s 2016/17 Visitor Information Service review and introduces future options for consideration and community feedback.

3. Background

The Visitor information service review commenced in February 2016 and is due for completion by the end of the 2016/17 financial year. By completing this review in consultation with the community, Council will ensure that future visitor information services are:

- Being delivered as efficiently and effectively as possible
- Meeting customer needs
- Meeting industry needs
- Delivering value to our ratepayers

The review process has involved extensive consultation and analysis to inform six options for public consultation. Research and analysis of key industry trends, environmental influences, and current business performance indicators were considered.

Consultation via a comprehensive communication and engagement program was developed. Input was received from a broad range of service users, residents, businesses and industry representatives. An analysis of data and relevant industry literature, and a series of targeted surveys and submissions have also been considered.

Six separate surveys were distributed through:

- Council’s e-newsletter system
- Direct contact via email and information sessions with local business and tourism groups and networks
- Via phone, face to face and email with Industry groups including the VIC reference group and VIC networks

- Face to face in Foster and Korumburra VICs by staff
- Council's internal email system to staff and volunteers

Overall, 420 survey responses were received.

Respondent	Number
Visitor and residents	312
Business Community	46
Benchmarking (other VIS operators)	15
Industry representatives	5
Staff and volunteers	6
Total	420

Of the 312 visitors and residents that responded, 11% were of international origin whereas 25% were from interstate.

Industry consultation included Victorian Government representatives, Destination Gippsland Ltd, Prom Country Regional Tourism, Australian Tourism Accreditation Program (ATAP), Parks Victoria, VIC Reference Group other local government tourism officers.

Business community consultation included six local business/township associations (13%) and 40 business operators across the accommodation (44%), main street retail (22%), Café/ restaurant/hotel/winery (15%), arts and culture (4%) and attraction/tour operator fields (2%).

4. Current Situation

4.1 The role of visitor information services

“A VIC provides a central location (in a fixed building/structure) for visitors to gain access to timely, accurate and impartial visitor information and advice.

The prime purpose of a VIC is to enhance the visitor experience, encourage visitors to stay longer and undertake additional activities, exceed visitors’ expectations and encourage visitors to return to the region.

A VIC delivers the above by sharing its passion and providing quality accurate information, by providing exceptional customer service and effectively promoting the range of visitor experiences and services available.

A VIC also supports local businesses and tourism operators within the region. Many local business and tourism operators are reliant on the services of the VIC to provide additional business and ensure a high standard of visitor servicing in the area.”

(ATAP Accreditation guidelines)

Visitor Information Services are often delivered through physical centres, known as Visitor Information Centres (VICs). In recent years, digital services have become more prevalent with the rise of mobile technology and online booking services.

While most service visitors to the area with local information, the different models can vary significantly.

There are currently 73 accredited Visitor Information Centres (VIC’s) across Victoria.

South Gippsland’s VICs perform an important tourism promotion function and analysis undertaken through this review highlights that they serve a broad purpose. In particular, they act as a place-based Council information point for local and surrounding communities and support important emergency management activities.

As part of this review, Council undertook consultation with other VIS providers to understand contemporary trends and operating systems for visitor information services. Council officers found that most have accredited VICs in their shire. Of the respondents, 63% said they have non-accredited VICs, 25% have satellite centres and 25% have other models in place. These results suggest that although VIC accreditation is an important status to maintain in regions such as South Gippsland who rely heavily on the visitor economy, it is commonplace for regions to adopt alternative models to reflect local needs and visitor expectations.

Through this process, it was found that 69% of the respondents had either undertaken, or were in the process of undertaking visitor information service reviews within their organisations. This report has taken into account the experiences of other organisations undertaking similar reviews.

4.2 Accreditation

Foster and Korumburra are accredited VICs through the Australian Tourism Accreditation Program, which is administered by the Victorian Tourism Industry Council (VTIC). Accreditation allows Council to use the yellow “i” trademark logo, representing national standards of risk, quality control, impartiality and customer service principles. It also entitles the accredited organisation to erect “i” signage on major approaching roads.

In order to maintain accreditation, Council must meet minimum service standards. These include being open from 9am to 5pm 364 days per year and assigning dedicated staff to tourism related activities.

