Great White Shark circles King Island

DUNCAN ABEY

KING Island's metamorphosis from Bass Strait dairying outpost to international golfing destination continues apace, with playing great and famed developer Greg Norman making several recent fact-finding missions to the island as two championship courses near completion.

King Island Mayor Greg Barratt said the dual British Open winner had made several trips to the island – including one recently – as construction on the Ocean Dunes course on the island's west coast and Cape Wickham at the northern tip promise employment opportunities for the struggling community.

"Bearing in mind we've only got a small population of 1500 people, any number of new jobs is of benefit," Cr Barratt said.

"And of course there is the potential these courses will increase tourism activity on the island, because hopefully when the golfers come they will get curious about what else is here and have a drive around."

Ocean Dunes developer Graeme Grant – who plans to open his venture by mid-next year – welcomed news of Norman's interest in King Island, saying that rather than posing a threat, any involvement by one of golf's biggest names would only enhance the prospects of other ventures.

"His presence on the island would have a massive beneficial impact, and having a third course operating would make it that much more of a destination than having two," Mr Grant said.

"It may be a few years down the track, but I think that eventually King Island will turn out like the Lancashire coast in England, or places in Scotland or Ireland where there are three to four golf courses all beside each other.

SLOW AND STEADY: Development of the Ocean Dunes course, pictured above and below, is proving to be a challenge.

"The thing that gives me confidence is that people are not joining golf clubs as much but are instead travelling to play."

Mr Grant said his small construction team was taking a slow but steady approach to Ocean Dunes, with the difficult rock work on the coastal holes slowing progress. But he said that the natural contouring of the farmland meant the work would almost be done for them when his crew finally moved inland.

"I'm standing on the fourth green, and it's got water in front, behind and to the right of the green," he said.

"It's phenomenal and not many people would get the opportunities to build on this sort of land."

Norman's sprawling golf empire includes a course design business that has created renowned layouts across the US, South Africa, China, and Vietnam.

Great White Shark Enterprises has seven courses under construction across Australia.

Cape Wickham project consultant Darius Oliver – who said any involvement by Norman on the island could only be positive news for its golfing ambitions – described progress on the northern course as well advanced.

"We've actually now grassed 12 of the 18 holes, and we expect to have the whole course completed by July next year, but this depends on the weather," Mr Oliver said.

"If we get the sort of winter conditions as we had last year, the course won't open until late 2015.

"But golfers are going to love the interaction with nature at Cape Wickham, because there will be holes left and right of you full of muttonbirds, and that is very unique in the world to have a great golf course within a shearwater sanctuary."

Acting Tourism Minister Jeremy Rockcliff said more high-quality courses in Tasmania would boost the state's reputation as a destination of choice for golf lovers world-wide.

He said that while sport was the lure, golf tourists also got to experience and enjoy Tasmania's natural, cultural and gourmet experiences while they were here.

"The State Government, through Tourism Tasmania, works closely with Tourism Australia to promote the state's world-class golf experience internationally through their Great Golf Courses of Australia marketing program, which includes two of the world's Top 25-rated courses at Barnbougle Dunes and Barnbougle Lost Farm," Mr Rockcliff said.

"These are widely acclaimed as two of the nation's finest golfing experiences and are supported by a host of other courses throughout the state, including the heritage courses at Quamby and Ratho."

Great White Shark Enterprises did not respond to the *Sunday Tasmanian*'s request for comment.