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A report on the ACT's
Potential for Tourism
in the Eco Tourism and
Related Fields and for
Self Generation of Revenue
in the Parks and Conservation
Program

Andrew

*Your comments. will be
most welcome*

Please return to

Joan Hayley

Heaven Friday

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David, 16/8

A QUESTION OF BALANCE

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CANBERRA
AUGUST 1994

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Mr Jeff Townsend
Secretary
Department of Environment
Land & Planning

Attached is my report on the potential for the Australian Capital Territory to gain some benefits from Tourism in the eco tourism and related fields.

It has become obvious that the Territory has not achieved anywhere near its potential in this area when compared with the rest of the nation. As about half of the land area of the Territory is devoted to nature conservation the potential is certainly there.

Canberra is surrounded by relatively untouched alpine and sub alpine country. It adjoins national parks in New South Wales and provides a high degree of wilderness. The low level of exploitation to date results from a comparatively conservative attitude towards areas with important conservation values. This is fortunate and will prove a competitive advantage.

I have endeavoured to make a series of suggestions which could be implemented over the next decade. It is important that the Territory proceeds slowly and learns from each new development. There is a wealth of experience around the nation from which we can learn.

Eco tourism, being a component of the tourism industry generally, is impossible to define accurately, hence we have a number of definitions in the National Eco-tourism Strategy. The ACT's Eco-tourism Strategy also devotes significant effort to defining the term.

This report goes well beyond ecotourism and looks at many proposals only loosely attached to the wider category of nature based tourism.

I have included Googong Foreshores in this report even though it is not part of the Territory. It is acknowledged that the Commonwealth, New South Wales and ACTEW have interests in Googong. Should the Governments proceed with the developments proposed, citizens of NSW and the ACT would benefit.

David Lawrance

August 1994

CHAPTER 2

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PROJECT BACKGROUND

Ecotourism has recently achieved world wide attention. Australia is very well placed to take advantage of this component of the tourism industry because of its relatively low level of development and large areas of non-urban country.

Consequently the Federal Government has released a National Ecotourism Strategy aimed at strengthening Australia's ability to enter this market niche whilst protecting the very thing that makes this industry component possible - the environment.

As one would expect, the debate on nature based tourism has started from extreme positions on each side. As the debate has progressed it has become obvious that the areas of agreement are increasing with the issues surrounding the areas of disagreement being defined more specifically.

This report is written from the tourism, rather than the conservation, perspective. Unless a development proposal contained herein or elsewhere can survive the test of attracting commercial funding it should not proceed. At this point, it becomes appropriate for the community to examine the proposal from the social and nature conservation perspectives.

I have been impressed by the approach adopted by most of the conservation movement. This has changed significantly in recent times with conservationists recognising that the southern half of the ACT does belong to all the community and that some development is inevitable. When that development takes place, the movement expects to be consulted and to have substantial input into the process.

The most controversial issue uncovered is whether to allow developments within national parks, nature reserves or conservation zones. Many ACT residents believe that as a matter of policy no development whatsoever should be allowed in a national park. This point of view tends to be held in respect of all undeveloped land without there being an appreciation of the gradation of land from unused Crown Land to nature reserves, conservation areas, national parks, wilderness areas and World Heritage Areas.

On the other hand some conservationists and park administrators believe having developments within parks and nature reserves leads to an ability to much better control their day to day operations via the Plan of Management rather than the Courts.

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There are numerous examples throughout Australia of developments, both inside and outside national parks that provide good examples and reasons for caution in developing the ACT's proposals.

The ACT is fortunate in being able to regulate land usage through its land tenure system by way of lease purpose clauses and development conditions. The Territory is also fortunate in that it is not faced with having to accommodate a large range of pre-existing interests.

This report goes well beyond a formal ecotourism definitions as it is essential that we adopt a coordinated strategy. Many of the recommendations relate to areas without a formal conservation status such as rural leases and village areas.

