


An aerial photograph of a winding wooden boardwalk or path that cuts through a dense forest. The path is made of dark brown wooden planks and has a low metal railing. Two people are walking along the path, one in the foreground and one further ahead. The forest is composed of various types of trees, including some with bare, white branches and others with green foliage. The lighting suggests it might be late afternoon or early morning, with long shadows and warm tones.

Annual Report 2022/2023

MARGARET RIVER
BUSSELTON
TOURISM
ASSOCIATION

FOR THE YEAR ENDED JUNE 2023

MRBTA.COM



MRBTA honours the traditional owners of this land, the Wadandi (Saltwater) people, and their elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge the Wadandi people's 60,000-year custodianship of this special place, and we thank them for generously sharing with us their deep cultural knowledge and connection to the land.



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1. MRBTA Vision & Organisation

OUR VISION



Tourism in the Margaret River Region will be an experience which delights visitors, stimulates the regional economy, contributes to the region's rich social and environmental values, and supports a vibrant Aboriginal culture.

OUR ROLE



MRBTA is dedicated to developing tourism in our region in way that improves the economic, environmental, social, cultural and Aboriginal outcomes for our community. As Australia's largest, independent, not-for-profit, Local Tourism Organisation (LTO), we have an unprecedented ability to achieve our vision through our traditional Tourism Division and recently established Capes Foundation Division, ably supported by our Corporate Services Division.

MARGARET RIVER REGION

ON WADANDI BOODJA

TOURISM DIVISION

Our Tourism Division seeks to develop a robust tourism industry through considered destination management, contemporary marketing and visitor servicing, incisive industry capacity and capability building, and influential advocacy.



CAPES FOUNDATION DIVISION

Our Capes Foundation seeks to sustain and share our region's rich environment, history and culture at the eight sites entrusted in our care – Ngilgi, Lake, Mammoth & Jewel caves, Cape Naturaliste & Cape Leeuwin lighthouses, Eagles Heritage, and Forest Adventures – and by working collaboratively with partners on regional initiatives.

CORPORATE SERVICES DIVISION

Our Corporate Services Division Underpins work of organisation by providing efficient and effective financial, governance and human resources support to the Tourism Division and Capes Foundation Division.

2. Strategic Priorities

2022-25 Strategic Priorities

1

BRAND AND DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

- Growing the proportion of travellers that share our regional values.
- Providing leadership for the development of authentic, memorable and enjoyable experiences.
- Contributing to the economic and social wellbeing of our diverse communities.

2

CULTURE AND HERITAGE

- Acknowledging, understanding and respecting Aboriginal history and culture.
- Preserving, celebrating and appreciating the stories of our region.
- Enabling people and organisations to work together cohesively to achieve positive outcomes for those who live in and visit this region.

3

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

- Appreciating, conserving and improving our natural assets and environment.
- Minimising impacts on our environment by reducing waste and carbon emissions.
- Providing leadership, support and investment for tourism-related initiatives that demonstrate positive outcomes for our people and place.

ORGANISATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

- Efficient, effective, and financially sustainable management of all aspects of MRBTA operations, initiatives, and partnerships.
- Representing the interests of our region with strong leadership and clear communication.





3. Chair Report

It is now over 12 months since Western Australia's borders reopened to interstate and international visitors. The world we have reopened to is different to the one we knew before Covid. Tourism contributes \$1 billion to the economy of the Margaret River Region, and much investment and effort is being made at the regional, state and national level to rebuild tourism in this new landscape.

Tourism Australia's Future of Demand Report released this year confirms, among other things, that visitors are looking for authentic connections to place—to visit destinations where tourism is embedded in the community. At the same time, it seems that the value of tourism is being increasingly scrutinised by its host communities. More than ever, our industry is called to develop tourism in ways that improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing of the place in which we operate. That is reasonable and appropriate.

In pursuit of that, our region's tourism challenge requires that two key things be recognised and understood. Firstly, we must see that tourism is an intrinsically hyper-local activity. It must be fostered in ways which encourage initiatives to be led from the ground up. Secondly, it is imperative that tourism never becomes an extractive industry: its role should be to support and contribute to its host community, not to exploit it.

Through its key Tourism and Capes Foundation divisions, MRBTA has made significant progress in addressing these challenges in 2023.

