

## APPOINTMENT OF YARRA RANGES TOURISM INDEPENDENT CHAIRPERSON

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Report Author: Manager - Economic Development & Investment  
Responsible Officer: Chief Executive Officer  
Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

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*The author(s) of this report and the Responsible Officer consider that the report complies with the overarching governance principles and supporting principles set out in the Local Government Act 2020.*

### CONFIDENTIALITY

This item is to be considered at Council meeting that is open to the public

### SUMMARY

Yarra Ranges Regional Marketing Ltd, trading as Yarra Ranges Tourism, is the not-for-profit organisation created to operate as the peak regional tourism organisation for the Yarra Valley, Warburton Valley and Dandenong Ranges. James Robinson notified Council that he would be standing down as Chair of Yarra Ranges Tourism as of October 2022. Under the constitution the Chairperson is to be appointed by Yarra Ranges Council. Council requested that a Nominations and Consultative (N&C) Committee undertake the selection process on its behalf and make a recommendation of a suitable candidate.

Following a competitive recruitment process, the N&C Committee recommends Council appoint Leigh Harry as Chair.

### RECOMMENDATION

#### *That Council*

- 1. Endorse the appointment of Leigh Harry as Chair of Yarra Ranges Tourism for a three-year term (1 November 2022 to 30 October 2025).***
- 2. Thank the outgoing Chair, James Robinson, for his strong leadership and contribution during his tenure.***
- 3. Delegate to the Chief Executive Officer to make operative the transitional plan to the new Chair in conjunction with the Chief Executive Officer of Yarra Ranges Tourism.***

## **RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS**

Council Meeting 10 March 2020 – Council supported the extension of the Partnering Agreement with Yarra Ranges Tourism for a further 12-month period concluding 30 June 2021 and increased the funding support by 2.5% to \$489,016 (excluding GST) annually for a 12-month period (2020-2021).

Council Meeting 8 June 2021 - Council supported the extension of the Partnering Agreement with Yarra Ranges Tourism for a further 12-month period concluding 30 June 2022 maintaining the existing funding amount associated with the Partnering Agreement of \$489,016 annually for a 12-month period (2021-2022).

Council Meeting 14 June 2022 – Council supported the extension of the Partnering Agreement with Yarra Ranges Tourism for a further 12-month period concluding 30 June 2023 maintaining the existing funding amount associated with the Partnering Agreement of \$539,016 annually, including a one-off allocation of \$50,000 to contribute to the development of the Destination Management Plan, for a 12-month period (2022-2023).

## **DISCUSSION**

### ***Purpose and Background***

Yarra Ranges Regional Marketing Ltd, trading as Yarra Ranges Tourism, is the not-for-profit organisation created to operate as the peak regional tourism organisation for the Yarra Valley, Warburton Valley, and Dandenong Ranges. Its purpose is to grow visitation to the region in partnership with industry.

The company was established on 6 June 2006 by an interim Board of Directors and on 15 November 2006, a permanent Board comprising six directors and a chairperson was inducted. Following a review of the Tourism Industry in 2013 the Board modified its Constitution to allow the following composition of Directors to its Board:

- An Independent Chairperson;
- Up to Four Skills-based Directors;
- Up to Five Industry Partner Directors; and
- One Director to be appointed by Yarra Ranges Council

James Robinson notified Council that he would be standing down as Chair of Yarra Ranges Tourism as of October 2022, in line with the Yarra Ranges Tourism Annual General Meeting.

Mr Robinson's contribution as Chair has been well received, he has steered the organisation since his appointment in 2016 through the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, June 2021 storm event, and major changes in the tourism industry. His strong leadership skills have enabled the organisation to maintain services and support to this important industry in the Yarra Ranges.

Under the constitution, the Chairperson is to be appointed by Yarra Ranges Council. The intention is to ensure that the Chairperson has a high level of business, governance, financial acumen, and chairing skills.

Council requested that a Nominations and Consultative (N&C) Committee undertake the selection process on its behalf and make a recommendation of a suitable candidate. This Committee comprised Ms Tammi Rose, CEO, Yarra Ranges Council; Ms Penny Guadagnuolo, Director of Reform and Recovery, Department Jobs Precincts and Regions – Tourism Events & Visitor Economy; Mr Carl Cowie, CEO, Nillumbik Council.

The position was advertised seeking expressions of interest for a period of one month – 9 May 2022 to 6 June 2022. Advertisements were placed on the Yarra Ranges Council website, AICD website, Seek website and LinkedIn. Applicants were asked to respond to the selection criteria as part of their application.

A total of 26 applications were received for this position – 7 emailed directly with the balance received via LinkedIn.

Twenty one of the 26 applications did not meet the criteria:

- One applicant had a direct commercial involvement in the Yarra Valley or Dandenong Ranges tourism industries;
- Two applicants lived interstate – Qld and ACT; and
- Remainder of applicants did not sufficiently meet one or more of the noted criteria elements.