Benefits of Accreditation

- Eligible to use the Visitor Information Centre (VIC) trademark. The blue and yellow italic *i* has been in the marketplace for some years now and has become a powerful and sought after trademark.
- Opportunity to use VicRoads signage (including gateway and directional on major roads).
- Only accredited VICs can be provided with directional signage featuring the VIC trademark.
- Marketing of the VIC brand and network to the travelling public and industry.
- Free listings in official publications such as official visitors' guides, touring maps and authorised digital content.
- Access to training opportunities including VIC professional development seminars and the annual VIC Summit.
- Participation in the state VIC Reference Group (as appointed) and the regional VIC network group to share information and ideas with other accredited centres and access to research, regular updates, information and advice.
- Access to benchmarking data and monthly reports.
- The accreditation process also assists VICs in running a more professional service and promotes continuous improvement.
(ATAP Accreditation guidelines)

The value of the yellow "i"

Consultation undertaken by Council officers in 2016 revealed the following findings related to accreditation:

- 70% of business community respondents said that the yellow "*i*" is either very important (46%), or "important" (24%). The remaining respondents indicated they were either undecided (20%) or that they do not believe it is important (10%)
- 89% of visitors and residents surveyed look for the yellow "*i*" when visiting a destination
- When asked why accreditation is important, some respondents referred to the standards that it represents
- When visitors and residents were asked what they associate the yellow "*i*" symbol with, the most commonly used response words were "information" (29%); "places" (15%); tourist (12%); accommodation (10%); Information Centre (9.5%) and maps (9%)
- 80% of tourism industry representatives surveyed indicated that the yellow "*i*" is either important (60%) or very important (20%), with the remaining 20% undecided
- Tourism staff expressed a range of views regarding accreditation. 50% rated maintaining accreditation as important, 25% as very important and the remaining

25% rating it as not important. By forgoing accreditation, visitor services could have greater flexibility in terms of opening hours, especially during quiet times of the year.

4.3 South Gippsland's Visitor information service model

Council currently operates two fully accredited Visitor Information Centres based at Coal Creek Community Park and Museum (Korumburra) and Stockyard Gallery (Foster).

The two centres play an important role in dispersing visitors throughout the shire and into the greater Gippsland region. VICs increase awareness of local activities, accommodation availability and encourage visitors to stay in the region longer. South Gippsland's current visitor services model also includes an accommodation booking service called Singboko whereby customers can book directly online or through VIC staff.

Council's VIS team provides additional marketing and promotional support to both Council's Economic Development and Tourism team and Prom Country Regional Tourism through the two VICs.

Recognised by Council as the marketing and industry development association for South Gippsland, PCRT is run by industry for industry. Membership dollars are matched by Council and are used to produce brochures, a digital presence including a website www.visitpromcountry.com.au, and App, develop marketing campaigns and organise events.

The statistics below relating to PCRT's digital presence have been taken from the 2015/16 PCRT annual general meeting.

