**Planning students visit Flinders Island – video transcript 16/3/12**

**Narrator:**

The Aussie dollar may be going up affecting the number of tourists visiting our shores, but then so is the value of a pristine environment in this era of rapidly dwindling natural landscape. Few places are more unspoiled than Flinders Island, nestled in the waters of Bass Strait between Northeast Tasmania and Victoria’s Wilsons Promontory, so how do we make the most of the economic potential of such places for international and domestic tourism while respecting local economic, environmental and community values? Seventeen students from La Trobe University’s Bachelor of Urban, Rural and Environmental planning course visited the Island; it is one of only two such accredited undergraduate courses in Victoria and taught on the Bendigo campus.

**Associate Professor Trevor Budge**:

We started a Bachelor of Urban, Rural and Environmental Planning in 2007, and was designed to fill a gap. A lot of planning courses focus around metropolitan issues, which we deal with, but we felt there was a need for something that dealt with rural and regional Australia and this has really hit the mark.

**Narrator:**

Before coming to the Island the students carried out extensive research on the Island’s adventure tourism industry and its walking and cycling trails, but also looked at ways of boosting its economic potential.

**Fraser Neele - student:**

Basically we’re here as a group to help the Flinders Island community to look at what they’ve got, to help them develop a tourism plan which involves environmental and adventure tourism, as well as that we’re looking at other forms of economic development in general to advance themselves with.

**Narrator:**

Flinders Island has a resident population of about 900 people with limited infrastructure.

**Fiona Maw - student:**

Flinders Island is quite unique, we’ve done a lot of work back on the mainland in Australia and as much there’s issues that are universal, the Island poses some new challenges because of its isolation, and so that from a planning perspective we’re really having to think outside the box and think of ways to overcome these issues, its actually been a fantastic challenge.

**Associate Professor Trevor Budge:**

Planning is about working with people, working with communities, seeing places, understanding places and so field work is an essential part of all our course. All our students regularly go on field trips, and of course trips like this to Flinders Island there’re a bit of an exception, but we have two or three of these every year and so a student who completes the course can expect to undertake an range of field work both in Australia and even overseas.

**Narrator:**

Along with the Island’s tourism industry, Flinders Island prides itself on its agriculture and producing quality lamb and beef for export to the mainland. It also has a fine fishing industry where you can find some of the best rock lobster in Australia.

Flinders Council is working closely with the group from La Trobe and is looking forward to establishing a closer partnership.

**Raoul Harper – General Manager Flinders Council:**

Flinders Council is really keen to try and develop a much stronger partnership with La Trobe Uni, I think we share many similar gaols. The planning approach that La Trobe can offer the Flinders community has some significant benefits for us.

**Associate Professor Trevor Budge:**

They’ve been really enthusiastic to know that someone’s coming in from a University base that can understand what’s happening with the Island but can also give them some ideas, they’re actually looking forward to some objective, concrete comments and thoughts and strategies about how they can take the Island forward.

**Narrator:**

While on the Island students spent time talking with local business’s and tourism operators, government officials and tourists. They also experience what the Island has to offer including many bush tracks with remarkable views, riding some challenging trails and walking some of the best beach’s you’ll find anywhere. The natural assets of the Island are its biggest drawcard.

**Fraser Neele - student:**

They’re absolutely stunning; yesterday we climbed Mt Strzelecki, the views from the top are absolutely spectacular, and just beach’s, you walk along the beach and you’re the first person to walk their in ages, there’s no footprints, there is no other people there is nothing, its incredibly beautiful.

**Narrator:**

Trevor Budge is a life fellow and former Victorian president of the Planning Institute of Australia. He has run his own planning business and played a leading roll setting up a sixyear post tsunami project in Sri Lanka.

**Associate Professor Trevor Budge:**

We deliberately started up a fairly aggressive program in terms of international field trips because we realised that a lot of students didn’t get the opportunity to do that. So we’ve now built up a program which we know is actually the most extensive international field work program of any planning course in Australia, so our students can expect the opportunity to go to places like Sri Lanka or Europe or whatever, and not only just undertake a sight seeing trip but actually do real project work with planning students from other countries.

**Narrator:**

At the end of their five days on the Island, the students presented their findings at a community meeting to be followed by a comprehensive written report to be presented to the Flinders Council in April.

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