

8 August 2008

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## Tourism Drives Local Economy

**Recent research revealing the value of tourism to the Southern Downs and Granite Belt is welcomed by Granite Belt Wine & Tourism (GBWT).**

GBWT President Mrs Bobbi Cragg commented, "We've known for years the real value of tourism is much greater than the dollars that change hands over the winery counter or accommodation reception desk. To see the figure quantified in this month's Economic Impact Study\* is a great step forward."

According to the study, the headline figure of \$109.4m in expenditure by visitors in 2006/07 generated \$93.1m in total value to the region. What surprised many locals was the proportion of visitors to the Granite Belt was 35% relative to 65% to the Warwick area.

Mrs Cragg said "We need to bear in mind a number of factors. Firstly this reflects an element of supply and demand. Warwick actually has greater accommodation capacity than we do, which is why organisers of our major events often refer visitors to stay in Warwick or Tenterfield.

"Essentially the Granite Belt has a large number of boutique accommodation operators. For the most part this perfectly suits our target market, who are couples looking for a secluded romantic getaway. Also because of our location, many visitors to the Granite Belt break their drive in Warwick and contribute to their economy."

The study recognises that visitors to Warwick are more often sports enthusiasts looking for a motel, camping or caravan facilities.

Mrs Cragg said through its participation in a number of consultation projects with the Regional Tourist Organisation, with Council and with Tourism Queensland, the GBWT has clearly identified the need for a large scale quality hotel conference facility to be built in the Queensland wine capital.

Such an investment would enable the Granite Belt to better meet demand for major wine, food and cultural events as well as for the largely untapped corporate market. For the GBWT and its members, these meet their objectives to attract a higher yield visitor.

The Granite Belt community appears increasingly to value tourism as important to its economy. Mrs Cragg said this is evidenced by the Association's boom in membership of businesses not traditionally considered tourist operators.

Mrs Cragg who stands down from her term as President at the AGM on 21 August added, "We now have more than 150 members, comprising tourist operators and those who benefit from tourism. It's good to see the hard numbers in this report which support the contribution we make to the local economy."

*The data relates to the financial year 2006/07 – a period in which Warwick hosted the Ridley Polocrosse World Cup and a year in which Stanthorpe did not host its biennial Apple & Grape Harvest Festival.*

*The report is not based on Visitor Information Centre figures, which consistently show an increase in traffic to the Stanthorpe Visitor information Centre. More than 30,000 visitors passed through the centre in the last financial year, with merchandise sales increasing 100% for the same period.*

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1. \* **Southern Downs and Granite Belt Regional Tourism: Economic Impact of tourism to the Southern Downs Region and Council's Budget, July 2008.**
2. **Wine** The history of the Queensland wine industry dates back to the 1860s - and like all good wines it has developed with age. Of Queensland's current 1100 hectares planted to wine grapes, approximately half of these are on the Granite Belt. The Granite Belt is Queensland's premier wine region and one of ten wine regions in the state, of which only two have official GI status. The Granite Belt is home to approximately 50 wine cellar doors, the state's most awarded winemakers, plus the Queensland College of Wine Tourism – the first of its type in the world.
3. **Food** The Granite Belt is the only area in Queensland to produce apples: creating a gross value of approximately \$35m per annum (DPI&F 2006). Agriculture is the largest employer in the area, which boasts a vibrant and diverse horticultural sector. In this part of Queensland, the food production sector is expected to experience an average annual growth rate of approximately 8.0% per annum, despite the drought. Over the 10 years to 2017, growth in the sector is expected to result in a 12.7% increase in the regional economy's turnover (source Darling Downs & South West Queensland Centre of Enterprise and AEC Group 2007.)

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