

## Conference Overview

by Ian Brown, Conference Director

Over a weekend in September a wide range of speakers explored aspects of the conference theme: Wilderness, tourism and national parks: taking stock and looking ahead. Generations of conservationists and park managers have grappled with balancing conservation and recreation in protected areas. Two things everybody seems to be able to agree on is that nature-based recreation is an important function of protected areas and that it can help to build connection with the natural world and support for conservation.

Beyond those 'motherhoods' lies a great divergence of ways and means, which came to a head in NSW in 2010 when powerful industry lobby group the Tourism and Transport Forum (TTF) succeeded in its push for government to loosen the legislative bonds around private development in national parks – despite the best efforts of environment groups. This push has now succeeded in most Australian states.

However the TTF represents only the 'big end of town', the land developers and resort operators, not the vast diversity of nature-based recreation and the nature tourism industry. The underlying purpose of the conference was to examine the nuances of how 'tourism' (in its broadest sense, and consistent with 'visitor use') should fit into protected areas. Hopefully this would arm conservationists with a better understanding of the issues and how best to deal with them.

Dr Les Molloy outlined the history and current challenges of the New Zealand park system, highlighting some differences with Australia. Peter Prineas argued against private development in national parks, saying that it always ended up being subsidised, while Dr Terry De Lacy stressed the importance of the tourism industry as an ally, especially in the developing world. Also from academia, Dr Brendan Mackey presented the case for wilderness quality being real and measurable, and Dr Catherine Pickering put forward techniques for rapidly assessing recreational impacts.

Dr Haydn Washington said that our anthropocentric and 'resourcist' world views are the key problem in all environmental conflict. An ecologically sustainable future depends on the adoption of ecocentric perspectives that recognise intrinsic value in nature. Phil Ingamells described the problems with national park planning in Victoria. Kym Cheatham (Ecotourism Australia) stressed that the tourists are still coming, motivated predominantly by nature, and we need to give them the best experiences – assisted by rigorous ecotourism certification.

Peter Cochrane (Parks Australia) was an enthusiast for the National Landscapes program and how it was building a strong alliance with tourism. Bob Conroy (NSW NPWS) outlined government plans for various new recreational developments in parks, industry partnerships and a revamped website, all aimed at re-asserting the value of parks to a changing community. Finally, ENGO speakers from around the country described what's been happening in their regions, and suggested some ways forward.

The discussions and workshop session drew some key threads and meanings from this diverse material. There was strong endorsement of more advocacy to re-assert the conservation values of parks, and the need to strengthen park planning and engagement across tourism and the broadest constituency - well-established and robust methods that tend to get overlooked when moneyed

interests and governments intervene. Regional, cross-tenure recreation planning also got a lot of support, so parks don't have to carry too much of the recreational load. The National Landscapes are one example, but perhaps marred by a narrow focus and power imbalances.

The 70-odd participants were a well-informed and enthusiastic bunch that engaged speakers with cogent questions and comments. Most were from the environment sector, and from NSW, and we failed to attract a good number of industry and government folk.

For the environment movement, the conference provided plenty of food for thought and a platform to develop a stronger and more focused position on tourism in protected areas. Whether this happens when the environment is besieged on all fronts, many of them arguably more threatening than tourism, remains to be seen.

But it could be considered that the dangers we face are all connected. Speakers from all sides noted that national parks and wilderness are more important now than ever before, and yet are also more threatened than ever. We are seeing a renewed assault on our wild places. If forests are to be open-cut, and fancy resorts and hunting allowed in national parks, then this points to a new materialism and a lack of community connection with nature and respect for wild places. The environment movement needs to consider how it responds to this challenge, and what role human activity in national parks and wilderness will play.

**6th National Wilderness Conference:**  
***Wilderness, tourism and national parks – taking stock and looking ahead***  
**Sydney, 21-23 September 2012**

## **Summary of Workshop Findings**

**Compiled by Ian Brown using notes from each workshop**

### **Workshop questions:**

*What should be the future of tourism in protected areas?*

- *What is the 'right' balance?*
- *How do we achieve it?*
- *What are the risks if we get it wrong?*

(all 6 workshops addressed the same questions)

#### **Balance**

- Is 'balance' is the right word?
- 'Balance' can be misleading as it cannot always be achieved and may not be appropriate, e.g. horseriding is not appropriate or sustainable in (most?) wilderness, recreational shooting is not appropriate, some infrastructure is not appropriate
- Activities/developments must be consistent with the 'place' and *all* of park's values – sustain and improve them
- Recognise parks are public domain – not for exclusive use
- Does tourism benefit biodiversity conservation?
- Note that only 1% of visits to NSW PAs are 'commercial'
- More resources to provide for 'ordinary' (non-commercial) visitors
- Encourage lower impact environmental and educational 'experiences' in PAs
- Better to have new buildings off park

#### **Achieving it**

##### **Principles**

- Emphasise intrinsic values of PAs, scientific evidence and precautionary principle
- Give at least equal (or more) emphasis to ecological sustainability over economic principles
- Accept some compromise between impact levels and benefits of visitation

##### **Planning**

- Regional planning across tenures
- Respect plans of management
- Robust, regional, consultative processes before developing plans of management
- Need to calibrate tourism with park-specific and region-specific values, through inclusive discussions
- Involve various other interests in management discussions: research/academic, indigenous, mental health, education, youth advocates, biodiversity advocates
- Systematic approach to identifying and conserving (and not developing) the highest priority sites

- Adaptive management plan - adapt as species move and knowledge improves
- More resources for impact studies and monitoring (allow adaptive management) - respond!
- Good zoning - use recreational opportunity spectrum
- Use facilities to reduce impacts
- Work closely with user groups
- Might need to limit numbers - permit systems

#### Advocacy

- Build public support for PA objectives
- Lobby for ecological management of PAs
- Create links with the health industry to promote lower impact/ecologically sustainable activities

#### Community engagement

- Engage with local communities, Landcare/Bushcare groups, schools, adult groups, families and grey nomads
- Strengthen role of NPW Advisory Council and local Advisory Committees
- Understand tourism viewpoints and impacts - work together for common objectives
- Promote tourism and job opportunities for indigenous peoples

#### Education

- Visitor education - minimal impact
- Use skilled volunteers to educate visitors, eg. campground hosts
- Use “friends” groups

#### Other

- Possibly devolve management to regional level to reduce political influence? (drawbacks)
- Depoliticise NP service – failure of govt?
- Well-designed facilities, tracks, etc

#### **Risks**

- Loss of biodiversity, localised extinctions
- Pest/pathogen invasion
- Erosion
- Entrenched activities become hard to stop (ie. to apply adaptive management)
- Reduced visitor enjoyment
- Safety issues
- Degradation of wilderness areas
- Loss of social values of interconnectedness with nature
- Cultural entrenchment of anthropocentric/resourceist world views
- Economic consequences
- Progressive pressure to expand development footprint and impacts
- Appropriation of public land
- Hidden costs of managing tourism development a drain on public purse and diverts funds from conservation
- Loss of public support for PAs (and credibility/budget for NP agency)

#### **Concerns in relation to tourism in PAs**

- Rights of nature to exist
- Health of the environment

## **An international perspective on tourism in national parks and protected areas.**

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### **Abstract**

National parks and other protected areas continue to grapple with the complexities of dual management mandates. Since the establishment of national parks one of the driving motivators in many parts of the world has been that these places provide opportunities for recreational activity and enjoyment by people. However, they are the major mechanism globally for the conservation of biodiversity and many parks have been established primarily for this purpose. Yet even within these areas tourism remains one of the activities permitted by management agencies. National parks have also traditionally received little funding to support conservation efforts and park budgets continue to decline. Consequently, for many nations tourism provides the foundations for their parks continued existence. National parks and tourism are therefore closely linked. The dependence on tourism and requirement for parks to become increasingly self sufficient is now a dominant feature in many countries, but what are the potential threats and opportunities associated with such land use in parks? I first review some of the principal threats to national parks arising from tourism (e.g. visitor use, infrastructure), and then place these in the context of potential benefits to parks. I present recent data on the importance of tourism revenue to parks and show how species conservation benefits from tourism to protected areas. I also explore other mechanisms that can deliver benefits and what strategies agencies are adopting to deal with these challenges globally.

**Keywords:** Conservation, threat, opportunity, benefit, recreation

## Introduction

National parks have been features of landscape use patterns for decades, although their specific purpose differs amongst regions. National parks management often differs depending on the emphasis placed on conservation versus the provision of recreational opportunities. Commonly national parks are of significant natural beauty and are frequently regarded as national icons established to protect representative examples of a nation's natural and cultural assets (landscapes). However, in some places the driving forces behind establishing parks was so they could be enjoyed by people and used for recreational purposes (Eagles *et al.* 2002). For others, these locations may not hold such value due to issues related to expulsion, dispossession of traditional rights to land and exclusion from parks (Naughton-Treves *et al.* 2005).

These examples represent a continuum of management objectives within national parks, with an underlying recreational focus in a dynamic socio-economic environment (McNeely 2005; Uddhammar 2006). The IUCN captures the essence of the variation in the purpose of parks, with six different categories ranging from Category I (strict protection – e.g. wilderness) to Category VI (sustainable use of natural resources – e.g. managed resource reserve). Those with dual mandates include Category II parks where management objectives focus on the protection of natural, scenic and cultural areas, maintain ecological functioning, exclude the exploitation of natural resources, consider the needs of indigenous communities, and provide visitor access while minimising impacts.

The multiplicity of management objectives often results in conflicts amongst the range of user groups and again the extremes are dominated by preservationist versus utilitarian philosophies (Wyman *et al.* 2011). It is widely acknowledged that national parks and other protected areas are critical for the continued conservation of global biodiversity (Watson *et al.* 2010), but these areas are not sufficient to stem ongoing declines in our natural resource base (Butchart *et al.* 2010; 2012; Hoffmann *et al.* 2010). Furthermore, as human populations expand, threats facing these parks increase. This places political pressure on parks to justify their continued existence, particularly in developing countries where social issues (e.g. health, education, provision of essential services etc.) carry greater weight than conservation. Even in developed nations the relative contributions to national conservation efforts is well

below allocations to social welfare, education, health, and defence. For example, in the 2012 national budget for Australia the national parks estate and environmental protection in general received only 1.1% of total budget allocations,. Globally, the economic benefit from protected areas far outweighs the funds diverted to protect these networks (reviewed by Buckley 2009).

National parks face increasing budget restrictions and arguments for them to become self-sufficient abound. Herein lies both opportunity and threat in that parks can support a range of land uses in addition to biodiversity conservation. One of these land use options is of course tourism in its various forms (e.g. mass tourism, nature-based tourism, ecotourism, responsible tourism, sustainable tourism).

Tourism is a major industry supporting the global economy and one of the principal activities within national parks. The nature-based or ecotourism sub-sector is significant, increasing demand for natural attractions in the majority of global destinations (Balmford *et al.* 2009). While the recreational value of national parks continues to increase, their relative contributions to biodiversity conservation have also escalated due to the ongoing loss and degradation of surrounding landscapes. Therefore tourism could have significantly greater impacts on biodiversity within national parks today than in the past.

Tourism threats within national parks and protected areas have been the subject of much scientific study and public scrutiny. Much of this work has investigated the impacts of visitors and tourism infrastructure on the natural environment (e.g. wildlife disturbance, campsites, track networks, human-wildlife conflict etc.) (Buckley 2004; Monz *et al.* 2010; Pickering and Hill 2007; Pickering 2010; Steven *et al.* 2012), but there is also a plethora of work investigating the visitor experience (e.g. enjoyment, overcrowding, user group conflicts) (Choi and Sirakaya 2006; McCool 2006; Coghlan 2012). Other factors that need to be considered when assessing tourism impacts include global tourism trends, changing politics and values. Park management agencies may have little control over impacts on park values or user group values of national parks as these may be directed by higher level decision-making. Furthermore, the commercialisation of tourism products (including the development

of tourism infrastructure) (Buckley 2009), and climate change impacts associated with travel and tourism also need to be quantified.

One of the central factors that affects the degree to which tourism may impact upon the natural values of parks is the type of tourism activity, the distribution of visitor use within the park, and the monitoring and management of visitor impacts (Castley *et al.* 2009; Monz *et al.* 2010). Buckley (2002) has previously presented a series of draft principles guiding tourism in protected areas and I do not attempt to expand on these here. Suffice to say that tourism activities need to be considered in the context of the core conservation objectives for the park, and the relative importance of aspects such as wilderness, biodiversity values as well as the intrinsic value of the landscape as a whole.

For many parks, even those with high visitation, extensive infrastructure nodes and networks of hardened tourism infrastructure, effective zonation and bans on inappropriate high impact activities can minimise impacts. For example, in Yosemite National Park in the USA some 95% of the park is zoned as wilderness while the bulk of tourism activities are concentrated in the central valley. The key message here is that regardless of the nature of tourism activities within national parks, once the decision to open the park to visitors is made there will be visitor impacts.

One of the primary threats associated with increasing tourism activities in national parks relates to the development of tourism infrastructure. This has been an issue for park management for decades (Fitzsimmons 1976; 1977), and is one of the ongoing areas of concern with Australian reserve networks. However, in other parts of the world (e.g. United States, Southern Africa, South America) tourism infrastructure in national parks is not uncommon (Wyman *et al* 2011). For example in the Kruger National Park, South Africa there are 13 main camps (all with variable types of camping and built accommodation facilities), five bushveld camps, two bush lodges and two overnight hides which had in excess of 900 000 bed nights sold in 2011/12 at 60% occupancy (J. Stevens, pers comm. 2012). In addition to these facilities that are operated by South African National Parks (SANParks) there are an additional nine luxury lodges that are operated by concessionaires. Of course such tourism



infrastructure does have impacts, but tourism to the Kruger National Parks and the revenue accruing from this is the backbone of financing SANParks operations.

Within national parks, park management agencies have embarked on strategies to award concession contracts to commercial entrepreneurs to provide a range of tourism services (Wyman *et al.* 2011). These range from outsourcing hospitality services (e.g. restaurants and souvenir shops), to providing alternative accommodation opportunities. Impacts associated with such concession developments can be managed and mitigated through the formulation of strict contractual requirements with concession operators. These requirements should relate not only to the financial returns that could accrue to the parks agencies but should also address environmental impacts, social development and constituency building (Pfueller *et al.* 2011; Wyman *et al.* 2011). Two of the key criteria for concessions within US National Parks are whether these are ‘necessary’ or ‘appropriate’. In this context ‘necessary’ relates to those operations that add value to existing tourism services, are not available nearby (e.g. in gateways), and provides a unique experience. ‘Appropriate’ developments are those that do not conflict with the fundamental parks management values and objectives. A central consideration with any potential commercial operator within a national park is that a standard contractual agreement is unlikely to be relevant in all cases. Each potential contract should be evaluated on a case by case basis to assess potential costs (both environmental and social costs) and benefits.

As stated previously park budgets are insufficient, but the revenue that tourism contributes to national park operations at a global scale is also highly variable. Park budgets for a number of countries rely heavily on tourism, primarily by charging entrance fees and associated costs for accommodation and tourism activities within parks. However, others receive relatively little by comparison (Bovarnick *et al.* 2010; Bruner *et al.* 2004; Mansourian and Dudley 2008). Generally developing nations have a greater dependence on tourism revenues than developed nations and this also makes these nations, and their national park systems, more vulnerable to fluctuations in the global tourism market. Revenues to parks are often not captured at a local level with funds being diverted to central government, or potentially even tourism operators. However, in cases where park management agencies are able to retain

revenue generated this can be important in funding conservation related activities, such as protected area expansion, anti-poaching, habitat rehabilitation etc.

More recently a global analysis of the contribution of tourism revenue to threatened species conservation has demonstrated that tourism revenues generated by parks protect significant proportions of global populations for a number of threatened vertebrates (mammals, frogs and birds) (Buckley *et al.* 2012; Morrison *et al.* 2012; Steven 2011). This is simply because significant sub-populations occur within these protected areas globally and tourism is fundamental to the ongoing protection of these landscapes. Without tourism these populations would be at a much greater risk than what they currently experience.

One of the additional benefits of tourism to national parks is the downstream benefits beyond the finite boundaries of many national parks. National parks are no longer managed in isolation adaptive management strategies that are more inclusive of myriad stakeholder groups. In some countries benefits accrue through the development of gateway communities supported by peripheral tourism developments (Bennett *et al.* 2012). In others tourism services provided within the national park provide employment opportunities for residents of local communities neighbouring parks in addition to local businesses benefiting from parks sourcing goods and services from the local area. Deriving tangible benefits from tourism activities within national parks can result in a stronger attitude to conservation among local communities (Liu *et al.* 2012; Snyman 2012), but this may be dependent on local and historical circumstances. This is an important aspect for many national parks in developing nations where communities were removed from their lands to facilitate the establishment of national parks.

Reconciliation efforts are currently underway in many countries where local communities were disposed of their traditional lands. As communities lay claim to these areas within national parks, tourism is one of the mechanisms being used to ensure that the land itself is retained for conservation while bringing financial and social development opportunities for these communities. Examples of these from South Africa include the Makuleke and Khomani San land claims that have seen the

development of tourism infrastructure in former national park lands that have been handed back to these communities (Uddhammar 2006).

Tourism to national parks has also resulted in the escalation of tourism enterprises outside national parks. Those with a nature-based or ecotourism emphasis can have complimentary conservation outcomes. For example, in some southern African countries the proliferation of private ecotourism destinations (e.g. private game reserves) has contributed to the large scale conversion of previous agricultural land to conservation land use (Castley 2010; Cousins *et al.* 2008).

The preceding overview has provided only a glimpse of the potential threats and opportunities arising from tourism within and surrounding national parks. It provides some global perspectives and examples to illustrate these points. In closing, the key message being conveyed is that regardless of the nature of tourism within national parks, these will have impacts. There are also a number of examples that demonstrate that tourism is critical to sustain conservation in some areas. The way forward for tourism in national parks is not clear cut and each opportunity requires a detailed individual assessment that considers the values, needs, costs and benefits to all stakeholders.

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# Travel Shouldn't Cost the Earth

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# ‘Driving Visitation To Australia Using Experience Themes’

Research travellers from 11 international markets and the domestic market.  
‘**Nature in Australia**’ and ‘**Australian Journeys**’ are the two experiences that are the most **motivating to travel to Australia**.

