

## OVERVIEW

Neil McGarry has spent his entire working life in the tourism sector, a total of 32 years, with Neil still as passionate about the industry today as he was when he took his first position. Neil has spent 28 years driving tourism at the Local Government level working in all regions of the State, with the exception of the Murray-Riverina. Neil's commitment to local communities was only broken by a 4 year stint at Tourism NSW where he held the positions of Regional Manager, Marketing Services Manager and International Manager, before returning to the 'bush'.

During his career, Neil has strived to be at the forefront of the tourism industry, introducing computers to VICs, participating in an extensive range of training programs as well as industry events such as the ATE Trade Missions, presenting at conferences and seminars and challenging established concepts in marketing and promotion – resulting in significant changes in direction that have delivered visitation both locally and regionally.

Within the tourism sector, Neil has played a very active role on a diverse range of local and regional committees, boards and working parties, including the Outback Regional Tourism Organisation (RTO), New England – North West RTO (Vice Chair), Inland NSW Tourism Board, Kamilaroi Highway Promotions Committee (Vice Chair), Film Broken Hill, Broken Hill Convention Bureau and the Outback Regional Consultative Committee. At the State level, Neil was the Vice President of the NSW Council of Tourist Associations and was instrumental in the introduction of the AVIC system. For over 15 years, Neil was also actively involved with the Council of Tourist Associations.

Working at the community level, Neil has been engaged in a range of activities including membership of the National Parks and Wildlife Service Advisory Committee, Centenary of Federation Committee and Olympic Torch Relay Committee (Chair). He was also the Chair of the Year of the Outback Working Group and, as a result of his contribution, became an 'Ambassador' during the National Year of the Outback.

## Current Position

### **Neil McGarry & Associates**

Principal

Formed July 2014

**Previous Position**

Neil was the Director, Economic and Community Development at Liverpool Plains Shire, a position that he has held 2002 until July 2014, after 13 years of managing tourism in Broken Hill and Outback NSW. Tourism development and marketing has been one of the significant drivers of economic growth in Liverpool Plains Shire, with Neil responsible for developing this sector. Significant tourism development projects that Neil has conceived and delivered within the Shire include the establishment and operation of the Liverpool Plains Visitor Information Centre at Willow Tree (a finalist in the 2013 Inland Tourism Awards), the First and Second Fleet Memorial Gardens at Wallabadah (the project won the 2006 Tidy Towns award), the Australian Railway Monument and Rail Journey's Museum at Werris Creek, the Quipolly Dam Recreation Area (including bird hides and trails), and the restoration of the historic Quirindi Royal Theatre (Tidy Towns – Cultural Heritage Award 2012).

Having just completed the Royal Theatre Project, Neil has already conceived and started working on developing two new attractions for the Shire and region – 'The Kamilaroi – A Highway and Its People' – an interpretative and educational experience based around the Bora Ring Concept' to mark the start of the Kamilaroi Highway in the east, and a multi-media touch screen that will explain the Hunter Valley-Gunnedah Basin supply chain, from mine to port, which will include historic footage as well contemporary 'stories' and real-time location of ships and trains.

Neil also provides significant on-going support to the Australian Rail Journeys Museum at Werris Creek and the Quirindi Heritage Village. He was also responsible for coordinating visitor information services, designing and producing a comprehensive range of information and marketing and promotional collateral, marketing and promoting the Shire and representing the Shire and New England – North West Region on a range of Boards and Committees, including the Inland NSW Tourism Board.

## PROFESSIONAL CONTRIBUTION & SERVICE

For a person who has lived and breathed tourism for more than 30 years, it is difficult to separate professional and personal contributions and service. For Neil, a 60-80 hour week is relatively normal.

Professionally, Neil has held Tourism and Economic Development (which have included responsibility for tourism) Management positions at Cooma-Monaro Shire, Eurobodalla Shire, Broken Hill and Liverpool Plains Shire as well as Tourism Manager, Manning Valley Tourist Association (Taree). In each of these positions, Neil has been responsible for:

- Provision of visitor services, including the operation of Visitor Information Centres.
- Design and production of an extensive range of information, marketing and promotional collateral.
- Product and infrastructure development including securing funding and sponsorship and project management and delivery.
- Marketing and promoting the LGA, both independently and co-operatively at the sub-regional and regional levels as well as part of highway / touring routes.
- Industry training and development.
- Staff training and development.

### Professional Highlights:

- 30+ years in the industry
- Held Tourism / Economic Development Manager positions in 5 LGAs in different regions of the State.
- 4 years with Tourism NSW in regional and international management positions.
- Leadership positions on an extensive range of local, regional, State and National committees and boards.
- Conception and delivery of a number of major tourism projects that have created new attractions and tourism infrastructure, including the Broken Hill Sculpture Symposium.
- Ongoing involvement in showcasing regional NSW products and experiences, marketing & promotion – nationally & internationally.
- Introduction of a range of innovative operational and marketing approaches.

In his 4 years at Tourism NSW (now DNSW), Neil held positions as Regional Manager, Marketing Services Manager and International Manager. A Regional Manager, one of Neil's first initiatives, was to establish the New England Tourism Development Authority – a pilot project to explore the effectiveness of combining resources to build a destination. As part of this project, Neil designed and implemented a regional marketing campaign. In its first year, the campaign increased awareness of the Region by 95%, which translated directly in visitation and an additional \$50 million of visitor expenditure being injected into the regional economy.

In his role as International Manager, Neil undertook an in-depth analysis and predicted the growth of the South East Asian market. He recommended the establishment of a Tourism NSW office in South East Asia – resulting in the establishment of the Singapore office – with this being the fore-runner of today's presence within the Region.

