**The Surf Coast Destination**

By Ryan Jopp

Victoria's Surf Coast with its spectacular coastline, scenic rainforests and magnificent beaches, is one of Australia’s major tourist draw cards. The Surf Coast Shire was proclaimed on 9 March 1994, and it covers an area of 1,560 km2 (Surf Coast Shire, 2008). The Shire is located in southwest Victoria, 20 minutes from Geelong and 90 minutes from Melbourne (ibid). It has an area of 1,556 km2 with some 55 kilometres of coastline and the start of the fabulous Great Ocean Road defining its southern boundary (ibid).

The main population centres include Torquay, well known for its surf related industries and Bells Beach, Winchelsea, the gateway to the fertile Western District, and leafy Anglesea and the beautiful resort town of Lorne (Surf Coast Shire, 2008).

The natural physiography of the region is a major drawcard for tourists, with a drive along the Great Ocean Road being among most visitors to Victoria’s “must do list”. The Great Ocean Road winds along the picturesque and ever-changing coast from Torquay to Warrnambool, providing spectacular views throughout. Inland there is a mix of rural plains and native forests, which provide a dramatic contrast to the beautiful and rugged coastline.

The permanent population is 21,771 (Census 2006) however this more than trebles at peak holiday times when large numbers of holidaymakers and visitors stay in the Shire. The Great Ocean Road, which starts in Torquay, attracts over 2.5 million travellers annually (Surf Coast Shire, 2008). The destination itself is popular with both domestic tourists, from both Melbourne and interstate, and with International tourists. This is discussed further in the section on the Surf Coast Tourism System.

Indeed tourism and related industries, such as hospitality and accommodation, are major contributors to the economy of the region, along with agriculture and the Alcoa Power Plant in Anglesea.

Figure 1 presents a detailed map of the Surf Coast Region.
Figure 1: Surf Coast Shire

Source: (Geelong Otway Tourism, 2007)