Also ranked as the most ‘**appealing, exciting and relevant.**’

*Tourism Australia, 2011*

**WHAT  
DOES  
WELL  
IN MY  
MARKET?**

CONCEPT RANKINGS	AUSTRALIA	NEW ZEALAND	US	UK	FRANCE	GERMANY	CHINA	SINGAPORE	INDIA	JAPAN	KOREA	MALAYSIA
												
Nature in Australia	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1
Australian Journeys	1	1	2	2	3	2	2	2	1	2	2	2
Aussie Coastal Lifestyle	3	2	3	4	5	4	3	3	3	3	3	3
Outback Australia	4	4	4	3	2	3	4	4	4	4	4	4
Aboriginal Australia	6	7	7	5	4	5	6	7	5	5	5	6
Australian Major Cities	7	5	6	6	6	7	7	5	6	7	7	5



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# OECD

*Ecotourism is travel undertaken to witness the unique natural or ecological quality of particular sites or regions, including the provision of services to facilitate such travel.*



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The bottom of the slide features a horizontal strip of four small images: a river flowing through a lush green forest, a red dirt road winding through a desert landscape, a close-up of an orange starfish on a sandy beach, and an aerial view of a vibrant blue coral reef.

# National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations Sustainable Tourism definitions:

- "First, do no harm."
- Protects its product-the destination..
- It conserves resources.
- It respects local culture and tradition.
- It aims for quality, not quantity.



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# The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)

*Ecotourism is:*

*"Responsible travel to natural areas that  
conserves the environment and improves  
the well-being of local people."*

(TIES, 1990)



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# Ecotourism Australia:

"Ecotourism is ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation"



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# Principles of Ecotourism:

Ecotourism is about uniting conservation,  
communities and sustainable travel.



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# The scope of ecotourism to finance national park conservation

**Source:** Bednar-Friedl, B., Behrens, D.A. and Getzner, M. (2012) Optimal Dynamic Control of Visitors and Endangered Species in a National Park. *Environmental and Resource Economics*.  
6 September, 2012.

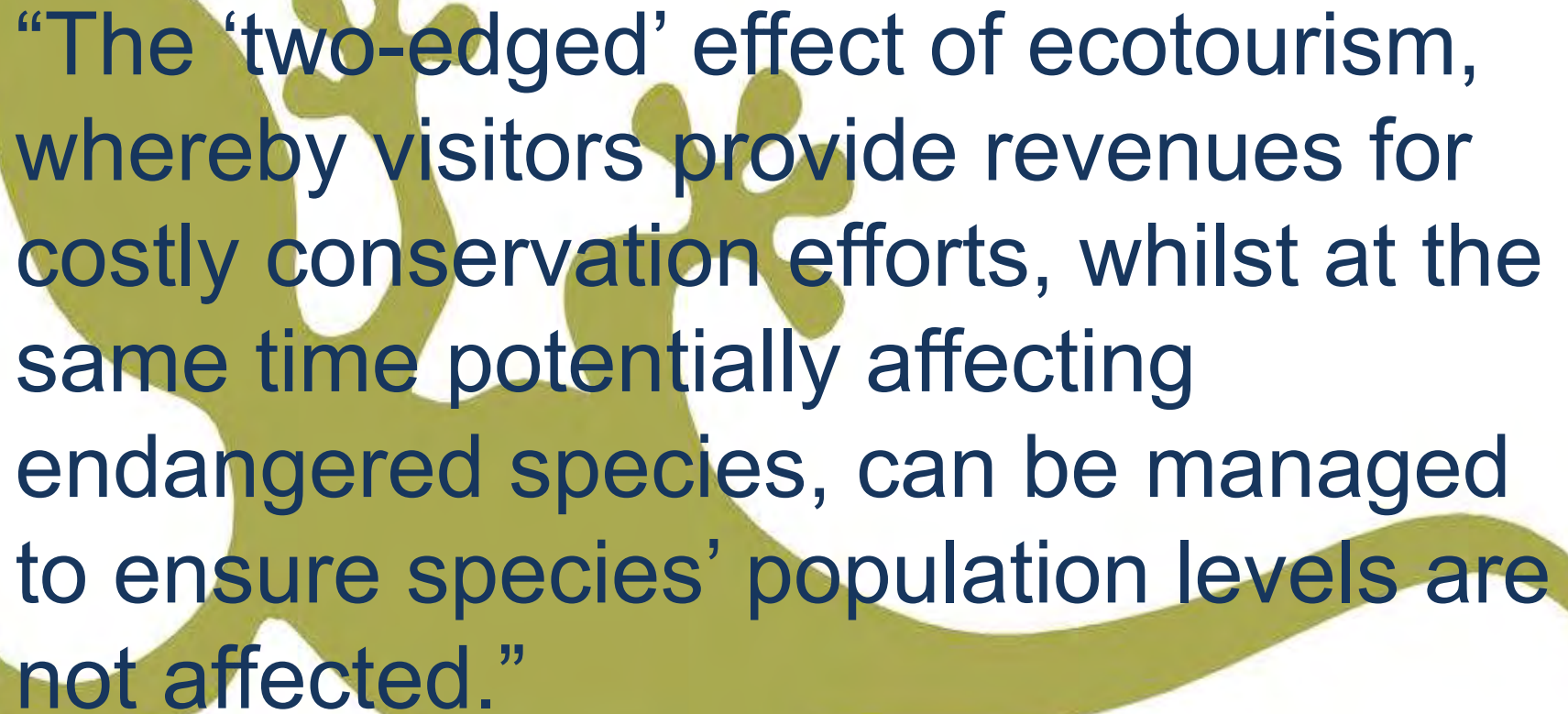
The study used a mathematical model to calculate the trade-off between ecotourism and conservation from the viewpoint of a park manager for the endangered rock partridge *Alectoris graeca saxatilis* in the Hohe Tauern national park, Austria. The partridge is a protected species and is unintentionally disturbed by visitors to the park, mainly hikers.

The model analysed how a national park manager can balance the money for conservation generated from visitors with disturbance to the rock partridge in order to ensure that the species is not negatively affected.



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“The ‘two-edged’ effect of ecotourism, whereby visitors provide revenues for costly conservation efforts, whilst at the same time potentially affecting endangered species, can be managed to ensure species’ population levels are not affected.”



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# ECO|Tourism

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Appreciation



Conservation



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# Our Programs



**ECO Certification**—for nature tourism



**Respecting Our Culture**—for all involving culture



**Climate Action Certification** – any tourism business

**EcoGuide Certification** – for individual tour guides



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# ECO Certification – 3 Levels



1. Nature Tourism



2. Ecotourism



3. Advanced Ecotourism



Australian Government

Great Barrier Reef  
Marine Park Authority

## Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) High Standard Tourism Programme

- Relies on independent certification to identify tourism operators as “High Standard”
- Recognises the Eco Certification Program (Ecotourism and Advanced Ecotourism levels of certification) as a certification scheme for the Marine Park
- Major benefit offered by the GBRMPA is an extended permit term of 15 years for tourism programme permits.



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*Working together today for a healthier Reef tomorrow...*



About Us

About the Reef

Outlook for the Reef

Visit the Reef

Our Partners

Zoning, Permits and Plans

## Our Partners

Home > Our Partners > Tourism partners > High standard tourism

> Traditional Owner connections to sea country

> Australian Government agencies

> Queensland Government agencies

> Reef Guardians

### High standard tourism

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) encourages tourism operations to adopt high standards for protection, presentation and partnership within the Marine Park. These standards enhance environmental protection, reef resilience and tourism sustainability.

The GBRMPA relies on independent certification to identify high standard operations. It recognises the [ECO Certification Program](#) operated by Ecotourism Australia as a certification scheme for the Marine Park.

Through the [ECO Certification Program](#), Ecotourism Australia identifies and monitors

SHARE



### Free Zoning Maps



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# Visit the Reef

[Home](#) > [Visit the Reef](#) > [Choosing a high standard tourism operation](#) > High standard tourism operations

> [Planning your visit](#)

> [Experiences on offer](#)

> [Great Barrier Reef National Landscape](#)

> [Sightings network](#)

▼ [Choosing a high standard tourism operation](#)

▼ [High standard tourism operations](#)

> [Responsible Reef Practices](#)

> [Moorings](#)

> [Visitor contributions](#)

> [Zoning](#)

## High standard tourism operations

The list of high standard tourism operations is based on the main area of operation – Port Douglas, Cairns, Townsville, the Whitsundays, Capricorn Coast and Reef wide.

### Far North

- [Lizard Island Resort](#)
- [Mike Ball Dive Expeditions](#)
- [Ocean Safari](#)
- [Spirit of Freedom](#)
- [Taka Dive Adventures](#)
- [Eye to Eye Marine Encounters](#)

### Port Douglas

- [Aristocat Reef Cruises](#)
- [Enterprise Charters](#)
- [Low Isles Sailaway](#)
- [Malaita Low Isles Cruises](#)



# Visit the Reef

[Home](#) > [Visit the Reef](#) > [Choosing a high standard tourism operation](#)

> [Planning your visit](#)

> [Experiences on offer](#)

> [Great Barrier Reef National Landscape](#)

> [Sightings network](#)

▼ [Choosing a high standard tourism operation](#)

▶ [High standard tourism operations](#)

> [Responsible Reef Practices](#)

> [Moorings](#)

> [Visitor contributions](#)

> [Zoning](#)

> [Plans of Management](#)

> [Site specific management](#)

## Choosing a high standard tourism operation

If you're looking to choose a tourism operator for your trip to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, consider selecting a high standard operator that are ecologically sustainable.

They also help to protect and present the Marine Park to a consistently high standard, and are recognised by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority for their good standards.

These operators are independently certified as high standard tourism operations by gaining the Ecotourism or Advanced Ecotourism levels of the Ecotourism Australia's ECO Certification Program.

Look for these logos:



Use our [interactive map](#) to find details of the certified high standard tourism operations or view a complete list of [high standard operators](#).

The GBRMPA's own [ReefHQ Aquarium](#), the National Education Centre for The Great



[www.ecotourism.org.au](http://www.ecotourism.org.au)



› Traditional Owner connections to sea country

› Australian Government agencies

› Queensland Government agencies

› Reef Guardians

› Commercial fishing industry

▼ **Tourism partners**

- ▶ High standard tourism
- ▶ Tackling climate change
- ▶ Eyes and Ears incident reporting
- ▶ Eye on the Reef Program

› Reef Advisory Committees

› Local Marine Advisory Committees

› Aquarium collection industry

## Tourism partners

The marine tourism industry is a key partner in the protection and management of the Great Barrier Reef. Tourism operators help enhance visitor experiences of the Reef and play an important role in protecting the amazing biodiversity that supports their industry.

Many tourism operators ensure their activities are best practice by following the [Responsible Reef Practices for tourism operators](#).

[High Standard Tourism Operators](#) voluntarily operate to a higher standard than required by legislation as part of their commitment to ecologically sustainable use. These operators are independently certified as meeting best practice standards for the key areas of protection, presentation and partnership.

As an iconic global destination, tourism operators are taking proactive action to [tackle climate change](#) to ensure the best outlook for the Great Barrier Reef into the future.

There are also many tourism operators situated across the Marine Park who regularly work in partnership with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to monitor the Reef.

- Tourism staff who are involved in the [Eye on the Reef Monitoring Program](#) are trained to monitor and record the health of the Reef. Scientists use this information for their research activities and Marine Park managers use it to identify areas requiring concentrated effort.
- Tourism staff assist with management of the Reef by reporting any interesting and unusual things they see in the Marine Park through the [Sightings Network](#)

In the face of an emerging outbreak of crown-of-thorns starfish, the Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators and individual operators are working with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority on [crown-of-thorns starfish](#) control activities in the Marine Park. The program is funded under the Australian Government's Caring for our Country program.



# Visit the Reef

[Home](#) > [Visit the Reef](#) > [Visitor contributions](#)

> [Planning your visit](#)

> [Experiences on offer](#)

> [Great Barrier Reef National Landscape](#)

> [Sightings network](#)

> [Choosing a high standard tourism operation](#)

> [Responsible Reef Practices](#)

> [Moorings](#)

▼ [Visitor contributions](#)

▶ [Visitor Trends](#)

> [Zoning](#)

> [Plans of Management](#)

## Visitor contributions

Tourism is a major industry along the coastline of the Great Barrier Reef and it contributes exponentially to both the Queensland and Australian economy. Up to 2 million visits are made each year to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park by visitors using a tourism operation. These visitors usually pay an [Environmental Management Charge](#) (EMC).

It is a way for visitors, to contribute to keeping the Great Barrier Reef great for future generations to enjoy.

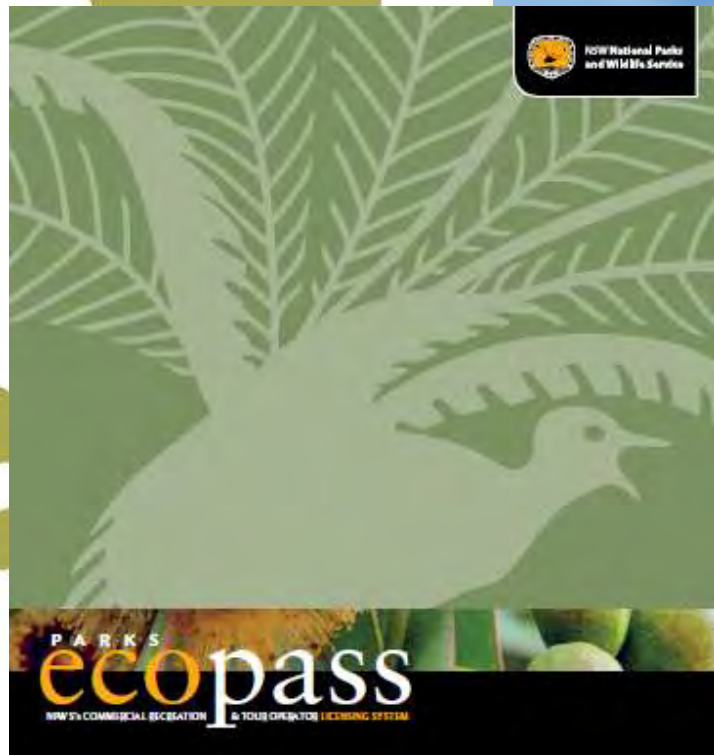
The funds received by the GBRMPA through the EMC are vitally important in the day-to-day management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

It is used to monitor, manage and improve the resilience of the Great Barrier Reef with the money applied across all aspects of Marine Park management including:

- Education and research
- Ranger patrols
- Site planning
- Public moorings
- Reef protection markers
- Information signs and maps.

The standard charge per person per day is \$3.50\*, however tourists spending less than three hours in the Marine Park are only charged \$2.75\* each.





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<b>State</b>	<b>Certification</b>	<b>Details</b>
<b>ACT</b>	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Under review</li></ul>
<b>NSW</b>	<b>ECO</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 3 year license – Nature, Ecotourism &amp; Advanced Ecotourism</li><li>• 10 Year Eco Pass – Advanced Ecotourism - extended 10 year permits are available through NSW National Parks.</li></ul>





<b>State</b>	<b>Certification</b>	<b>Details</b>
<b>NT</b>	<b>ECO &amp; ROC</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourism NT and Territory Discoveries will only support operators certified through one of their approved programs (includes ECO and ROC).</li> <li>• Kakadu Board of Management: From 1 January 2013, Tourism Accreditation Australia Limited (TAAL) programs (includes ECO &amp; ROC) – 3 year standard land-based permits.</li> </ul>

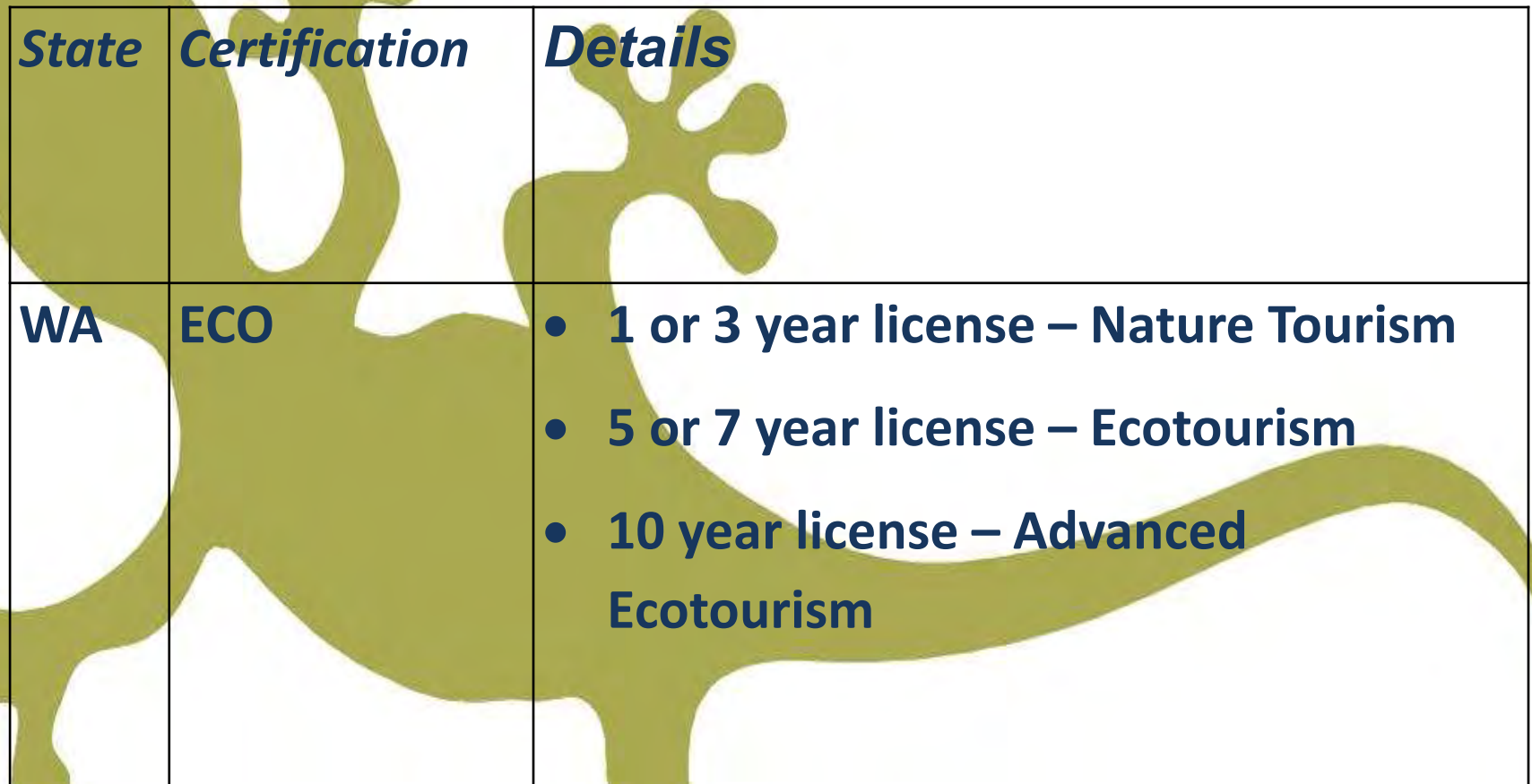


<b><i>State</i></b>	<b><i>Certification</i></b>	<b><i>Details</i></b>
<b>SA</b>	<b>ECO, ROC &amp; CA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• South Australian Tourism Industry Council (SATIC) assist with administering the ECO, ROC and CA programs.</li> <li>• 3 year Commercial Tour Operator License – Nature Tourism + Climate Action</li> <li>• 5 year Commercial Tour Operator License – Ecotourism + Advanced Ecotourism</li> </ul>
<b>TAS</b>	<b>-</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Just decided to add ECO certification at all levels as one of the recognised certification schemes</li> </ul>




