

Given the limited resources available, it is recommended that Council concentrate on the localities that have the greatest potential to attract visitors and to directly benefit economically from increased visitation.

The priorities should be:

1. Bingara - completing the final stages of the town centre improvement program.

Bingara has already implemented a town centre improvement program with most of the centre presenting well. This needs to be completed and then well maintained. The next stages should focus on:

- Improving the signage to accommodation establishments; and
- Improving the gateway arrival points - Fossickers Way and Cunningham Street, and the appearance of the routes through the town.

Followed by:

- Building dining, fresh food and local produce products.

Then, as resources become available:

- Improving the river corridor area.

2. Warialda - embarking on the planning and implementation of a town centre improvement program with the objective being to encourage passing travellers to stop in town by improving the attractiveness and appeal of the Highway corridor and the shopping centre. Any improvements to the public domain will need to be supported by improvements to the buildings and businesses within the centre.

3. Gravesend & North Star - improving presentation and signage and providing visitor information services.

4. Croppa Creek Road - establishing this road as an alternative route to the Newell Highway.

9. SIGNAGE

Issues

- Each of the towns and villages need attractive, coordinated gateway entry signs that identifies it as part of Gwydir Country while retaining individual identity.
- Inconsistent use of signs in the different localities, in particular the use of international symbols in Warialda but not in other locations.
- Ineffective signposting of the major attractions, such as Cranky Rock.
- The visual approach to some of the towns and villages is marred by out-of-date and/or signs in poor condition. These signs need to be removed or replaced.
- Need for improvement and augmentation of the route markers for the bird routes, walks and scenic drives and site markers for the fossicking areas and the Upper Bingara Heritage Trail sites, so that signage is consistent across the Shire, markers correspond to the supporting information provided and clear directions are provided to visitors.

9.1 Importance of Signage

Signage plays a very significant role in how an area presents. It also forms part of the visitor information services network and is a significant marketing and promotional tool. To be effective, the Shire needs a comprehensive, integrated family of signs which are strategically located. The signage needs to include:

- Motivational and promotional signage – to raise the profile of an area, develop brand / image recognition and to make travellers aware of the area and the attractions and facilities on offer..
- Gateway signs – important in creating a sense of arrival and making a visitor feel welcome. Gateway signs also help to create and re-inforce an image or brand for the area. Ideally gateway signs should be integrated with landscaping to create a feature.
- Directional signage – primary purpose is to ensure that travellers can find their way easily. Directional signage also provides re-assurance and re-inforces the motivational signage by creating the perception that the area has ‘a lot to offer’.
- Information signs – on arrival in a new area, visitors frequently look for a roadside map so that they can get their bearings. They also look for the Visitor Information Centre ‘i’ signs.
- Service signs – use of international symbols for public toilets, accommodation, parking etc.
- Interpretive signage / information – this is particularly important at attractions and in ‘gateway’ towns and villages, as it provides the link between the town or village and the surrounding area.
- Shopping centre signage – shop fronts, awning, footpath – contributes to the atmosphere, vitality and presentation of a centre.
- Tourist / scenic drives signs / route and site markers

9.2 Signage in Gwydir Shire

As with most LGA's, signage is an issue within Gwydir Shire. It is often difficult to gain approval to erect signs, the signs themselves are costly, and signage needs to be maintained regularly. The

issues in Gwydir Shire are compounded by the different approaches to signage adopted by the former Councils and limited resources available to invest in signage.

From a tourism perspective, the signage issues that need to be addressed are summarised below.

Locality	Improvements Required
Shire Wide	
Gateway Entry Signs	Gateway entry signage is an issue in Warialda and the villages. Most of the village entry signs are the standard black-on-white RTA signs which lack character and appeal. There is a need for co-ordinated signage advising travellers that they are entering 'Gwydir Country' as well as town / village entry signs. These latter signs need to identify each of the towns and villages as being part of Gwydir Country while at the same time retaining (or building) the identity of each settlement. Specialist design input is required.
Signposting of facilities and services	There needs to be consistency in the signposting of facilities and services (accommodation, public toilets, information boards etc) throughout the Shire, with the use of international symbols the preferred approach.
Route and Site Markers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need to formulate and implement a consistent Shire-wide policy of signposting scenic and themed routes, keys walks and historic / fossicking / geological sites. ▪ Bird routes - Signs consistent with the Bingara bird route signs need to be erected for the bird routes in Warialda and the northern half of the Shire. ▪ Fossicking routes and areas - review sign designs. Provide directional signs along routes and site markers and/or map to delineate each fossicking area.
Towns & Villages	
Bingara	As part of the town centre improvements in Bingara, signage has been addressed and the signage in the town is good. Areas for improvement are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Signpost the accommodation from all arrival points ▪ Signage on the riverside scenic drive - clearly mark the entrance and provide a route map (desirable), provide information on suitability for 2WD vehicles and caravans, provide route markers if needed.
Warialda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Update entry signs on all approaches. In the short-term, remove out of date red 'welcome' signs and prune shrubs around the Warialda entry sign on the eastern approach to town. ▪ Remove old / out of date / poorly presented signs. ▪ Replace Yallaro Council signs (as funds become available). ▪ Review and rationalise all signage at the intersection of Stephen Street (Yetman Road) and the Gwydir Highway. The erection of the school zone signs has obscured other signs. Some signs are also obscured by the telegraph poles at the intersection. ▪ Erect advance warning signs on the Gwydir Highway for the turnoff to the shopping centre - travellers, particularly those towing vans, need time to make a decision. ▪ Provide directional signs to the motel, as per the international symbol directional signs used for the caravan park. ▪ Signpost Cranky Rock from all major intersections and include on relevant RTA locality / distance signs. ▪ Ensure that the VIC is effectively signposted from all arrival points (as part of the relocation to the Ambulance building). ▪ Explore options for improving the presentation of the services directory in Apex Park so that it encourages travellers to explore Warialda, while also providing information on key infrastructure and services. ▪ Review information signage at the track heads for the Kooligur and Reedy Creek Walks, and ensure that track markers are well located and regularly maintained. ▪ Ensure that the information board at Carinda House is regularly maintained, removing out-of-date and poorly presented notices.

Locality	Improvements Required
Warialda (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Erect an events advertising sign framework on the Highway, where banners / signs for Shire events can be hung 2-3 weeks prior to an event. This advertising is targeted at the regional market that travels between Moree and Inverell.
Gravesend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Update entry signs - review 'Saddle Bronc Country' branding. ▪ Remove old, out of date, and/or poorly presented signs along the Highway. ▪ Improve signage to the public toilets in Moffat Park, using the international symbols for toilets. ▪ Erect an information board / directory in the park opposite the General Store and signpost using the 'i' signs. ▪ Use the brown tourist signs to signpost key attractions (Waa Gorge, Rocky Creek Glacial Area) from the intersection of the Gwydir Highway and the Terry Hie Hie Road. ▪ Erect signage on the Terry Hie Hie Road just after the intersection providing details of distances and road conditions to the attractions.
North Star	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Erect gateway entry signs. ▪ Erect signs using international symbols on the approaches to North Star advising of the services available (accommodation, petrol, food, etc) in the village. ▪ Signpost key businesses and services - hotel, caravan park, general store, sports club. ▪ Improve information signage at caravan park - provide details of booking in procedures, contact numbers etc. ▪ Erect an Information Directory / Map in the park opposite the Store and signpost effectively.
Croppa Creek	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need for an eye-catching 'entry statement' at the turnoff into Croppa Creek from Croppa Creek Road.
Croppa Creek Road Alternative Route	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ RTA to erect alternative route signs on the Newell Highway at the Croppa Creek road turnoff (25km north of Moree) and at Boggabilla. ▪ Route markers at intersections ▪ Directional signs to the Lake.
Upper Horton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Entry signs ▪ Tourist route markers (if route is established) ▪ Review attraction signposting to ensure that Horton Falls and the Rocky Creek Glacial area are signposted from the village. ▪ Public toilet to be signposted - international symbols
Coolatai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Entry signs ▪ Public toilet to be signposted - international symbols
Attractions	
Cranky Rock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Erect an information sign at the entrance that provides details about the access road - surface, length, suitability for caravans and 2WD vehicles - the objective being to minimise the propensity for caravans to turn around when they see the gravel road by providing reassurance that the road is suitable for caravans. ▪ Provide advance warning signs on the Highway approaches to the turn-off. ▪ Improve the directional signage from Warialda.
Rocky Creek Glacial Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need for interpretative signage explaining how the landscape was formed. The interpretative signage should be similar to that provided at Sawn Rocks.
Community Conservation Areas (former State Forests)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lobby the NPWS to develop and implement a signage policy as part of the establishment program for the new CCAs. ▪ Ensure that directional signage to visitor areas within the CCAs is provided from neighbouring towns / villages and along the main routes.