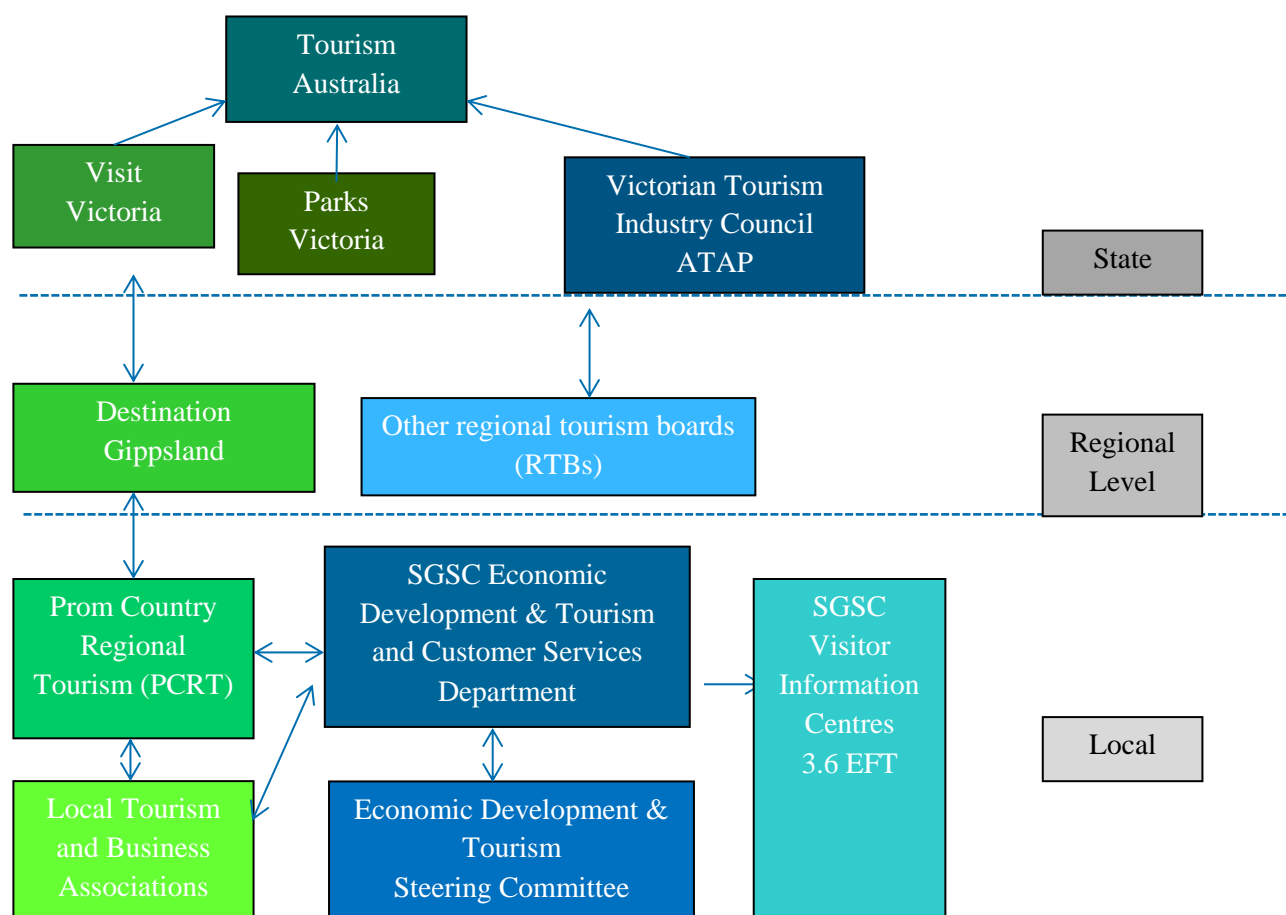
The PCRT Website

- received 147,039 visits last year- an increase of 29% on previous year
- 73% of visitors to the website were new visitors

The PCRT App- downloads and updates

- Prom Country (App store)- 2349 this year
- Prom Country (Google Play)- 453 this year

South Gippsland's Tourism Model



Australian Tourism Accreditation Program (ATAP)

The Australian Tourism Accreditation Program (ATAP) is a business development program that is based on Quality Assurance principles.

Destination Gippsland (DGL)

Destination Gippsland is the Regional Tourism Board and the peak tourism organisation for the region in eastern Victoria. Established in 2008 with the support of Tourism Victoria, Parks Victoria and six member councils of the Gippsland Local Government Network.

Prom Country Regional Tourism (PCRT)

PCRT is recognised as the marketing and industry development association for South Gippsland. Run by industry for industry, membership dollars are matched by Council and are used to produce brochures, develop marketing campaigns and organise events.

4.4 Operating costs

The combined operating cost of Council's two VICs in 2015/16 was approximately \$314k.

Costs	Actual 2015/16
Labour costs	\$301,105
Other costs	24,229
Total	\$325,334

These costs are consistent with research undertaken for the Australia's Accredited VICs: A Strategic Directions Report released in 2014, which found that the average cost of running a VIC in Australia ranges between \$100,000 and \$300,000 per annum.

It is also consistent with feedback received from other VIS providers surveyed in 2016, in which those who were able to provide this information said they operate with budgets ranging between \$300-350k, with one at \$195k.

4.5 Staffing

The Visitor Information Services team currently operates with a total of 3.6 FTE supported by a team of volunteers.

All team members work across the two sites on a rotating basis and are supported by a small team of volunteers. VIC staff has a comprehensive knowledge of the tourism assets of the shire and are skilled in operating and maintaining online promotional and transactional tourism-related websites and systems.

Consultation undertaken with other VIS operators during 2016 found that staffing levels and structures vary considerably, depending on a range of factors such as degree of organisational integration; visitation numbers and service model composition.

4.6 Office accommodation

Council considered a number of options relating to the configuration of its VICs in April 2013 and resolved to maintain the status quo.

Continual trends have since occurred with respect to mobile technology tourism trends and accommodation booking options.

These changes, together with synergies that now exist through the formation of the Economic Development, Tourism and Customer Services department provide opportunities to re-examine options with a view to achieving a more integrated and efficient service model.

Both of Council's VICs are currently co-located with other service providers. The Foster VIC is co-located with the Stockyard Gallery and the West Gippsland Regional Library Corporation, and shares a building with Parks Victoria who has a separate entrance. The Korumburra VIC is located within Coal Creek Community Park Museum and staff work closely with the Coal Creek team at a shared desk.

