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TOURISM DATA AIDS WILDLIFE CAUSE

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THE latest National Visitor Survey data just released by Tourism Research Australia shows birdwatching brings even bigger bucks than previously thought.

The data released in June, shows year ending March 2022, the number of domestic tourists who birdwatched in our country had skyrocketed by 40 per cent in 12 months - up to 751,000 people (more than those who took part in scuba diving or snow sports put together).

And domestic tourists who birdwatched helped the Aussie economy by spending a massive \$414 million in that one year alone.

At least four years' of consecutive data now shows nature-based activities consistently dwarf active outdoor sports activities in terms of number of participants and spend.

The domestic data is in addition to international figures which pre-COVID showed a further 608,000 international tourists birdwatched in Australia and spent a whopping \$2.6 billion.

This latest nature-based tourism data coincides with the Commonwealth government's "State of The Industry" report published last month, which warned "The visitor economy faces serious labor shortages and increased international competition".

So, what does Australia have that other countries don't, which we could effectively market to ensure our financial futures?

Our unique wildlife.

Studies for Tourism Australia have shown our wildlife is a number one attraction (*Consumer Demand Project*). Better still, it is already here - if we look after it. There's no infrastructure investment required.

This latest birdwatching data is proof. We have just one component of wildlife watchers - birdwatchers - bringing us more than \$3 billion already.

The potential value to our regions of other forms of wildlife watching has not yet been quantified, but is likely to be significant.

The government's "Thrive 2030 Strategy" aims to see the visitor economy spend reach \$230 billion by 2030.

Currently Victoria lags Queensland and

NSW for the number of jobs and spend associated with tourism.

In 20/21, Victoria saw roughly half the Gross State Product derived from tourism as NSW.

This does not appear COVID-related because it was also roughly half in 18/19.

Is it coincidence Victoria was recently the subject of a Parliamentary Inquiry into ecosystem decline?

Compared to other states for example, Victoria has not yet banned recreational shooting of native quail or ducks, many species unique to our country and their numbers in a long-term downwards spiral.

Neither has Victoria erected a single wildlife land-bridge overpass (of which there are hundreds overseas because they have been proven to protect wildlife and drivers), on our rapidly expanding network of roads.

The solution is obvious.

For biodiversity *and* economic reasons, it's time we protected our wildlife Australia-wide - and clearly time to do so in Victoria.

Kerrie Allen's family has lived in regional Victoria across generations. With a love of the bush and a penchant for the finance sector, she takes a keen interest in the social and economic factors influencing regional Victoria. Kerrie is a long-time member of, and a spokesperson for, not-for-profit group Regional Victorians Opposed to Duck Shooting Inc.