10. VISITOR INFORMATION SERVICES

Issues

- Suitability of the locations of the Bingara and Warialda Visitor Information Centres.
- Need for information directories at the Shire gateways - in particular in Gravesend and North Star.
- VIC staffing.

10.1 Importance of Information Services

Information services are an integral part of the visitor infrastructure. These services incorporate significantly more than just answering an inquiry or handing out a brochure. They are the communication link between the locality, the tourist trade and the visitor.

Visitor information services support the area's marketing and promotion and provide a direct service to both the tourism trade and visitors. Most importantly these services make a visitor feel welcome in the area and ensure that they are aware of the area's products and services.

Studies undertaken on the role and function of information services clearly demonstrate the importance of these services in encouraging visitors to an area, to stop and extend their length of stay.

Visitor information services encompass:

- Marketing and promotional materials – brochures, maps, guides, videos, web sites etc.
- Marketing and promotional support – the point of contact for the trade, visitors and potential visitors.
- Information delivery systems – telephone, fax, Internet/email, mail.
- Visitor information centres (VIC's) and information outlets (manned and unmanned).
- Product databases.
- Sign posting – directional and promotional.

The visitor information services provided by an area need to operate both externally and internally – at the international, national, regional and local levels. They also need to meet the needs of the travel trade and visitors, to integrate with and support sales and marketing activities and to link visitors with products. Within Gwydir Shire, these roles are coordinated by the Gwydir Economic Development and Tourism Manager and Tourist Officers.

The information services provided by an area need to operate both externally and internally. Services that need to be provided include:

- **Services to the Travel Trade**
 - Servicing trade inquiries - TNSW, Tourism BSC, Fossickers Way Committee and others
 - Media inquiries
 - Collating data
 - State Tourism Data Warehouse - input and maintenance of the data base
 - Trade briefings
 - Hosting familiarisation programs
 - Developing and supplying information kits
 - Website development and maintenance
- **Services to Local Operators**
 - Production of information brochures, maps etc
 - Brochure distribution external to the area

- Monitoring trends - dissemination of statistics and data
 - Answering inquiries
 - Advising of events and activities
 - Feedback on activities that could impact on business
 - Advice
- **Services to Potential Visitors**
 - Responding to telephone, fax, email inquiries
 - Provision and distribution of information
 - Accommodation / tour bookings
 - Liaison between potential customers and operators
 - **Services to Visitors in the Area**
 - Walk-in inquiries - accommodation, things to see and do, where to eat, road conditions etc
 - Itinerary planning
 - Distribution of information
 - Sourcing / referring accommodation

Table 10.1 Summary of Information Services that need to be provided

■ Important / necessary to provide □ Desirable to provide

FOR THE TRAVEL TRADE				
Service	International	National/State	Regional	Local
Computerised database	■	■	■	■
Website & Linkages	■	■	■	■
'Destination' Promotional Material	■	■	■	□
'Product' Promotional Brochures		□	■	■
Point of Contact	■	■	■	■
Sales calls / briefings		■	■	■
FOR CONSUMERS				
Service	International	National/State	Regional	Local
Point of Contact	■	■	■	■
Computerised database	■	■	■	■
Website & Linkages	■	■	■	■
Destination Promotional Material	■	■	■	□
Product Brochures		□	■	■
VIC			■	■
Information bays/maps			■	■
Sign Posting			■	■
Booking Service / Sales	■	■	■	■

10.2 Structure of Services

At the regional level, there are accredited Visitor Information Centres (VIC) in all larger towns within the Big Sky Country Region. Many of the smaller towns also have information outlets, with these operated primarily by volunteers. Each of the VICs in the Region carry the 'official' brochures of

other LGAs and localities within the region and along the major routes. The larger towns on the routes leading into Gwydir Shire - Inverell, Moree, Tamworth and Goondiwindi, each have Level 1 accredited VICs that operate 7 days per week.

10.3 Information Services in Gwydir Shire

Gwydir Shire operates two VICs:

- Bingara VIC - situated in the Roxy Theatre
- Warialda VIC - situated in the Warialda Heritage Centre complex in Hope Street.

There are also information boards / maps in Cunningham Park in Bingara and Apex Park in Warialda. Copeton Dam, the kiosk at Cranky Rock Reserve and the Sunflower and Fossickers Way Motels also carry a mix of tourist brochures and information and there are notice boards with limited visitor information in the Bingara and Warialda Caravan Parks. There are no information services available in any of the villages.

Bingara Visitor Information Centre

The Bingara VIC is located on in the foyer of the Roxy Theatre, in the main street of Bingara. The Centre is Level 3 accredited and is open 5.5 days per week (Monday to Friday and Saturday morning). The Centre is managed by a full-time Tourist Officer and a part-time assistant (Tuesdays 9.30am - 3pm, Saturday morning 8.30am - 1 pm).

Bingara VIC handles in the order of 6,300 inquiries per year, of which 82% are face-to-face and the remainder telephone, fax and email inquiries. The number of inquiries received by the Centre has been increased from 1999 to 2004, with a marginal fall-off in numbers in 2005.

Bingara VIC - Total Inquiries						
1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
4674	5023	5046	4517	5526	6669	6259

The Centre produces a range of information brochures and fliers for Bingara and the southern areas of the Shire. The Centre also operates as the 'Box Office' for the Roxy theatre providing information on performances, selling tickets and showing visitors through the Theatre when Theatre staff are not available.

There is some debate about the suitability of the location of the VIC with some local operators and the Bingara 20/20 Committee suggesting the need for a stand-alone centre. The key attributes of the current location are:

- Within the town centre - visitors are stopped in the centre and once stopped are more likely to explore the town.
- The Roxy Theatre is a landmark building which is very easy to find.
- On-street parking for caravans and long rigs is available in Cunningham Street adjacent to the Theatre. Note: the availability of parking for caravans in Cunningham Street needs to be signposted (advanced warning sign), on the approach to the VIC.
- Provides the opportunity for visitors to view the theatre auditorium. As there are no theatre staff based in the building, the tourism staff will show visitors through the building. (The Theatre Manager will take tour groups through the building, provided that they pre-book).
- Proposed coffee shop will complement the VIC operation, providing the opportunity for visitors to browse brochures etc while having a coffee, meal etc.

The space provided in the Theatre however is not considered ideal for a VIC. Issues include:

- The space is too small to accommodate the information display and the VIC office. Displays are cramped and there is no browsing room. The centre can only handle 2-3 visitors before it starts to feel congested. The workspace for staff is also very crowded and 'back of house' activities are fully visible to visitors, which is not particularly attractive or desirable.
- Congestion is compounded when events are held at the Theatre and patrons congregate in the foyer and VIC area. This makes it difficult and somewhat confusing for visitors and also raises the noise levels in the centre.
- Noise intrusion from the Theatre. When there are events on in the Theatre, it can become very noisy in the VIC. For example when school bands are playing, it becomes almost impossible to have a face-to-face or telephone discussion.
- Difficulties in finding visitor parking when there are events held at the Theatre during VIC opening hours.
- Lack of window space to provide an after-hours information display.