This is consistent with feedback received from other Visitor service providers during consultation undertaken in 2016, whereby 79% of respondents confirmed that their VICs are co-located with other services. The types of co-located services varied considerably, ranging from other Council-run business operations to private sector and other government departments including service stations, art galleries, V/Line outlets and caravan parks. However, most were of a customer-service nature.

5. Issues and analysis

5.1 Industry trends

In 2013, Tourism Victoria and the Victorian Tourism Industry Council commissioned Urban Enterprise to undertake an analysis of visitor information services in Victoria to assist in developing a 2022 state-wide vision.

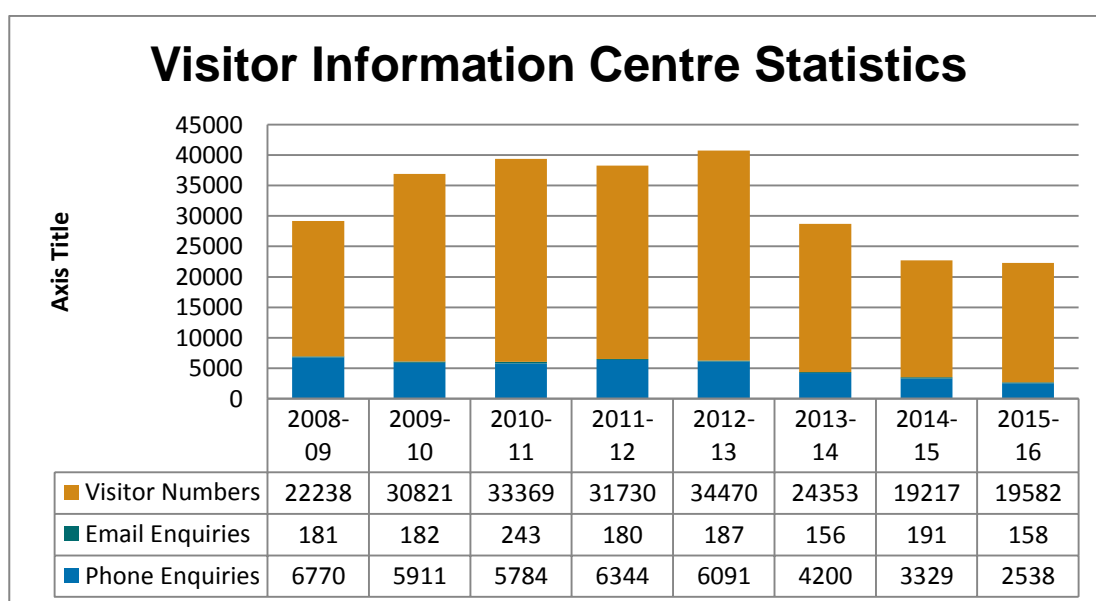
Some of the key findings from the resulting Victorian Visitor Information Centres Futures Project report, released in December 2013 included:

- Walk-in visitors to VICs had declined over the 2009-11 period by around 2.1% per annum, likely to be attributed to growth in internet use (smart phones in particular);
- The large majority (around 85%) of Victorian VICs are owned and operated by local government;
- The average external cost of running a VIC in Victoria was around \$206,000 per annum
- Around 50% of the information sought in VICs relates to product across an entire region, highlighting the importance of regional collaboration between local government areas