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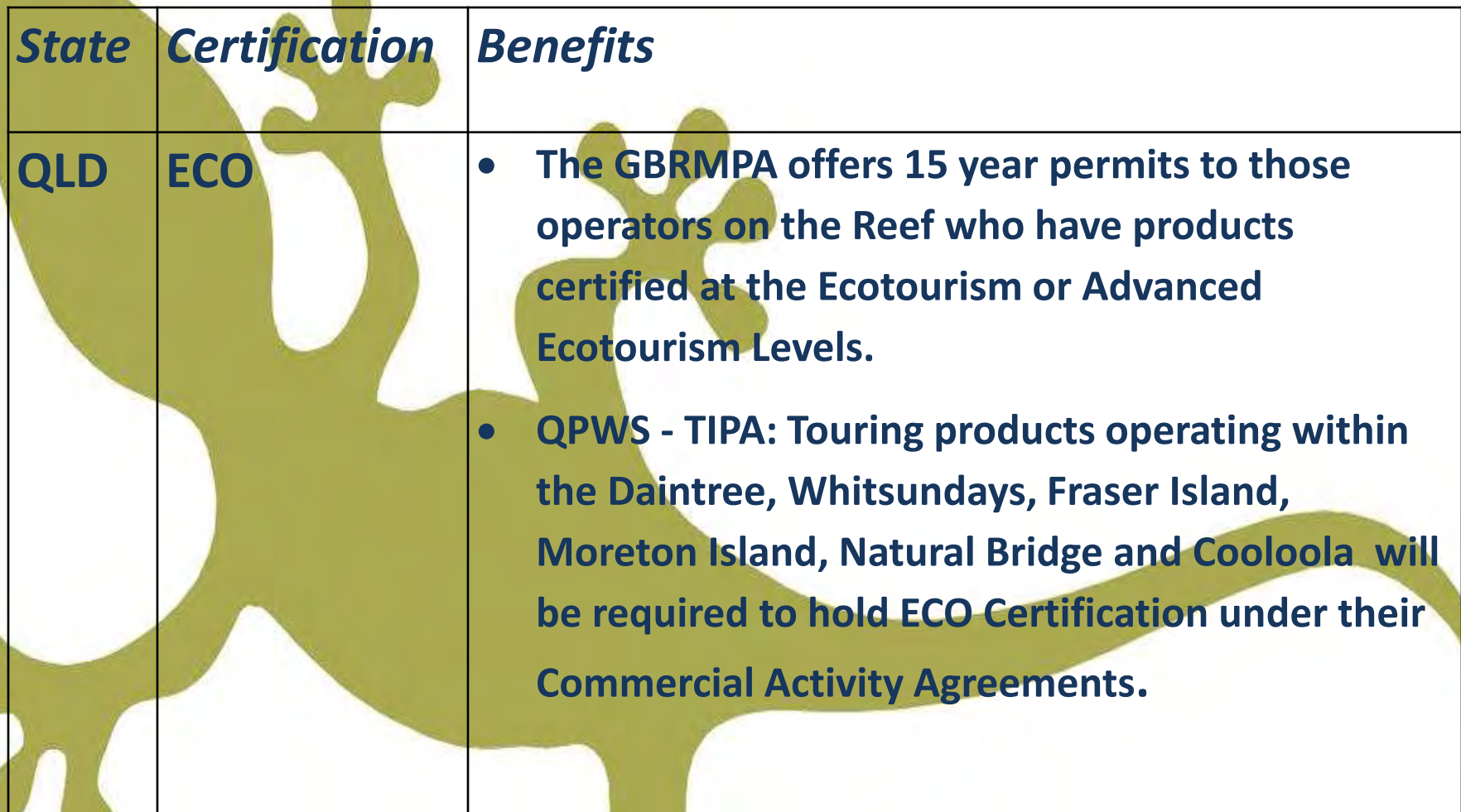




<b><i>State</i></b>	<b><i>Certification</i></b>	<b><i>Details</i></b>
<b>WA</b>	<b>ECO</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1 or 3 year license – Nature Tourism</li><li>• 5 or 7 year license – Ecotourism</li><li>• 10 year license – Advanced Ecotourism</li></ul>



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<b><i>State</i></b>	<b><i>Certification</i></b>	<b><i>Benefits</i></b>
<b>QLD</b>	<b>ECO</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The GBRMPA offers 15 year permits to those operators on the Reef who have products certified at the Ecotourism or Advanced Ecotourism Levels.</li><li>• QPWS - TIPA: Touring products operating within the Daintree, Whitsundays, Fraser Island, Moreton Island, Natural Bridge and Cooloola will be required to hold ECO Certification under their Commercial Activity Agreements.</li></ul>



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# What does the tourism industry think?

## Pros:

- Can reduce red tape
- Can lift the quality of the tourism operator
- Can remove 'rogue' operators
- Can create a partnership/a vision for shared custodianship
- Can add value to their business

## Cons:

- Can add process and regulatory burden
- Parks agencies can still fail to understand commercial realities of doing business
- Does not manage bad behaviour of independent park users



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# What does Ecotourism Australia think?

- Certification can assist the Park Managers in ensuring the best operators (carry the same values as well as operate properly) are getting access
- Assist Park Managers in compliance management
- Not all the certification schemes recognised have strong environmental component particularly in conservation and interpretation
- Like to see all PAMs use permitting and certification/ accreditation to build partnerships in custodianship with ecotourism operators



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# Jeju Declaration : IUCN World Conservation Congress, September 2012

15. We must support the effective and equitable governance of nature's use at all relevant levels: stewardship of natural resources by indigenous peoples, integrated management of protected areas and natural resources, and national and international decision making for sustainable development.



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We are in this together!

Thank you!



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The bottom of the slide features a horizontal strip of four small, square images. From left to right: a tropical beach with white sand and turquoise water; a red dirt road winding through a dry, hilly landscape; a close-up of an orange starfish on a sandy surface; and a view of a coral reef with various shades of blue and green.

# 21 years of Ecotourism in Australia

Kym Cheatham  
Chief Executive Officer  
Ecotourism Australia Limited



[www.ecotourism.org.au](http://www.ecotourism.org.au)





# Background of Ecotourism Australia

Formed following Australia's first ecotourism conference in 1991

Non-profit, non-government organisation

Peak national body for the nature-based & cultural tourism industry



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# Current global trends and challenges



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**January 5th, 2010**

## **What will be the Top 5 Travel Trends in 2010?**

**Adventure and luxury travel website iExplore predicts**

- 1.It's All About Value
- 2.Ecotourism Here to Stay.
- 3.Baby Boomers Taking Experiential Trips.
- 4.Travel: Not a Game of Risk
- 5.Unique and Customized Itineraries.



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# ‘Driving Visitation To Australia Using Experience Themes’

Research travellers from 11 international markets and the domestic market.  
‘**Nature in Australia**’ and ‘**Australian Journeys**’ are the two experiences that are the most **motivating to travel to Australia**.

Also ranked as the most ‘**appealing, exciting and relevant.**’

*Tourism Australia, 2011*

**WHAT  
DOES  
WELL  
IN MY  
MARKET?**


CONCEPT RANKINGS	AUSTRALIA	NEW ZEALAND	US	UK	FRANCE	GERMANY	CHINA	SINGAPORE	INDIA	JAPAN	KOREA	MALAYSIA
												
Nature in Australia	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1
Australian Journeys	1	1	2	2	3	2	2	2	1	2	2	2
Aussie Coastal Lifestyle	3	2	3	4	5	4	3	3	3	3	3	3
Outback Australia	4	4	4	3	2	3	4	4	4	4	4	4
Aboriginal Australia	6	7	7	5	4	5	6	7	5	5	5	6
Australian Major Cities	7	5	6	6	6	7	7	5	6	7	7	5



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***“Most tourism in natural areas today is not ecotourism and is not therefore, sustainable. Ecotourism can be distinguished from nature tourism by its emphasis on conservation, education, traveler responsibility and active community participation.”***

**The Nature Conservancy**



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# *Ecotourism greenwashing*

***'Eco' and 'eco-lodges' have become buzzwords used by both terrific organisations dedicated to conservation and benefitting local people, and those seeking to exploit its marketing potential for economic gain with little or no regard for destinations.***

Justin Francis, [responsibletravel.com](http://responsibletravel.com)



[www.ecotourism.org.au](http://www.ecotourism.org.au)



# Current Environment

Australia's dependency on Nature Tourism

Age of the Responsible Traveller

Living up to Expectations

Good business sense



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# Our Programs



**ECO Certification**—for nature tourism



**Respecting Our Culture**—for all involving culture



**Climate Action Certification** – any tourism business

**EcoGuide Certification** – for individual tour guides



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# How it Works

- Guidance to know what is best practice
- Practical criteria to implement
- Independent assessment and recognition
- Logo for travellers to identify green businesses



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# ECO Certification

The **ECO Certification Program** was been developed in 1996 to address the need to identify genuine ecotourism operators in Australia.

Ecotourism Certification provides an assurance that a certified product is backed by a commitment to best practice ecological sustainability, natural area management and the provision of quality ecotourism experiences.



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# 10 Principles

**1. Business Management & Operational Planning**

**2. Responsible Marketing**

**3. Customer Satisfaction**

**Business**

**4. Natural Area Focus/Indigenous Culture Focus**

**5. Environmental Sustainability**

**Environmental**

**6. Climate Action**

**7. Interpretation & Education**

**8. Contribution to Conservation**

**9. Working with Local Communities**

**Social &  
Cultural**

**10. Cultural Respect & Sensitivity**

# ECO Certification – 3 Levels



## 1. Nature Tourism

Business Management  
Environmental Criteria



## 2. Ecotourism

Business Management  
Environmental Criteria  
Social/Cultural Responsibilities



## 3. Advanced Ecotourism

Business Management  
Environmental Criteria  
Social/Cultural Responsibilities



# Assessing and Auditing

- ✓ Independent assessors
- ✓ Independent auditors
- ✓ Full qualifications and experience mandatory
- ✓ Audit every 3 years



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The Green Travel Guide  
Australia 2013

RRP \$39.95

otourism.org.au



LEVEL EXPERIENCES IN AUSTRALIA

**THE BEST GREEN TRAVEL EXPERIENCES IN AUSTRALIA**

**ecoguide**  
**AUSTRALIA**  
**CERTIFIED**  
**GUIDE**

**climate**  
**Action**  
**CERTIFICATION**

**ecotourism.org.au**

**ROC**  
Responsible Outdoor Certification



Climate Action  
CERTIFICATION  
www.ecotourism.org.au  
ECO  
TOUR  
AUSTRALIA



Respecting Our Culture  
**ROC**



**Holiday-makers and travellers**  
... be able to judge the efforts  
... to reduce  
... footprint of their  
... experiences with  
... *certification.*

**Identified** experiences  
ons, tours, transport,  
and venues.



for Action Business [www.madguyz.com.au](http://www.madguyz.com.au)  
or [www.madguyz.com.au](http://www.madguyz.com.au)



**Lady Elliot Island  
Queensland**

## Australia's Landscapes

acular collection  
re's finest work

Australia's national parks, places of cultural, and spiritual significance include World Heritage-listed iconic national parks. Landscapes are a collection of Australia's most unique and remarkable experiences, each offering opportunities to learn about the environment, to contribute to conservation and to connect with communities. We invite you to follow the beaten track and immerse yourself in our most beautiful and inspiring natural wonders.

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About  Edit

Eurotours Australia was formed in 1991 as an incorporated non-profit orgn...

Show





**TRAVELFOREVER**  
GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE TOURISM COUNCIL

# Global Sustainable Tourism Council

*Working together for the universal  
adoption of sustainable tourism principles*

United Nations Foundation, United Nations World Tourism  
Organisation, United Nations Environment Program plus other  
global bodies including Ecotourism Australia



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**TRAVELFOREVER**  
GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE TOURISM COUNCIL

## 4 'Pillars'

1. Demonstrate effective sustainable management.
2. Maximize social and economic benefits to the local community and minimize negative impacts.
3. Maximize benefits to cultural heritage and minimize negative impacts.
4. Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts.



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**TRAVELFOREVER**  
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## 11 CERTIFICATION STANDARDS RECOGNISED DECEMBER 2011

1. ***Ecotourism Certification, Ecotourism Australia***
2. ***Advanced Ecotourism Certification, Ecotourism Australia***
3. *Bundesministerium für Land - und Forstwirtschaft, Umwelt und Wasserwirtschaft (BMLFUW)'s Austrian Ecolabel for Tourism (Österreichisches Umweltzeichen)*
4. *Costa Rica Tourist Board (ICT)'s Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST)*
5. *Ecotourism Ireland's Ecotourism Ireland Label*
6. *European Ecotourism Knowledge Network's European Ecotourism Labelling Standard (EETLS)*
7. *Fair Trade in Tourism for South Africa (FTTSA)*
8. *Instituto de Turismo Responsable's Biosphere Hotels*
9. *Japan Ecolodge Association's Environmentally sustainable accommodations standard*
10. *Rainforest Alliance's Standard for Tourism Operations*
11. *Sustainable Travel International's Sustainable Tourism Eco-Certification Program (STEP)*



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# **National Tourism Accreditation Framework - TOURISM QUALITY COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA -**

*Department of Resources Energy and Tourism*

**Launched 3 April 2011**

**Approved programs ECO Certification, Respecting Our  
Culture (ROC) Certification**



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# Who wins?

**For Operators**

**the tools to change  
marketing advantage  
continuous improvement**

**For Tourists**

**easy identification  
guilt-free holiday  
Increased awareness**

**For the Environment**

**conservation  
preservation**



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***Certification provides an excellent framework to help you improve your business operations, achieve more sustainable goals and deliver a better customer experience. It is an ongoing partner that helps you maintain a better business and help create a better world.***

Christopher Warren

Proprietor, Crystal Creek Meadows, April 2011

Winners of:

- Ecotourism Australia Climate Action Award 2010
- Australian Tourism Qantas Award for Excellence in Sustainable Tourism 2009



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***Eco Certification not only helped us formalise our practices, but also provided an excellent baseline to measure continued improvements, as well as helping to create realistic performance targets for the future.***

Tony Baker  
CEO  
Quicksilver Cruises



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***To be honest, we were relieved when we finished the application! It took months.***

***The interpretation we are now delivering to our clients has improved as has our staff training and documentation.***

Bernard Heimann,  
Managing Director  
Maxi Action, June 2006



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The bottom of the slide features a horizontal strip of four small images. From left to right: a beach with turquoise water and a white pier; a red dirt path leading through a landscape; a close-up of an orange starfish on a sandy surface; and a view of a coral reef under clear blue water.



Optimising  
Eco Wonders

Cairns, Australia  
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[www.ecolodgesaustralia.com.au](http://www.ecolodgesaustralia.com.au)

[www.globaleco.com.au](http://www.globaleco.com.au)

# Thank you!



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## Tourism in National Parks - the Australian scene

Peter Cochrane

6<sup>th</sup> National Wilderness Conference  
University of Technology Sydney

22 September 2012

I would also like to acknowledge traditional owners of the land on which we meet, and their elders past and present.

Peter Prineas this morning said the issue is not about tourism in national parks, it's about tourism development in national parks. I don't agree. There are much bigger questions than just developments in parks.

Protected areas have never been so important - firstly in conserving biodiversity - which is disappearing at an increasingly alarming rate, including inside national parks.

They have never been so important in providing essential ecological services - water, clean air, catchment protection, natural carbon stores, natural buffers against natural disasters.

They have never been so important in providing for current and future generations, places for learning, physical and spiritual replenishment, and experiencing the wonder, power and fragility of nature.

But protected areas have never faced such great challenges:

- funding;
- people with the skills and capacity to manage the growing diversity of issues;
- declining support and visitation which of course translates fairly directly into social and political support;
- growing alienation of youth and populations more generally from nature through urbanisation, technology and the allure of competing, easy and socially attractive alternative uses of time;
- from illegal activities such as logging, poaching, land clearing;
- and of course from invasive species and climate change.

The challenge in front of us is actually about society - our societies - and in particular decision-makers and opinion leaders, understanding and appreciating how vital a functioning natural world is to our economy, to their own wellbeing, and to that of future generations. And of course ultimately the challenge for all of us, or enough of us, is behaving and acting to conserve enough of the remaining natural world and its effective functioning to secure the future of life on this wonderful planet.

This is not just about wilderness or tourism developments. It's about nature and human contact and interaction with nature. It's a battle for the hearts and minds of this and future generations.

This is a hot topic for park agencies worldwide.

What are we doing about this?

We are actively collaborating and sharing our thinking, lessons, failures and successes, and innovations between park agencies. We have some key areas of focus.

Firstly on health and well being.

Contact and interaction with nature has well-established physical and mental health benefits.

