Towards a Sustainable Future for Australian Wildlife Tourism

Karen Higginbottom

© Karen Higginbottom 2001
Aims

1. Identify for Australian wildlife tourism:
   - Opportunities
   - Obstacles
   - Research gaps

2. Recommend steps to enhance sustainability and facilitate sustainable growth
Methods

1. Literature review
2. Database of wildlife tourism enterprises
3. Stakeholder consultations
4. Limited primary research

Acknowledgements
Opportunities
Opportunities … (ctd)

The Australian Wildlife “Product”: Positives

- High biodiversity
- More endemic fauna than any other major tourist destination
- Highly unusual fauna, especially marsupials
- Large areas of natural habitat and well developed protected area system
- Safe
Opportunities ... (ctd)

Economic Importance of Wildlife Tourism to Australia

- >1200 operators
- Half international visitors go to zoo/ WP
- Half international visitors go to Nat. Park(s)
- >> 10 million participants p.a.
Opportunities … (ctd)

Economic Importance of Wildlife Tourism to Australia

- Australian wildlife re inbound tourism = $1.8 - 3.5 billion (?)
- Recreational fishing = $2 billion
- Hunting = $1 billion
- Whale watching = US$56 million
- Phillip Island Penguin Reserve = $96 million
- Mon Repos Turtle Rookery = $1 million
- Potential importance to regional areas
Opportunities … (ctd)

Demand

- Global growth in participation in free-range wildlife viewing (?)
- 17% of international visitors influenced to visit Australia by presence of native wildlife
- Koalas are the species international visitors most want to see and enjoy seeing, followed by kangaroos
Opportunities … (ctd)

International Trends

• Increasing specialisation of wildlife tourism products
• New species and environments
• Increased and improved use of interpretation
• Increased use of technology to facilitate wildlife viewing
• More experiences combining free-range and captive
• Increased synergies between tourism and conservation
Obstacles
Obstacles ... (ctd)

Australian Wildlife: Negatives

- Many land-dwelling species are small, hard to see, nocturnal, solitary
- Lack of infrastructure and interpretation to support wildlife viewing in most protected areas
- Wildlife often in remote areas with little infrastructure and difficult access
- Physical hardships (dust, flies...)
Obstacles ... (ctd)

The Wildlife Tourism “Industry”

- Limited capacity to deliver high quality wildlife tourism experiences
- Limited capacity to develop financially sustainable businesses
- Risks of negative effects on wildlife and habitats
- Low levels of communication, coordination, strategic direction, government support
Research Gaps
• Demand – magnitude, nature, market segments, visitor satisfaction
• Product development opportunities
• Impacts and their management (esp. monitoring)
• Economic value
• Critical success factors for businesses (esp. marketing)
• Legislation and policy
Recommendations
Recommendations … (ctd)

- Encourage innovation and best practice in product development
- Raise standards of product quality
- Improve effectiveness of marketing
- Build industry capacity to deliver high quality experiences
- Build industry capacity to be financially successful
Recommendations ... (ctd)

- Improve and expand application of techniques for minimising negative effects on wildlife
- Improve and expand application of techniques for maximising effects on wildlife
- Make regulation more operator-friendly
- Improve effectiveness of accreditation
Recommendations ... (ctd)

- Increase government support for sustainable development of wildlife tourism
- Increase role of Indigenous people and issues
- Build communication channels
- Facilitate research
- Initiate coordination and strategic development
Further Information and Action

- Wildlife Tourism Research Report 1: *Status Assessment of Wildlife Tourism in Australia - an Overview*. CRC for Sustainable Tourism

- Workshops and final plenary at this conference