5.2 Local visitation trends

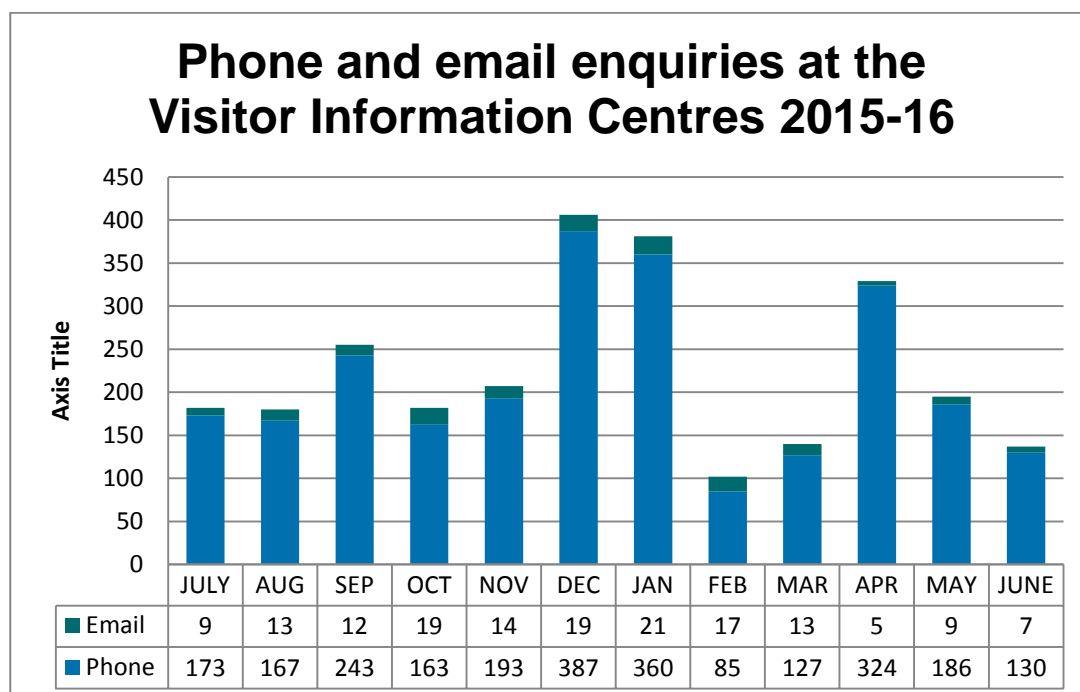
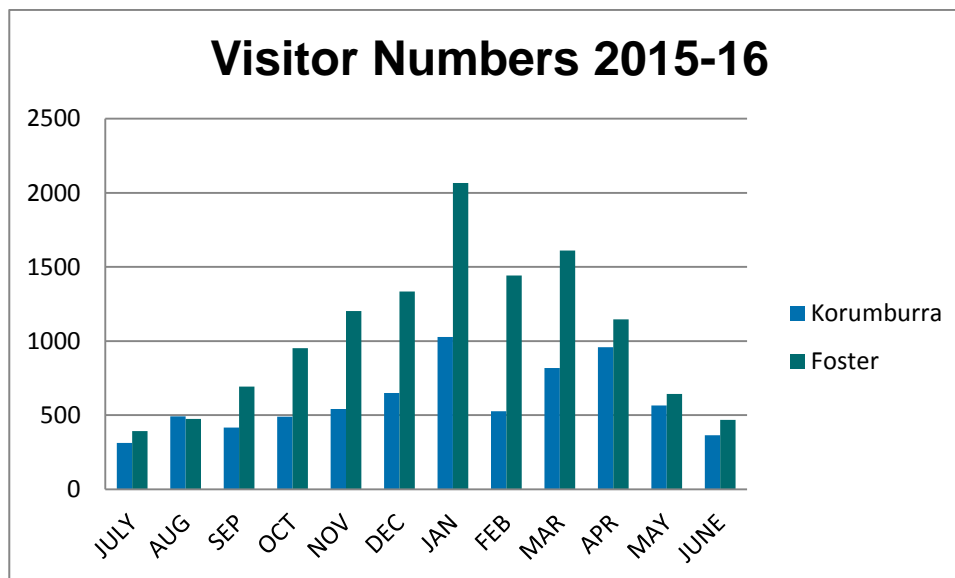
Annual visitor numbers at the Foster VIC are consistently higher than Korumburra, with over twice as many people visiting Foster.

In the 2015/16 visitation statistics, 12,421 attended the Foster centre and 7,161 attended Korumburra – reasonably consistent with the 2014/15 financial year, during which Foster received 13,107 visitors and Korumburra 6,110.



With an overall total cost per visit in 2015/16 of \$16.61 per walk-in visitor, the cost per visit (walk-in) at Korumburra was \$22.71 and cost per visit (walk-in) at Foster was \$13.01.

The downward trend in walk-in visitor statistics between the 2012/13 financial year and 2013/14 financial year is the result of a change in data collection.



Email and phone enquiries often lead to additional bookings and greater visitation to the region. In peak times, staff depends upon door counter statistics to ensure that numbers are accurate.

