WTA Workshop Session Outcomes

DESIGNING AND MANAGING WILDLIFE TOURISM INTERACTIONS

Facilitator
Ian Tranter, Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources

Supplementary notes:
(see recent research produced by DITR on nature-based and indigenous tourism markets).

Background:

- Last Tourism Australia meeting: wildlife tourism operators have problems with regulations both inside and outside parks. DITR have issued a tender to look at this issue. Based on the idea that sightings of animals tend to be the highlights of nature tourism experiences, yet Australia is not well-recognised internationally for wildlife experiences.
- Interaction with wildlife is discouraged in Australia - dichotomy: easier to get a license to kill an animal than to interact with it
- Most Australian mammals are not easily seen in wild
- The Commonwealth is committed to working with the states over the next two years to address this issue, so this is a real opportunity for WTA and others to address this issue.

Comments relating to workshop questions
The given questions were not directly addressed, but there was much discussion and agreement around the theme that the existing regulatory and policy environment not only did not support wildlife tourism operators contributing to conservation, but often worked against it.

- Include sex in wildlife tourism PR e.g.NT- one ad for wet season showed frogs mating, with the caption, 'the wet is here and the frogs are having fun'
- Injured animals that can't be released can be kept in captivity for tourism/educational purposes
- Bed-and-breakfasts - food for wildlife on table (apples, banana etc for wildlife) or animals being foster reared are ways of getting wildlife for tourism or for education (this has caused a lot of scrutiny and bad-feeling in some quarters, especially as some release foster-reared wildlife onto own properties instead of point of collection)
- One operator asked for permit to keep injured wildlife, couldn't get because authorities felt it might encourage some operators to deliberately injure wildlife in order to be able to keep and breed them.
- Obtaining animals in Qld must go through QSMP. For those considered non-releasable first zoos etc., are considered then others
- Australia has no large private wildlife reserves – too many regulations and $$

- Some areas of private land in good habitats – but obstacle to native wildlife conservation is legislation against fences (feral proof fences are needed to protect wildlife). Main issue is whether on balance the fence is enhancing wildlife populations or impeding travel.
- One operator has a property near to a rare kind of rainforest, biggest risks are weeds and fire, and their proposed tourism development would reduce these risks. Would build low-impact walking track, remove weeds and preserve from fire and pigs. However, development prevented by government, but nothing spent by govt on saving that rainforest and fires have now decreased the rainforest area by half.
- If private sector can get involved, it would alleviate some of the problems, but infrastructure doesn't support all that could usefully be done.
- Many ways tourism operators want to help with conservation, but there are obstacles if they don't come into any 'proper' category. Could have incentive via payroll tax etc to help contribute to conservation

Actions

- Issues relating to wildlife interaction policy will be explored further in a consultancy project on wildlife-tourism interactions which DITR are currently funding. WTA members will be asked for any written input into this.

- WTA itself should work on the issue of overcoming regulatory and bureaucratic obstacles to their involvement in conservation and to developing responsible wildlife-tourist interaction opportunities, and also to the related issue of public liability insurance. (This was taken up in the WTA AGM where it was agreed an action group would be established to work on this issue.)

- WTA should consider developing an information resource for operators/ prospective operators regarding new product development opportunities/ possibilities. The WTA committee will consider this in conjunction with resources possibly available from the Sustainable Tourism CRC.