Our solid financial performance for the year ensures we will continue to pursue our vision with vigour and to invest in initiatives that support our industry and our community into the future.

The MRBTA team continues to carry out its work with an exceptional breadth of expertise and passion and I proudly acknowledge the incredible work of the whole team. I also thank my colleagues on the MRBTA Board for their commitment, leadership and support over the last 12 months.

As always, our work is made stronger through our working partnerships and building a shared vision for tourism within our region and the state. I acknowledge and thank our partners for their ongoing collaboration, the closest of these being our members.

We look forward to strengthening these partnerships and to growing the benefits delivered by tourism to the region as a whole.



4. CEO Report

Over the last 12 months our team has remained focussed on pursuing our strategic priorities, which include building tourism for the benefit of the broader community and our future generations.

At the same time, we continue to respond to current pressures experienced within our local industry. This year, these pressures have included ongoing worker accommodation shortages, rapid increases in the costs of doing business, and the predicted decline in domestic visitation as West Australians' confidence to undertake outbound travel has grown.

Supported by our Board of Directors and the contributions of our passionate 100 staff members, we continue our commitment to overcoming these challenges and growing the benefits that tourism brings to this region.



Sharna Kearney

Sharna Kearney

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE
OFFICER**

YEAR IN REVIEW

Visitation

Domestic tourism numbers to the region have softened as West Australians' propensity to travel outbound continues to grow. However, numbers are still above their pre-Covid levels, with June 2023 showing a 4.7% growth in visitor numbers compared with June 2019 (1,518,000 vs 1,450,000 visitors respectively). For the year ending June 2023, Australia's South West saw an increase of 38% in visitor spend – a figure which, while healthy, is affected by inflationary factors. International visitation to WA is at 69% of pre-Covid levels.*

Experiences

This year our Capes Foundation team has reached a major milestone, with the completion of an immersive new above-ground tourism experience at Ngilgi Cave. The Ancient Lands Experience connects visitors to the rich history, culture and environment of this region. This \$3.6m project has been supported by Federal Government funding of \$1.35m, WA State Government funding of \$465,000, and a \$1.25m loan provided by the City of Busselton.

Aboriginal Tourism

As part of the Ancient Lands Experience project, Capes Foundation has supported the development of a new Aboriginal Cultural Meeting Place at the Ngilgi Cave site, which will be the new home of Koomal Dreaming's tours. The Meeting Place has been supported by funding from Tourism WA in line with its Jina Aboriginal Tourism Action Plan.

Aviation

We continue to support the efforts of the City of Busselton and our other partners in establishing interstate flights, which have seen Busselton Margaret River Airport (BMRA) become Jetstar's highest performing regional route, with a passenger load of 80%. In response to the success of the Melbourne-Busselton route, Jetstar has added a permanent fourth weekly flight from October 2023. The WA government has also committed funding to support the planning for the expansion of Busselton Margaret River Airport (BMRA).

MRBTA's efforts to support the success of BMRA include the provision of ground handling services provided by our South West Aviation Services team, who are contracted to all five airlines flying in and out of the airport.

Tourism Destination Management Plan

MRBTA participated in the state government-led process to develop a Tourism Destination Management Plan, which identifies 10-year priorities for the South West region. Tourism WA will share the final plan with industry towards the end of 2023.

Events

Our Tourism Division team partnered with over 20 events to promote event-related visitation to the region and disperse event visitors widely throughout the destination. We also participated in stakeholder consultation around the state government process to develop a major new wine and food event for the region, due to launch in November 2024.

Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park

We welcomed the news of the state government's \$2.7million commitment to upgrades to the Cape to Cape Track and visitor signage in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park. We are hopeful that these commitments from the State Government will form part of an ongoing staged investment program for the Park. We were also pleased that Undalup Association were successful in securing \$1.17m for their 'Ni Kidji Gnangkaa Boodja - Listening to Mother Country' project, which will deliver critical guidance for the long-term management of visitation and protection of the Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park and Ngari Capes Marine Park. The announcements were received further to many years of advocacy from MRBTA and its partners on the need for increased funding for the National Park to sustain growing visitation rates.