5.3 Usage and Perceptions

Key findings from research undertaken by Council in 2016 highlighted the following:

Visitors and residents

- 89% of visitors and residents surveyed said the main reason they use the VIC's is to source information about activities, attractions, restaurants and events, while 37% use them to seek out information about local services
- 46% of visitors and residents surveyed said they had used the Foster VIC only, 20% had used Korumburra only, 21% had used both and 13% had used neither
- Only 18% of the respondents use VIC's for accommodation bookings, and even less (12%) use them for planning a holiday
- 82% of respondents said that they (a) spent more time, and (b) participated in more activities within the region after visiting a VIC.
- When asked whether they like to use touch screen technology when visiting a VIC, 68% said they do not while the remaining 32% did. The primary reason cited by those against touch screen technology was that they prefer interpersonal interactions when visiting VIC's
- In rating the service performance of the VICs, respondents identified friendliness and staff knowledge as the two most satisfying aspects of their experience with internet/iPad experience the lowest

Business

- The most common reason that local businesses use the Prom Country Visitor Information Centres are: brochure distribution (54%) and referrals (51%). A total of 28.6% of business surveyed indicated they do not use them at all
- When asked about the benefits of having VIC's in South Gippsland, business community respondents identified promotion of businesses and attractions with the shire (88%) and encouraging visitors to explore the whole shire (85%) as the most important attributes. A total of 68% identified accommodation booking services as being a key benefit of the VIS

Industry

- The main reason industry respondents use the VIC's is for enquiries about the local tourism sector (80%), followed by promotional/marketing support (40%) and for networking (40%)
- When asked about the benefits of VIC's, all industry respondents nominated "They encourage visitors to explore the whole shire" and "They promote businesses and attractions within the shire" as most important, while 80% also highlighted "They encourage visitors to stay longer in the shire" and 'They promote greater Gippsland'

Staff

- Staff indicated that overall, the current VIS model is working well and meeting the needs of its users (75%)
- When asked what aspects of the current model are working well, staff identified service and knowledge as the two highlights

5.4 Booking services

Council currently offers an accommodation booking service called Singboko to around 110 small tourism operators throughout the Shire. This has historically resulted in approximately \$10,000 income from commissions each year.

While this income helps to offset the annual operating costs of the VICs, it is trending downwards with only \$2,902 taken in 2015/16, compared with \$7,844 in 2014/15 and \$9,674 in 2013/14.

The annual cost of providing this service is \$1,500 for the online platform subscription plus labour. It is estimated that on average, each booking consumes approximately 45 minutes of a Visitor Information Centre team members time. This equates to around \$4,500 a year, based on a total of 200 bookings at an average hourly labour cost of \$30.

This decline in revenue is potentially reflective of broader consumer behaviour trends with the rise of popular online services such as Wot-If, LastMinute.com and AirBNB.

It is also consistent with the findings of the *Victorian Visitor Information Centres Futures Project* report, which found that the cost of providing booking services often outweighs the revenue generated from commissions and, that the booking market is crowded by many well developed services.

The report also highlighted that a small number of local accommodation businesses rely on booking and/or referral services provided by VIC's and with this in mind, careful consideration must be given to the impact of introducing changes to the current arrangements.

Consultation undertaken by Council officers in 2016 found the following:

- 18% of consumers surveyed indicated that they use VIC's for accommodation bookings, and even less (12%) use them for planning a holiday
- 72% of visitor and residents surveyed said they book their accommodation before commencing their trip
- 50% of the business community surveyed said they use an online booking service, with 92% indicating they are happy with their current platform. About one fifth of them indicated they use Singboko, the current Prom Country accommodation booking platform, however none use it exclusively
- All staff surveyed indicated the current online booking service is not working effectively, with general concern within the team about the suitability and

performance of the current system, mainly to do with a lack of integration or automation, manual update requirements, double-handling and double booking issues

- Feedback received through staff consultation suggests that consideration could be given to developing more of a “referral” or “advisory” model for accommodation bookings, given the current system is not serving the needs of the business and most customers use other platforms

5.6 Technology

The way that people access and consume tourism information around the world is changing rapidly.

The *Australia's Accredited VICs: A Strategic Directions Paper* report, developed by Tourism Victoria, South Australian Tourism Commission, and Tourism and Events Queensland in 2014 highlighted that the traditional VIC operating model is in need of change, to better reflect contemporary consumer trends whereby travellers will typically research and book accommodation and experiences using mobile technology while on holiday.

The report also highlighted research showing that smartphone usage amongst Australian adults was then at 88% (up 12% year on year) and that it was projected to reach 93% by the end of 2014.

The rapid rise of online travel review sites, and in particular, TripAdvisor also influences the way travellers access information, with around 2 million platform users registered in Australia at the beginning of 2015.

With respect to fixed interactive technology at VICs, the Victorian Visitor Information Centres Futures Project report found that while such technology is desirable and visitors mainly enter VICs to engage with staff and volunteers. With the increased usage of smartphones and tablets, technology is not necessary for smaller VICs with limited resources. Recent consultation with other Victorian Councils confirms this position.