Reaching deeper into communities, particularly younger generations, to get a greater cross section of society to engage with, experience and value parks has a range of environmental, social and economic benefits.

We are collaborating with interested segments of the health sector to build the evidence base. Some of you may have participated in the Healthy Parks Healthy People conference a couple of years ago in Melbourne - a brilliant initiative and of growing international interest and application.

Secondly we are working on the economic arguments - both direct and indirect benefits to regional and national economies from the expenditure by park agencies, and from the associated visitor economy that is based on visitation to parks. Increasingly there is work on the economic value of ecosystem services, still largely unpriced and therefore undervalued. The emerging carbon economy is also an area of great potential and interest.

And thirdly we are beginning to look at social issues - how different parts of society, for example from different cultural backgrounds, use and view parks. How can we realign what we do to attract more diverse visitors, and educate them, or at least give them a taste for the natural world? How can we bring more families into parks? Early experiences after all are a critical influence on future behaviour and activity.

So to tourism, or more importantly to visitors – who are the ones who get the direct engagement in and with nature, and of course nature as experienced through protected areas.

In common with most park agencies globally we are keen to reverse a widespread and chronic decline in visitation and to do so, we need to reach out to much newer and wider audiences.

As a park agency with the mission 'the conservation and appreciation of Commonwealth reserves' Parks Australia has, among its priorities, a major focus on visitors and the visitor experience. This led us, among other reasons, to develop the National Landscapes partnership with Tourism Australia.

We approached Tourism Australia over six years ago, in part to try to defuse an unproductive public contest between conservation and tourism, and to enlist the tourism sector to support parks rather than criticise their management and managers.

Nature after all is the primary, and consistent, compelling factor attracting visitors to Australia across all our primary international visitor markets.

We began to learn the language of tourism; we adopted Tourism Australia's target market - the experience seeker. We discovered that this market segment represents, in many respects, the ideal park visitor.

We set out to articulate and elaborate the argument that nature-based tourism depends on natural assets, and therefore for self-interest, the tourism sector should support measures that protect this asset base.

We also took a landscape approach, in part, as we say, to make Australia digestible to the international visitor. With some 10000 protected areas, our national park system (I use the term loosely) doesn't provide a particularly useful guide to the best, most unique and characteristically Australian nature-based experiences.

So we suggested aggregating these up, into large regional landscapes. A deliberate element of this approach was to aim to attract visitors to, and disperse them across, a broad region, using the key iconic parks to craft the key messages about these regions and the experiences they offered, but not so much that the parks had to become the sole focus of visitation or developments, such as accommodation and other hard infrastructure.

A key criterion was engagement in what became the National Landscape program, was to build and sustain a broad constituency of support - including park and tourism agencies, at state and regional levels, local governments, conservation groups, tourism operators, local business, development corporations etc.

One of the exciting achievements of the program for me, has been the feedback from many participants to the effect that this is the first time they have all been in the same room together talking about what makes their region special, what it is about their environment that attracts visitors, and what they need to do, not only to attract more people to stay longer, but to also protect what they have because they better appreciate what a unique offering they have.

I want to turn briefly to what is happening in the states and territories. There is no doubt that protected areas everywhere are under increasing pressure – from human use, invasive species, and climate change.

Clearly there are some important issues being aired, such as what are appropriate uses of areas that are primarily managed for biodiversity conservation.

The most prominent political discourse now not so much around setting aside more areas for conservation, but the uses of the existing conservation estate.

I don't think this is a bad thing of itself, however it does require intelligent engagement in these debates.

These issues provide an opportunity for articulating the case for why these areas have been set aside, why conservation is important, and how the increasingly complex task of managing these areas should be best achieved.

It's imperative that we improve public awareness and understanding that all of our futures depend on nature and, increasingly, on how well we manage this responsibility. We must



however build the constituency of support for conservation through practical experience. The tourism sector is a critical first port of call.

We must look to how public discourse is conducted and the media through which influenced is generated and noticed.

I have been intrigued by the super trawler issue, and the critical role played by social media in generating outrage and political response. This is an important pointer to the future.

However unless campaigns like these are, at their heart, motivated by a widely held emotional connection to the issue involved, and in particular to personal experience with and love of nature, I suspect they may be ephemeral and ineffective in redirecting and sustaining public, and private, investment in protecting nature.

Thank you.

## **6<sup>th</sup> NATIONAL WILDERNESS CONFERENCE 2012**

**When: Sunday, 23 September 2012**

**Where: University of Technology, Sydney**

**Time: 9:00 – 10:15**

Presentation – Bob Conroy A/Head of National Parks and Wildlife

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

I would like to acknowledge and pay my respects to the Traditional Owners and Elders, past, present and future, of the land on which we meet the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation.

I would also like to acknowledge and sincerely thank the many groups represented at this conference who have worked tirelessly over many, many years to lobby and provide support for our wonderful system of parks and reserves and wilderness areas in NSW.

I would also like to thank the conference organisers for offering me the opportunity to talk to you today and to open the second day of this conference.

The theme of the conference, **'Wilderness, tourism and national parks: taking stock and looking ahead'**, resonates with our vision for our national parks – that by engaging with those across the full spectrum of park users we will be in the best possible position to create meaningful, memorable experiences that will ensure greater connection between people and our wonderful parks and natural spaces and help build a stronger constituency for conservation..

### **OPPORTUNITIES FOR TOURISM IN NATURE**

With more than 860 parks and reserves in NSW sampling a range of ecosystems including sub-tropical, warm and cool temperate rainforests tall open forests, mallee, myall and brigalow woodlands, grasslands, coastal heath and wetlands and iconic river red gum forests, the opportunities for nature-based visitation to parks, both for recreation and tourism, are both diverse and extensive.

Around 9% of NSW is protected through the extensive network of national parks and reserves, including more than 40% of the state's coastline. These areas provide visitors with a range of activities from bushwalking, picnicking, touring, kayaking, horse-riding and camping to more adventurous outdoor pursuits like mountain bike riding, abseiling and canyoning.

Nearly 2 million hectares have now been declared as wilderness in NSW, there are 51 wilderness areas within 44 parks and reserves representing nearly 30% of the total protected area system. These wilderness areas represent a broad range of environments including Mutawintji NP in the far west, the Snowy Mountains and Nandewar Ranges, the Great Dividing Range and the coast and its hinterland. There are also 6 declared wild rivers in NSW representing more than 10,000kms of waterways which together with wilderness areas provide opportunities for solitude and self-reliant recreation.

As mentioned earlier this wonderful system of parks, reserves and wilderness areas would not exist without the passion and commitment of many visionary people over the last 150 years including people like Miles and Milo Dunphy, Allen Strom, Eccleston Du Faur, Marie Byles, Paddy Pallin and conservation groups such as the NCC, NPA, the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife and the Colong Foundation for Wilderness and this needs to be duly acknowledged.

The NSW parks system receives nearly 35 million domestic visits each year, and nearly 3 million international visitors to the state incorporate a visit to a protected area while they are here.

Our research tells us people are motivated to participate in outdoor recreation for many reasons, such as health and fitness, or the chance to escape, to socialise, to do something different, challenging or fun. Sometimes it's simply being able to appreciate the beauty of natural settings.

This diversity within protected areas means they also play an important role in supporting regional tourism, and in turn contributing to local economies across NSW and the delivery of the Government's NSW 2021 targets for encouraging more people to participate in recreational activities. The National Park system has long invested in visitor facilities, with more than:

- 660 lookouts;
- 750 picnic sites;
- 2,500km of walking tracks;
- 470 campgrounds;
- 70 short term holiday accommodation buildings and
- about \$74 million annual expenditure on park infrastructure and visitor facilities to name but a few features.

A key challenge for protected area managers, and we are not alone in this, is ensuring the planning process for visitor facilities is both robust and sustainable and that visitation does not incrementally degrade the important values that exist within the park.

There is no denying that nature-based tourism is considered to have the greatest potential to assist growth in domestic and international tourism in Australia. 3 in 5 international visitors participate in nature based tourism and in 2010 international visitors spent \$14.6 billion in NSW.

There is clear research that shows our national parks provide a wide range of inspiring experiences that appeal to domestic and international tourists alike.

In considering a key theme of this conference, responding to the demand for more access and development of national parks - it is important to consider what makes a good outdoor recreation experience?

## **BENEFITS OF RECREATION IN NATURE**

Being in nature is good for you. More and more research is telling us that access to nature and parks plays a vital role in our health and wellbeing. More than that, contact with nature has been shown to boost immunity to disease, enhance our concentration and productivity, and promote healing.

There is evidence that nature has positive effects on blood pressure, cholesterol, outlook on life and stress levels. It provides people with an opportunity to unwind from the day to day stresses of contemporary living.

For children in particular, nature engagement and play can help with cognitive development, and aid in the prevention of issues that are on the rise such as childhood obesity, diabetes and depression.

Our parks offer a critical setting for the promotion of healthy lifestyles and the creation of wellbeing. Outdoor recreation in our parks plays an invaluable role in helping people to access nature – and these health benefits – in a safe and sustainable way. It also helps visitors to appreciate, understand and enjoy our parks.

Through fostering appreciation, we can encourage a sense of connection to nature, and long-term support for our parks to ensure they remain relevant and protected for this and future generations to experience and enjoy.



The challenge and opportunity is to ensure that in creating memorable and meaningful nature-based experiences, we continue to ensure the conservation of our natural and cultural heritage while supporting sustainability in the recreation and tourism industry.

## **WE HAVE A NEW APPROACH**

We're leading the way in balancing the conservation of our natural assets, with new and engaging ways to attract and welcome visitors to our parks for recreation and enjoyment. This approach applies to all visitors, be they there as a family, tourists visiting friends and family or participating in a commercial tour. Our approach is to

- Address both supply and demand;
- Develop new and revitalise existing experiences;
- Implement considered marketing to reach visitors through the right channels and with the right messages;
- Strengthen our partnerships with both industry and other government agencies and land managers to deliver cross tenure experiences; and
- Introduce new vigour in the business feasibility and revenue we attribute to on-park activities.

Our track record in recent years demonstrates our commitment to this new approach. It's also testament to the strong partnerships we have developed with the outdoor recreation industry for the development and delivery of quality nature-based experiences.

There's a lot happening across the state. We're working hard to improve sustainable access to our national parks – for example through our new strategies for Sustainable Mountain Biking and horse riding, and a range of new and exciting experiences in our National Landscapes and Riverina regions.

## **A NEW STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE MOUNTAIN BIKING**

In October last year, Minister Parker launched the NPWS Sustainable Mountain Biking Strategy following extensive consultation with a wide range of community, industry and government stakeholders. The Strategy balances the need to provide for this increasingly popular and healthy recreational activity and continuing to protect our national parks.

It helps guide the provision of high quality mountain biking experiences that riders of all experience levels can enjoy, while ensuring they are provided where it is appropriate and safe. The Strategy outlines what planning requirements are needed for any new trails and specifies track design requirements.

It also encourages continued partnerships between the NSW Government and mountain biking groups to improve and maintain mountain biking tracks and adopts a code of conduct so all visitors can enjoy their time in our parks.

We're working with other land managers and local communities to identify future opportunities in the most appropriate sites and create linkages between existing trails that improve the diversity of the offer, quality of the ride and sustainability of the track.

In addition to the opening of a new network of dedicated mountain biking tracks in Glenrock State Conservation Area near Newcastle last October, work is already underway on a number of priority projects, including:

- A new cross-country loop track in the Murray Valley Regional and National Parks – to be completed by the end of June 2013;
- A new multi-use loop track in Livingstone National Park, which officially opened on 14 September 2012;

- A new shared mountain bike and walking track linking Thredbo Resort, Perisher Ski Tube and Lake Crackenback Resort in Kosciuszko National Park – this is already partially open and will be fully completed by end June 2015; and
- Enhancement of the Woodford-Oaks mountain bike single track in the Blue Mountains National Park, which will be completed by the end of 2014.

Planning is also well underway for:

- A new mountain bike track system in a national park in Northern Sydney; and
- Enhancement of mountain bike tracks in Yellomundee Regional Park, an important recreational facility for Western Sydney.

We're also creating opportunities for the community to participate or try out cycling in our national parks. Last October, we hosted community cycling events in 13 parks, including mountain bike competitions, cycling tours, family cycling days and volunteer maintenance open days. We're planning to do the same again this year, with a further series of community events in parks across the State in October.

### **A NEW STRATEGY FOR HORSE RIDING**

We're currently developing a set of Strategic Directions for Horse Riding in NSW National Parks and Reserves, to guide the identification and development of new horse riding opportunities in our parks in the years ahead.

The Strategic Directions have been developed in consultation with peak horse riding bodies and the NPW Advisory Council. They balance the provision of new horse riding opportunities with ensuring park values are protected. They identify 'priority regions' in NSW that will be the key focus of new horse riding opportunities.

They also outline a process for working with local horse riders to provide improved and sustainable horse riding experiences in these regions. The Strategic Directions also propose the establishment of a wilderness pilot, to trial horse riding for a three year period. The pilot program will be managed through a best practice, adaptive management strategy.

A final version of the Strategic Directions will be released later this year.

### **NEW RECREATION EXPERIENCES IN OUR NATIONAL LANDSCAPES**

NSW is home to more National Landscapes than any other state in Australia – spanning the spectacular natural environments of coast, bush, alpine and rainforest:

- Australia's Coastal Wilderness
- Blue Mountains
- Australian Alps and
- Green Cauldron.

We're also in the process of adding another magnificent landscape to the portfolio, with a National Landscape focused on the natural wonders of Sydney Harbour and surrounds expected to be officially announced later this year.

Each of our National Landscapes offers a special opportunity to identify, implement and promote new and exciting recreation experiences in partnership with other land managers and the recreation and tourism industries.

In the Australian Alps, we're working with Destination NSW, Forests NSW, Catchments and Lands and NSW Fisheries, to position the Snowy Mountains region as a recreation hub and peak destination for experiences such as hiking, horse-riding, mountain biking, kayaking, canoeing, fishing, skiing and special events. The project aligns with the Australian Alps National Landscape positioning of "Challenge" and identifies opportunities for cross-tenure cooperation.

In Australia's Coastal Wilderness on the far south coast of NSW, we're working with the private sector to develop a truly world-class nature and cultural experience along the spectacular, 30-kilometre, multi-day Light to Light Walk in Ben Boyd National Park. It includes guided experiences with low impact accommodation facilities along this magnificent coastal walk, as well as the adaptive reuse of the heritage-listed lighthouse station buildings.

### **NEW OPPORTUNITIES IN OUR RIVER RED GUM REGIONS**

We're also working on new and exciting recreation opportunities in our magnificent River Red Gum settings of the Riverina and Murray, where 100,000 hectares of River Red Gum reserves have been set aside for protection and the enjoyment of locals and visitors.

Earlier this year, a Nature Tourism Action Plan was launched for the region – a significant achievement following extensive consultation with local government, regional tourism stakeholders and the communities of the Riverina.

The Plan identifies a range of opportunities for people to access and enjoy the magnificent forests, rivers and wetlands of the area.

The Government has committed more than \$2 million in funding this financial year for the planning and development of tourism and visitor projects such as:

- a multi-day adventure trail including kayaking, mountain biking and bush walking;
- investigating a high ropes tree top adventure park;
- a cross-border canoe trail of the Murray, and kayak and canoe tours of the Murrumbidgee River and Yanga Lake wetland;
- feasibility of an Eco Lodge to be operated under a lease arrangement;
- revitalisation of existing picnic grounds, boat access areas, and camping grounds and walking tracks within each of the visitor nodes.

This year we licensed the first tour operator for this region, Riverina Experience, and positive media has helped promote this fledgling business which is delivering activities consistent with the Nature Tourism Action Plan.

Projects such as these will help to ensure these magnificent forests remain a productive part of the local economy while also conserving them for the enjoyment of future generations.

### **CONNECTING VIA THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE**

In developing new initiatives and experiences for nature-based recreation, we're also re-shaping the way we communicate with our visitors. We're turning digital technology to our advantage with exciting and innovative new approaches to the promotion of our natural and cultural heritage, and the benefits of nature for recreation and healthy lifestyles.



We've recently launched two key initiatives in the digital space: a children's program called WilderQuest, and a new visitor website.

## **WILDERQUEST**

We're laying the foundations early for healthy lifestyles and a life-long conversation with nature. In August this year, NPWS hosted international expert and speaker on the connections between people and nature, Richard Louv.

Louv's research identifies the critical role that nature plays in our overall health and wellbeing; he points to correlations between rising rates of poor health in children with what he coins as 'nature-deficit disorder'.

Louv's work was one of the driving forces behind our exciting children's program, WilderQuest, launched in April this year by the Minister.

WilderQuest uses the latest technologies to encourage children to learn through play, and inspire them and their families to get out and experience nature in a fun and safe way, providing a first step into nature for many. It does this through integrating a feature-rich, interactive website and an iPad app with real, in-nature experiences.

We recognise that if we are going to reach the children of today and capture their attention, we need to do so using the technology that they like and use daily. Many of you will remember the impact of Skippy on inspiring a love for the Australia bush and its wildlife. We hope that Ranger Sam and Pug will catch on just as well.

The website has already attracted more than 10,000 unique visits, while the WilderQuest app was named Apple *iPad app of the Week* in early April and has achieved a 4.5 out of 5 star rating.

It was also ranked at number 1 in the education category for iPad apps in Australia, was downloaded more than 11,000 times in the first two weeks since launch and continues to perform strongly.

The long-term aspiration of WilderQuest is to build life-long connections between people and nature, ultimately encouraging healthy, outdoor lifestyles, more time spent in nature and inspiring the next generation to pursue nature based careers.

A core element of the program is the delivery of special WilderQuest Discovery tours, which will be run in national parks during school holiday periods. These activities help to create an important link between the virtual and the real, and make nature experiences and recreation an easy choice for families.

We've also recently released WilderQuest Education, offering classroom resources for teachers, like smart board technology, linking NPWS Discovery for Schools activities to specifically developed WilderQuest's online resources.

## **IMPROVING OUR PROMOTION OF PARKS AND EXPERIENCES ONLINE**

We're putting significant effort into improving the way we tell visitors about the sustainable recreation opportunities they can have in NSW's national parks, and making it easier for them to access information about those experiences.