The report also endeavours to draw on source markets as different as possible to those feeding the ACT's current tourism market. If all we did was to redirect business already being attracted to the ACT's tourism industry to the southern half of the ACT there would be little real advantage to the community, its economy or its employment base. Consequently most of the recommendations concentrate on the Canberra resident market and the overseas market.

It would be relatively easy to expand visitor numbers to all of the nature parks, nature reserves and national parks in the Territory by simply promoting them in Canberra and interstate. This would get large numbers of people through the properties with little real benefit to the Territory or to the visitors. We need to avoid this and ensure that we attract visitors who will make a significant contribution to our economy and to our employment potential whilst providing an educational experience in environmental terms. Not only should the visitors' experience concentrate on the educational element of conservation but it should also provide education in terms of what a visitor can do to protect the environment at home.

Much work has already been done within the Parks and Conservation Service and the Territory Planning Authority towards putting the ACT on a more commercial basis in terms of its conservation program and the development of the southern part of the Territory. This work will be most valuable in implementing any of the suggestions in this report that meet with the approval of the Government.

It should be noted that the ACT's land tenure system provides for extensive public consultation in respect of any changes of land status and these processes will give the community ample opportunity to make specific comment and alternate suggestions.

It is sensible to adopt policies that are as uniform with rest of Australia as possible. We should only depart from this principle where there is good reason

for adopting a different standard. This should not be interpreted as a plea for adopting the lowest common denominator.

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CHAPTER 3

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ABSTRACT

It is quite clear that the ACT could do much better in managing its resources in terms of nature based tourism. To do so would enhance the ACT's economy, provide jobs for young people and attract a range of visitors who might not otherwise visit the Territory. It is essential that we concentrate on attracting different visitors to the ones we normally attract to the City. The two groups that would be most productive are the ACT resident and the international visitor who is looking for a nature based experience close to a city where a range of other experiences can be enjoyed during the same visit.

There is a growing recognition in the conservation movement that some development is inevitable and that the conservation movement should be involved at the initial stages. The conservation movement also sees such development as a perfect opportunity to sell the conservation message to those visitors attracted to natural areas. Therefore it is essential to widen our appeal to include those members of the community who would not otherwise seek a nature based experience.

The ACT is fortunate in having a clean slate on which to work when compared with other jurisdictions who have had to work around pre existing interests in the land that became nature parks. The ACT is more rigorously controlled in land usage terms than the states because of the necessity of complying with the requirements of the National Capital Planning Authority, the Territory Plan and whatever lease conditions the Government chooses to impose. Consequently the people of the ACT can expect a higher standard of nature based tourism development than might be the case elsewhere.

These recommendations go well beyond the definitions of ecotourism. This is essential because visitors tend to seek a nature based component to a general visit rather than simply an ecotourism experience. (See appendix E for a range of ecotourism definitions).

The Parks and Conservation Service has engaged a consultant to look at some of the same issues as this report and no doubt the consultant will examine many of these proposals in far greater detail. This report is intended only to expose some of the possibilities for reducing the financial burden the Parks and Conservation Program imposes on the ACT taxpayer and stimulating the ACT's tourism industry and economy.

- 8.1.1 That the ACT Parks and Conservation Service embark on a program to generate 25% of its own revenue within a reasonable period.
- 8.1.2 That the ACT Government maintains its subvention to this program for the foreseeable future
- 8.1.3 That the ACT Parks and Conservation Service be allowed to establish a trust account so that staff and the public are aware that money raised is used to enhance the experience of visitors to the properties and onservation responsibilities of the Service are met to a greater degree than currently.
- 8.1.4 That revenue be generated through the following activities:
- Park usage fees for Tidbinbilla and Namadgi.
 - Concession fees for retail outlets and food outlets where-ever commercial operators display an interest in trading. Concessions should be sympathetic with the style and the goals of the Parks and Conservation Program.
 - Camping fees be levied in all camp sites controlled by Parks and Conservation Service and ACT Forests with such fees being collected by way of pre purchased vouchers obtained from ACT Shopfronts and Visitor Information Centres.
- 8.1.5 That the Parks and Conservation Service investigate the desirability of retaining a fund raising company to assist it in maximising its sponsorship and revenue potential. This should not be done in such a way as it detrimentally affects any contribution that might be made by the Foundation for National Parks.

