

Response to Green Paper on A Medium to Long-term Strategy for Tourism

Wildlife Tourism Australia, July 31 2003

Wildlife Tourism Australia is a non-profit organisation established in 2002 ' to promote the sustainable development of a diverse wildlife tourism industry that supports conservation'. It consists of tourism operators who see wild animals (in captivity or in nature) as an important part of their product, as well as others with a professional interest in wildlife tourism (government conservation and tourism agencies, academics, NGOs etc). It currently has 39 member organisations and individuals, although this is expected to grow substantially following a membership drive in the near future (see Appendix 1). WTA is in the process of becoming an Incorporated Association.

WTA supports the vision, goals and themes and strategic directions identified in the Green Paper. In particular, we feel that the following initiatives will be of benefit to wildlife tourism operators and sustainability of this sector:

- the focus on higher yield, rather than volume (key theme 3)
- improved effectiveness of marketing support (strategic direction 1,2,3)
- the development of a sustainable national system for tourism accreditation (Chapter 3, Strategic option 2).
- the identification of nature-based tourism as deserving special attention for sustainable regional economic development (section 3.1.10).
- the Australian Commonwealth rejoining the WTO (section 4.3.3)

However, we believe it is vital that the following additions and changes be made. These are addressed with reference to the sections in which they appear (in order) in the Green Paper. Proposed changes are highlighted in yellow, with the justifications given below in plain type.

Goals

Add a new goal:

'To facilitate cross-sectoral benefits of tourism to nature conservation and community development initiatives'

or

'To facilitate mutual benefits between tourism and conservation/ community development initiatives'

No mention is made in the goals or body of the Green Paper of the potential for tourism to contribute in a positive way to conservation (or to the welfare of local communities). This goes beyond the concept of environmental and social sustainability of the tourism sector that is included in the present goals, since sustainability implies only that there is no long-term decline in key indicators. Nature-based tourism and wildlife tourism, if well-managed and appropriately designed, should not only avoid degradation of the natural environment, but can be a mechanism for facilitating conservation initiatives that

would not occur in the absence of tourism. We expand on this point in our comments relating to Chapter 5 below.

Tourism that confers conservation benefits is not only of benefit to the environment and society as a whole, but has positive spin-offs for tourism businesses in terms of enhancing their image with consumers. If the Australian tourism industry as a whole, and in particular nature-based tourism, can be seen internationally as being an ally for conservation, this could raise its international profile in a way that would help attract more visitors and/or encourage visitors to pay more for tourism.

Although the Green Paper is clearly focused on the tourism sector, cross-sectoral links such as those with conservation should also be included. Government policies should not be developed in isolation; they should represent a co-ordinated and strategic whole-of-government approach.

We commend the recent publication by the Commonwealth Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources (2003) '*Pursuing Common Goals: opportunities for tourism and conservation*', and the recommendations contained therein, and believe that these should be reflected, where relevant, in the Green Paper. This report strongly supports our arguments above, and provides further justification and practical mechanisms for achieving this goal.

Key Themes

Add a new key theme
'ensuring environmental and social sustainability'.

The key themes of the Green Paper do not include mention of environmental and social sustainability, and in the strategic directions this is only mentioned in relation to business practices (7) and infrastructure (13). Sustainability should be a theme running through all relevant aspects of the strategy, as without this the tourism industry has no long-term future. Sustainability of the tourism product/ resource also needs to be highlighted in every relevant part of the paper (it is not, at present). This is also important to the credibility of the strategy both internationally and with environmental groups in Australia.

Chapter 3: Growing yield and niche markets

Section 3.1.10

'Wildlife tourism' should be added to the list of forms of nature-based tourism given at the end of the first paragraph, and should be identified as a specific area for sustainable growth and innovative product development.

Recent research by the CRC for Sustainable Tourism (in conjunction with industry and government partners) has shown that wildlife tourism is an important component of

nature-based tourism in Australia, and one that is likely to attract growing consumer interest. This research provides a knowledge base that can help underpin sustainable development of this sector.

There is considerable evidence that wildlife tourism is economically important and seems to have growth potential. Fillion (1992) estimated that 20 to 40% of international tourists visit destinations with the primary motivation of observing wildlife, and that they have a total direct economic impact of around US\$100 billion. In the USA (the only country where wildlife tourism has been properly quantified), an estimated 82 million residents participated in recreation for the primary purpose of wildlife activities during 2001, and spent a total of US\$108 billion on these activities and associated travel and equipment (U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service and US Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau 2002). In general, there appears to be global growth in tourism involving encounters with animals in their natural habitat (Higginbottom *et al.* 2001), and wildlife tourism is being targeted by governments for development in a number of countries (A & M Training & Development 2003; Akama & Kieti 2002; Environment North and Associated Consultants 2001; Guzman 2000; Hughes 2001).