Roll-out of our new visitor-focused national parks website is well underway and delivers on the Government's election commitment. Phase one launched in May and offers vastly improved

functionality, an inspirational new design, engaging new content, integrated social media, stunning images and video, and online booking technology.

This is an ongoing project; more great content and functionality will be coming online in carefully planned phases.

In phase two, we'll be adding even more parks, bringing the total to 180, with more fantastic 'see and do' content, improved maps, and more links to commercial tour operators, opportunities to book accommodation and camping online. Phase two is due for delivery in December this year.

We're also promoting the accommodation and experiences provided by our recreation and tourism partners. We're working with them to help make their businesses a success while supporting regional economies.

Ultimately, we want people to know about the vast array of nature and cultural experiences on their doorstep, including our stunning wilderness areas and to encourage safe and healthy, outdoor lifestyles.

## **WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH INDUSTRY**

We're committed to working in partnership with local communities, recreation and tourism operators, and transport and accommodation providers to inspire and motivate people to visit our national parks.

And to encouraging growth and delivery of experiences in a sustainable way. Outdoor recreation activities take place in many national parks and wilderness areas across the state. There is great value in these natural spaces as places for recreation and diversity of experience and so they must be protected and respected.

We value the importance of recreation and adventure activities in our parks and wilderness areas, and the positive role recreation and tour operators play in ensuring that visitors have an inspiring, safe and enjoyable experience.

And we look to high operating standards – delivered through our Parks Eco Pass licensing system and through the standards, guidelines and accreditations developed by and for the industry – to protect both the environment and continued growth in the sector.

National Parks recognises there are great challenges in getting consistency and agreement in the development of these guidelines, but we do believe these standards play a role in the delivery of outdoor adventure activities such as abseiling, kayaking and mountain biking.

## **NPWS' PARKS ECO PASS**

There are currently about 180 licensed recreation and tour operators taking visitors into parks to participate in a wide range of activities from bushwalking, abseiling, cycling, surfing and kayaking to cultural, educational and eco tours.

In line with the Government's commitment to reducing red tape for businesses seeking partnerships with us, we are currently developing a rapid assessment process for Parks Eco Pass licence applications for low-risk activities or locations.

There will be standard operating conditions and operators will be able to better engage with parks through an enhanced online environment.

There are still a number of sensitive environments or high-risk activities where a more rigorous assessment will continue to be necessary.

We aim to have the reforms complete by the end of this year, ready to roll out in the first half of 2013.

Park visitation including tourism is an embedded expectation into the future and is reflected across the spectrum of National Park's operations.

Recently, the National Parks and Wildlife Act was amended to incorporate tourism and visitors, and give greater clarity in relation to private sector provision of experiences and facilities.

Increasing opportunities to visit and enjoy parks is a NPWS Strategic Goal, we have developed a Sustainable Tourism Action Plan and included specific consideration of visitation and experience development in Regional Operations Plans.

NPWS has a Tourism and Partnerships Branch and, most recently has established the Business Reform and Development Branch.

With so much going on it is appropriate to ask – what is being done to ensure the protection of the key element that makes our protected areas so special – the natural environment. How can we manage for both conservation and visitation?

## **TOOLS FOR MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION OF PARKS**

A key question is what information do we need to manage for these outcomes, how do we use it and how does it influence our park planning. I would like to mention a few examples of the range of tools in place to ensure the long term protection of protected areas.

Plans of management are key statutory documents which among other things determine the provision of park use opportunities, including for wilderness areas. This is a statutory requirement. Currently 83% of the reserve system is currently covered by an exhibited and adopted plan of management.

Plans of management are guided by the provisions of the NPW Act and by a number of other planning and policy instruments including the NPWS Living Parks Strategy which is a framework for the management of sustainable and culturally appropriate visitation, by National Landscape strategies, horse riding and mountain biking strategies, and by state and regional tourism plans.

In addition, a State of the Parks survey is conducted every three years on all NPWS reserves. Visitation and the impact of visitation on park values is specifically considered. Through State of the Parks, park managers:

- Estimate visitor numbers
- Identify where visitor behaviours or numbers are threatening park values
- Assess the effectiveness of current visitor management in terms of meeting visitor expectations and impacts on park values.

State of the parks data is available to all NPWS staff and its information is a key contributor to the development and review of Branch Operations Plans, allocation of NPWS resources and budget and performance benchmarking over time

NPWS has in place a range of corporate policies to further support the objective of Acts we administer. Included in this is the Policy for Commercial Recreation and Tourism in Wilderness.

This policy provides a tight framework of what commercial use of wilderness is appropriate including limiting group sized to a maximum of 15 and outlining how overnight experiences are to be managed in the form of camping or utilising existing buildings or structures.

Within this example, it is acknowledged that a one-size fits all set of rules is unable to accommodate differing levels of environmental sensitivity across landscapes and activities, and

specifically focuses on visitors associated with commercial tours who across all national parks and reserves represent less than 1% of total visitation.

On 14 February 2011 specific sustainability assessment criteria were adopted by NPWS for consideration in issuing leases or licences under Section 151B of the NPW Act,

These guidelines, which are available to the public on the OEH website, inform the assessment and decision making process and apply equally to proposals made by the public and those of a similar kind to be undertaken by NPWS.

These guidelines have been customised to further support those preparing sustainability assessments, and include various templates that reflect both the proposed scale of use and nature of the associated structures and facilities.

## **CONCLUSION**

Visitors and tourists participating in outdoor recreation make an enormous contribution to the economic vibrancy of communities – it has transformed from an option to an essential through the delivery of undeniable economic, social and health benefits.

Protected areas play a cornerstone role in meeting the community's desire for outdoor recreation through the provision of well maintained, well considered and engaging experiences - bringing communities and visitors into nature and natural spaces.

Maintaining the balance between access and conservation is undoubtedly a challenge. I'm not shying away from the fact that NPWS collects fees from some users and budgets for this. Revenue of over \$27million was collected from park user fees in 2011-12, all of which is retained by NPWS for reinvestment in the protected area network.

Opportunities to generate revenue will continue to play an important role decision making, in particular as NSW moves to an environment of tighter financial constraints, and growing demands for resources across all agencies to deliver Government priorities.

Key priorities for NPWS are the delivery of the expectations of NSW 2021 through:

- continuing to contribute to economic outcomes for regional NSW
- being customer focused and involving communities in decision making
- reducing red tape and
- implementing the reform agenda as proposed by the Visitor Economy Taskforce

By working in partnership, the Government and the vast community of park users can continue to deliver motivating, meaningful experiences in our national parks, encouraging healthy lifestyles and life-long connections with nature and meeting the promise that protected areas will be preserved for the enjoyment of future generations.

Thank you.



Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> December, 2007

The Project Officer  
Kosciuszko National Park  
Draft Horse Management Plan  
National Parks and Wildlife Service  
PO Box 472  
Tumut NSW 2720

Dear Sir/Madam,

### **Submission on the draft horse management plan 2007**

The Colong Foundation supports increased efforts to control feral horses in Kosciuszko National Park. The Foundation is concerned that many areas of the park are being degraded by feral horses.

The reader of the draft report is confused when the term wild horse is used 15 times and feral horse is mentioned 22 times in the text. The reader may conclude that wild horses and feral horses are different types of horse populations.

The Colong Foundation would prefer that feral horse is used consistently throughout the report and the term 'wild horse' be used inside inverted commas when quoted. The term 'wild horse' can confuse horses with native wildlife. As you would appreciate, horses are feral in Kosciuszko National Park because they comprise populations arising from domestic stock that have gone wild.

### **Horse damage is an observable reality**

The Colong Foundation disagrees with the Snowy Mountains Horse Riders and the Snowy Mountains Bush Users Group regarding maintenance of feral horse populations in national parks. Bush Users Group state in a well circulated form letter submission that feral horses cause little damage to the natural environment. Damage to the park by feral horses, however, is well documented and referenced in the draft report. Any community group position that does not accommodate good evidence or provide other evidence supporting their position should be considered unrealistic.

The BUG form letter states that the damage to the park is temporary and short term in nature. These claims ignores the biological and arithmetic facts presented in the draft report. Feral horse populations will continue to grow until a point of dynamic equilibrium with the natural environment. Before that point is reached, however, the park will be degraded by overgrazing, followed by soil erosion and weed infestation.

Last Christmas I visited the Goobragandra Wilderness and was greatly concerned by the damage that feral horses cause to this area. The attached letter by Mr and Ms Gye to the former Minister for the Environment, the Hon Bob Debus, sought greater efforts for the removal of feral horses from the park. The letter further documents recent observations on the extent of the damage to that area.

### **Sustained horse populations are not consistent with the Act or management plan**

Some pro-horse activists believe that the park should be well stocked with horses. The adjoining Long Plain area is also subject to protests from those who believe that cattle drives should continue in the park. These objections when taken together describe a form of park management that benefits exotic animals before native wildlife.

The Colong Foundation is disappointed by the BUG form letter submission. The form letter seeks to gain public support for the view that National Parks and Wildlife would control feral horses for purposes other than the limitation of environmental impacts. Such campaigning is offensive to the traditions and professionalism of the Service. These sorts of attacks are unfair because public servants cannot defend themselves from unjustified criticisms of this nature.

By casting of aspersions and attacks on the Service, the pro-horse lobby apparently seek to discredit the recommendations of the draft horse plan and win support for an alternative vision. The pro-horse vision seeks to establish an agreed level of a feral horses in the national park. Such a policy position would turn pest species management, and the primary conservation purpose of national parks, on its head.

The draft plan's horse exclusion from key areas policy should be unobjectionable to the pro-horse lobby, and come as no surprise at all considering policy directions contained in the plan of management. The draft plan will be laborious and resource demanding to implement. The policy offers no adequate means to protect the natural values in remote areas such as in the Pilot Wilderness. For the pro-horse lobby to claim that the Service is not accommodating their concerns after this expensive and exhausting planning effort is also unfair and unreasonable.

The *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* defines the management principles for a national park. These include the conservation of biodiversity, the maintenance of ecosystem function, the protection of geological and geomorphological features and natural phenomena and the maintenance of natural landscapes. The maintenance of feral horse populations would be contrary to the above management principle that would need amendment before the BUGs vision could proceed.

The Kosciuszko National Park Plan of Management calls for the exclusion of horses from key areas and for a Feral Horse Management Plan to be prepared for the whole of the Park. The plan of management would also need amendment before a specified level of feral horses could be maintained in the park.

The Colong Foundation considers the draft policy in the feral horse plan to be the absolute minimum acceptable level of management response, due to the damage that horses cause. The draft plan only partly satisfies the management principles of the Act. It would be better for the draft plan to have adopted a draft plan that sought to eradicate feral horses as an ultimate goal. Such a goal could help limit the geographic spread of the Equine influenza virus, and so should not be considered as an anti-horse policy.

There are also public safety risks from not eradicating feral horses. Failure to eradicate feral horses near public roads would leave DECC open to a litigation risk when there is a serious vehicle collision with a feral horse.

It would appear that the horse lobby is using the age-old ploy of describing the draft policy as a political loss to their interests when it is a significant gain. The draft horse plan is a victory for the pro-horse lobby as feral horses would not be eradicated through its implementation across the entire park. The pro-horse lobby have presented this victory as a loss apparently to establish the grounds for its next round of park management compromises. The Service should not grant concessions in the face of such misleading manipulation of public opinion. If they give in, then a race to the bottom commences amongst the self interested who want parks managed for their group's benefit, instead of for nature.

### **Improve option assessment**

The draft management plan states that feral horse management is not new. The draft plan, however, fails by not making best use of the reasoned assessment of the horse control methods presented. The draft plan should select by due process the preferred suite of management actions based on the available evidence.

An adequately detailed draft plan should propose what is going to happen and where, or at the very least specify a narrow range of options and show how they are to be deployed across the park.

The risk of not selecting preferred methods is that more expensive and less humane methods could be chosen that do not reduce population levels.

The current proposed efforts may fall into the more expensive and less humane category if major improvements to current practice are not adopted. Only 206 horses were captured from 2002 to 2006 and even the 64 horses captures in the 2006/2007 summer would not reduce horse populations.

Multiplying the conservative population growth estimate (8 per cent) by the population (about 1715) gives conservative annual increase 137 horses. The actual growth is probably more like 200 horses as horse numbers in remoter wilderness areas were omitted from the estimate and the park horse populations would be on the rapid rebound to fill the core habitat after wildfire.

The draft management plan should not use methods proven to be ineffective in Kosciuszko National Park and in Guy Fawkes National Parks.

The inadequacy of the current methods should be clearly stated in the horse management plan. The general community and decision makers should consider that existing methods are ineffective and through the narrative of the report be encouraged to select better options.

There is a lot of hot air generated over 'adaptive management', but the advocates of this form of management must ensure strong and effective feedback loops to decision makers and the community.

The DECC should communicate the intended effective actions of the horse plan. It should explain that aerial shooting is the most effective, cost efficient and humane method of controlling feral horses. It should seek to bring public opinion around to supporting more effective management by providing considered information.

Ms Fiona McCrossin explained that 'A minimum on-park population, which must approach zero, should be achieved in a humane way, in the shortest possible period of time. The method should recognise the positions of other agencies and independent scientific bodies. This method is aerial shooting.' These conclusions are as relevant today as they were in 2003. The community should be presented with the considered information by Dr Tony English that supports the feral horse eradication.

The Foundation is pleased that the draft plan has well explained that land managers of many different political backgrounds regularly shoot horses in all parts of the continent to control feral horse numbers. The report also explains that many the graziers who once used the High Country also shot horses when horse numbers competed with stock. Such remarks help remind the pro-horse lobby that they are viewing their cultural memories through rose coloured glasses.

### **Evaluation of management options**

As described above, the current approaches are unlikely to stop horse numbers increasing. Although the draft plan does not specify future control strategies, these strategies need to be constantly assessed to determine success.

The evaluation methods specified in the draft report should focus on the key issue; whether the management will reduce horse numbers in key areas. The draft plan is wrong to consider

the number of horses removed that as a measure of success. Rather success is achieved with the annual rate of horse removal (from death and export) is greater than the increase (from birth rate and immigration). This is basic information would not be obtained by implementing the draft plan.

The draft feral horse policy, unfortunately, must have a high probability of failure because monitoring does not collect information on population dynamics. A successful control strategy should be defined as one that reduces the feral horse population to zero in the shortest time, subject to all the other policy constraints. Monitoring should be constructed to reflect this policy framework.

The unintended goal of the draft policy may well be the maintenance, or slow increase, in horse herds at great expense, perhaps for the benefit of only the contractors and the pro-horse lobby. (This was the experience at Guy Fawkes National Park, where ineffective mustering was undertaken for many years.)

Monitoring as currently presented in the draft plan considers all aspects of the program as equal factors. The essential monitoring test for any control approach should be against the population reduction goal but on this key consideration the draft plan is silent.

Monitoring should also extend to the description and mapping of both the damage and core feral horse habitat areas. Quantitative records of core habitat and disturbance areas should not be for research partnerships alone, but part of the management plan evaluation program. Such mapping should inform the pest control task by identification of priority action areas. I am sure such evaluation would be done, even if it is not formalised. The feral horse management plan should develop a transparent program that develops a useful data base to inform future actions, as does effective fire management currently.

#### **Key area strategy should be tested as a priority**

The biggest risk with the key area approach is that the immigration of feral horses from other core habitat areas outside chosen key areas may remain high. If immigration into key areas remains high, then the key area strategy in the park plan of management would fail. Such population dynamics should be monitored to understand the on-ground situation. It may be necessary to review key area selection and co-operation with off-park management to insure that feral horse immigration and emmigration is reduced.

The draft plan is does not test the recommended actions against the goal of reducing feral horse populations (in key areas or across the park). This omission will make it impossible to ascertain, at some future date, whether the draft horse plan has meet the policy directions in the park plan of management. It is also not possible to determine whether the key area strategy is the best approach or whether some other approach focussed on core feral horse habitat strategy would be better.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the 2007 draft feral horse management plan. A copy of Ms McCrossin's 2003 submission on the Wild Horse Management Plan is also attached for its excellent presentation of the case for reinstating humane aerial shooting of feral horses across the entire park.

Sincerely,

Keith Muir  
Director



# Countering the attack on NSW wilderness and protected areas

by Keith Muir<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

*Since the 2006 National Wilderness Conference there has been significant progress in wilderness, wild river and national park reservation in NSW. When the O'Farrell Government was swept to power in March 2011, however, the Shooters and Fishers Party strengthened their hold on the balance of power in the Legislative Council, with dire consequences for the natural environment, tourism and national parks.*

*The wild places of New South Wales, like those in Victoria and Queensland, are suffering from a redistribution of political power toward those whose interests are resource extraction and property development. This change is producing deregulation, euphemistically called 'cutting green tape'.*

*The O'Farrell Government has opened NSW national parks to hunting and is cutting public involvement in planning and focusing on growth. Proposals for logging and grazing in national parks are even being discussed in an Upper House Inquiry into public lands.*

*Nature is under attack. Conservationists need to redouble efforts to passionately re-engage with the public to support the enduring values of national parks and inspire community-based defence of natural areas.*

## Introduction

Until very recently, the most remarkable thing about NSW protected areas was the dedication of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to nature-focused reserve management. There were only a few notable exceptions, such as the ski villages in Kosciuszko National Park, the historic infrastructure at Hill End Historic site and Royal National Park, and more recently, visitor facilities in Ku-ring-gai Chase and Sydney Harbour National Parks.

National parks in NSW are publicly owned and government managed but are increasingly expected to pay their way. These changes are due to diminishing government funding, and changes to legislation and policy that regulate visitor use.

NSW national parks were recently estimated to receive over 38 million visits each year (Morgan, R., 2009) by tourists and members of the local community. All who visited parks were recreating, enjoying and learning about important cultural and natural heritage. Nearly all visitors were at least gaining a sense of the wild and experiencing some elements of unspoilt nature.

To support such levels of visitation at least a billion dollars had been invested over many decades in low-key facilities such as walking tracks, camping areas, lookouts and picnic areas. These facilities were maintained and enhanced through an annual Government expenditure of over \$70 million dollars (DECCW, 11/11/2010). Environment groups support continued improvement of these low-key facilities for national park visitors and better promotion to encourage appropriate use, combined with

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off-park accommodation and other services which will support local economies while reducing adverse visitation impacts on national parks.