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- 8.2.1 That park usage fees be implemented initially at Tidbinbilla and Namadgi with levels not excluding the scale used in New South Wales for similar parks. Revenue collected should be clearly identified for the enhancement of parks and reserves.
- 8.3.1 The Government considers authorising a distinctive series of number plates from which \$50 per issue goes to supplement Parks and Conservation revenue.
- 8.4.1 That the Government concentrate its efforts on those areas adjacent to Tourist Drive 5 which should be retitled Tidbinbilla Tourist Drive.
- 8.4.2 That large signs should be erected on all the entrance roads to Canberra directing attention to Tidbinbilla and Namadgi. This will increase the recognised ability of these easily marketable names.
- 8.4.3 That a marketing plan be instituted as a result of the consultancy recently let by the Parks and Conservation Service to promote the program. In the meantime the low cost initiatives contained in the Marketing Chapter in this Report should be implemented.
- 8.5.1 That the Government consider making leases available to support the infrastructure proposals listed in the body of the Report over a ten year period in an orderly fashion based on the degree of commercial interest displayed in each of the proposals. Should commercial interest be

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displayed in proposals not listed above, the Government should also consider these.

8.5.2 Amongst the proposals the Government could consider are:

- A four star chalet with conference facilities in or adjacent to Tidbinbilla.
- A two star hostel adjacent to Tidbinbilla or somewhere else along Tidbinbilla Tourist Drive.
- An exclusive five star chalet at Googong Dam.
- A short stay good quality caravan park below Googong Dam but within the Foreshores Reserve.
- An old style high country guest house adjacent to the Visitor Information Centre outside Namadgi National Park.
- Cafe facilities at the Visitor Information Centres at Tidbinbilla and Namadgi and eventually at Googong Dam, Pine Island and Jerrabomberra Wetlands.
- Purpose built farm stay accommodation on several rural leases close to Tidbinbilla Tourist Drive.

8.7.1 That the Government authorise a system of concessions in those areas managed by the ACT Parks and Conservation Service and ACT Forests where these are appropriate to the revenue generation goals of the Government and in keeping with the general program goals.

- 8.8.1 That the Government instruct the Parks and Conservation Service to allow food outlets at any nature reserve where such a service would be attractive to visitors and commercially viable.
- 8.9.1 That a program be initiated to establish a sports fishing industry, headed by a fisheries biologist, with the cooperation of the ACT fishing clubs and funded in the long term by the sale of an annual park usage permit, a set proportion of which is allocated to the sports fishery sub-program.
- 8.9.2 That some research be undertaken to find an appropriate place in the Territory for the construction of an aquatic viewing area to enable people to view spawning beds, platypus and water rats.
- 8.9.3 That Cotter Dam be managed as a catch and release fishing facility, financed by the fishing licence component of park usage fees and with the advice of the local fishing clubs.
- 8.10.1 That the Government invite expressions of interest from commercial operators who would wish to run a cruise vessel on Googong Dam.
- 8.11.1 That a site be identified for a short term caravan park in the Googong Foreshores Reserve below the outflow.
- 8.13.1 That the Government accept applications from rural leasees for a change in lease purpose such as would enable a form of Farm Stay Accommodation to be constructed to suit a complete coach load of school children.
- 8.14.1 That the Parks and Conservation Service should be enabled to retain revenue from its commercial activities to expand its merchandising capacity by producing books, postcards, posters, video and

audio cassettes and other associated materials to a much greater degree. These should be sold through a wide range of retail outlets but particularly through the concessions in the ACT's own properties.