While it has been suggested that the VIC should be relocated to a stand-alone purpose-built centre on the edge of town, this would require significant capital expenditure. An alternative option is to acquire the Chinese Restaurant that occupies the northern side of the theatre building, on the corner of Cunningham Street. This business is for sale.

As discussed in Section 6.3, the restaurant building is art deco in style and has a commercial kitchen as well as the main dining space downstairs and a number of upstairs rooms. The restaurant space could be readily integrated with the Theatre and provide:

- Expanded premises for the Visitor Information Centre .
- Commercial kitchen - to support and increase function use of the Theatre.
- Additional foyer space for the Theatre (by relocating the VIC to the Chinese Restaurant space).
- Additional small function and/or meeting rooms which can be used as 'breakout' rooms for conferences, and space for small meetings and functions (eg dinners). These rooms could also be used as rehearsal and teaching space and 'holding' rooms for school performances.

Relocating the VIC into the ground floor of the restaurant would address the space constraints, alleviate congestion and reduce the noise intrusion issues. The Centre's rock and mineral collection could be effectively displayed which creates another attraction for the town and additional Fossickers Way product. There would also be the space for a small merchandising area. The space could be designed to remove the 'back office' functions from public view. The restaurant also has toilets which could be used by visitors, rather than using the theatre toilets. The window along the Cunningham Street frontage is ideally suited to an after-hour information display.

Warialda Visitor Information Centre

The Warialda VIC is located in the Heritage Centre complex in Hope Street. The Heritage Centre (library and VIC) is located on the western edge of the shopping centre. The VIC houses the Wells Gem Collection and a local history display.

The Centre is Level 3 accredited. The VIC is open from 8.30 to 5pm Monday to Fridays and from 10 to 12 on Saturdays. Weekdays, the centre is staffed by a Tourism Officer three days per week (9am - 3.30pm Tuesday - Thursday) and by the Economic Development Assistant at other times. On Saturdays the Centre can be accessed via the library. The Centre handles in the order of 1,800 face-to-face inquiries per year.

The Heritage Centre is not the ideal location for the Warialda VIC. It is not visible or easily accessible from the main routes through the town (Gwydir Highway and Yetman Road) and parking

is difficult for long rigs. Parking problems are also experienced during the morning school drop-off and afternoon pick-up times.

Council is currently assessing the feasibility of relocating the VIC and the Economic Development Office to the former ambulance station on the corner of the Gwydir Highway and Market Street. The ambulance station is a prominent, two storey, brick building, which is highly visible and accessible to Gwydir Highway traffic. Car parking is available on-site with on-street parking available in Market Street for caravans and longer rigs. There appears to be sufficient room on-site to accommodate the VIC, a number of displays, the Wells Mineral collection, the Economic Development office, a small meeting room and possibly a gallery and merchandise outlet.

The Ambulance Station provides both the opportunity to have a well located VIC and also to create another attraction for Warialda. There may be sufficient space in the centre to feature a number of displays, with possibilities being:

- Wells Gem Collection integrated with information and displays on where and how to fossick in the Shire.
- Crops of Gwydir Country - combining stunning visual photographs of the different crops (as per the Gywdir Country booklet) with information on cultivation and harvesting and possibly a display of the different products produced - grains, legumes, seeds etc. The display could be in the form of a mosaic.

It may also be possible to build a relationship with the farmers in the area that cultivate paddocks that are visible from the road, with the farmers notifying the VIC when they are about to harvest. Details can be listed on a noticeboard in the VIC so that visitors who are interested can drive out and have a look from the roadside, or choose a particular route due to the harvesting activity they can stop and watch.

Another possibility is to provide in the Centre, information relating to seasonal employment opportunities on farming properties in the District.

- Honey - capitalising on the name Warialda which means 'Place of Wild Honey'. The display could feature wild hives and the techniques used by the aboriginal people to collect the honey and the importance of honey to the tribes (food, trade, medicine etc). This display would be another site on the Aboriginal Heritage Trail and also capitalise on the Warialda name and the desire by travellers to sample local produce. There are more than 6 honey producers in the Warialda - Moree - Inverell area and a honey display including information on honey production, tastings and a sales outlet, could also be established. There may be the opportunity for the establishment of a 'cottage' industry to produce honey products for sale in the centre and at other locations in the surrounding area.

Expanding Information Services

Information Boards and Directories

There is a need to provide information boards / directories in key locations throughout the Shire. While there are boards in both Bingara and Warialda, the map and information provided relates to each town rather than to the Shire and surrounding region. The boards need to be redesigned to include:

- A Shire / sub regional map showing the main routes through the area and the higher profile attractions.
- A map of the town / local area that details the local attractions and the facilities and services that are relevant to visitors.

The suggested locations for these boards include:

- Cunningham Park, Bingara
- As part of an after hours information display in the Bingara VIC (if it relocates to the Chinese Restaurant) and in the grounds of the proposed Warialda VIC (ambulance station).
- Apex Park, Warialda (if not located at the ambulance station)
- North Star - War Memorial Park
- Gravesend - park opposite the general store
- Possibly Upper Horton. If the road through to Moree is fully sealed, then a board will definitely be needed at Upper Horton.
- Cranky Rock Reserve
- Possibly, the Rocky Creek Glacial area or a site on the Narrabri Road in the vicinity of the Rocky Creek Glacial area targeted to east-bound traffic coming into the Shire.
- Copeton Dam - possibly at the main lookout and/or near the Copeton Waters Park entry - kiosk precinct.

Information Outlets

The possibility establishing information outlets in the general stores in North Star, Gravesend and possibly Croppa Creek should be explored. This would require each store having a map of the area on display and a brochure rack carrying relevant brochures for the area. One of the Tourist Officers would have responsibility for:

- Being the point of contact and liaising regularly with the store operators.
- Briefing / training the store staff and possibly hosting a familiarisation tour of the Shire, so that the operators are familiar with the product Shire-wide.
- Ensuring that the outlets have sufficient stocks of brochures, maps etc - and sending out replacements when needed.
- Providing the operators with details of events being held in the Shire and surrounding region, sending through brochures, fliers etc.

Level 3 accreditation of these outlets would be desirable but not essential. The general stores will potentially benefit from travellers coming into the centre to seek information, and hopefully making an impulse purchase.

Accommodation Establishments

While 'tourists' tend to seek out VICs, people travelling for business purposes and for personal reasons generally do not. It is therefore important that up-to-date and relevant information on the local area and Shire is available at each of the accommodation establishments, preferably both in reception and in the rooms. Travellers in particular need to know basic information such as where to eat, buy petrol and access an ATM. Tourists arriving in town after the VIC has closed also need access to information so that they have time in the evening / morning to read through the information and plan their day.

Ultimately it would be ideal to have brochure racks, branded with 'Gwydir Country' in each of the accommodation establishments, with these racks containing relevant and up-to-date information, as well as space to display a 'What-on' list.

A coordinated approach to providing information is preferred, with the Tourist Officers developing a suggested list of brochures / fliers that should be on display, briefing and liaising with the operators, supplying relevant brochures as required and keeping the operators advised about changes that have occurred (eg changes in trading hours, new businesses opening etc) and events that are happening in the Shire and surrounding region.

10.4 Directions Forward

The short-term priorities are:

- Coordinate and improve the information available at the accommodation establishments and other outlets in the Shire.
- Explore the possibility of the general stores in North Star, Gravesend and possibly Croppa Creek, becoming information outlets, with these outlets supported by the Economic Development and Tourism Unit.
- To redesign the information boards and erect these in key locations throughout the Shire, with the first priorities being erecting boards in North Star and Gravesend.