Since the Fifth National Wilderness Conference in 2006 significant progress has been made toward nature conservation goals. The Mummel Gulf, Yengo and Curacabundi wilderness areas and forty six wilderness additions to existing areas have been declared over a total area of 228,459 hectares. . Two wild rivers have been created within national parks, the Colo and the Grose Rivers, bringing the total to six protected. And on May 19, 2010 a new 107,000 hectare river red gum reserve system was proclaimed in the Riverina, a bioregion that was previously almost devoid of reserves. One other significant advance is important to the Colong Foundation, the reservation of the iconic Mugii Murumban State Conservation Area in the Gardens of Stone region. This 3,650 hectare reserve was gazetted after a twenty-five year conservation effort and was secured just before the previous Labor administration was swept from office in March last year.

The progress towards enhancing ecologically sustainable visitor management of parks and reserves over the last six years, on the other hand, has been unimpressive. Despite major policy changes and recent efforts to make national park management more visitor-focused, including providing for on-park accommodation and the needs of higher-impact users, park managers report that visitation is declining.

Since the O'Farrell Government was swept to power in NSW on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2011, the Dharawal and Berowra Valley reserves have been upgraded to national park status, but with the Shooters and Fishers Party holding the balance of power in the Legislative Council, the new agenda for "appropriate" visitor use is becoming distorted in unexpected directions.

Nearly everyone recognises the need for society to achieve ecological sustainability, but then goes on to deny, often in the same breath, that their actions have much of an impact upon the planet. This is the case whether a massive tourist corporation or avid cycling and bushwalking enthusiasts are involved. This denial of impact may have contributed to the poor compromises made by Environment Ministers in the last six years on visitor use policy. When it comes to the crunch, our political representatives generally tend to put our needs before those of nature, even in national parks. So is this recent policy trend, the move away from nature-focused park management, paradoxically the reason for the decline in park visitation or is it associated with recent legislative action taken by the Shooters and Fishers Party?

Although we may be reluctant to admit it openly, the majority of us know that to protect wilderness and national parks society must place the needs of nature before our wishes for private coastal eco-resorts, glamour camping, motor sport rallies, horse riding, off-road trail blazing and hunting. This surely has been our very first baby step toward ecological sustainability. Yet it was made way back in 1934, when the Blue Gum Forest was saved from the axe by a fund raising campaign during the Great Depression. So why now, after all these years, are we in NSW turning our back on the national park vision of nature-focused management?

### **Gruen Planet – can national parks be bought and sold?**

The reversal of policy direction arose not unsurprisingly from the well-heeled end of the tourism lobby. The Tourism and Transport Forum (TTF) using some deft marketing techniques sought to influence politicians and establish a policy segue for building 'eco-resorts' in national parks. Certain park user groups are also following their political leads to gain more access to remote national parks and wilderness, regardless of the damage they may cause.

Parks have been misrepresented by these users and the TTF as “locked up” and that view accords with pro-business Government policies to double tourism by 2020. The subsequent policy changes, however, have done little to increase high-quality, heritage-focused park visitation which benefits most by means of well thought out, low-key facilities made available to all.

Market theory that carves up national parks into various customer sectors to maximise product and sales is an inappropriate approach to visitor management. Policy makers who wish to ensure social equity of access and visitor use remains nature-focused need to think carefully about applying user pays models to national parks (Hughes and Carlsen, 2011).

### **Misapplication of the Private-Public Partnership Model**

A 2008 tourist report from John O’Neil, the Chairman of Events NSW, commissioned by the then Premier, Morris Iemma, recommended that national parks should ‘sustain and enhance assets instead of focusing on protecting them from people’. This heavily-loaded directive for park managers to become less risk averse was followed up with more detailed recommendations from a Taskforce on Tourism and National Parks. This Taskforce proposed more commercial facilities in and access to national parks. This commercial policy framework was then adopted by the NSW Government in December 2008.

These park development policies were based, at least in part, on the false premise that privately funded high-end facilities can increase park visitation. At that time, discussions with the then NPWS revealed a second rationale for increased park development. These development policies would generate revenue for conservation programs through the program of private development (NPWS Tourism and Partnerships Branch head, pers. comm., 14 July 2009). These two arguments were actually those used by the powerful TTF, but even their extensive research had not produced a single Australian example of any on-park tourism operation providing significant net revenue to support conservation.

The TTF’s version of ‘nature tourism’ is always that something has to be built. Their constituency is big developers, transport operators and hotel chains, as underscored by their annual membership fee of \$27,000 per company. The TTF are the lobby behind a multi-state push to ‘open up’ National Parks for tourist development, under the guise of this being good for conservation. The TTF have won the first round, amending park legislation in several states to allow for high-end, high-impact development in protected areas. This campaign agenda is a demonstration of TTF’s political power, but one that has no apparent economic or other rational basis. Even the lease agreement for the 800-bed Snowy Mountains ski resort in Perisher that was approved in 2009 hasn’t gone ahead. The developer of this large resort wasn’t allowed under the development agreement to sell off the apartments as real estate, and without that huge cash boost, the proposal wasn’t economically viable.

Professor Ralf Buckley, director of the International Centre for Ecotourism Research at Griffith University, believes that current evidence disproves TTF’s private-public partnership theory. His data reveals that “proposals for upmarket exclusive tourist accommodation within NSW national parks do not fit any of the successful models. The closest analogues are historic hotels in US national parks, and recent lodges in South African national parks, and neither of these have made net contributions to conservation or parks budgets” (4 March, 2009).

The potential contribution of ‘high yield’ resort visitors to grow park visitation is inconsequential as the great bulk of park visitors are not interested in paying premium prices. Even the modest cabin-style accommodation facilities at Merry Beach in Murrumbidgee National Park are not guaranteed sufficient patronage for financial success. The owners of this resort, Mariner Leisure Management Pty Limited, were placed into receivership in May 2009, being unable to pay back a \$30 million loan to the

Commonwealth Bank. At about the same time, the Merry Beach resort was alienated from the national park, turning the public's wonderful national park beach front into a very valuable private asset that would have been very handy for a failed company seeking to restart itself.

The *laissez faire* approach to on-park tourism is further explained by TRC Tourism. According to this international tourism consultancy company, eco-resort investors will not respond well if sites in national parks are chosen for them. Investors prefer to drive site selection and the chosen site needs to have the "wow factor". Further, protected natural and cultural areas that are part of an established tourism destination or tourism corridor will be far more appealing to investors (TRC, September 2012). In other words, private interests want to be allowed to pick the eyes out of national parks and don't like the identification of investor ready sites, as applied in Western Australian national parks, and beginning to be applied to NSW parks under the national landscapes program (DECCW, 2011).

Such "exploit the honey-pot" logic led to a holiday cabins proposal on the mid-north coast at Trial Bay, just behind the fore dune in the Arakoon State Conservation Area and near to a successful off-park eco-resort. The owner of the off-park Trial Bay Eco Tourist Park, Tony Mayne, believes his eco-resort would have been "cannibalised" by building resorts in the nearby park. The Nationals Leader, Andrew Stoner said that "Instead of focusing on protecting the unique coastal environment at South West Rocks, the Wildlife Service has been directed to become a revenue-raising venture". For a cabin development to spoil the most beautiful part of a coastal park and destroy a nearby resort owner's profits on private land is, as Mr Stoner said, a "crazy" idea (Sun-Herald, 7/6/2009, pg 30).

If business can muscle in on a successful trade and get a "wow factor" site in a park, and the Government is agreeable, then yes, investors can successfully develop tourist accommodation inside national parks. This sort of shameful deal-making degrades parks and compromises local tourism.

In reference to the NSW Planning Green Paper (2012), the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) warned that the proposed flexible planning laws could breed corruption. Such laws would be a perfect fit with private resort proposals that virtually alienate state-controlled coastal national park land. ICAC warned that introducing such flexibility into the planning system "will create a corruption risk, especially when combined with the potential for proponents to obtain huge windfall profits through obtaining an approval" (SMH, 3/10/2012, pg 4).

Long-standing Australian Conservation Foundation Councillor, Dr Geoff Mosley (2011) believes that Governments are easy targets for park development interests because of their business oriented philosophies.

Dr Mosley argues that conservationists need to ensure that the public appreciates the distinct recreational and educational roles of national parks so that business interests, like the Tourism and Transport Forum, are unable to capture Government support with their propaganda. This campaign emphasis he believes would also counter the mainstream media's focus on commercial travel that dilutes conservation efforts to redirect tourism development away from national parks.

Local conservationists agree with this emphasis. Robin Mosman (2004), an influential past-president of the Blue Mountains Conservation Society believes "Parks are constantly under pressure from commercial interests, and it is only the democratic weight of public opinion and strength of the environment movement that will preserve them for the people of NSW, to whom they really belong".



## **Big money power**

The approval of the Emirates Wolgan Valley Resort on the western side of the Blue Mountains offers no better example of the pressure on national parks from powerful tourism industry interests. The Emirates Wolgan Valley Resort was the very first 'concept plan' proposal under the notorious Part 3A planning law, a law that gave too much power to the Planning Minister and which slashed green tape. The initial 'plan' placed most of the resort buildings on freehold land when it went on public exhibition just before Christmas 2005. Then just before Christmas 2006, a variation of the 'plan' went on exhibition that relocated the proposed resort into the World Heritage listed Wollemi National Park.

The amended 'plan' did not even indicate the boundary of the national park let alone explain why the 1,000 hectares of freehold land available for the proposed resort were so unsuitable that it had to go onto adjoining national park land. Being a Part 3A variation of an approval it too was approved, with no possibility of a legal challenge to that 2007 decision.

After half a dozen tourism reports, inquiries and reviews, and the establishment of the Emirates in the Wolgan Valley, the NSW Government took further action to open up parks. Incredibly even after the TTF succeeded in getting NSW national park laws weakened, the tourism lobby still blames the delays in the approval of this blundered resort development on conservationists and demands yet more green tape to be cut (Bolt, A. 2012).

## **National Parks and Wildlife Amendment (Visitors and Tourists) Act 2010**

In June 2010 the then Environment Minister, Frank Sartor, passed legislation to broaden Ministerial powers to grant exclusive, private development rights for accommodation and other tourist infrastructure in NSW National Parks. Respected barrister Tim Robertson SC, believes this legislation overturned 20 years of case law and destroyed the 'delicate balance that the Courts have struck, which gives primacy to the conservation objectives of the Act' (Robertson, T., 2010).

In addition to the previous leasing or licensing powers over national park land, concessions can now be granted for facilities and amenities for tourists not associated with their accommodation, such as retail outlets 'commensurate with the needs of the area in which that outlet is located', 'restaurants and other food outlets', 'cultural institutions, including museums and galleries', as well as enabling activities of a 'sporting, recreational, educational, or cultural nature', 'the hosting of conferences' and the provision of facilities for those purposes, and 'to provide residential accommodation to facilitate the provision of services to tourists' (Robertson, T., 2010).

For the first time, the 2010 National Park legislation allows commercial tours into wilderness. This law also permits long-term park closures for private events and the issue of leases for unlimited periods, even for 100 years or more.

## **Recent park development plans**

The *Draft Australia's Coastal Wilderness National Landscape Tourism Master Plan* (2009) identifies four "product enhancement focal points" on the South Coast: the Pender's site in Mimosa Rocks National Park; and Green Cape, Bittangabee and Mowarry Point in Ben Boyd National Park. A bed and breakfast is to be located in the old Myer house at Pender's, which is situated on southernmost headland of Wapengo Estuary (Birthy Inlet). Even to establish a low-scale adaptive reuse B&B resort at Penders, fire regulations require the removal of forty eucalypt trees, and the access road to be widened and upgraded. A half million dollar Government grant under the Heritage Assets Revitalisation Program (HARP) was provided to ensure the resort is opened for business this

Christmas. The Myer house will then be available only to elite park visitors who can afford the \$5000 per week price tag.

Dr Kevin Tolhurst, an expert witness at the Royal Commission into the Black Saturday bushfires with over 25 years in fire management, has criticised the Victorian Government's national park tourism policies on just this point. Dr Tolhurst explained that commercial tourist development in national parks requires more intensive fire management:

"We've got a relatively recent example with what happened in Tidal River in the Wilsons Promontory area; having those facilities in the parks actually compromises a whole prescribed burning program... we need to come to a clear picture as to why we have national parks, and how much we expect to be able to develop those areas to improve our economic return from those areas. Primarily they are there to protect the natural values of the areas... Campers, walkers, you can close the park - but if you've got facilities in there worth millions of dollars,... the facilities will still be there and that will put a lot of pressure on the fire authorities to protect them" (Tolhurst, K., 2012).

In addition to the Pender proposal, accommodation developments are proposed for Mowarry Point, Bittangabee Bay and Green Cape outside the light-station complex on the Light to Light Walk. The Office of Environment and Heritage recently advertised a proposal to lease Ben Boyd National Park's Mowarry Point and Bittangabee Bay as part of the commercialisation of this walk (*SMH* advert. of lease notice, 3/10/2012).

The potential lease sites both are almost a hectare in size and have access to car parking. The November 2010 park management plan allows for these developments and reversed the closure of the 4WD road between Leather Jacket Bay and Mowarry Point proposed in the previous plan. On-going vehicle access to Mowarry Point carpark would permit vehicle access for the proposed accommodation facilities on the Point. This vehicle access arrangement necessitates duplication of the coastal walking track to Leather Jacket Bay that could otherwise use the closed road, magnifying the environmental impacts in sensitive coastal vegetation.

Further, the lease is being offered to Austwide Projects Ltd, a tertiary training company with no experience in eco-tourism and park visitor guiding. Austwide Projects Ltd does, however, have experience in training for hospitality services. So the character of the proposed tourism product could be influenced by the experience of the proposed lessee. Under these arrangements upmarket, high-priced glamour camping for visitors could be proposed, using Bedouin-style tents, fine food and wine.

Meanwhile the substitution of government TAFE Certificate courses with private Certificate courses, like those provided by Austwide Projects may also impact upon park management. Courses in Outdoor Recreation at Blue Mountains TAFE at Wentworth Falls are being shut down due to NSW state government budget cuts. These public TAFE courses have been producing qualified wilderness guides and outdoor professionals for the eco-tourism and outdoor education industries for decades.

At the northern end of the Light to Light walk, the proposed Green Cape lighthouse development could put at risk the population of Spotted-Tailed Quolls found there (*Canberra Times*, June 7, 2010). The public investment in this speculative tourist track and accommodation development comes at the expense of the nature conservation budget. In his legal advice of June 9th, 2010, Mr Tim Robertson SC, explained some of the adverse aspects of development in national parks:

"As everyone knows, tourist facilities usually involve permanent development, not readily reversible [development] like camping areas and narrow tracks. It is difficult to envisage how a tourist development as is commonly understood could coalesce with an objective to promote or conserve biodiversity, especially over time (how can a tourist development whose

impacts are only perceived after approval be reversed?). A tourist resort requires power, water and sewage facilities, increasing the footprint of development in remote areas for many kilometres.”

These concerns are echoed in Australia’s Wilderness Coast Tourism Master Plan. The Plan describes these environmental impacts politely as “*Site Challenges*: access for additional accommodation developments and services (power, water etc.).” These challenges can increase the development costs, even before a sod is turned. This then creates economic forces that drive the scale of the accommodation development to be much larger than would be needed for an economic return if these tourist facilities were located close-by in the villages of Pambula, Eden and Wonboyn. Fortunately as this national park development is Government subsidised, these upscale development pressures are lessened.

A further example of inappropriate visitor facility development is found in the 16,200 hectare Green Gully addition to the Macleay Gorges Wilderness, near Walcha. In 2010 the then Environment Minister, Frank Sartor, ruled out an Office of Environment and Heritage plan to use three old huts in the area as a base for helicopter tourism and instead directed that the wilderness be declared without any holes cut in it.

Despite this direction and before Green Gully was protected under the *Wilderness Act, 1987*, and without public consultation, the Office of Environment and Heritage refurbished the three huts by adding cooking facilities and sleeping quarters. New outdoor picnic tables, paved areas and fire places were built for the paying guests and utensils and crockery provided. Extensive signage was also installed along the “Green Gully Track” contrary to Wilderness Policy.

The new facilities are not only contrary to the self-reliant recreation management principles of the *Wilderness Act*, but by encouraging paying guests not to carry tents and cooking utensils on a wilderness walk with long days between huts, the Park managers are also ignoring essential bush safety practices. Any accident will drive home this lack of professionalism and scrutiny of the development in the worst way imaginable.

The Green Gully property was purchased with the help of a public fundraising campaign that raised over \$170,000. It was the largest acquisition made by the Dunphy Wilderness Fund, established by former Premier Bob Carr to commemorate the conservation achievements of Milo Dunphy. These accommodation facilities are an appalling example of on-park tourism in declared wilderness. The development dishonours the memory of Mr Dunphy and the donors to the Wilderness Fund, and actively promotes public confusion over wilderness management.

### **The adverse impact of the so-called “recreational hunting” lobby on park tourism**

The Federal Environment Minister, the Hon Tony Burke addressing the Sydney Institute on 20th July 2011 said “an area, once protected, usually has the principle apply that there shall be ‘no backward steps’. New areas for National Parks frequently have existing commercial uses that are phased out or scaled back over time. But once those commercial uses end we don’t talk about going back on it.”

As Minister Burke went on to explain, this long-standing political consensus on the management of national parks, wilderness areas and nature reserves is now being eroded. In NSW, once the Shooters Party had gained a balance of power in the Upper House in 2002, the previous Labor administration began heading away from nature conservation, as illustrated by the passage of a law that gave shooters executive powers over hunting in state forests through the Game Council. They made a further retrograde step in 2009 when over 1,036 hectares of World Heritage value bushland in

the Bargo State Conservation Area were revoked for construction of a \$5.1 million dollar tax-payer funded regional shooting complex adjoining the Nattai National Park (Keneally, K., 2009).

The political influence of Shooters and Fishers Party has already damaged nature conservation programs and policies in this state. The current NSW Government is even more dependent on the Shooters and Fishers Party, as the Greens are a “bridge too far” in policy terms, especially for the Nationals. The Shooters and Fishers Party can now successfully negotiate politically difficult policies as it can withdraw support from key elements of the NSW Government’s legislative program at any time. In these circumstances, the Shooters and Fishers Party is seeking more park access for shooters, bike and horse riders. It is also Party policy to open up national parks to logging, fire wood collection and domestic stock grazing (Shooters and Fishers Party, 2011 a and b).

