



**Media Release**

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## **March visitor numbers a welcome tourism boost for early 2016**

Mildura region's strong tourism performance during March came at the right time for industry as the latest official figures reveal an overall tourism decline for the 2015 calendar year.

Excellent visitation across both holiday weekends in March were a welcome boost for local tourism operators, particularly in light of numerous 'soft' periods last year, according to Mildura Tourism CEO, Rod Trowbridge.

"Official visitor data for the March 2016 quarter will not be available for some time, but it is clear that March was a bumper tourism month for the local economy," he said.

In contrast, for the Year Ended (YE) December 2015, total domestic overnight visitors (409,000) were down 12% on the previous year while domestic visitor nights (1.2 million) were down 26%.

"The year's worst declines occurred during the first half of 2015, with business gradually picking up again between July and December," Mr Trowbridge said.

"However gains for the year were overshadowed by declines, hence the net double-digit annual downturn for our domestic market.

"Due to our accurate quarterly tracking, Mildura Tourism was able to forecast circumstances well in advance, providing the likely result at both last year's AGM and within our Annual Report".

Other features of the recently-released YE December 2015 results include :

- 'Friends or relatives' property (42%) was the most popular accommodation type used for domestic nights in the region. 'Caravan Park or commercial camping ground' (20%) was the second most popular.
- Victoria produced 51% of our domestic visitors – 26% from regional Victoria and 25% from Melbourne.
- Travellers aged over 55 (47%) remain the region's biggest age group of visitors
- Domestic visitors each spent an average of \$153 per night
- The region received 19,500 international visitors, up 16% on YE December 2014
- Domestic daytrip visitors (238,000) declined by 23% for the year, however they spent an average of \$167 per visitor.

Mr Trowbridge said that winning and keeping domestic tourists had never been more complex or competitive than in today's market.

"The key is understanding what your visitors want and doing your best to deliver beyond their expectations," he said.

"For some time Mildura Tourism has realised that we need to know much more about our visitors and the perceptions, both constructive and critical, that consumers have of our destination.

"In a first for our region, we commissioned extensive Consumer Perceptions Research and will be presenting the research findings to a forum of key tourism, business and political stakeholders next week."

Among the findings, Mr Trowbridge said that indicative issues that had been fleshed out included :

- What were the drivers behind travellers' intentions and preferences for where they visit and what they choose to do?
- How Mildura rates in terms of travellers' awareness, consideration and compulsion to visit
- Whether or not Mildura has enough or suitable attributes to set it apart from other regional centres
- In what categories does Mildura compare favourably or poorly with potential visitors?
- What is required to ensure that consumers view our destination more favourably?

"This is just a taste. Research that will be presented is detailed, provocative and refreshingly honest within a climate that recognises that only consumer-driven tourism will succeed," Mr Trowbridge said.

"As an essential insight into consumers' current thinking and attitudes towards Mildura as a holiday destination, this will be a 'must attend' for tourism industry stakeholders," he concluded.

Ends.