As funds become available:

- To relocate the Warialda VIC to the ambulance station and develop the new centre as an attraction for the town, providing information, attractive displays and some merchandise.
- To relocate the Bingara VIC, preferably into the adjoining area currently occupied by the Chinese Restaurant or to another location in Bingara. Possible locations could include the buildings of the self-service petrol station on the Fossickers Way or as part of the Community Arts Centre complex. Both locations are slightly removed from the town centre so the propensity for travellers to visit the VIC and then browse through the town may decline.

11. STRUCTURE OF TOURISM

Issues

- Rivalry between Bingara and Warialda (southern and northern parts of the Shire).
- Competition and rivalry between localities within the region - strong north-south alliances focused on the New England and Newell Highway corridors, but relatively weak east-west alliances.
- Limited funds and resources available for tourism development and promotion. Gwydir Shire does not have the funds or resources to compete effectively with the larger LGA's such as Tamworth, Inverell and Moree.
- Very small 'commercial' tourism sector in Gwydir Shire - the opportunity for cooperative marketing and industry 'buy-in' to promotional initiatives is very limited.

11.1 State & Regional Organisations

To be effective in the marketplace, Gwydir Shire needs to work closely with key tourism marketing organisations that have the resources and funds to effectively market and promote the region and cooperatively with localities and operators to develop and market product. At the State and regional levels the key tourism organisations are:

- Tourism New South Wales
- Big Sky Country (BSC) Regional Tourism Organisation (RTO)
- Fossickers Way Committee
- The Rural Get-A-Way Committee

The role and function of these organisations are outlined below. Gwydir Shire is also working cooperatively with Moree and Inverell Shires and local aboriginal communities to establish an Aboriginal Heritage Trail that links aboriginal sites and products across the three LGA's.

Tourism New South Wales

Tourism New South Wales (TNSW) is the primary tourism industry development and marketing authority for NSW. Its main role is to encourage interstate and international visitors to holiday in NSW and New South Wales residents to holiday in their own State. TNSW focuses on building destination awareness and sector-based market development and promotion. TNSW provides support for, and assistance to Regional Tourism Organisations, including Tourism Big Sky Country.

TNSW maintains the State Tourism Data Warehouse and the 'visitnsw' website. The State Tourism Data Warehouse is a database listing tourism product throughout NSW. This feeds into the Australian Tourism database. Data is organised by both locality and sector (eg accommodation, attraction). Data can be entered by the Regional Tourism Organisation, Local Tourism Organisation, Visitor Information Centre and individual operators.

The 'visitnsw' website is the 'official' tourism website for NSW. It is fast becoming the first port of call for travellers seeking information on NSW destinations, products and routes, with 'visitnsw' attracting more than 1 million hits per year. The site is actively promoted by the TNSW and is the point of contact for the promotional campaigns undertaken at State and regional level.

Gwydir Shire needs to capitalise on the exposure offered by this data base and website, and ensure that the information entered on the Shire is comprehensive and kept up-to-date.

Tourism Big Sky Country

Tourism Big Sky Country (BSCT) is the peak tourism body of the Big Sky Country region. The region incorporates 13 Local Government Areas of which 10, including Gwydir Shire, are members of BSCT. BSCT is an umbrella organisation that is responsible for encouraging and facilitating the development of tourism product and infrastructure within the region and coordinating the marketing of the region. BSCT is an incorporated association, which has a board, marketing committee and project sub-committees.

Research undertaken for BSCT into the 'Needs and Wants of travellers to the BSC' region identified 'Compatriots' and 'Wanderers' as the primary market for the region, with 'True Travellers' being the main secondary market.

The results of the market research formed the basis for the preparation of the BSC Marketing Plan 2005 -2006. BSCT's priorities over the next 12 months are to:

- Build a cohesive regional tourism industry with increased partnerships and co-operative activities.
- Improve communications between key stakeholders, building intra-regional networks.
- Ensure that there is information on BSC available within the trade and consumer marketplaces at all stages in the planning cycle.
- Build the BSC / Big Sky identity and brand.
- Market to key market segments - Wanderers and Compatriots, leveraging off the TNSW 'Heart of Country' campaign.

BSCT has limited funds and resources.

Fossickers Way Committee

The Fossickers Way Committee was established to develop, market and promote Main Road 63 and part of the Gwydir Highway as a 'tourist route', marketed as the 'Fossickers Way'. The Committee is comprised of the LGA's along the route - Tamworth, Gwydir, Inverell, Glen Innes - Severn. Marketing is funded co-operatively by the members of the Committee and individual operators from along the route. The Committee produces a brochure (updated every two years), maintains a website and undertakes promotional campaigns, including exhibiting at consumer shows and advertising in country NSW on NBN Television.

The Fossickers Way promotions focus on the localities along the route and the range and activities and attractions available.

The Rural Get-A-Way Committee

The Rural Get-A-Way is a joint initiative of Gwydir Shire and LGA's in Southern Queensland to develop the route that extends north from Warialda through Yetman, Texas, Dalby and Mundubbera into Central Queensland, as a tourist drive - an alternative to the Newell and New England Highways. The Councils represented on the Committee are Gwydir in NSW and Wambo, Dalby, Inglewood, Millmerran and Mundubbera in Queensland.

The Committee is at the product development stage and in the process of completing an audit of the product available along the route corridor. The next stage will involve developing marketing and promotional collateral including a brand and logo, brochure and website, before launching and promoting the route.

11.2 Gwydir Shire

Following amalgamation, the structure for managing tourism in Gwydir Shire is still evolving. Council has assumed responsibility for the coordination and management of tourism within the Shire. The Bingara 20/20 Vision Committee and the Warialda Chamber of Commerce which existed prior to the amalgamation have retained their interest in promoting their towns, with Bingara Vision 20/20 being very active. The Community Strategic Planning Workshops held in May 2005, also recommended the establishment of Tourism and Marketing committees in each town and village, as well as committees to improve presentation, encourage business development and organise events. These committees liaise with the Economic and Tourism Unit, which in turn reports to Council.

Role of Council

Gwydir Shire Council is involved in tourism at a number of levels including:

- Employment of professional tourism staff. Council employs an Economic Development and Tourism Manager and the Bingara and Warialda Tourist Officers.
- Operation of the Bingara and Warialda Visitor Information Centres.
- Marketing and promotion of the Shire.
- Product development - developing trails and routes.
- Accommodation - owns the Bingara, Warialda and North Star Caravan Parks.
- Responsible for the provision of infrastructure - parks, toilets, picnic facilities etc.

The Economic Development and Tourism Manager is responsible for a range of activities including:

- Marketing and promotion of Gwydir Shire, both individually and in conjunction with the regional tourism organisations and committees.
- Representing Gwydir Shire on relevant tourism committees.
- Overseeing the operation of the Bingara and Warialda VICs and providing information services to trade and industry.
- Product and market development.
- Producing information and marketing collateral.
- Industry liaison.
- Liaising with the town and village communities and facilitating the implementation of the Community Strategic Plans.

The marketing and promotion of the Shire is undertaken primarily by the Economic Development and Tourism Manager and funded by Council with some limited industry 'buy-in'.

Council's budget for the operation of the VICs and the marketing of the Shire is in the order of \$133,000 pa. Of this, around \$5,000 is spent on membership of Big Sky Country Tourism and other organisations, \$7,000 on promotions and \$30,000 on brochure production. Neither VIC generates income and financial contributions by the tourism sector and business community are minimal.

Bingara

Bingara has a very active community, led by the Bingara 20/20 Vision Committee. The business community has been involved in tourism for a number of years.

The Bingara 20/20 Vision Committee has produced a detailed draft Vision Statement for the town and surrounding district, with tourism featuring very strongly in this Statement. The Statement does not, at this stage, provide an action plan for achieving the Vision. The Committee has also organised television promotions of Bingara, produced the Bingara brochure and, more recently secured funding to re-print this brochure and further develop the website.

The Vision Statement and the Community Strategic Plan prepared in 2005, recognises that Bingara has the potential to further develop its tourism sector. The town also has the potential to contribute

to the development of tourism in other areas of the Shire and to benefit from tourism development and marketing Shire-wide and regionally.

