



Wild ecotourism

Story Lizzie Corke, images Doug Gimesy

A new ecotourism attraction, which allows visitors to experience the unique environment of the Otways up-close and predator-free, has been given the go-ahead by Colac Otway Shire Council.

Based on a spectacular 20 Ha property just west of Apollo Bay, the attraction will be the first of its kind on the Great Ocean Road. It's expected to create at least 30 permanent jobs, and the profits will be reinvested into the Conservation Ecology Centre's research and conservation activities in the Otways.

"We want visitors to the area to be able to experience the Otways truly vibrant with wildlife," said Lizzie Corke, Conservation Ecology Centre CEO.

"Accompanied by a qualified conservationist guide, small groups of visitors will experience a beautifully restored area, where koalas doze in the treetops, potoroos and bandicoots forage on the ferny forest floors and kangaroos hop along the horizon against a spectacular ocean vista."

Visitors will be able to see native wildlife behaving naturally – at liberty within the protected habitat area. There are no cages – the visitors share space with the animals as they walk through stunning bushland along designed paths and raised walks, against the backdrop of the Southern Ocean.

They'll have unsurpassed opportunities to observe and photograph the iconic animals of the area and will experience the Otways as it once was, and could be again – abundant and vibrant with wildlife. The qualified and engaging guides will share the secrets of the bush, the animals and the ecosystems, and visitors will learn about the conservation programs that are protecting this precious wildlife.

The experience will be designed and created by Brian Massey who was the Greens Master for 'The Lord of the Rings' trilogy, Art Director of 'The Hobbit' and designer of the highly successful 'Hobbiton' in New Zealand. In addition to the walking path, the project includes a themed 'field-research base'; visitor arrivals building; and a café and retail outlet showcasing local products.

"This immersive experience will engage visitors and the local community alike in conservation issues, at the same time generating significant funding wildlife and ecosystem conservation across the region," said Lizzie.

Colac Otway Shire Mayor Chris Potter said Council was committed to developing the shire's visitor economy.

"This project is sustainable and builds on the nature-based tourism that the Colac Otway Shire has a growing reputation for," Cr Potter said. "Council was thrilled to work with the Conservation Ecology Centre on this innovative and sustainable project."



"The Centre has a strong track record in ecotourism operations and is ideally placed to engage both visitors and our local community in conservation to the benefit of our overall region. I'd like to congratulate Lizzie and her team for their continued commitment not just to our region, but the environment that makes it so special!"

The venture will generate at least 45 jobs during construction and 30 new full-time positions in both

ecotourism and conservation once operational, resulting in significant ongoing employment and career development opportunities. All surplus generated through the venture will support conservation of region's flora and fauna.

The attraction is expected to open in December 2018.

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About the Conservation Ecology Centre

The Conservation Ecology Centre is a nationally registered non-profit conservation and ecological research organisation dedicated to conserving and understanding the flora and fauna of the Otways. The Centre established the Great Ocean Ecolodge in 2004 and has operated this business as a social enterprise to support its work in conservation for over 13 years. The Ecolodge has maintained the highest level of certification from Ecotourism Australia since this time and has earned significant recognition including being named as one of the 25 best ecolodges in the world by National Geographic Traveller.

More at: www.conservationecologycentre.org