Neil's commitment, contribution and services to the tourism industry extend well beyond the LGA boundaries and his workplace roles and responsibilities. Over the past 30 years Neil has been a member of an extensive range of local, regional and state-based tourism organisations including Inland NSW Tourism (a Board member since inception), Kamilaroi Highway Promotions Committee (Vice Chair) and the Year of the Outback Working Party (chair).

Some of the highlights of Neil's career have included:

- Raising the standard and professionalism of VIC's including extensive involvement with the formulation and introduction of the AVIC accreditation program.
- Establishment of creatively driven tourist attractions – creating 'something from nothing' – including the Sculpture Symposium at Broken Hill which attracts more than 35,000 visitors per year and the First and Second Fleet Memorial Gardens at Wallabadah.
- Changing the face of regional tourism – the trialling of a cooperative approach to tourism development and marketing – the New England pilot project, the first Tourism Manager in Australia to take a tourism region to ATE and the development of the first regional tourism website.
- Winning a range of awards for both his product development and marketing campaigns, including the INTA Marketing Award for the Kamilaroi Highway marketing campaign.

**Board and Committee Positions held by Neil during his 30+ year involvement in the tourism industry:**

- NSW Council of Tourist Associations (Vice Chair)
- NE-NW RTO (Vice Chair)
- Kamilaroi Highway Promotions Committee (Vice Chair)
- Inland NSW Tourism (Board Member)
- Outback RTO (Board Member)
- Australian Outback Tourism (Member)
- Outback Regional Consultative Committee (Board Member)
- National Parks and Wildlife Service Advisory Committee (Board Member)
- Olympic Torch Relay Committee (Chair)
- Year of the Outback Working Party (Chair)
- National Year of the Outback (Ambassador)
- Centenary of Federation Committee (Member)
- Broken Hill Regional Tourist Association (Board Member)
- Broken Hill Convention Bureau (Board Member)
- Film Broken Hill Committee
- Numerous local government, business and business chamber, precinct and

Over the years Neil has enthusiastically and unreservedly shared his ideas, knowledge and expertise with tourism operators, government officers and business and community groups. He has willingly given his time (both in and outside office hours) to participate on committees and boards, deliver papers at conferences, run training seminars and programs, and lobby for the tourism industry. He has mentored more than 30 staff, most of whom have gone on to play active roles in the tourism industry.

## **PERSONAL CONTRIBUTION**

In each position held by Neil he has been a leader and an innovator – bringing a new perspective to the tourism sector. It is Neil's creativity, both operationally and through marketing and promotion, that has delivered the results in terms of his professional contribution and services.

In his first position as the Public Relations Officer at Cooma Monaro Shire Council, Neil recognised the potential of the Snowy Mountains for summer tourism, and put together a range of 'off season' campaigns. The first marketing campaign increased summer visitation by 10%, with this campaign demonstrating that the Region had the potential to be a destination year round – a concept that is now fully embraced in the marketing of this region.

In his next position as the Tourism Manager for the Manning Valley Tourist Association, Neil lead the industry by introducing the first computer to a VIC in NSW – in the face of Board opposition that wanted to introduce a word processor. From this Neil developed the first computerised data base of commercial operators for use in a Visitor's Centre and produced a range of information and marketing collateral in-house. Neil also produced the first self-funded, four colour tourist guide in Australia, the fore-runner of the business model for the modern Visitor Guide.

Neil's interest in applying emerging technology to the tourism sector has continued. From meeting a Dutch MTV journalist from New York through a famil that Neil was conducting in the Outback, Neil came to learn about the internet – the journalist drew a picture of the web into a sand-dune. Realising the significance and potential of this fledgling technology, Neil introduced the concept to the Outback Region, which ultimately led to another first – a regional tourism website, jointly developed by Murray-Outback and Tourism Victoria.

In Broken Hill, Neil's focus was on positioning Broken Hill as a unique 'cultural' destination – quirky, creative, vibrant. Under his direction, visitation in Broken Hill increased substantially – for example the number of visitors through the Broken Hill VIC went from 85,000 to over 140,000 within a few years. With a limited marketing budget, Neil had to think laterally to raise awareness of Broken Hill and generate publicity. As such he sought to develop new attractions and was a primary driver of and responsible for securing the funding for, the Broken Hill Sculpture Symposium – an attraction that has become synonymous with Broken Hill and now averages over 35,000 visitors per year. He also targeted the film industry, promoting Broken Hill as a film location and developing the first LGA-based Film Manual – attracting movies such as Priscilla Queen of the Desert, Race the Sun, Dirty Deeds, the last of the Flying Doctors series and an extensive range of commercials.

In Liverpool Plains Shire, Neil has created a tourism sector from virtually nothing. Through mobilising and supporting local community groups, the Shire now has a number of

attractions – the First and Second Fleet Memorial Gardens, the Australian Rail Journeys Museum, Quirindi Heritage Village and Quipolly Dam. Having created demand, visitor services now had to be provided, resulting in Neil's latest project, the Liverpool Plains Visitor Information and Interpretative Centre. The VIC was a finalist in the 2013 Inland Tourism Awards. Neil is currently working on two more innovative projects – the Kamilaroi Highway and its people, and the Hunter Valley-Gunnedah Basin supply chain touch-screen project. In this latter project, Neil is meeting the demand for information on the mining sector from visitors – filling a gap in the marketplace that other mining localities have not addressed.

Neil's 'can do' attitude and 'no nonsense approach', combined with his creativity, willingness to work hard and passion for the industry, has earned him the respect of his peers and colleagues as well as that of tourism operators and the community and industry groups that he worked with and supported.