The Vision is a starting point for Bingara to move forward. The next step should be to undertake a 'reality check' / feasibility assessment to ensure that the different components of the Vision are achievable and to identify the sequencing (what needs to happen first), actions, resources and funding required to achieve these components. As part of the process of developing the Vision Statement Implementation Plan, the outcomes of the Bingara Community Strategic Planning Workshop 2005, this Tourism Plan and other relevant plans, should be taken into consideration. Council also needs to play a very active role in this planning process as achieving many of the components will require assistance and resources from Council.

In the past, there has been a close, but informal relationship between the Bingara business community and Council, with Council providing assistance to the Committee on an 'as requested' basis. With the amalgamation, and the size of the area and number of communities now being managed by Council, the former arrangement is no longer practical. Council is required by the Local Government Act to prepare a range of plans for the Shire and for its operations and budgeting and, as such, a more formalised, co-ordinated and professional approach is now required. Council now has to balance the funds, resources and priorities in Bingara with those in the other localities within the Shire and, as such, Council is no longer in a position to respond immediately to requests for funding and assistance from the Bingara community.

There is also a need to improve the standard of the projects undertaken. In the past, ad hoc product development has occurred with product promoted before it has achieved an acceptable standard. (The riverside scenic drive is an example). Strategic planning has also been lacking, with the past approach being to identify an opportunity, undertake some product and infrastructure development then produce a low cost brochure / flier for distribution. The follow-through, in terms of how to capitalise on the product - eg packaging, niche marketing, integration into the regional product base and market development etc, has been absent or very limited. Bingara is also at the stage where it needs to shift its focus from concentrating inwardly on Bingara to looking outwards - to capitalise on the product and market development opportunities available Shire-wide and regionally.

In moving forward, it is important that there is a shared vision for Bingara between the community and Council and for both to be working cooperatively to achieve agreed objectives. A framework needs to be put in place to facilitate this, with the roles and responsibilities of the key players defined and lines of communication between the community and Council clearly established. Consideration should be given to Bingara 20/20 becoming a committee of Council with the committee working with Council to implement the Vision Statement and other agreed projects. A mix of sub-committees, working parties and project teams can then be established on an as-needs basis to undertake different implementation tasks.

Warialda

Warialda has two organisations with an interest in tourism, the Warialda Chamber of Commerce and Warialda Works. The Chamber of Commerce is an established committee that over the years has endeavoured to improve the presentation of Warialda and market and promote the town regionally. The Chamber is struggling with membership and its future is uncertain.

Warialda Works was established in May 2003 to implement the Community Strategic Plan for the town. Warialda Works is an extension of two former committees, the Warialda District Development Task Force (1998) which was renamed the Yallaroi Development Group (2000) both of which were actively involved in improving the presentation and infrastructure in Warialda. Warialda Works is a Committee of Council. It has 4 sub committees - Business and Tourism, Physical Development, Marketing and Events and Social Development. The group is involved in implementing some of the projects identified in the Warialda Community Strategic Plan 2003.

As with Bingara it is recommended that there be one 'official' committee to work with Council to address the issues in Warialda and facilitate economic and social development. The Warialda Community Strategic Plan, 2005, needs to be integrated with Council plans and programs for the

town and surrounding area and an action plan developed and jointly implemented. Tourism should form part of this plan.

The Villages

The Community Strategic Plans have also recommended the establishment of organisations in each of the villages to work towards improving the presentation of the villages, strengthening the economic base and building visitation. The proposed representative organisations are:

- North Star Shines
- Gravesend Alive
- Cultivate Coolatai
- Crooble Community Program
- U Beauty Upper Horton
- Grow Croppa Creek

Each of the Community Strategic Plans recommends the establishment of a number of sub-committees and project teams to undertake the projects identified in the Plans. Many of the projects will in some way contribute to improving the product and infrastructure for visitors passing through the area and may contribute to increasing visitation.

The Economic Development and Tourism Manager (EDTM) will be working with each of the village committees to assist with the implementation of their plans. Where relevant, the EDTM should also involve the Tourism Officers in product and market development.

Tourism Operators

The tourism operators within the Shire generally liaise directly with the Tourist Officers at the VICs. Council does not require any financial contribution from tourist operators towards the cost of running the VICs, with operators able to display their brochures in the VICs free of charge.

Operators have the opportunity to participate in regional promotional initiatives through industry buy-in. To date, the opportunities for buy-in have been very limited, with most of the opportunities coming via the Fossickers Way Committee initiatives.

The small number and size of operations limits the opportunities for co-operative marketing and promotion and the funds that can be raised.

11.3 Directions for Moving Forward

- Gwydir Shire needs to remain actively involved in BSCT, the Fossickers Way Committee and the Rural Get-A-Way Committee. The Shire will gain far greater exposure and benefits from cooperative initiatives than from individual actions. Gwydir Shire needs to 'feed-off' visitors attracted into the region by other centres and activities and also to tap more effectively into the regional market.
- Given the distances between settlements, the diversity of product, the varying levels of tourism potential and the different stages in the development process, there is need to develop tourism product and infrastructure at the local level within a Shire-wide framework.

Shire

It is recommended that the Economic and Tourism Unit be responsible for:

- Overseeing the implementation of this Tourism Plan.
- Evaluating Council programs and policy making from a tourism perspective and providing advice to Council on matters relating to tourism.

- Representing the tourism industry - bringing locality and industry concerns to Council's attention.
- Preparing the Shire-wide tourism marketing and promotional collateral and assisting the town and village communities to prepare promotional material.
- Developing the annual business and marketing programs for the Shire
- Liaising with and supporting the town and village communities in developing tourism product and infrastructure and marketing and promotion.
- Providing advice and assistance to event organising committees.

As outlined below, each town and village should have one organisation responsible for implementing their Vision / Community Strategic Plan. In relation to the tourism component, the organisation should liaise directly with the EDTM.

Bingara

To establish a strong partnership between Council and the Bingara 20/20 Committee to refine the vision for Bingara and formulate an implementation / strategic plan for the town and surrounding area. The findings and recommendations of this Tourism Plan relevant to Bingara, should be incorporated in the implementation plan.

Warialda

To establish a strong partnership between Council and the Warialda Works Committee to implement both the Community Strategic Plan for Warialda and the recommendations of this Tourism Plan in relation to the town and surrounding area.

Villages

For the villages, it is recommended that the Committees established out of the Community Strategic Planning process work with Council to improve presentation and undertake product, infrastructure and market development. Specific tourism initiatives identified in this Tourism Plan for each village will need to be integrated into the overall village strategic plans. The Village organisations should liaise closely with the EDTM, with the EDTM responsible for bringing tourism issues from the villages to the attention Council.

12. MARKETING & PROMOTION

12.1 Marketing Activities

The marketing and promotion of the Shire is primarily funded by Gwydir Shire Council and coordinated by the Economic Development and Tourism Manager.

There is no Marketing Plan for the Shire. Marketing has primarily been undertaken cooperatively as part of Big Sky Country Tourism (BSCT), with other LGA's, with Gwydir Shire buying into promotions such as the Fossickers Way.

The main marketing activities in 2004 - 2005 were:

- Fossickers Way promotions
- Production and distribution of the Gwydir Country brochure and booklet
- Development of the Gwydir Country Website
- Big Sky Country promotions

As part of BSCT, Gwydir Shire will continue to be included in some of the promotional activities to be undertaken by the regional organisation. There may also be opportunity to 'buy' into campaigns with BSC and/or Tourism NSW. In the next 12 months, BSCT will be primarily leveraging off the Tourism NSW 'Heart of Country' campaign.

Gwydir Shire will also be promoting through the 'Rural Get-A-Way' program, which is aimed at establishing the route from Warialda to Queensland via Mundubbera and onto Rockhampton, as an alternative to the Newell and New England Highways.