As a result of the Shooters’ political power, NSW national parks will become ‘hunting public land’ by January 2013, and hunters in national parks will be exempt from interference by law, forcing the Government to break its no hunting in national parks election promise. Walkers who stray into park land that has been so designated could be guilty of interference while at the same time risk being shot. Shooters claim to be “conservation hunters” but seek to maintain sustainable populations of game species to shoot (e.g. deer), which is completely the wrong motivation for the effective control of feral animals. Other so-called conservation measures of the Shooters and Fishers Party (2012) include hunting native ducks and the introduction of new exotic pest birds, such as the Californian Quail. Such initiatives create public confusion and anxiety regarding parks and wildlife management.

Ms Carmel Tebbutt, the Labor Member for Marrickville speaking against the hunting in parks legislation said: “Opening our national parks to recreational hunters is a very real threat to public safety” (*Hansard L.A.*, 21/6/12). Park rangers also overwhelmingly oppose hunting in NSW national parks and many believe it poses a serious risk to human lives, as well as killing native animals and damaging existing feral animal control programs (B. Cubby, *SMH* 15/9/12).

Tourism has been the first fatality of hunting in national parks. The risks to public safety from stray bullets and rogue hunters have discouraged park visitors, and as previously stated, park managers have reported a drop in park visitors from previous years.

Public perceptions of national parks are further adversely affected by the Shooters and Fishers Party constantly ventilating the incorrect view that NSW parks are degraded, full of feral animals and would be better managed if their natural resources were exploited. For example, the Upper House Inquiry into the Management of Public Lands established by the Shooters and Fishers Party has collected submissions from organisations, such as the Australian Environment Foundation, in support of parks and reserves becoming multiple use zones for logging and grazing, as well as conservation. At the Inquiry’s public forum in Deniliquin, Councillor O’Neill (2012) described the River Red Gum National Parks as a “tinder box and a harbour for all manner of pests and vermin”. His General Manager, Mr Graham (2012) added that Wakool Shire Council “is of the view that our national parks, State parks and forests should be managed for multiple benefits and uses, including timber production, conservation, tourism and recreation.”

### **Exclusive access detracts from nature-focused park management**

In addition to tourism accommodation, the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) has sought to broaden the appeal of national parks by catering to a broader range of recreation pursuits. By becoming less risk averse in relation to environment impacts of user activities, the NPWS believes it can introduce more opportunities for activities such as horse riders and mountain bike riders, as well as for off-road vehicle users. These park user groups are establishing partnerships through policy



and memoranda of understanding that dictate or circumvent long-standing nature-focused park management for their benefit.

Under instructions from the NSW Coalition, via a 2006 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between horse riders and the NSW Liberal Party and the NSW Nationals, horse riding is being allowed into wilderness. A three year trail of horse riding in a wilderness inside the Kosciuszko National Park is part of a new horse riding policy developed due to this MoU. This concession is in addition to the 3,000 kilometres of trails currently available to horse riders that are already causing damage to the park estate. The Bicentennial National Trail is also available to horse riders and is located on a dedicated easement that cuts through half a dozen declared wilderness areas in NSW.

The NPWS has apparently forgotten that wilderness describes a specific approach to conservation land management, with the governing intent being to minimize disturbance of an area. The management principles of the *Wilderness Act* specify:

‘A wilderness area shall be managed so as:

- a) to restore (if applicable) and to protect the unmodified state of the area and its plants and animal communities;
- b) to preserve the capacity of the area to evolve in the absence of significant human interference; and
- c) to permit opportunities for solitude and appropriate self-reliant recreation.’

A 1999 NPWS position paper on the Bicentennial National Trail (BNT) states: ‘The Service considers horse riding is incompatible with principles a) and b) and does not fulfil the definition of appropriate self-reliant recreation. Horse riding is not regarded as self-reliant because the means of travel is not powered by the person and is regarded as inappropriate because it is not undertaken within any formal wilderness areas in Australia and the impacts generally degrade wilderness areas.’ An even earlier NPWS position paper on horse riding in wilderness stated that ‘Horse riding is one such activity that is incompatible with the protection and management of wilderness values, and therefore is excluded from these areas.’ ... ‘From experience throughout NSW, elsewhere in Australia, and overseas some of the principal environmental impacts of horse riding can be summarised as follows:

- destruction of vegetation caused by horses trampling plants through wandering off trails or widening existing trails;
- accelerated erosion of tracks, especially on highly erodible soils, through loosening and breaking up the trail surface by horses’ hooves leaving an unstable surface that may be readily removed by water during the next rain;
- sedimentation due to accelerated trail erosion, causing siltation of water courses, impeding the flow of water, adversely affecting aquatic flora and fauna, and encouraging weed growth;
- altered watercourse patterns where a proliferating track network may impose an altered or entirely new drainage pattern on the natural system and interrupt water flow, which can effect downslope vegetation communities significantly;
- increased rates/risks of weed introduction and spread;

- greater access via track proliferation; the number of unauthorized horse trails is often greatest near a park's boundary and these provide for other damaging activities, such as motor bike riding, bicycle riding, and rubbish dumping;
- water pollution from horse manure which finds its way into water systems and greatly increases the level of nutrient, bacterial and viral input causing potential health hazards; and
- disturbance of native fauna by the noise of horses and riders, the disturbance of vegetation, and the fragmentation of habitat.'

In the face of law and evidence, it is deeply disturbing that the NSW Government has displayed a degree of unconcern with the details of its deregulation of access to parks. A small horse riding lobby group should not redefine wilderness recreation based on horse riding being an appropriate 'self-reliant' activity, while being entirely reliant of horse power. It seems that in the last two decades the NPWS has become a Government policy lap dog, rather than a trusted public servant and national parks defender.

In another move, the NPWS adopted a bicycle access policy in 2011 that allows for the construction of new exclusive mountain bike tracks that divert yet more of its limited management resources into an inappropriate track forming activity that damages park values. Like horse riding, the diversion of funds from nature conservation to bicycle track construction is unjustified as riders have adequate legal access in the form of thousands of kilometres of roads in parks, including an almost countless number of management roads that lie outside declared wilderness areas.

A 2010 NPWS Discussion Paper extolled the virtues of "mountain bike experiences" including:

- Cross-country, which may include "technical challenges" suiting a wide range of skill levels;
- All-mountain riding that can include "advanced technical challenges and steeper hill sections";
- Downhill riding – "predominantly downhill";
- Free riding involving riding tracks and/or "stunts that require more skill and technical features than cross-country";
- Dirt jumping involving hopping over shaped mounds ... "to become airborne";
- Trials involving "hopping and jumping bikes over obstacles".

Nowhere is there mention of mountain bike riding involving the enjoyment of nature and cultural heritage. At the moment, visitor facilities in national parks are provided to enable enjoyment and appreciation of natural and cultural heritage, apart from the ski resort areas and a limited number of passive picnic grounds. The facilities proposed for mountain bike riders are of a different order all together, as these track facilities are primarily for the exclusive use by bike riders and their sport, and thus should fail the compatibility test in the national park management principles laid down in the Act. The major land forming with earth moving equipment necessary to develop trails for mountain bike sport has no nexus with nature conservation.

At the very least, a careful consideration of cycling and horse riding proposals should be through park management plans that can minimise adverse impacts on public safety, park assets, the appropriate enjoyment of the park by other members of public, and the conservation of the heritage values of the reserve. Such regulation of use through a management plan is now under attack through memoranda of understanding with various high-impact user groups.

Even more worrying is that the Shooters and Fishers Party gave notice of a Wilderness and National Parks and Wildlife Legislation Amendment (Management) Bill introduced in September 2012. The content of this legislation is yet to be disclosed, but according to party spokesperson, Robert Brown, MLC it will open up wilderness areas in NSW to mountain bike and horse riding (Brown, R., 2012). If the Shooters and Fishers Party are successful with this legislation, they may be disappointed with the subsequent electoral support from these politically unaligned riders. A party that wants to log and graze national parks is unlikely to secure votes from city-based middle classes.

After generations of bipartisan support for nature-focused national parks policy, different policy ideas are developing that are business and visitor focused. The O'Farrell Government has conceded NSW national parks to hunters. The Government are also taking steps to reduce public involvement in planning, local government and environmental protection. The proposed deregulated planning laws will be more pro-growth and pro-development, and will facilitate development within national parks.

A thin green line exists between national parks and developed land, not just on a map, but now also in politics. At stake is nature-focused park management of national parks, wilderness and other protected lands. The introduction of gun culture into protected areas seeks to change the community's relationship to wildlife, and through that use, the perception of how natural areas can be managed to benefit visitors.

The political pressures on national parks are becoming greater. Seeing national parks as yet another resource for consumption is being opposed. Conservationists must work smarter, not harder, if we are to claim back bipartisan support for nature and national parks.

### **The way ahead**

The wild places of New South Wales, like those in Victoria and Queensland, are suffering from the redistribution of power away from those parts of the community and government interested in nature conservation toward those with an interest in hunting, resource extraction and property development. This change is being expressed mainly through deregulation the so-called 'cutting of green tape', through skilful use of media communications by the big end of town, including the TTF, and in the advertising by outfitters of mountain bike riders, off road vehicle users and horse riders.

In these circumstances, conservationists must resist simply talking amongst themselves and tolerating the deregulation and adverse changes to conservation policy. More effective responses include engaging with the public to promote existing low-impact opportunities that permit everyone to enjoy our wonderful national parks and wilderness areas.

Others will need to undertake non-violent direct action. Such steps will alienate environmentalists from the seat of political power and, in consequence, government funding, but such steps are likely to be necessary if such hunting and resort development in national parks are to be stopped. Politicians detest high profile protests where the respectable middle classes are arrested defending a public asset, like national parks.

The very last thing politicians want to see, however, is conservation advocates engaging with the public regarding their concerns and the public through their letters and other representations then encouraging the Government to intelligently address these issues. So not every group needs to staff the barricades, march down Macquarie Street or organise non-violent action to stop shooting in national parks.

There is much that could be done to enhance both visitation and visitor enjoyment through improved promotion of our parks, including publication of more informative materials which provide information

on the geology, flora and fauna of the parks, and reasons for their protection. We need to point out that existing national park marketing has failed to effectively promote, package and present the latent potential of existing good quality, basic visitor facilities. Environment groups may need to prepare pilot materials to explain how park visitor opportunities can be enjoyed by all without destroying wilderness areas.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service should focus on promoting and upgrading its underutilised park facilities, rather than speculate in new controversial high-end expensive private developments for a niche market. Unlike the “cargo-cult” approach of providing high-end private developments, better presentation of low-impact park facilities will increase revenue to the regional communities that adjoin national parks. Off-park accommodation and other services will always best support local economies, while avoiding or minimising impacts on national parks.

Instead of spending money on building mountain bike trails, exclusive hideaway resorts, fancy glamour camps, and monitoring the degradation caused by horse riding through wilderness, resources should be spent in promotion of park values and how best to enjoy them. This would encourage more visitors to enjoy parks for their intrinsic value, rather than encourage and facilitate those users who want to engage in environmentally damaging activities.

Citizens of NSW should be proud of the fact that it has one of the best national parks estates in the world. Conservationists need to inspire public pride and affection towards these wonderful areas, even while contemplating non-violent direct action to stop park abuse. We need to celebrate our achievements, such as the events held last September for the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the saving of Blue Forest and the *Gumtree Songline Walk* to celebrate World Heritage listing for the Blue Mountains National Parks in 2001.

Young people need to be encouraged to make their first steps into the bush, such as through Wyn Jones’ *Golden Gumtree Postal Run*, to mark the 50th anniversary of the Blue Mountains National Park (gazetted 25th September 1959).

Conservationist groups also need to work more closely with responsible eco-tourism businesses and eco-tourism Australia. “Ecotourism is ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation”. Ecotourism Australia believes that the ultimate definition of ecotourism is compliance with the core criteria stated within the Eco Certification Program (2012). Certainly this eco-tourism organisation and businesses with Advanced Eco-tourism Certification are ensuring nature-focused visitor management is consistent with the ideals of environment group policy.

Meanwhile wilderness, in administrative reality, remains the cornerstone of the NSW park management system that has so far successfully defended nature from the spoiling forces of our modern society. It has helped to secure a higher priority for nature-focused management. Wilderness is also a powerful belief that respects the rights of nature and those of indigenous people.

The wilderness idea has done much to protect nature and there is much more to be done. Conservationists should promote wilderness and help provide more people with life changing experiences, especially the young. Visiting wilderness is a humbling experience that can provide visitors with the inspiration to work for a more environmentally sustainable society.

If conservationists stick to the basics and communicate these to the public, then the national parks idea and wilderness will weather the current storm and be the stronger for it. We must steadfastly resolve that nothing the TTF, the Shooters and Fishers Party or sporting outfitters can do shall ever damage the wilderness and national parks idea in Australia.



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Managing tourism in protected areas: Conducting desktop assessments of tourism activity and infrastructure impacts using horse riding as an example.

Associate Professor Catherine Pickering,

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Protected areas are the major mechanism for the conservation of biodiversity internationally and in Australia. Australia has a good track record in creating protected areas, including programs to promote an ecologically representative and comprehensive system of parks. Many parks are also popular with visitors providing people with the chance to experience nature and appreciate these stunning landscapes.

However, visitors to parks, their activities, and the facilities they use, have environmental impacts. This includes impacts on soils, vegetation, aquatic systems and animals. Some are direct and obvious such as removing vegetation when building a track, while others are indirect, such as spreading weed seed. Managing visitors involves minimising impacts while still providing opportunities for nature-based tourism and recreation. Visiting parks can also enhance conservation directly via fees and other income for parks, and indirectly through increasing support for the establishment and management of parks and other natural areas. There are also a range of important social benefits from visiting parks including increased physical and mental health, enhanced social bonding, and a great sense of place.

Recreation ecology is a specific area of research focused on evaluating the range and severity of impacts from different types of recreational and tourism activities and ways to minimise impacts. This includes documenting impacts from small scale nature-based tourism activities such as hiking on birds, to evaluating mass tourism developments such as ski resorts.

This research can be used by park managers, tourism operators, conservation organisations and others to conduct and evaluate desktop assessments of environmental impacts when new activities and facilities are proposed for parks. It is critical that assessments are done, done well and evaluated prior to implementation. Adequate monitoring of impacts once the activity or infrastructure is up and running is rare in Australia due to limited resources. Also, once operational, it is often politically difficult to then remove the activity or infrastructure even if it is shown to have impacts. It's also expensive to rehabilitate a site, once damaged.

Before any ecological or social analysis is undertaken, the following question needs to be addressed: should the park even be considered as a location for this activity/infrastructure? Tourism and recreation in parks should be nature-based, and more particularly, ecotourism focused: that is the attraction should be the natural environment, and use of the park should contribute to conservation. It's not about replicating tourism and recreation opportunities offered elsewhere. This particularly applies to high impact activities and infrastructure where the setting is of secondary importance. Often there are far more suitable locations outside the park.

Pre-assessments need to consider the conservation value of the site, the nature of the disturbance (e.g. horse riding, hiking, skiing), the resistance of the site to disturbance, its capacity to recover from disturbance, the susceptibility the site to erosion, the severity of direct and indirect impacts, likely amount of use, timing of use in relation to critical ecological events (flowering, nesting, etc.), and in relation to social factors such as crowding, conflict, temporal and spatial displacement of visitors and likely compliance with minimum impact behaviour, and the total area likely to be affected. They also need to evaluate the likely success of potential management actions to minimise these impacts.

An example of how recreation ecology research could be used is in the assessment of a proposal to allow horse riding in a park. The first consideration is the conservation value of the site. Parks have high conservation value, often contain a diversity of ecosystems, have minimal disturbance from other human uses, provide important ecosystem services and enhance ecological connectivity in the face of increasing threats to biodiversity including from climate change. They are also rare landscapes even in Australia.

The second factor, is the resistance of the site to disturbance from horse riding. Australian soils and vegetation evolved in the absence of hard hoofed animals. As a result they have much lower resistance to trampling by horses and other hard hoofed animals than those in North America, Europe and Africa. Within Australia there are also some ecosystems, such as mountains that have even lower low resistance to these types of use. They are also extremely slow to recover from disturbance, often taking decades or longer to recover. Some sites in mountains are still eroding due to cattle grazing 70 years later.

The next factor to consider is how susceptible the site is to erosion? Obviously steep slopes are more at risk than gentler slopes or flat areas. Soil type also has an effect with deep humus soils more likely to erode than sites with harder more compacted soils.

The severity of direct impacts on vegetation and soils is well known for many common recreational activities. For example, compaction of vegetation and soils from horse's hooves is 10 times greater than from hiking boots and 24 times as great as from shoes (e.g. the relative pressure per area of contact).

The severity of indirect impacts is also important. For example, horses have additional impacts to hiking. These include weed seed in dung. Seed from more than 216 species have been germinated from horse dung, including major environmental weeds. Weeds are a major threat to biodiversity globally and in Australia. It's much cheaper and easier to stop weeds getting into parks than remove them once established. Horses also create nitrogen and phosphorous hotspots when they urinate and in their dung. Australian soils are naturally low in these nutrients and many natives are adapted to low levels of phosphorous in the soil. Therefore the combined effects of trampling, added nutrients and seeds in dung can favour weeds over natives.

The amount of use is important. Horse riding appears to be declining in popularity both as a private recreational activity and as commercial tourism activity. This is in part due to large time and money commitment involved in owning and then transporting horses to access parks. For commercial operators insurance costs are also an issue for higher risk activities such as horse riding compared to lower risk activities.



Timing of use is important as it affects the severity of impacts and visitor behaviour. Riding on wet soils will obviously have greater impact than on dry soils. Similarly grazing and trampling by horses and other pack animals when plants are flowering and seeding can have greater impacts than at other times. Riding in large groups can cause greater impacts when it results in riders spreading out and going off-track. Non-compliance behaviour is a major issue as it directly contributes to greater impacts. Education, motivation, behavioural modelling and regulation can all influence how well visitors adhere to minimum impact behaviours in parks.

The total area likely to be affected is also important. People on horses can travel further than hikers over a day increasing the area affected. Therefore riders could introduce weeds over a greater area than other users who do not travel so far through the park. Zoning within a park can minimise the area used and hence where weed seed could be spread by any given activity.