Consultation undertaken by Council officers in 2016 found the following in relation to preferred consumer information channels:

- 72% of surveyed consumers said they book their accommodation prior to arriving at their destination
- 52% of respondents said they look for tourist information on websites such as TripAdvisor, whereas 47% rely on word of mouth
- 15% of visitors and residents surveyed indicated they use apps for sourcing tourist information, with Wikicamps (38%) the most commonly referred to followed by Google (21%), Trip Advisor (19%) and Prom Country (8%)
- 83% of visitors and residents surveyed indicated they currently source tourism information via VIC's , primarily when they arrive at their destination

- 81% of respondents indicated they look for information on attractions when they arrive at their destination, while 63% seek out information events & markets and 55% look for information on food and wine while in the area.
- 99% of respondents said they would use the same sources for their next visit, indicating that VICs, tourism websites like Trip Advisor and word of mouth will be the most preferred sources in the future

6. Future service model opportunities

6.1 Increased digital presence

While research indicates digital information services play an increasingly important role in today's visitor services landscape, Council should consider the consultation feedback from visitors highlighting the importance of personalised service and local knowledge.

Further, consideration should be given to the consultation results which suggests that:

- visitors generally use online channels to book accommodation prior to their visit;
- only 18% of visitors surveyed said they used VIC's to make accommodation bookings;
- the most popular websites for sourcing information when planning a trip are Google (38%), Trip Advisor (18%) and the Prom Country website (12%);
- visitors and residents value personalised VIC service when they arrive at their destination, with the main purpose being to seek information about events & markets (63%) and food and wine (55%); and
- 67% of visitors surveyed said they don't like to access touch-screen technology in VIC's;

The consultation results suggest that there is an opportunity to improve the way that digital information is made available to visitors.

Consultation undertaken with other VIS providers around Victoria in 2016 indicates that the majority of respondents are delivering integrated service models; with the majority also provide both website (81%) and social media (75%) services in addition to their physical VIC's.

These findings suggest there is an opportunity to further develop and improve the accessibility of the Visit Prom Country website and, to ensure it is more closely integrated with the physical VIC service offerings.

With increased smartphone and mobile technology, Council may to enhance its existing web presence and refine it for increased mobile usability.

It is important to note that internet use for mobile phone users can sometimes be inconsistent as a result of South Gippsland's geography and dependent on location and service provider.

6.2 Integration

Council could choose to pursue a more flexible resourcing model by using integrated and/or shared approach, which could potentially lead to reduced operating costs.

One option for achieving this could be to maintain current accreditation at Foster given it receives significantly higher visitation, and either revise the Korumburra accreditation or forgo accreditation altogether.

This option could provide further efficiencies by removing the requirement for Coal Creek Community Park and Museum to be open 364 days a year, and potentially adjust hours to reflect lower levels of visitation during off-peak periods. Consideration could also be given to the most appropriate organisational structure, which may assist in achieving a more integrated, consistent service delivery. There is potential for more effective allocation of resources during peak and off-peak periods.

In considering these options, Council should have regard for the importance of the Korumburra VIC given its location at the 'gateway' to the shire from Melbourne and, its perceived importance in terms of capturing the travelling visitor as they travel through the shire.

With respect to organisational structure, recent consultation found that the most common alignment is through economic development/tourism (69%) and customer service (13%) department.

6.3 Booking services

Singboko, Council's current booking system is delivered at a cost to Council. Feedback from staff suggests that the system no longer meets the needs of the organisation or users, primarily due to a lack of integration with other booking platforms.

Council could adopt a 'referral' model, whereby VIC team members provide advice on accommodation options and support visitors to make bookings either directly with operators or through other online platforms.

The following findings are noted:

- only 18% of visitors surveyed said they used the VIS to make accommodation bookings;
- 50% of the business community surveyed said they use an online booking service. 92% are happy with their current platform. About one fifth indicated they use the current Prom Country accommodation booking platform, however none use it exclusively;
- 77% of the VIS providers surveyed indicated that while they provide booking services for accommodation, events and activities, only 69% handle online bookings with the remaining respondents indicating they deliver either phone or walk-in models

6.4 Stakeholder preferences

Consultation undertaken in 2016 highlighted the following visitor information service preferences in future:

- 67% of business community representatives surveyed indicated an increased digital presence would be the best way to support their business into the future
- 63% of business community respondents said that the current model is in need of either a minor (41%) or major (22%) change, with improvements to South Gippsland tourism marketing—particularly online—highlighted as an opportunity
- 75% of tourism industry respondents were in favour of either a major (25%) or minor (50%) change to the current VIS model, with most feedback highlighting the need to improve the online service capabilities and ensure they are integrated with the physical service