The Bingara 20/20 Committee has also run television and radio advertisements promoting Bingara and has secured funding to reprint the Bingara brochure.

Fossickers Way Promotions

Council pays for membership of the Fossickers Way Committee. Membership entitles Gwydir Shire to inclusion in all promotional activities undertaken by the Committee with Gwydir represented at trade and consumer shows, in brochures and fliers, media features and on the Fossickers Way website.

There are two brochures produced for the route, the 'Free Guide' to the Fossickers Way, which is a quality colour brochure and map produced by the Committee and an A4 booklet that is produced by the Inverell Times Newspaper. The Inverell Times publication provides more detailed information on each of the area and is paid for by operator advertisements. Gwydir Shire, promoting Bingara and Warialda, has exposure in each brochure. Local operators also purchase advertising space in the Inverell Times brochure.

Both brochures features the localities along the Fossickers Way route and concentrate on the main attractions and activities available. The actual fossicking product included in the promotional material, in particular on the website, is limited.

For people looking for a lower cost holiday with a difference (eg families with primary aged school children), fossicking provides a reason for considering the BSC region. At present there is not sufficient information available to enable a fossicking holiday to be planned. As a minimum the brochures needs to include a matrix that summarises what minerals, gems and rocks are found where within the region and contact details for further information. On the Fossickers Way website there needs to be a section dedicated to fossicking including information on how and where to fossick, what to look for etc, with links to other relevant websites including the NRMA 'Gone Fossicking in NSW' site and the Mineral Resources site.

Within the region there is also a need for 'education' for potential fossickers. This needs to include:

- A flier that explains how to fossick. Inverell has produced a small brochure related to finding sapphires, but this is still not detailed enough.
- An identification chart (A4 in size or folded to DL size) - colour chart that shows the rock / gem in its raw form and also in its cut and polished form. Depending on production costs, this chart could be sold to recover costs.
- DVD on how to fossick that can be shown in the Visitor Centres.

There is also a lack of consistency across the region in the fossicking brochures and information fliers produced for each local area. This information needs to be presented in a standard format.

Fossickers Way should also promote 'rock hunting / rock collecting' as an off-shoot to fossicking. This makes it more accessible to people without fossicking equipment, and is a fun based activity for families.

Heart of Country Campaign

Heart of Country is a major campaign initiated by TNSW. The Campaign was launched in 2004, with TNSW committed to the campaign for 7 years.

The campaign is designed to re-introduce 'urban dwellers' (primarily Sydney-siders and Canberrians, but also some exposure in Melbourne and South East Queensland) to Country NSW. The campaign extends beyond regional boundaries and incorporates Central NSW and parts of adjoining regions - Capital Country, Riverina, Hunter and New England-North West.

The campaign aims to 'provide reasons to visit now' and is based on show-casing the 'best' of Country NSW (attractions, events and activities) and features the Region's main icons and event. It also promotes two tourist drives, Classic Country Drive which is a loop via Capital Country to Cowra, Orange Dubbo and returning via either Bathurst or the Hunter Valley, and Explorers Way to Bathurst, Mudgee, Wellington, Dubbo, Coonabarabran and returning via the Hunter. The drive product is limited and the BSC region is not included in either of the drives that are promoted.

The Campaign incorporates 'bursts' of high profile television and cinema advertising which reach more than 3.5 million viewers, supported by:

- Public relation programs - primarily media articles
- Familiarisation tours for the travel press
- Print advertising and articles in newspapers and magazines including Open Road, Outback and REX airline's 'Out There'
- Map - large fold out map of the region featuring the key attractions and towns in the region.
- Segments on travel shows
- Website
- Trade and consumer show exhibits

The estimated total reach of the campaign is 9.3 million people.

Rather than undertake an independent campaign, BSCT Tourism is supporting and leveraging off the Heart of Country Campaign. Some 'teething' difficulties' have arisen in determining how the leveraging will work and what activities BSCT will be involved in. BSCT has employed a public relations company to seek coverage for the Region and its products. Member Council can forward information to the PR company, which the company will use to write articles, press releases etc to gain media exposure.

TNSW is still developing its campaigns and promotional collateral, with the campaign being somewhat 'fluid'. This makes it difficult for BSCT to respond quickly. BSCT has very limited funds and has to refer most opportunities back to its member LGA's for 'buy-in'. Most LGA based organisations have annual budgets that are relatively fixed and often do not have the discretionary

'surplus' revenue and/or the flexibility to 'find' revenue from their budget to respond to these initiatives. To date, opportunities for industry/operator 'buy-in' have been very limited.

Given the nature of the campaign and the need to respond to opportunities as they arise, it is not likely to be possible for TNSW to prepare a detailed campaign 'buy-in' prospectus, 18 months ahead, in order that BSCT and its member LGA's can include the 'buy-in' in their annual budget preparations. Rather BSCT and the member LGA's need a 'pool' of funds allocated from which they can draw upon on an as-needs basis.

While TNSW has provided direction at a regional level for leveraging, opportunities for leveraging off the campaign at the LGA and locality level have not been determined. For example, how the Heart of Country branding can be incorporated in local brochures, in the VIC's etc.

Given limited fund at both regional and local levels, the decision to support and leverage off Heart of Country is the right direction to pursue, as far more exposure will be achieved cooperatively rather than individually.

From Gwydir Shire's perspective, the direction forward should be:

- Budget allocation to support relevant Heart of Country initiatives, with the EDTM having delegated authority to determine how this money is spent.
- For opportunities for operator buy-in to be explored. Consideration could also be given to Council offering a fixed amount of funding and with additional funds available on a ratio basis with funds raised by the local industry (eg dollar for dollar).
- To lobby at the regional level for additional drive product to be developed and included in the Heart of Country Campaign. There is a need for drive product that encourages travellers to visit the BSC region.
- Participation where relevant, in the 'free' activities associated with the campaign - in famils, providing articles for public relations and media articles etc.

Rural Get-A-Way Campaign

The Rural Get-A-Way Campaign is in the product development stage, with information being collated on the route. One of the challenges facing the organisation is the lack of high profiles towns and attractions along the route. Dalby is probably the only Queensland town along the route that travellers from NSW and Victoria may recognise.

The campaign will need seed capital from the member councils for a photo shoot and the development of marketing and promotional collateral (brochures, website etc) as well as for on-going marketing and promotion. As with the Fossickers Way and BSCT promotions, Gwydir Shire will need to allocate funds annually for this campaign.

12.2 Information, Marketing and Promotional Collateral

Gwydir Shire and the two VIC's produces a range of information and promotional based collateral including:

- Gwydir Country booklet
- Gwydir Country website.
- Information sheets - town maps, bird routes, fossicking, fishing, camping, historic drives, town walks, individual attractions etc

In addition, the Bingara 20/20 Committee has produced a Bingara brochure and has funds available for reprinting. The former Yallaroi Council funded the "Wonderful Warialda' brochure. This brochure will not be re-printed. There are no village brochures.

Gwydir Country Booklet

The Gwydir Country Booklet is a full-colour, 44 page, A5 booklet providing information on the Shire. The booklet is dual purpose, designed to promote the Shire to both visitors and potential residents. The booklet provides general information on the Shire, community services and infrastructure available and tourism - attractions, activities, accommodation, events and dining out. The booklet is very well presented, with some outstanding photographs.

Being dual purpose, it is difficult to get the balance correct. The education sector is very detailed, yet minimal information is provided on the towns and villages.

Suggested improvements, from a tourism perspective, for future print-runs include:

- Attractions - The attractions and activities section would benefit from 'leading' with the main attractions and grouping like attractions. For example, the attractions section is currently lead by 'Nature's Attractions' which promote Rosella Habitat and Apple Gums, when the main natural attractions in the Shire and surrounding area are the unique rock formations - Sawn Rocks, Cranky Rock, Rocky Creek Glacial Area, Waa Gorge, the rivers (Gwydir, Horton and Reedy Creek) and the National Parks and State Forests / Community Conservation Areas.

