



Conference Proceedings: Summary

SUSTAINABLE WILDLIFE TOURISM CONVENTION

28th – 30th October, 2001

Wrest Point Convention Centre, Hobart



Conference Organisation

Australia's first convention on wildlife tourism was jointly hosted by the CRC for Sustainable Tourism and Tourism Tasmania.

Organising Committee

Stuart Lennox	Tourism Tasmania
Dr Karen Higginbottom	Griffith University
Daryl Moncrieff	Department of Conservation and Land Management, WA
Kelley Rann	Southern Cross University
Ian Pritchard	CRC for Sustainable Tourism
Terry Carmichael	Rainforest Habitat, Port Douglas

Sponsors

Southern Cross University
Adventure Tours Australia

Australia Zoo
Antarctic Adventure
Experience Tasmania
Melbourne Aquarium
National Parks and Wildlife, SA
Seahorse World
Shotover WA
University of Tasmania
Mt Field Visitor's Centre

Objectives

1. Build networks and communication channels between wildlife tourism stakeholders.
2. Promote broad participation in development of sustainable wildlife tourism
3. Increase stakeholder understanding of sustainable wildlife tourism
4. Increase recognition of role of operators in wildlife conservation
5. Identify opportunities to increase diversity and distribution of products

Format

The formal proceedings consisted of 5 keynote presentations (including 3 international speakers), 58 concurrent presentations, and a set of workshops and a plenary session designed to generate recommendations and initiate further action. The concurrent sessions and workshops were organised under four themes: industry planning and development; managing environmental impacts; integrating wildlife tourism and conservation; and products and markets. In addition there were a series of field trips showcasing Tasmanian wildlife tourism, and a conference dinner held at Mt Field National Park.

Delegates

A total of 141 delegates were officially registered, in addition to a number of guests. The delegates consisted of tourism operators (22%), government conservation agency staff (22%), government tourism agency staff (6%), academics and students (39%) and representatives of a variety of other conservation and tourism-related groups.

Media

There was strong media interest in the conference, with 13 news items appearing in newspapers, radio and TV around Australia.

Outcomes

The following recommendations were generated through the workshop and plenary processes.

Goal

It was recommended that the overall goal of planning and development in relation to wildlife tourism in Australia should be to develop a "*strong diverse industry which supports biodiversity conservation*"

(Strong is taken to mean economically viable, effective and proactive)

Priority objectives and proposed mechanisms

The following objectives for the future of wildlife tourism in Australia, and proposed mechanisms for achieving each of these objectives, were generated at the workshops. These were then reported back to a plenary session, and all objectives were endorsed by the vast majority of delegates as representing appropriate priorities for further action. There was no time for discussion of mechanisms by the plenary group, and it was recognised that these need clarification and further development.

Objective 1

Build coordination and communication channels between wildlife tourism stakeholders

Mechanisms

- Form national wildlife tourism association, not necessarily a separate/new body (role: lobbying, information exchange, industry focus, conservation) - need to review existing structure and associations
- Website — need for more functions than currently achieved by ATC website
- Identify potential products at national and regional levels
 - initiate coordination and strategic development of wildlife tourism

Objective 2

Enhance development of wildlife tourism businesses

Mechanisms

- facilitate start up (3 years) of tourism businesses
- build industry capacity in general businesses and tourism skills
- facilitate through a forum of regional and state stakeholders

Objective 3

Ensure adequate funding of relevant authorities/ interested parties to ensure management of acceptable (priority) environmental impacts (and identification of unacceptable impacts)

Mechanisms

- Identify who is or will be managing an affected area or activity and the financial needs/ responsibilities of those authorities/ individuals
- Review funding mechanisms
- Develop (funding) priorities based on specific criteria eg. level of activity or threat, presence of endangered species
- Identify potential/ responsible sources of funding
- Direct funding according to priorities (as per above)

Objective 4

Identify, evaluate and monitor activities and environmental impacts associated with wildlife tourism on the environment

Mechanisms

- Develop standard guidelines, codes of practice, management plans, etc – through appropriate bodies, CRCs.

Objective 5

Improve awareness and understanding of domestic legislation and regulation; treaties and conventions; guidelines; standards; codes of conduct and ethics dealing with the environmental impacts of wildlife tourism

Mechanisms

A website and related information media could become a clearinghouse of information, providing links to key government departments and agencies, NGOs and research bodies, plus case studies and “best practice” examples in each state and territory.

Objective 6

Strategically increase links between wildlife tourism and conservation

Mechanisms

- Develop a package of incentives and initiatives for private operators
- Joint education of regulators, land managers and operators
- Develop joint strategies with government
- Reduce legal and bureaucratic obstacles to participation by tourism operators in conservation programs

Objective 7

Improve conservation-related education

Mechanisms

- Promote increased community awareness of the importance of wildlife tourism through schools, print and broadcast media, and the internet

Objective 8

Assess product quality

Mechanism

Improve uniform accreditation schemes

Objective 9

Develop excellent guides

Mechanism

Selection, training, guide accreditation, knowledge

Objective 10

Obtain knowledge of, and meet consumer expectations

Mechanism

Consumer research, tools for operators and distribution networks

Future Conference

The majority of delegates supported the idea of holding another wildlife tourism conference in about two years time.

Further Actions to progress recommendations

A working group was formed consisting of 27 of the delegates. This group, along with the conference organising committee, will work on progressing the above recommendations. This will include sending letters and seeking audiences with government representatives, and developing practical action plans.

Further Information

Further Information on the conference and details of presentations and papers will shortly be available at www.crctourism.com.au/wildlife/swtc