- 8.15.1 That the ACT adopts an eco tourism operator accreditation scheme consistent with the other States following the release of the consultancy report commissioned by the Federal Department of Tourism (due November 1994). In the meantime that coach operators using Tidbinbilla and Namadgi be required to have a Ranger or suitably qualified volunteer on board on a user pays basis.
- 8.16.1 That the Government reviews its policies in respect of licensing tour vehicles and places ACT operators in a position as favourable as interstate operators.
- 8.17.1 That the Government consider releasing the Yarralumla Brick Works site for a conventional (non eco tourism) resort to attract that part of the market that would not gain from visiting the southern part of the ACT.
- 8.18.1 That the Government offer a suitable site to the Siddha Meditation Foundation for the construction of a high quality rated facility. Although this falls outside the definition of ecotourism the contemplative nature of the pursuits at such a facility would be quite compatible with the area. The site sought by the Foundation is in the Murrumbidgee River corridor above the Cotter Dam and close to the Green Hills Uniting Church complex and the Cottermouth Scout facility.
- 8.19.1 That the Government encourage the proprietors of the Corin Forest recreation facility to proceed with developing their proposals on a commercial basis.

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The proprietors should be encouraged to complete the recreation facilities before proceeding to accommodation facilities.

- 8.20.1 That the Government consider locating the Parks and Conservation Service and the Canberra Tourism Commission within the same Agency with a view to maximising the cooperation between the two organisations.
- 8.21.1 That the Government formally invite the Foundation for National Parks to operate in the ACT on an agreed basis.
- 8.22.1 A program of seeking sponsorship for new initiatives and an invitation to the Foundation For National Parks to establish itself in the ACT and contribute funds to the Parks and Conservation Service.
- 8.23.1 That the Department of Environment, Land and Planning devise ways of co-operating in ways that will maximise the benefits to the ACT with the Canberra Tourism Commission being involved in promotion of co-operative efforts as appropriate.
- 8.24.1 That the Parks and Conservation Service explore a major increase in the volunteer service approached to extra development of the properties controlled by the Service.
- 8.25.1 That the Government direct that a school holiday package program be instituted that will enable senior school students to learn about and contribute to the conservation of natural resources in the ACT.
- 8.25.2 That the Parks and Conservation Service and the Department of Education develop a program of

regeneration of degraded areas by schools groups as part of environmental education curriculum.

- 8.26.1 That the Ranger Guided Walks Program be upgraded and commercialised using a voucher system. Purchasers of annual permits should be given a free voucher for one or more Ranger Guided Walks as part of the benefits of buying an annual permit.
- 8.26.2 That the Service and the Canberra Tourism Commission promote the Ranger Guided Walks Program to visitors through existing publications and through the schools visits program.
- 8.27.1 That the Spotighting Program be incorporated in the marketing of the Ranger Guided Walks Program and promoted.
- 8.28.1 That the Government further support the Night House and that a private sector sponsor be sought to fund this valuable new initiative.
- 8.29.1 That the Parks and Conservation Service seek a commercial sponsor for a walk through avairy at Tidbinbilla.
- 8.30.1 That discussuions be instituted with ACT theatre groups with a view to using the Performance Centre for general arts audiences who might not otherwise visit Tidbinbilla.
- 8.31.1 That Forestry and the Parks and Conservation Service establish a joint voucher system for camping fees throughout the ACT.
- 8.31.2 That Forestry investigate establishing a jointly funded Forestry Interpretation Centre at Pierce's Creek Forestry Village.

- 8.32.1 That the Government's new events organisation should have, as one of its first tasks, the support of a festival of Australian flora and fauna with the organising group comprising the National Botanic Gardens, the Parks and Conservation Service and the Canberra Tourism Commission with the first event being held in late Spring 1995.
- 8.33.1 That the Government encourage a greater degree of joint activity by the National Botanic Gardens, the Parks and Conservation Service and the Canberra Tourism Commission in promoting the National Botanic Gardens as a first point of call for ecotourism visitors.
- 8.34.1 That the Government instructs the new events organisation to examine the possibility of Australia's first, regular electric outboard event. The event should be directed by a group comprising the ACT Government, the National Capital Planning Authority and the scientific community of Canberra.
- 8.34.2 That the necessity for a permit system for the use of an electric boat on ACT water ways be abolished.
- 8.35.1 That the Government approach local aboriginal interests through the Chief Minister's Aboriginal Consultative Committee with a suggestion that an Aboriginal Cultural Centre be constructed within or adjacent to Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve so that the Aboriginal Community can have an opportunity to educate the rest of the community in aboriginal traditions and culture. That centre should also be a retail outlet for certified aboriginal artefacts from all over Australia.
- 8.36.1 A general upgrading of park facilities and interpretation services at Tidbinbilla, Namadgi, Jerrabomberra Wetlands, Canberra Nature Park