** Source: Tourism Research Australia/Tourism WA*



Connected
country

Seasons at Ngilgi

Wadandj people know that everything on boodja is connected – the land, the sea, the animals, the plants and the people.

As the seasons change, we can all look to the land to guide us how to live.

Walk this circle and explore the six seasons.

4. CEO REPORT

2023 HIGHLIGHTS PER DIVISION

Capes Foundation Division

- We welcomed 550,000 visitors to the eight attractions in our care – Forest Adventures; Ngilgi, Lake, Mammoth and Jewel Caves; Cape Naturaliste and Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse and Eagles Heritage – providing them with an educational insight into our region's fascinating environment, history, and culture.
- In October 2022, we joined with Wadandi Cultural Custodians; the Shire of Augusta Margaret River; the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the local Augusta community to celebrate the 400 Year anniversary of the recorded sighting of this coast by the Dutch galleon 'Leeuwin'. The event shone a spotlight on the unique maritime environment and history of Augusta and Cape Leeuwin. The celebration coincided with the completion of a once-in-a-century major renovation of the lighthouse.
- Work has commenced on a new interpretive centre at Cape Naturaliste which will share the history of the lighthouse through the eyes of keepers' children who lived at the lighthouse. It is set to open by Easter 2024.
- 12,500 students from 390 schools and not-for-profit groups took part in education programs organised by Capes Foundation.

These programs offer immersive experiences at the attractions, focused on the study and understanding of the history, wildlife and natural landscapes of the region.

- Our in-house Assets and Environment team continued to maintain and improve all eight of the sites in our care. This included a wide range of infrastructure maintenance and upgrades, extensive weed management, and the planting of over 2,000 native seedlings.
- More than \$300,000 was secured through the National Disaster Ready Fund to mitigate bushfire across the Capes Foundation sites, including installing fire suppression systems and the utilisation of low-impact cool burning techniques to reduce fuel loads.
- A Sustainable Retail Policy was developed, outlining our commitment to promoting ethical practices, reducing plastic and other waste, conserving resources, and fostering a culture of sustainability through the work of this business unit.
- \$17,000 from retail profits were donated to support the efforts of local groups including Friends of the Cape to Cape Track; Owl Friendly Margaret River Region, and Western Ringtail Action Group. Funds were raised as a percentage of retail profits from sales

across the Capes Foundation attractions and the Busselton and Margaret River Visitor Centres.

- Eagles Heritage took in 46 birds of prey in need of rescue and rehabilitation. The Eagles Heritage team continues to provide valuable care for up to 90 birds in total, alongside the visitor experience at the site. Additional grant funding was secured to support animal welfare enhancements at the site.
- Following the 2019 Calgardup Bushfire which led to a 6-month closure of Lake Cave, the bushland around the cave has continued to regenerate and the site made the news after the water level in the cave reached its highest point in decades. Capes Foundation have been monitoring the fluctuations in the cave water levels over the last 15 years. This is helping us and researchers to better understand the impacts of factors such as changing vegetation across the catchment on the hydrology of the limestone karst.
- Capes Foundation partnered with both local governments to produce an updated business case for the completion of the Wadandi Track from Busselton to Augusta along the route of the railway line. Funding for this work was provided by Tourism WA.