Discussions have occurred with the Yarra Ranges Tourism CEO, Simon O’Callaghan, regarding the timing of the change in Chair and whether tourism experience is essential for this position. It is considered that tourism experience is not essential with preference for sound business with intrinsically complex governance model experience.

The N&C Committee reviewed the applications and conducted online interviews on 21 July. As part of the process the Committee undertook to manage this process confidentially and to declare any conflicts of interest they may have in relation to candidates.

### ***Key Issues***

Following a competitive recruitment process, the N&C Committee recommends Council appoint Leigh Harry as Chair.

Leigh has had a successful career in the public and private sectors in a range of senior management, Chief Executive and Chairman/President roles.

Since finishing full time employment, he has undertaken a range of Board, consultancy, and volunteer roles with a variety of organisations.

Until September 2016 he was the Director Tourism Projects, in the then Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, Victorian Government.

Immediately prior to this he was Chief Executive of Tourism Victoria responsible for the Victorian Government's leadership of the tourism industry in the state,

Tourism is a critical growth industry in the state and incorporates not only leisure tourism but also major sporting and cultural events and business conventions and exhibitions. Tourism Victoria at that time was responsible for marketing, industry and product development, investment facilitation, business and major event attraction, airline services attraction, research, and policy advice to Government.

In all of Leigh's roles he has involved himself not only in the specific organisation for which he was responsible but also in strategic engagements with industry bodies and related organisations.

He has also contributed to the community in a variety of ways including through his previous involvement as a member and at board level in Rotary and he currently undertakes a range of volunteer responsibilities in the local community.

Leigh is a current member of the Board and will bring his extensive experience and skills to the position of Chair.

### ***Options considered***

The recommendation of the N&C Committee considered all applications to the position of Chair and provide a recommendation to Council on the appointment.

Council could consider to not appoint a Chair for the Yarra Ranges Tourism Board, this would in effect cause the Board to be non-functioning and subsequently trigger a potential dissolution of the Yarra Ranges Tourism organisation.

### ***Recommended option and justification***

To ensure strong leadership of the Yarra Ranges Tourism Board, and to maintain momentum for the organisation, it is recommended that Council endorse the appointment of Leigh Harry for a three-year term as Chair (1 November 2022 to 30 October 2025).

## **FINANCIAL ANALYSIS**

There is no remuneration for the Chair of the Yarra Ranges Tourism Board, the organisation is funded through an agreement which will be review this year.

## **APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES**

The appointment of the Chair will ensure strong leadership of the Board of Yarra Ranges Tourism. The objectives of Yarra Ranges Tourism support the following Council strategies.

- Council Plan 2021 – 2025;
  - Become a world class trails and eco-tourism destination through project development, delivery, advocacy, and partnerships, including the delivery of the and Ridges and Rivers projects;
  - Raise the cultural profile of Yarra Ranges to drive creative industry development and cultural tourism spend via attracting and retaining new creative professionals and businesses and supporting existing creative professionals and businesses; and
  - Develop a destination management Plan with Yarra Ranges Tourism Board to support the right eco-tourism, infrastructure growth that also protects our natural environment.
- Draft Economic Development Strategy 2022-2032;
  - Ensure an integrated tourism approach aligned to the Brand Identity Strategy and the Destination Management Plan.
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2025;
  - Promote direct access to local produce such as fruit and vegetable, including seconds that are affordable, and connect to and support sustainable local agribusinesses.
- Equity, Access and Inclusion Strategy 2013-2023; and
  - Work with Yarra Ranges Tourism Ltd (YRTL), Trader Groups and other tourism groups to encourage businesses to promote disability access, increase access and inclusion and tap into this growing market.
- Environment Strategy 2015 – 2025
  - Support nature-based and farm-based tourism opportunities in the region.

## **RELEVANT LAW**

Not applicable

## **SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

### ***Economic Implications***

The tourism sector has continued to experience increased positive economic growth. The YRT Chair provides the leadership and focus to ensure continued sector growth in terms of output, jobs, and visitor numbers.

The estimated value of tourism for the Yarra Ranges economy is \$383M and employs 1,877.

### ***Social Implications***

A vibrant tourism sector with strong leadership, well managed infrastructure and highly skilled operators has a direct correlation to liveability, which in turn has a positive social impact on how residents respond to their local community.

### ***Environmental Implications***

Strong leadership will ensure the coordination of regional marketing initiatives that increase the awareness of the region as a premier eco-tourism destination continues to grow.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

There is not a requirement for community engagement as part of the recruitment process. However, the position of Chair of Yarra Ranges Tourism was advertised via expressions of interest on Yarra Ranges Council and AICD websites, Seek and LinkedIn.

## **COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

Not relevant.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

Strong leadership ensures a vibrant tourism sector, capable organisation and builds consumer confidence.

## **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

No officers and/or delegates acting on behalf of the Council through the Instrument of Delegation and involved in the preparation and/or authorisation of this report have any general or material conflict of interest as defined within the *Local Government Act 2020*.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Nil