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and Murrumbidgee River Corridor be funded on a one-off basis

- 8.37.1 That the Government make an additional payment to the Parks and Conservation Service spread over the next two years to enable a proper Plan of Management to be in place for every appropriate area.

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CHAPTER 4

APPROACH

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This report endeavours to provide a range of suggestions that could enhance the ACT's tourism industry and economic base. There is a common theme of nature based tourism but the suggestions go well outside the conventional definitions of ecotourism. The report also makes some suggestions about how the reliance of the Government's Parks and Conservation Program on the tax payer might be lessened.

Discussions were held with a range of people in the ACT and interstate who have a specific interest in the subject matter. A list of these contributors appears in Chapter 9. A commercial-in-confidence list of potential operators and developers who have expressed interest in one or more projects is available.

Readers may consider some of the recommendations excessively ambitious but it should be remembered that they are designed to be implemented over a ten year period. If we consider the development Canberra has experienced in the last ten year period, the recommendations are easier to adjust to. A second list of projects appears at Appendix B, these projects could be considered for the following ten year period.

No attempt has been made to cost individual recommendations as potential proponents would wish to affect the type and scope of each proposal. Conversely, the community would want its views considered at the detail stage.

This report is designed to complement the consultancy let by the Parks and Conservation Service to look at Ecotourism marketing and development and has been made available to the consultant as a source document.

It is absolutely essential that we understand that nature based tourism is just as competitive as any other form of tourism. If the ACT is to be successful, it must acquire nature based tourism product that is better than the product being put together in other states and territories. This does not mean that we have to have higher mountains or larger lakes than everybody else but it does mean that we have to use our resources in a way that is as attractive as possible to the visitor.

It is clear that the quality of interpretation and the quality of people involved in nature based tourism is a determining factor in the success of any initiative. There is no point in palming visitors off with second rate attractions or accommodation or telling them that they can have a nature based tourism experience by renting a motel room in the city and commuting to the nature conservation areas of the Territory.

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We should also concentrate on the upper end of the market for nature based tourism because of the additional revenue that this generates for our economy. Experience has also shown that visitors seeking a nature based experience and wanting to have that experience at the higher end of the market have a more responsible attitude to the environment. From an equity perspective, it is desirable that we also provide suitable facilities for those visitors seeking a two star accommodation component for their nature bases experience. The proposals in this report allow for both ends of the market but concentrate on those elements that will maximise the benefit to the ACT in jobs and revenue.

The report proposes that the Government concentrate its efforts around Tidbinbilla Tourist Drive (Tourist Drive 5) which links the Cotter with Lanyon and Tharwa and leaves Namadgi National Park with very little impact other than improvements in interpretation and some site hardening. It is suggested that this will be better from a marketing perspective and leaves Namadgi for consideration by the next generation of Canberrans.

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CHAPTER 5

INVESTMENT FACTORS

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The Tourism Industry has suffered greatly since the late 1980's in attracting investment funds from conventional financial institutions. A poor record in terms of financial viability during the period of over building that we saw during the 1980's boom is the major cause. For this reason it will be quite difficult to attract commercial funding for the types of infrastructure projects described in this Report.

This problem is partly mitigated by the fact that the ACT Tourism Industry is enjoying higher levels of accommodation occupancy and yield per room than the national average. In fact, some analysts believe there is a looming shortage of tourist and business accommodation and facilities.