Management strategies to minimise impacts of horse riding include regulating where, when and how many people ride in the park. They also involve influencing how visitors use the park including via minimum impact codes. For horse riding, these can include strategies to reduce the potential for spreading weed by strategies such as changing what horses are fed and clearing equipment before entering the park. However, even when these types strategies are adhered to, the impacts from horse riding are likely to be much greater per user than for some other activities such as hiking and mountain biking. Therefore a desk top analysis of potential impacts is likely to demonstrate that horse riding is inappropriate in areas of high conservation value such as nearly all parks.

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# **Nature conservation and tourism development in our national parks**

**by Peter Prineas**

**6<sup>th</sup> National Wilderness Conference, Sydney**

**22 September 2012**

I would like to thank the conference organisers for the opportunity to participate in this debate and to speak for nature conservation.

The primary purpose of the national park system is nature conservation. A secondary purpose is to provide for recreation compatible with nature conservation.

## **Tourism development is the issue, not visitors**

The first point I wish to make is that I do not see this as a debate about tourism in national parks versus nature conservation. It is about tourism *development* in national parks versus nature conservation. I want to argue for minimising development in national parks, not visitors.

## **Tourism developments in parks – do people want them?**

Millions of people are visiting and enjoying NSW national parks and I do not believe there is a widespread demand or popular outcry for more tourism facilities to be built in our national parks. The situation was much the same in 2010 when a bill favouring tourism developments in national parks was rushed through the NSW Parliament.

A Roy Morgan survey commissioned by Parks and Wildlife in 2008 found that NSW national parks received about 38 million

domestic visits and 90% of visitors reported they were satisfied, and 57% very satisfied, with their experience.

A further survey in 2010 found that visits were lower at about 34.6 million but this was explained by factors such as weather (extremely wet weather was experienced throughout 2010). Visitor satisfaction levels in 2010 were not significantly different to 2008.

These survey results do not establish a serious decline in visitation to NSW national parks or that visitors are dissatisfied with their experiences.

Some minor sectional interests wish to see national park access widened to permit their favoured recreation. Legislation was recently passed by the NSW Parliament to give shooters access to many parks. This legislation was not the product of considered government policy but the result of a sordid political transaction. There is also a demand to open up wilderness areas to horse riding.

In the USA a 'gateway' development policy has been in effect for many years. This policy favours the location of park visitor accommodation and many other facilities in a gateway community on the national park approaches, rather than within the park. I recall that the National Parks Association of NSW took up this policy in the 1970s.

### **Building and keeping a parks constituency**

There are suggestions that park agencies globally are dealing with a decline in visitation and are anxious about losing their constituency. I am not sure there is such a global decline.

If there was such a trend then it would be a concern. However, I do not believe that building more tourism infrastructure in parks is the appropriate response. Other approaches may be effective and should be explored. These might include better promotion, or



better linking of park visitation with off-park facilities and venues, or better transport, or providing a better experience or ‘product’.

### **Is more tourism development the answer to declining park finances?**

Declining finances are a threat to national parks systems all over Australia. Governments are not adequately funding national parks. As a result, parks administrations are being forced to look to other sources of revenue. However, parks agencies have often not benefited from commercial concessions in their parks.

Professor Ralph Buckley, Director of the International Centre for Ecotourism research at Griffith University, in addressing a public meeting in 2010, observed that national park concession holders – with the possible exception of those leasing some heritage buildings such as lighthouses – do not meet all the costs they generate. He went so far as to say that private development in national parks “just does not work” and warned against national parks agencies giving away the profitable part of their business to private interests.

Professor Buckley also observed that in South Africa, where national park tourism is a large industry, 66% of national parks revenue comes from fees charged direct to visitors by the parks agency, with the commercial tourism operators contributing only 5%.

The most developed national park in NSW is Kosciuszko National Park (KNP). It accommodates the ski resorts. It has more beds than the town of Cooma. I have not seen any recent statement of KNP’s costs and revenues. However the situation would not have changed much from the 1990s when KNP was shown to be a drain on Parks and Wildlife finances.

You cannot develop a natural area without effecting natural

conditions and the KNP resorts are no exception. Among many impacts there has been a near loss of a Burramys population on the Perisher Range.

It is impossible to discuss Kosciuszko National Park in this context without mentioning the unusual development culture that exists there, and which I hope we will never see in other national parks. At KNP, leasehold apartments and villas within the ski resort areas are developed and sold to private buyers. In other words there is a real estate market. The parks agency has been trying for some years to interest a private developer in building a 'village' on the Perisher Resort car park. The development has been approved. It would cover an area equal to five football fields. There would be seven four-storey buildings with 239 apartments and associated retail, commercial and recreational facilities.

It should be noted that Parks and Wildlife has ceased to be the consent authority for development within Kosciuszko National Park resort areas; that role has gone over to the State's planning agency.

If the aim is to magnify park management costs then intensive tourism development seems to be the way to go. The cheapest management option is usually wilderness.

### **Tourism developments in NSW National Parks given greater scope**

The 2010 bill which brought in new arrangements for tourism developments in NSW national parks attracted criticism, and for good reasons.

The rationale for the Bill appeared to be based on two myths. One of these myths was that visitor numbers for NSW national parks were in serious decline. This has already been discussed.

Another myth was that the changes were needed to meet a target in the NSW State Plan which called for a 20% increase in visits to national parks by 2016. In fact the growth trend in visitation to NSW parks was sufficient to meet the 2016 target.

The 2008 O'Neil Report to the NSW Premier on the state of the tourism industry prepared the ground for the changes to the National Parks and Wildlife Act. It reported a decline in tourism in NSW, especially in regional areas. There was a decline, but the causes identified had little to do with national parks. The report grossly understated national park visitation at 22 million. It then went on to attack the management of national parks and wilderness areas in NSW. The criticisms seemed to rely more on ideology than analysis and were presented in general terms and mostly unsupported by examples or case studies. The Report argued for less regulation within the national park system.

Next we had the appointment of a Tourism Taskforce by the NSW Government. Senior people from environmental NGOs took part in this Taskforce and two NSW environment organisations were funded by the Government to the amount of \$20,000 each to make their input to the Taskforce's deliberations. I expressed my view at the time that this funding should not have been accepted. The Tourism Taskforce submitted a report that called for unspecified 'clarification' of the National Parks and Wildlife Act in relation to tourism developments.

Statements emanated at this time from NSW Parks and Wildlife about 'realigning our business' and making organisational changes to give greater emphasis to tourism development in parks.

The stage had been set some years before when the Australian Conservation Foundation and the IUCN signed up to a Tourism and Transport Forum (TTF) manifesto called 'National Parks & Tourism: A Natural Partnership'. The TTF is a tourism industry lobby. The TTF has worked its way around Australia's national parks agencies and has been able to move national parks policy to

a stance that is now more accepting of development.

The state and territory governments are being urged to compete with one another in opening up their national parks to tourism developments. This is evident from newspaper reports like this:

*Tasmania risks losing its grip on the wilderness tourism sector if it doesn't make it easier to develop in national parks, says the Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania* – Hobart Mercury Aug 30, 2012

### **The 2010 legislative changes for tourism developments in NSW national parks**

When the NSW national parks system was set up in 1967 the provisions concerned with visitor facilities consisted of three sections amounting to about 500 words. By 2010 there were 20 sections with over 5000 words.

The 2010 changes removed or weakened constraints on developments in national parks imposed by a long a line of court decisions and widened the discretion of the Minister in granting national park concessions.

The bill introduced a range of uses for new developments in parks that had formerly been limited to existing buildings and structures. These uses included research facilities, conference and function centres, recreational, educational and cultural activities, sporting activities and retail shops. Also, existing buildings in parks which were formerly able to be adapted for a limited range of uses could now be put to 'any use'.

Another change was to broaden the purposes for which developments could be provided from developments for 'visitors' to developments for 'visitors or tourists' The addition of 'tourists' might not seem important but it has the potential to facilitate developments in parks that are larger in scale and offer a more

sophisticated and wider range of facilities than would be appropriate for a mere 'visitor'.

The amendments also opened up wilderness areas to commercial operations. The NSW Wilderness Act was amended in order to effect this change.

A statutory duty to facilitate tourism in national parks was also introduced. This was achieved by amending the plan of management provisions so that Park managers are obliged to identify sites for tourism developments when formulating plans.

If the aim of the 2010 amendments was to assure greater scope and certainty to proponents of tourism developments in national parks, they would seem to have achieved their purpose. However this will only be known when the provisions have been in operation for some time and have been tested in the courts.

### **National Parks – a democratic institution**

In closing I should mention the importance of national parks as a democratic institution. The parks are public lands and open to everyone. They are made accessible by roads, walking tracks, signage and camping areas and visitors are free to engage in recreation that is compatible with nature conservation and does not interfere with the enjoyment of others.

Regrettably, democracy in the parks is under threat as a result of legislative changes that could see desirable sites appropriated for the enjoyment of those willing and able to pay for the privilege.



## Introduction – History of Wilderness Loss

The greatest threat to wilderness in Tasmania from the 1950s to the late 1980s was **hydro-electric development**. The controversy over the inundation of Lake Pedder in the early 1970s was a milestone in the development of environmental awareness in Tasmania and Australia as a whole. It set the scene for the successful campaign against the Franklin Dam a decade later. The halting of the Franklin Dam in 1983 and the related (1982) World Heritage listing of much of the highest wilderness quality parts of western Tasmania probably marked the highpoint for wilderness conservation in Tasmania although further gains have been made since (particularly the 1989 expansion of the WHA to its present boundaries). Despite the high profile of “wilderness” and the overuse of the word in tourism industry advertising, no state government has ever seen fit to actively protect wilderness values and a major legacy of these successes is the antagonism towards “Greenies” that still divides the Tasmania community and polarises public debate on any environmental issue.

The threat to wilderness from hydro-electric development ceased with the completion of the Henty-Anthony scheme in the late 1980s. By this time most of the highest quality wilderness areas were reserved in national parks and the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA). The early days of the WHA saw some wilderness restoration in the form of some closures of 4 WD tracks, mostly in the more remote parts of the Central Plateau.

However wilderness values outside these areas have been further eroded:

- **Forestry** has been ongoing since European settlement but was transformed into modern industry by the introduction of export wood-chipping in 1970. Talks to resolve the future of the industry are ongoing but until a resolution is reached, forestry remains the major threat to wilderness quality in some parts of Tasmania.
- **Mining** too has been ongoing since European settlement. Many areas of Tasmania are littered with remains of old abandoned mines. Some are being reclaimed by nature and have little impact on wilderness quality but others are major scars still responsible for acid drainage which will last for centuries. The industry has been largely successful in ensuring that areas of known mineral potential have been excluded from reservation which would preclude mining, so the potential remains for new mines which impact significantly on wilderness quality.
- **Land clearing** for agriculture and housing development continues. Some of this may pose a threat to biodiversity but is most unlikely to threaten wilderness values.
- **Road construction** does not often impact of wilderness values but two stand out:
  - The Cradle Link Road was constructed in the early 1980s to facilitate tourism. It made Cradle Mountain far more accessible but isolated the Vale of Belvoir and Black Bluff Range from the Cradle Mountain area.
  - The Western Explorer was constructed in the late 1980s, early 1990s. Its role was ostensibly to facilitate tourism in north-west Tasmania but the main rationale appeared to be to bisect the largest remaining area of wilderness in the Tarkine.

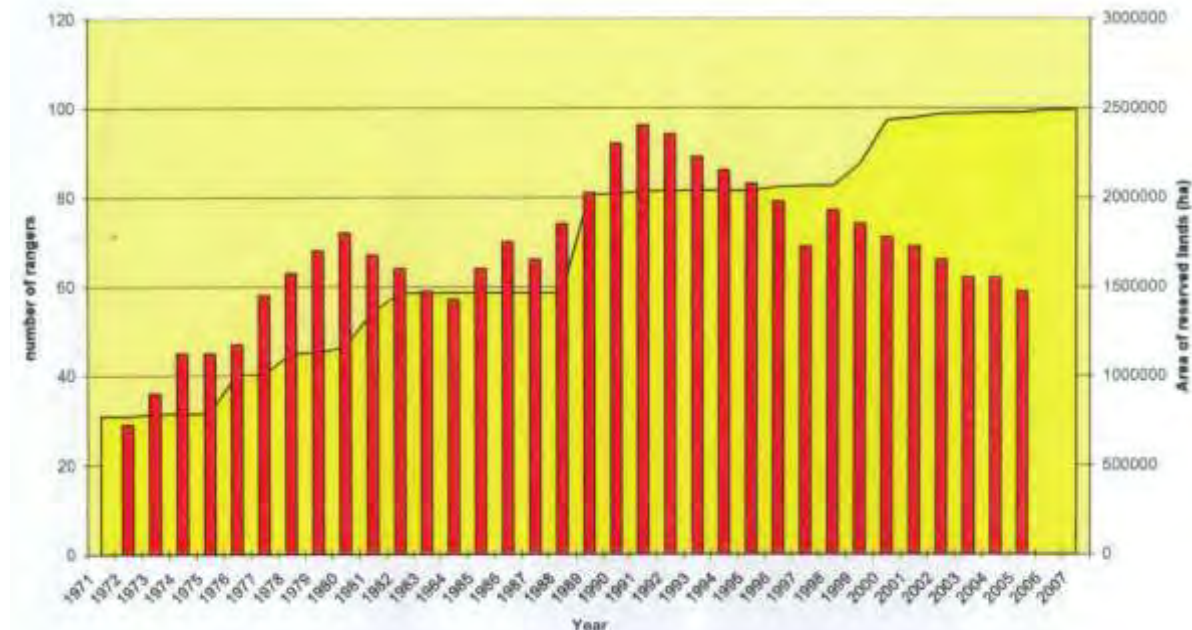
The major threat to wilderness values within reserved areas is now **tourist operations and developments**. In comparison to the impacts listed above, the impact of tourism on wilderness values is usually both minor and potentially reversible but it does have great potential to impact on the wilderness experience of visitors to reserved areas.

## The Management Authority

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) was created by legislation in 1970 (somewhat later than in many other states) as an independent government agency with responsibility for the development and management of an ecologically representative system

of reserved lands and for conservation of flora and fauna, with education, recreation and visitation being conditional on not impacting on these values.

Over the intervening years it has suffered more cutbacks than most other agencies while its responsibilities have increased (see graph below). It has been subsumed into larger agencies and undergone multiple internal restructures including the removal of the natural scientists to a separate branch within the overarching department (which appears to have led to a reduction of scientific influence on PWS management decisions).



Some of this experience was shared by other Tasmanian government agencies as multiple small agencies were consolidated into a few “super departments” but underlying many of the changes appeared to be a systematic attempt to change the role of the PWS. The consequences of a decade of restructure and reorganisation on the PWS can be summarised as “mission creep”: from a focus on environmental values and habitat conservation, to embracing more anthropocentric values, to promoting commercial opportunities, to being the basis of the tourism industry (Crossley 2009). Visitor facilities now absorb the majority of PWS resources.

### Management of reserved areas

Thanks largely to many years of relatively generous federal government funding (now mostly ceased) management of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA), which includes Tasmania’s three largest national parks and most of its major natural attractions, was much better resourced than the non-WHA reserves for which there is still a substantial backlog of management planning. So the management plan for the TWWHA provides a good indication of PWS (and state government) thinking. The 1992 Management Plan for the TWWHA probably represented the pinnacle of pro-conservation management planning. It essentially assumed that tourism operations would not expand beyond those already in existence; only a very limited range of new proposals could be considered and little guidance was provided on the approval process. In contrast, the 1999 Management Plan included a “New Proposals and Impact Assessment Process” with relatively few constraints on the type of proposals that could be considered. Proposals considered under this process included commercial helicopter/floatplane landings (rejected following an overwhelming number of public submissions opposing the proposals – this provided the impetus for the formation of the TNPA) and “wilderness lodges” at Cockle Creek (approved but never constructed) and Pumphouse Point (currently under construction).

## **Key Challenges for Protected Area Management in Tasmania**

### **Big Picture**

- There is increasing pressure from the State Government for parks to provide facilities for tourism and to earn money from tourism. This leads to compromise on protection of natural values and weakening of management control (e.g. new Wellington Park Management Plan includes a change to make a cable car discretionary – previously not allowed). This also leads to even more pressure from the industry for relaxation of perceived restrictions on development within parks. e.g. The Mercury, 30-08-2012: Tasmania risks losing its grip on the wilderness tourism sector if it doesn't make it easier to develop in national parks, says the Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania. This is apparently based on the need to “provide continually updated and new experiences in our national parks” and the examples of Victoria and Queensland in opening their parks to private tourism development.
- The COAG proposal to delegate many of the Federal government's responsibilities under the EPBC Act to state governments. Tasmania has a history of major issues where conservation has only been achieved through the application of federal powers. e.g. saving the Franklin River, saving Recherche Bay from logging.
- The opportunities for raising pro-conservation arguments in decision making forums are limited. There are still many dedicated, well-informed and well-intentioned staff within PWS but their influence on senior management and government is limited. The National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council includes conservation representatives but it is an advisory council, not a decision making body. Groups such as the TNPA lobby the PWS and government and use the media to “keep the bastards honest” but there are limits to what such groups can achieve from outside government.

### **Specific Tasmanian Issues**

Poorly considered (government backed) schemes for development – e.g. Three Capes Track. There has been opportunity for public comment on aspects of the proposal but the underlying concept has remained unchallenged because it has never been explicitly subject to public review or scrutiny.

Walking track hardening – this protects the environment from additional impact at the cost of introducing structures into remote areas. Track work in remote areas has essentially stopped in recent years due to funding cuts but overdevelopment (e.g. unnecessarily high standard of the new Cape Hauy Track and excessively large and intrusive public huts on the Overland Track) remains a concern.

Off road vehicles – a major problem on the Tarkine coast despite some commendable recent attempts at control, and on the coast between Cape Sorell and Low Rocky Point.

### **Conclusion**

Underlying all of these concerns is the failure of senior PWS management and the state government to recognise the importance of preserving the intrinsic wildness of Tasmania's unique reserved lands.

**Reference:** Crossley, Dr Louise; May 2009. Paradoxes of Protection, Evolution of the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service and National Parks and Reserved Lands System. A Report for Senator Christine Milne.