Under the historical attractions, the townships of Warialda and Bingara should be featured as should some of the heritage walks and drives.

There are also more activities that could be included - camping, 4WD, cycling, mountain-biking, rafting etc. Activity related events, such as Easterfish, need to be included in the activities section.

- A section on routes and scenic drives. Where feasible, the villages should be linked with these routes.
- The Restaurant and Takeaway section lists the eateries and food outlets without promoting some of the more unique features - the Imperial Hotel coffee shop and its open fire, the fruit icecream at the Bingara fruit market, pizza at the Sportsman's Hotel, local produce at Carinda House etc. Some form of footnote advising that some of these outlets that have limited opening hours and telephone first, also needs to be provided.
- The accommodation section could be improved by providing an introductory paragraph on some of the accommodation highlights in the area and photographs of the accommodation, rather than of tractors. The accommodation at Copeton Dam is not listed. There also needs to be a small section on group accommodation, which lists the bunkhouse accommodation (including bed capacity) available in Bingara, North Star, Copeton Dam and the Scout Camp. Riverside and showground camping should be promoted for the motorhome market.
- A regional road map showing the main routes through the Shire and how they link into the surrounding region and southern Queensland. The Shire Map provided is too 'busy' and somewhat difficult to read and does not show the location of the key attractions in the Shire.

Websites

Tourism information on Gwydir Shire is provided on the Council website with this accessed from www.gwydircountry.com

Warialda has its own website - www.warialdansw.com.au and the Bingara Council website has been retained and is accessed from www.bingara.nsw.gov.au

The Gwydir Council website provides information under a range of headings and subheadings which include accommodation, attractions and activities, where to eat, events and a location map plus street maps for Bingara and Warialda. The information provided on the website is very similar

to that presented in the Gwydir Country booklet. The site is still in the development stages with suggested improvements from the tourism perspective being:

- Tourism Section - this section contains attractions and activities with a link to where to eat. Accommodation and events are covered under other pages. It is suggested that the Tourism Section be restructured to provide a title page with links to:
 - Getting to the Shire - context map, driving distances, Countrylink, regional air services, light planes and access to Council airstrips etc. This section should also include links to the Fossickers Way website and the proposed Rural Get-A-Way site.
 - Accommodation - links back into the accommodation section of the website.
 - Towns and Villages - new section to be developed
 - Attractions and activities
 - Maps and drives - expand the map section to include the different drives
 - Where to eat
 - Events - links back to the events section of the website.
 - Contact us - contact details for the Warialda and Bingara VICs
 - Links - links to other relevant websites - visitnsw, BSCT (when developed), Fossickers Way, Rural Get-A-Way, DSRD regional food and wine site (foodandwine.net.au), NRMA site 'Gone Fossicking in NSW', Bingara and Warialda websites, and possibly links to other VICs in the surrounding region

- Attractions and activities section needs to be restructured to lead with the main attractions. The comments relating to the attraction section of the Gwydir Country booklet also apply here. Additional information needs to be included on:
 - Additional attractions - Waa Gorge, possibly Horton Falls, the Barraba and Terregee Tracks, Delungra winery.
 - Bird watching - further develop this with a link to a bird watching page which includes the bird trails and species list.
 - Fossicking - further develop the fossicking section through a link to a fossicking page which includes information on how to fossick, the fossicking areas in the Shire, what to look for, fossicking equipment and where to buy or hire, links with other key fossicking sites including the NRMA 'Gone Fossicking in NSW' and the Mineral Resources sites.
 - Roxy Theatre - link to the theatre site to view the shows that are coming.
 - National Parks, State Forests and the Community Conservation Areas (when they come on-line).
 - Activities - add additional activities such as camping, hunting (pig shooting), 4WD, mountain biking etc. Where there is a festival that relates to an activity - eg the fishing competitions, these should be listed under fishing and dates and contact details provided.
 - Historical attractions - should include information on resources available in the Shire for those researching their family tree and contact details for the library, historical associations etc.
 - Maps and scenic drives - the main tourist routes / scenic drives need to be included. The heritage drives and geological drives also needs to be incorporated into this section.
 - Links - if attractions have their own websites - links to these sites and/or contact details.

- Towns and villages - new section to be developed. This should be included in the main menu and also accessible from the tourism page. The towns and villages section should provide background information on each of the towns and villages including the size, location, services available, main economic activities etc and a list of the accommodation (with contact numbers), attractions and where to eat.

- Accommodation section - should be restructured under locality headings. Ideally images of the different properties should be provided with each operator able to purchase a linked web page so that more detailed information can be provided on each property. The section should also include information on:
 - Accommodation available at Copeton Dam, the Kamilaroi Scout Camp and Cranky Rock Reserve
 - Accommodation available for groups - bunkhouse accommodation
 - Camping in the Shire - caravan parks and 'free' areas
- Where to Eat Section - needs an introduction that promotes some of the highlights of eating out in the Shire and where to buy local produce. A description of each outlet is also needed as the business name listings do not convey the type of dining experience or the cuisine on offer.

A decision needs to be made regarding the future of the Bingara website. With the Council amalgamation, some of the information is out-of-date. The format of parts of the site also appears to have become corrupted with pages not opening properly. It is suggested that this site be updated and revamped to become part of the Gwydir Country (include logo, corporate colours, title page etc) series of town and village sites. Links to other relevant sites, eg Gwydir Country, Warialda, Fossickers Way etc, also need to be included.

The Warialda website is difficult to locate. With the name 'warialdansw' the site is not selected in the first 10 listings by search engines searching for 'Warialda'. The website has a number of pages, including a 'Tourism' section and a 'Whats-On' section. The Tourism section is limited to describing the attractions of the Warialda area. There is a section in the website on the 'Business' page for accommodation listings, however this is not linked to the Tourism page and the only accommodation property listed has ceased trading. The Tourism section needs to be expanded to include:

- Other attractions in the area - Warialda State Forest, Reedy Creek / River Walk, Carinda House, scenic drives in the area (eg Gragin Peak), Delungra - Winery, Apex Park machinery display, post office etc.
- Accommodation listing with contact details and photographs, plus accommodation in the surrounding area.
- Dining out guide.
- Links to other sites - Gwydir Country, Bingara etc

As with the recommendation for the Bingara website, it is suggested that the site be re-vamped as part of the Gwydir Country town and village sites.

Gwydir Shire also needs to identify other websites that provide information on the Shire and the towns of Warialda and Bingara, and to regularly monitor these sites to ensure that the information on Gwydir Country is up-to-date and well presented. Currently, for example, the Warialda page of the Fossickers Way website is showing as 'Page not Found'. There are also other websites - such as the NRMA 'Gone Fossicking in NSW' and the DSRD Food and Wine site for the region, that provide the opportunity for promotion of individual activities available within the Shire.

Information Sheets

Information sheets are the most cost-effective means of providing information once visitors are in the area. At present there are a plethora of sheets available on a range of activities in Bingara and a few sheets available in Warialda. There is nothing available for the villages or for the key tourist drives through the area.

While the information provided in the sheets is comprehensive, the presentation is 'average' and lacks consistency. The sheets need to be reformatted, with the formatting to be consistent in terms

of corporate' image', brand, layout and font, orientation etc. It may be possible to work with the local TAFE, high school or other educational facility that provides IT and Graphic Design to develop the information sheet template as a student project or teaching module.

12.3 Additional Collateral Required

Additional marketing and promotional collateral required includes:

- Information kits for niche markets - for example:
 - Day-trip kit with suggested itineraries aimed at seniors and social groups within the surrounding region.
 - 4WD kit - for 4WD clubs - 4WD trails in the Shire combined with information on Copeton Dam, and the 'rock' attractions, accommodation, camping, special screenings at the Roxy etc.
 - Kit designed for the motor-home and campervan markets designed to encourage clubs to hold meetings and social events in the Shire.
- Tourist Map of the Shire - A3 tear-off map that shows the main tourist routes, attractions and accommodation.
- Scenic drive information sheets or low cost brochures.