Specialist attractions and accommodation facilities have a poor record in financial viability terms. This has been so in the ACT and even more so in the rest of the nation. However, there have been some recent success stories with exactly the sort of facilities proposed in this report in other parts of Australia. For example the purchase by P&O of the Cradle Mountain Lodge and its subsequent expansion and the construction of the Freycinet Lodge within the Freycinet National Park have proved to be outstanding in financial terms and in offering visitors a responsible and educational approach to the surrounding environment.

Interest has been expressed by entrepreneurs wishing to acquire specialist nature based tourism facilities which complement their current range of resorts, and by general accommodation companies who wish to have an ecotourism establishment in their range of properties. There is also some interest from non profit, environmental organisations who see a facility of this nature as a source of long term funding and an opportunity to advance their particular conservation message whilst promoting environmental responsibility in a practical way.

If the ACT Government wished to be involved in providing or guaranteeing financial support, the range of potential proponents would go well beyond the normal tourism operators. This might be quite appropriate if the Government chose to maximise the environmental responsibility factors in construction and operation and seek a partnership or cooperative arrangement with a national conservation organisation.

A further possibility exists in the ACT Government building one or more of the proposed facilities with the assistance of the University of Canberra's Environmental and Architecture Faculties as a way of advancing environmental

best practice and incorporating it into a practical facility. There would be many tourism operators who would bid to lease the facility from the Government.

The first facility built is likely to be a major financial success story and will probably encourage commercial interest in the subsequent opportunities. It would be essential for the ACT to proceed slowly to ensure that each facility provides valuable experience in setting the conditions for subsequent proposals. Any well designed, environmentally responsible facility in an area noted for its environmental attractiveness which can draw on both the ACT conference market and the romantic weekend business will be well placed to succeed.

There is no reason why the ACT Government should not consider providing capital works funds to the Parks and Conservation Service where the consequential expenditure would result in boosting the Service's ability to generate its own revenue. A percentage of the new revenue could then be used to repay the capital works funding.

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CHAPTER 6

MARKETING

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The ACT Parks and Conservation Service has retained a consultant to provide a marketing plan for the properties and services administered by the Service. Whilst the report is awaited there are a range of things that can be done at very little cost to lift visitor numbers as high as desirable for Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and the Namadgi National Park, Jerrabomberra Wetlands, Canberra Nature Park and the Murrumbidgee River Corridor as well as those other parks of a more urban nature such as Weston Park, Commonwealth Park and Lake Ginninderra.

Appointing a tourism marketing officer within the Parks and Conservation Service who can work with the Canberra Tourism Commission in assisting tourism operators, both international and domestic, in providing itineraries and advice on how to access the ACT's nature reserves would be more effective than any other marketing option. This officer should attend travel trade shows within Australia and internationally as part of the ACT delegation. The person selected should be a Ranger and should wear uniform. This would get ACT nature based tourism modules into many wholesalers programs.

For more immediate results, a promotion in the Visitor Information Centre on Northbourne Avenue with a nature based display and a Ranger or suitably qualified volunteer in attendance could direct large numbers of appropriate visitors to each of the ACT properties. Because of the current popularity of Rangers and national parks on children's and other TV shows a personal chat with somebody who understands the specialities and educational peculiarities of each ACT property would be invaluable and most attractive to family visitors presenting at the Visitor Information Centre.

A program of school visitation in which a Ranger or a suitably qualified volunteer gives a talk to school groups as part of their environmental education and invites them to visit a nature reserve or national park consistent with their curriculum goals would be most successful in boosting visitation. Upon students accepting the Ranger's invitation to visit, a kit could be provided that would assist students in project work and encourage them to return with other members of their families.

Entering into an arrangement with a local youth theatre group to present a range of theatrical productions based on texts set for the ACT and NSW curricula, at the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve would be another way of encouraging visitation by school children who might not otherwise take an interest environmental matters.

There is a need for a comprehensive brochure aimed at potential eco tourists which could be mailed out with information kits from the Canberra Tourism Commission. Approximately one thousand kits are mailed weekly and this alone would probably boost tourism numbers to levels considered manageable by the Parks and Conservation Service. There would be merit in a targeting process to concentrate on those potential visitors who would put a high premium on nature based tourism rather than just another tourism experience.