Australia has many competitive advantages in relation to its wildlife that have not been adequately recognised by the tourism industry (Higginbottom *et al.* 2001). There are currently more than 1200 Australian tourism businesses that include wildlife as a planned component of the experience they provide to tourists (Higginbottom *et al.* 2001). More than 18% of international visitors are attracted to visit Australia partly because of its wildlife, and 67.5% of them wish to see Australian animals during their visit (Fredline and Faulkner 2001). For visitors to Australia from Japan, Korea, England and Germany, 'seeing wildlife in their natural surroundings' was ranked as one of the top six preferred activities among a long list of options (Chalip and Fairley 2002). Several surveys of domestic holiday-makers in Australia have shown that seeing wild animals is a significant factor in choice of holiday destination for around one third of these people (Moscardo *et al.* 2001). The economic value of wildlife to international tourism in Australia has been estimated to be in the range \$1.8 to \$3.5 billion, and koalas alone to be worth about \$1.1 billion (Hundloe and Hamilton 1997).

Wildlife tourism is an area where product innovation may have a considerable positive impact. There has been virtually no strategic thought given to ways of best presenting wildlife to visitors in Australia. Many opportunities have been identified for innovative wildlife tourism product development by the CRC for Sustainable Tourism in conjunction with stakeholders (e.g. Higginbottom *et al.* 2001). These would build on the unique features of Australian wildlife combined with adaptation of some of the innovative approaches used overseas. These innovations can and should also be used to enhance links between tourism and conservation of Australian wildlife. Significant opportunities exist for growth in wildlife viewing on private rural lands, supporting the government's focus on environmentally sustainable development in regional areas.

With the recent formation of *Wildlife Tourism Australia*, there is now an effective multi-stakeholder organisation that is able to provide quality advice to governments and to work jointly with governments to facilitate strategic initiatives relating to wildlife

tourism. We specifically propose that the Federal Government support a forum focusing on tourism product development in wildlife tourism (possibly in conjunction with its planned international conference in 2004), and consider supporting a small number of demonstration projects of innovative wildlife tourism products. These measures should be carried out jointly with Wildlife Tourism Australia, and should involve liaison with the CRC for Sustainable Tourism.

Section 3.2

Add discussion of the need to rationalise different forms of accreditation to reduce compliance costs for operators.

Currently many of our operator members are accredited through several different systems relating to different aspects of their business, which they find an undue strain on their finances and time. The different accreditation systems should be united under one national (or international) framework in such a way that compliance costs are reduced. This rationalisation would thus have joint benefits of enhancing the likelihood of consumer recognition, and reducing costs for operators.

Chapter 5: Diversification of tourism product and experience

Title

Change title of chapter 5 to clearly reflect initiatives to foster sustainability.

Given that chapter 5 includes the strategic direction of facilitating environmentally and culturally sustainable tourism, we feel that ‘diversification’ is not an adequate title to reflect this content.

Strategic directions

Change strategic direction 8 to:

‘Promote more effective partnerships between the tourism sector and government bodies charged with land/heritage management, and between the tourism sector and non-government organisations or individuals involved in land/heritage management’
(or separate this into two strategic directions)

Further, the links between the strategic directions and the content of this chapter need to be improved.

Strategic direction 8 currently states: ‘Promote more effective partnerships between the tourism sector and government bodies charged with land/heritage management’, which we strongly support. However there should also be mention (here, or in another strategic direction) of promoting more effective partnerships between the tourism sector and non-government organisations and individuals (such as conservation NGOs and private landowners) that have an influence on land/heritage management.

Strategic options

Add strategic options:

- ‘Review barriers to effective involvement of the tourism industry in conservation initiatives, and consider suitable incentives and mechanisms to facilitate this’.
- ‘Facilitate greater involvement of private landholders in integrated nature-based tourism and conservation initiatives, through enhanced incentives and removal of barriers’
- ‘Support initiatives to enhance the quality of environmental interpretation in tourism’

The main mechanisms through which tourism can contribute in a positive way to conservation are:

- creating an economic incentive for preservation, restoration and/or protection of natural habitats (on private land used for nature-based tourism, and in protected areas)
- providing funding or labour for conservation initiatives
- educating tourists in such a way that they become more conservation-minded

The proposed strategic options given above will lead to enhanced effectiveness of these mechanisms.

We support further details on practical mechanisms for enhancing the links between tourism and conservation given in Commonwealth Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources (2003) ‘*Pursuing Common Goals: opportunities for tourism and conservation*’.