4. CEO REPORT

2023 HIGHLIGHTS PER DIVISION (CONT.)

Tourism Division

- We have been pleased to provide support to address worker accommodation shortages, with our work alongside local stakeholders resulting in the development of new camping facilities at Southern Stars Holiday Park in Dunsborough for the specific purpose of providing much-needed seasonal worker accommodation in 2023-24. Efforts to secure further dedicated worker accommodation for the region continue through the Margaret River Region Worker Accommodation Steering Committee.
- Other issues on which MRBTA has provided support and advocacy include access to public liability insurance; planning for the future of Busselton Margaret River Airport; Dunsborough Town Centre building height limits, and tour and transport compliance with the Department of Transport and WA Police.
- In partnership with the City of Busselton we supported the relaunch of the cruise industry at Busselton by managing the shoreside welcome experience and tourism industry liaison. The first season in over two years welcomed 11 cruise ships to Busselton with over 16,000 passengers, making it one of the largest cruise seasons yet delivered since the first Busselton season in 2014/15.
- Our Industry Development team continued to respond to provide support, networking opportunities, and training and development to our members in the areas where they are seeking support. This year our program received a participation rate of 698 members across events including Mingle networking events, member famil days and group training sessions which included Customer Experience Design and a Rezdy Masterclass. We also became the first region in WA to offer support for businesses to undertake Ecotourism Australia's Strive 4 Sustainability Scorecard, with a rebate offered on membership fees for those joining the scheme.
- The Recovery for Regional Tourism project funded by the Federal Government and delivered in partnership with Australia's South West came to a conclusion in 2023. The project saw MRBTA provide direct support for the development of 20 new regional experiences, 25 new bookable tours being loaded onto Rezdy and two new tourism businesses. Consumer marketing around the drive trails element of the project included a content collaboration with creator Jarrad Seng.
- Our 2023 Membership Satisfaction Survey produced a Net Promoter Score of +30, up from +3 in the previous year. Members told us that the support they value most highly from MRBTA is in the areas of Destination Marketing & Consumer Exposure; Industry & Business Support; Tourism Community & Networking Opportunities; and MRBTA Strategic Leadership & Industry Advocacy.
- Together with the Margaret River Wine Association, we invited our members and the local community to join Wadandi Pibulum Elder, Dr. Wayne Webb for a Welcome to Country event for workers who had arrived in the region to work vintage 2023. The event was extremely well received by guests and in the media, and will continue in 2024.
- We were thrilled to be recognised as a leader in publishing at the Mumbrella Travel Marketing Awards, with Tales & Trails magazine receiving Highly Commended in the Publication of the Year category. Industry peers shortlisted in the category included QANTAS, Perth is OK, and We Are Explorers. 20,000 copies of each biannual edition of Tales & Trails are distributed throughout the region, with the magazine

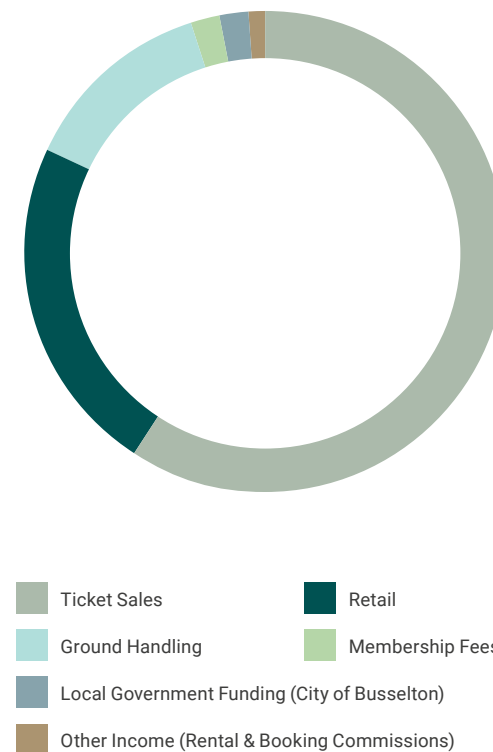
sharing the unique stories of our people and our place through professional journalism and photography.

- We serviced over 320,000 visitors through the Busselton and Margaret River Visitor Centres and Central Reservations team, whose teams respond to visitor enquires 7 days per week, 364 days per year. Our team distributed over 150,000 copies of the ever-popular regional map. We have been able to increase our print distribution service to Vasse, Dunsborough, Yallingup and Metricup thanks to funding from the City of Busselton.
- Over 980,000 visitors used the destination website at margaretriver.com, which continues to be the most trusted online authority for travel planning to the region.

Corporate Services

The organisation's financial performance produced an EBIDA (Earnings Before Interest, Depreciation and Amortization) of \$2.09m for the year. This strong performance is thanks to the diversification of income streams, which this year have included sustained visitation to the Capes Foundation attractions, increases in ground handling income for services at the Busselton Margaret River airport, grant income and government traineeship incentives.

A summary of our income sources for 2023 is as follows:



- The Audit Report noted that internal controls relating to MRBTA's financial reporting framework have been adequately designed and effectively maintained throughout the audit period.
- Critical financial and payroll systems were overhauled to drive efficiency across the organisation.
- A strong emphasis on upholding corporate governance continues.
- All staff were offered the opportunity to complete a traineeship aligned with their area of work; all new staff participated in Cultural Awareness Training with the Undalup Association.
- For the first time, we have undertaken a business-wide carbon emissions review. The early findings from this process will assist us to build on the sustainability initiatives already in place, including rainwater harvesting, solar power and wastewater treatment, to meet our net-zero aspirations.