12.4 Directions Forward

- For the mainstream markets (Compatriots and Wanderers), continue to participate in relevant TNSW, BSCT and Fossickers Way marketing and promotional initiatives to build marketplace awareness of and visitation to the region, rather than try to promote the Shire independently.
- Actively participate in the Rural Get-A-Way route development initiative.
- Undertake niche marketing to specific interest groups including:
 - 4WD clubs
 - Motorhome / Campervan organisations
 - Boating / water skiing clubs
 - Fishing clubs
 - Gem clubs
 - Social groups, walking clubs, retirement homes etc in the surrounding region
 - Schools - educational excursions
 - Nature based tourism groups - eg bushwalkers and bird watchers.
- To continue to improve the marketing and promotional collateral available, in particular improve the presentation of the information sheets, continue to develop the Gwydir Country website, develop websites for the individual towns and villages and revise the Visitor Guide and booklet to provide more comprehensive information on the tourist attractions and infrastructure available within the Shire.
- Encourage the Fossickers Way Committee to include more information on fossicking and rock hunting in the area, in particular provide detailed information on fossicking on the Fossickers Way website.
- Continually monitor websites that provide information on the Shire to ensure that the information available is accurate, current and comprehensive.
- To ensure that information on the towns, villages, attractions, events and accommodation within the Shire is inputted into the State Tourism Data Warehouse, with this information regularly updated.

13. DIRECTIONS FORWARD

This study has identified a range of opportunities to strengthen and diversify Gwydir Shire's visitor markets. However, to capitalise on these opportunities and realise its full potential, product and infrastructure development is required, with this supported by effective marketing and promotion. The resources available to achieve this are however limited.

Key stakeholders will need to work together to grow the industry with Gwydir Shire Council providing the leadership and direction.

13.1 Issues facing Tourism

The key issues faced by the tourism industry in Gwydir Shire are:

- Over-dependence on two markets - passing traffic and backpackers (Bingara only). As of 2006 the backpacker market will be substantially reduced.
- Accommodation capacity constraints - limits the potential to build the conference and meetings market, the over-night group tour market and the events market. In the short term, market development needs to concentrate on day-trippers and markets that will use bunkhouse accommodation, provide their own accommodation (eg motorhomes) or camp.
- Limited resources available within the Shire to undertake the product and infrastructure development needed, improve the presentation of the towns and villages and market and promote the area.

13.2 Moving Forward

Given limited resources, Gwydir Shire needs to focus on developing the:

- Markets that come 'naturally' to the Shire and are 'compatible' with the attractions and infrastructure available.
- Products, activities and localities that have the highest potential to increase visitation and generate economic benefits for the locality and the Shire.

The product and infrastructure available in both Bingara and Copeton Dam is 'saleable'. There is sufficient depth and diversity of product and the presentation is good. The next step is to build visitation through marketing and promotion, in particular building the special interest markets.

Warialda is at the product and infrastructure development stage. The emphasis needs to be on capitalising on its cross-roads location, improving presentation, developing its 'raw' assets into attractions and building its event sector.

Of the villages, North Star and Gravesend have the most potential to grow visitation. North Star already has a small market base, with the opportunity to grow this base by enhancing the presentation of the village and improving and expanding accommodation.

Increasing visitation in Gravesend will be dependent on the emergence of one or more eateries / shops that appeal to passing traffic, coupled with improved presentation of the village.

Route development should remain a priority for the Shire with the focus being:

- The north - south routes - Tamworth to Queensland via the Fossickers Way linking with the Yetman and Boggabilla Roads and north into Queensland.

- Narrabri Road - to develop as both a 'signature' tourist drive for the BSC region and an east-west link through the region.
- Gwydir Highway - improving the presentation of Warialda and Gravesend to encourage Highway travellers to stop in town.
- Croppa Creek Road - scenic alternative to the Moree - Boggabilla section of the Newell Highway.

13.3 Short-term Focus

Provide leadership and direction

- To develop partnerships between Council and the town and village communities to improve the presentation of the areas and encourage and facilitate economic development.
- For the Economic Development and Tourism Unit to co-ordinate and drive the marketing and promotion of tourism in the Shire in conjunction with State and regional organisations.

Market development and diversification

With emphasis on building:

- Domestic touring market - in conjunction with TNSW and BSCT and the Fossickers Way and Rural Get-A-Way committees.
- Daytrip markets from the surrounding region - in particular targeting groups in the region that organise day trips and activities.
- Special interest markets, particularly out-door oriented clubs and organisations.
- School and educational excursions.
- Motorhomes and campervans.
- Events that have the potential to attract visitors from outside of the Shire.

Product Development

- Continue to develop existing product - eg bird routes, fossicking and geological product, Roxy Theatre, etc
- Establish tourist drives, with the immediate focus on the Narrabri - Inverell link (Narrabri Road - Copeton Dam Road) and the Croppa Creek Road.
- Develop dining, food and local produce product.

Infrastructure Development

- Improve signage throughout the Shire, with emphasis on gateway and directional signage.
- Complete the sealing of the Narrabri Road - from a tourism perspective this is the most important road to seal in the Shire.
- Information boards / directories - to be strategically located throughout the Shire, including boards at North Star and Gravesend, with these villages to be recognised as gateways to the Shire.
- Relocate the Warialda VIC to the ambulance station and develop this area as a tourism focal point for the town.
- Establish a dump point in Bingara for the caravan and motorhome markets.

- Introduce credit card / EFTPOS facilities at the Bingara and Warialda caravan parks.

Marketing & Promotional Collateral

- Further develop the Gwydir website to ensure that it is comprehensive and effectively meets the needs and expectations of potential visitors and the travel trade. Develop and incorporate town and village websites.
- Produce a tourism map for the Shire.
- Standardise and improve the presentation of the information sheets and expand the range of sheets available.
- Develop Information Kits and other promotional collateral needed to support market development initiatives.
- Co-ordinate the information displayed and distributed at accommodation establishments and attractions in the Shire and surrounding area.

13.4 Medium - Longer Term Initiatives

Once the short-term projects are under-way, the focus needs to be on:

- Improving customer service standards and raising the level of professionalism within both the tourism sector and the local businesses.
- Working with the town and village communities to realise their tourism potential. The main focus will be on improving presentation and diversifying the business / merchandise mix to encourage travellers to stop and spend.
- On-going market development - targeting the smaller special interest markets, working with Moree and Narrabri to build the coast markets and increase east-west travel through the region, develop technical and educational tours, small meetings etc.
- Encourage the expansion of the accommodation base in Warialda and Bingara and explore opportunities for providing some accommodation in the villages to meet local needs.
- Develop strategies for providing temporary accommodation in the towns and villages to cater for event-related demand.
- Improve and expand the attraction base, in particular exploring opportunities for the new Community Conservation Areas and continuing to improve facilities in riverside areas in Warialda and Bingara and at Cranky Rock and the Glacial Area.
- Relocating the Bingara VIC, preferably to the Chinese Restaurant space, with this area providing additional space and infrastructure to support a more diverse range of uses at the Roxy Theatre.

13.5 Desired Outcomes

- Increased visitation to Gwydir Shire with a more diverse market mix and higher yielding market segments, visiting year-round.
- Enhanced visitor experience, with this translating into longer stays, repeat visitation and 'word of mouth' referrals.
- Professional service delivery at all levels – to the tourism trade and to visitors.

- Improved infrastructure, products and events within the Shire for the benefit of both residents and visitors.
- Increased income and employment for the local community – to improve the viability of existing businesses and to encourage new investment within the Shire.
- Protect the environment and ambience of the Shire - the quality and uniqueness of the environment is the basis for the tourism industry in the Shire.