Add strategic options:

- ‘Tourism organisations should work with government agencies responsible for environmental management to support initiatives to enhance environmental management and monitoring of the impacts of tourism, including in protected areas’.

Although referred to in section 5.1, none of the strategic options relate explicitly to the need for improved environmental management and monitoring of tourism, including in protected areas. This has been identified in a variety of reports as important for the sustainability of the tourism industry in Australia. While such initiatives in protected areas are clearly the core responsibility of environmental/ land management agencies, the tourism sector can help create pressure for required increases in budgets and efforts in these areas.

Add strategic option:

‘Facilitate formation of alliances between a range of tourism and conservation stakeholders to address joint goals’

We recommend that the Green Paper incorporate the recommendations regarding tourism-conservation partnerships given in Commonwealth Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources (2003) ‘*Pursuing Common Goals: opportunities for tourism and conservation*’.

Add strategic option:

- 'Work with industry, States and Territories to enhance consumer recognition of tourism accreditation and its significance'.

We agree that accreditation is an important mechanism for improving the quality of tourism product (3.2 Improving the quality of the tourism product). However the Green Paper fails to sufficiently stress a key issue that requires attention. One of the greatest impediments to effectiveness of accreditation is operator uptake being limited by awareness of low consumer recognition of the significance of accreditation. This has been identified as a core problem with the Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program, and is an issue of concern for our members. Thus, increased consumer education regarding accreditation schemes is crucial, and should be supported by governments as well as industry. Further, minimising the number of accreditation programs will aid in consumer recognition.

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Wildlife Tourism Australia

Wildlife Tourism Australia is a non-profit organisation established in 2002 to **promote the sustainable development of a diverse wildlife tourism industry that supports conservation**. The principal focus of WTA is on viewing and interpretation of native Australian animals in the wild and in captivity.

Objectives

1. **Communication:**
Provide a forum for collation and dissemination of knowledge, and communication between wildlife tourism stakeholders
2. **High Standards:**
Support development of high standards in wildlife tourism product design and interpretation
3. **Low Environmental Impacts:**
Promote appropriate management and monitoring to minimise negative environmental impacts of wildlife tourism
4. **Conservation:**
Promote enhanced links between wildlife tourism and conservation of native Australian wildlife
5. **Promotion and Awareness:**
Promote sustainable wildlife tourism and raise awareness of the benefits and costs of wildlife tourism

Membership

Currently, membership is free of charge, but in the near future a modest fee will be charged to cover the costs of running the organisation.

Full membership is open to individuals or organisations involved in wildlife tourism in a professional capacity, including:

- **tourism operators** who incorporate wildlife in their operations, or who are interested in doing so
- other members of the **tourism industry** with an interest in wildlife tourism
- Commonwealth, State, and Local **Government staff** who deal with wildlife tourism, particularly those in tourism and environmental/land management agencies
- **academics and students** conducting research on wildlife tourism
- members of **NGOs** with an interest in wildlife tourism.

Benefits of full membership include:

- free advertising for wildlife tourism businesses and organisations on the WTA website¹
- the opportunity to communicate with others involved in wildlife tourism around Australia
- free downloadable material to support wildlife tourism businesses and conservation
- regular updates on useful research findings on wildlife tourism
- the opportunity to participate in initiatives to promote the sustainable development of wildlife tourism.

Associate membership is open to all members of the public with an interest in wildlife tourism, and is expected to entail the same benefits as full membership except for advertising and voting rights.

History

At the Sustainable Wildlife Tourism Convention held in Hobart in October 2001, the majority of delegates supported the idea of a group being formed to further the recommendations of the conference, and some volunteered to be part of this group. The CRC for Sustainable Tourism, who jointly hosted the conference with Tourism Tasmania, facilitated initiation of this group in mid 2002, and invited participation from a wider network of stakeholders. At present the group has about 39 members (organisations and individuals), and contact is principally by email. So far, principle activities have been establishing future directions, structure and tasks for the group; making a submission on the Tourism Green Paper, planning a workshop and setting up a website.

Workshops and Conferences

The inaugural national workshop of Wildlife Tourism Australia will be held on Nov 8-9, 2003 in Adelaide. This is immediately prior to the Ecotourism Australia conference in Adelaide. Delegates will participate in discussions on the future of wildlife tourism in Australia and its ecological and economic sustainability, as well as have a first-hand look at two of South Australia's best-known wildlife sanctuaries. Other workshops and conferences are expected to be held on a regular basis.

Structure

WTA has an elected committee consisting of a chair, two vice chairs, secretary and treasurer. Administrative support is provided for six hours per week. It is in the process of become an association incorporated in South Australia.

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¹ Note that the website is expected to be operational in August 2003