5. Our Board Members



Stuart Hicks AO
CHAIR

Fellow of the Institute of Company Directors, Stuart has led key state and national bodies and has served as commissioner of the WA Planning Commission and as chairman of the South West Development Commission. In 2006 Stuart was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for services to industry, government and the community.



David Willcox
**COMMON GROUND
TRAILS / DEPUTY CHAIR**

David has established Common Ground Trails, one of the state's leading trail planning and design consultancies. David is a multi-talented professional with a broad experience and interests within tourism related industries, including as general manager and lead designer or Willcox & Associates Architects.



Glenn Callegari
**HILLZEEZ DOWN
SOUTH SURF SHOPS**

Glenn Callegari is a Certified Practising Accountant and worked at Wesfarmers before returning to Busselton and purchasing the Hillzeez Down South Surf Shop Group. Glenn has expanded the business and now owns stores in Busselton, Dunsborough, Margaret River, Bunbury and Albany.



Janine Carter
**THE LANDSMITH
COLLECTION
/VOYAGER ESTATE**

Janine is The Landsmith Collection's Head of Tourism & Business Development – a portfolio of brands including Voyager Estate, Bullo River Station and a number of properties in development including Wallcliffe House. Janine has held roles with Margaret River Wine Association and in the fields of events management, journalism and PR.



Keith Warrick
**EAGLE BAY
BREWING**

General Manager at Eagle Bay Brewery, Keith has held similar roles at several Margaret River wineries and has over 20 years' senior management experience. Keith is currently the President of Smiths Beach Surf Life Saving Club and has served on several boards.



Evan Lewis
**BROADWATER
RESORT**

Evan is the Owner and Resort Manager of Broadwater Resort Busselton. Evan has 30 years' experience in senior roles within the tourism and hospitality sector and has held several Regional Executive Marketing and Global Communications Roles with multinational companies.



Matt Credaro
**CREDARO FAMILY
ESTATE & SHELTER
BREWING CO.**

Matt brings to the board his experience of current and previous roles on several boards and his involvement with hospitality, retail and tourism experiences in the region. Matt is part of the fourth generation at Credaro Family Estate and is also an owner at Shelter Brewing Co..



Kelly Hick
**DUNSBOROUGH
RIDGE RETREAT &
KLH CONSULTING**

Kelly is an experienced multi-sector Board and Committee Member and a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. A former lawyer, Kelly has experience at senior executive level across professional services and member-based organisations.



David Moyes
**PRIVATE PROPERTIES
AUSTRALIA**

David is the Owner and Managing Director of Private Properties Australia – a premium, short-stay accommodation provider that manages 112 properties in Australia's Southwest. David's former businesses include Blue Bay Property Services and Cottesloe-based Private Properties Booking Agency.

6. Members and Partners

As always, our work is made stronger through our working partnerships and building a shared vision for tourism within our region and the state. MRBTA acknowledges and thanks all of our members and partners for their ongoing collaboration.

Members

Our closest partners are our 650 members. We are extremely proud to be working alongside a body of member businesses committed to innovation and excellence, whose collective achievements include:

- 10 awards at the 2022 Perth Airport WA Tourism Awards
- 3 awards at the 2022 Australian Tourism Awards
- A total of 19 tourism businesses with Ecotourism Australia Certification
- A total of 94 tourism businesses accredited through the Australian Tourism Accreditation Program (ATAP)
- Countless awards for excellence in hospitality, dining, wine, beer, events and accommodation sectors.

Our Partners

Thanks to our partners: Tourism WA; Australia's South West; the City of Busselton; the Shire of Augusta-Margaret River; South West Development Commission; Margaret River Wine Association; the Andalup Association; Karri Karrak Aboriginal Corporation; Koomal Dreaming; the Regional Chambers of Commerce and Industry; Busselton Toyota; and Nature Conservation Margaret River Region. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with these partners and exploring new partnerships in the coming 12 months.





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