A Training Needs Assessment of Wildlife Tourism Operators in the Northern Rivers Region of New South Wales

Prepared by
Kelley Rann, CA, MIntHotMgt
And
Ros Derrett, OAM (M.App.Sc)

Southern Cross University
PO Box 157, Lismore, NSW Australia, 2480
Ph. (02) 6620 3920, Fax (02) 6622 2208

© Kelley Rann and Ros Derrett 2001

A Training Needs Assessment of Wildlife Tourism Operators in the Northern Rivers Region of New South Wales

- Initial assessment of training needs of operators of small WT enterprises.
- Identify gaps between management skills required and those currently being used.
- Pilot study of the Northern Rivers Region of New South Wales.
- At present 6 of the 20 operators have responded. Sectors included farm stays, camping grounds, wildlife parks and tour operators.
- Followed a formal approach to conducting the Training Needs Assessment.

Characteristics of WT Enterprises

- Heavy representation of small to medium sized enterprises.
- As many as seventy percent of all small businesses fail within the first five years.
- Do operators possess the required managerial and operational skills?
- Are operators making the same mistakes as those before them?

Summary of Reasons for Small Business Failure (From review of current literature)

- Lack of management skill and experience
- Lack of planning and research
- Poor financial management
- Lack of capital and under-capitalisation
- Lack of advertising and marketing skills

Additional Observations of Small Business Failure (From review of current literature)

- It appears operators do not make adequate or appropriate use of essential management and operational practices.
- Main causes of failure are internal factors that could be controlled by operators.
- Management training could reduce the level of failure.

Key Findings from Study of Wildlife Tourism Operators in Northern Rivers Region of New South Wales

- All respondents have fewer than five employees, including the owners.
- One business exceeded the owner's expectations in each of the first five years of operations.
  - Operator with extensive written business documents including a mission statement; five year business plan, marketing plan and cash budgets; quality assurance standards and environmental standards.
- One business was below the owner's expectations in each of the first five years of operations.
  - Operator with no written business documents.

Key Findings from Study of Wildlife Tourism Operators in Northern Rivers Region of New South Wales (cont.)

- Many responses indicated that the operators lacked knowledge and skills in key areas of small business management, and that they did not understand the processes that should be carried out.
- For example:
  - One operator prepared cash budgets for a five year period and two operators prepared budgets for a one year period. The other three operators did not prepare a cash budget. However, five operators indicated that they compare actual to budgeted results at least once per annum. This is not possible without a budget.
  - Two operators have a five year written business plan and one operator has a one year plan. The other three operators do not have a written business plan. However all six operators indicated that they monitor if their business is achieving its goals and 5 operators have a contingency plan. Both these task would be difficult, if not impossible, without a written plan in the first instance.

Key Findings from Study of Wildlife Tourism Operators in Northern Rivers Region of New South Wales (cont.)

- Fifty percent did not have an environmental policy.
- Three respondents indicated that it was not applicable to conduct an assessment of quality.
- One respondent indicated it was not necessary to update quality assurance standards.
  - These additional responses indicated the operators lacked knowledge and skills in key areas of small business management, and that they did not understand the processes that should be carried out.

Conclusions from Study of Wildlife Tourism Operators

- Responses to management task questions were not consistent with other responses on the questionnaire, indicating a lack of knowledge and understanding of management concepts and practices.
- WT operators are currently not making adequate use of essential management and operational practices.
- WT operators are currently making the same mistakes made by previous small business owners.

Desired Outcomes of Training Programs and Recommendations

- Assist operators in making adequate use of essential management and operational practices.
- Training should result in each operator developing a business plan and budgets (as a minimum) for their business.
- Provide training and mentoring to existing operators and new entrants.
- Accreditation programs should include the requirement to complete a business management certificate.