6.5 Impacts

Consultation undertaken by Council in 2016 found the following perceptions, which should be taken into account when considering any potential changes to the current service model:

- While business community respondents were split on whether a potential change to the VIS model would have an impact on their business, 64% said it would either have a slight impact (32%) or a great impact (32%)

Concerns generally related to the impact of a potentially reduced physical VIC presence; less captured visitation in the townships of Korumburra and Foster and reduced promotional exposure/referrals for businesses who currently use the VIC's

Respondents were more definitive in their concerns about the impact that a change to the current service model would have on tourism promotion of South Gippsland, with 61% suggesting that a change would have a major impact and 27% indicating it would have a minor impact

- 80% of tourism industry respondents indicated it a change to the current VIS model would likely have a “slight impact” on their organisations, with 20% reporting that it would have “no impact”

7. Options

The following options introduce various service delivery models to support the visitor economy in South Gippsland in future. Each model is accompanied by an estimated cost for the service. Further cost analysis is required for each proposed service delivery model.

Option 1

Maintain the current operating model

By maintaining the current model, the VICs would continue to co-locate within Coal Creek Community Park and Museum, Korumburra and at the Stockyard Gallery, Foster. Both VICs would maintain the current level of accreditation, or yellow “I” status and staffing will maintain its current status.

The combined operating costs would remain approximately \$325K per annum.

Option 2

Increase digital service offering

South Gippsland, or Prom Country, currently has a growing digital presence in the form of website, APP and Facebook page. By focusing on an increased digital presence, the *Visit Prom Country* brand, which is managed by PCRT, can grow in the future. PCRT has recently secured the domain names of all towns in South Gippsland and is already working with the Mirboo North community to develop www.visitmirboonorth.com.au. This centralised approach can link all South Gippsland towns to the current Visit Prom Country website at a minimal cost. Mirboo North will soon have a website which will require no additional upkeep as it is automatically linked to any changes made to the Visit Prom Country website and App.

Additional costs to this current digital structure may include:

- An increase of search engine optimisation
- Marketing
- 1 Full time equivalent
- Provision for increased funding to PCRT to expand their marketing initiatives and campaigns
- Development of town websites for all South Gippsland towns will cost \$500 per town

It is estimated that additional costs could range between \$100K and \$150K per annum. Costings are based on level of increased marketing and search engine optimisation.

(The remaining visitor services budget may be held in reserve and allocated to an increased digital presence)

Option 3. *Integrated model*

This option would allow Council to combine general customer service functions with visitor information services in shared desk facilities in Korumburra and/or Foster during peak times.

Model A

Maintain two VICs offering additional Council services within peak periods and prescribed times including during quarterly rate collection and annual animal registration times.

Current operating costs of \$325K remain PLUS additional infrastructure costs may apply and are subject to further investigation.

Model B

One VIC in Foster (discontinue Korumburra VIC) integrated with additional Council services within peak periods and prescribed times including during quarterly rate collection and annual animal registration times.

Estimated at \$250K per annum, the additional infrastructure costs to cater for additional service delivery may off-set the reduction to one location.

Option 4 *New VIC Location*

This option would require a full investigation for one accredited VIC including:

- Community and industry consultation
- Location and cost benefit analysis

The cost of the new location is approximately \$250,000 per annum including infrastructure and employee costs.

A reduction in costs may see additional funds considered for future digital expansion. Further cost analysis is required to identify accurate costs for this option.

Option 5 *Close VICs and increase volunteer offering*

This option will empower the business and wider community to train as local guides to encourage greater visitation within the shire. Volunteers would be supported by Council staff to ensure they have current knowledge of the region to share with visitors.

With an estimated cost of \$150K for training and ongoing support, it is recommended that the remainder of the existing budget be allocated to grow the digital presence provided by PCRT.

8. Consultation

A four week community consultation plan commencing April 2017 will allow the community and relevant stakeholders to provide feedback to be considered in the final report to Council.

		Date
Website	VIS review report 2016/17 and response survey link to be available on Council website for a period of 4 weeks	Commencing March 2017
Response survey	To be sent via Council's e-newsletter system to the business database and shire-wide business and tourism associations	Commencing March 2017
Hard copy distribution	Copies of the report and survey to be available at Korumburra and Foster VICs	April 2017
Community forums	2 open community forums to be held in Korumburra and Foster VICs	April 2017