Local media would be more than willing to enter into a promotional arrangement with the Parks and Conservation Service to encourage appropriate visitation to Canberra's nature parks. This could be a relatively inexpensive promotion based on a strong education message delivered by Parks and Conservation staff combined with competitions and other promotional activities.

It would be an easy marketing initiative to install a hotline that enabled visitors to contact the Parks and Conservation Service from the Canberra Tourism Commission's Visitor Information Centre, leading hotels and other appropriate locations. This would enable Parks and Conservation Officers to encourage a responsible attitude in visitors to Canberra's natural assets and to direct visitors to the property that would best meet the experience for which the visitor was best matched.

There would be merit in the Government holding a quarterly welcome barbeque for the Diplomatic Corps at Tidbinbilla, Namadgi, or Jerrabomberra Wetlands to establish a link between the ACT Government and newly arrived Diplomats and to ensure that each of them understands the nature based assets on their door step. This will make it much more likely that foreign Diplomats will take their visititors to the ACT's parks and reserves when they visit Canberra.

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DEVELOPING A COORDINATED STRATEGY

Officers of the Parks and Conservation Service have expressed fears that the Government might give instructions to implement various development and marketing initiatives on an ad hoc basis rather than as part of a coordinated strategy. They believe that the combined effects of more than one thing happening at a time might prove difficult to manage. For example the implementation of park usage fees might have a detrimental effect on the ability of concession holders and other retail outlets to trade profitably. Another example would be that promotion of the Ranger Guided Walks Program might result in demand that the current Ranger and volunteer resources could not meet.

Consequently it would be helpful if implementation of those suggestions in this report that the Government chooses to proceed with should be in a manner that the professional staff of the Parks and Conservation Service can accommodate within their resources. Officers have expressed fears that their financial resources might not enable them to implement Government Policy if an appropriation to support each initiative is not forthcoming.

Coordination with the New South Wales Parks and Wildlife Service is also necessary so that we do not have radically different policies and charging regimes in the ACT. It should also be noted that nature based tourism operators are likely to take their clients through national parks in the ACT, NSW and Victoria in the same tour.

CHAPTER 8

ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Generation of Revenue in the Parks and Conservation Program

The ACT probably makes less internal contribution to its own Parks and Conservation Program revenue than any other state or territory. There is a general trend towards usage fees, concessions, merchandising, income producing infrastructure and similar revenue sources in Australia and certainly overseas.

The most important factor in general revenue production is to assure both staff and the public that revenue collected will be held within the program. One of the better ways of achieving this is by establishing trust accounts, within which revenue is retained. This is common practice elsewhere in Australia and it motivates staff to maximise revenue and makes the public much happier about contributing. There are numerous good examples, both within parks and wildlife services interstate and in places such as the National Gallery where the public are made aware that their entrance fees are directed to a new acquisitions fund. If revenue is simply paid into Consolidated Revenue, motivation is minimised and public antipathy maximised.

There is no reason why the Government could not expect the Parks and Conservation Service to generate 25% of its own funds within a reasonable period. New South Wales generates 25% of its own income despite the fact that it has many new national parks and nature reserves in the remote parts of the State which have only been established recently and do not yet attract usage fees. For example, long established parks have shown that they can generate well over half of their recurrent expenditure. It is also essential that the Government does not simply reduce its subvention to that program by the same amount as this as the same demotivating effect referred to above. These comments refer to the National Parks and Nature Reserves Program and not to the municipal parks and gardens function.

New South Wales' current budget delivered a massive boost to the Parks and Conservation appropriation aimed at allowing the NSW Parks and Wildlife Service to lift its contribution to its conservation objectives and to enable it to improve its long term economic viability. Because of the large increase this year, the percentage of revenue internally generated will reduce in the short term.

There is no reason why the Government should not consider making capital funds available to the Parks and Conservation Service on a loan basis to be repaid out of increased revenue in situations where the expenditure is aimed at increasing visitor numbers and revenue.

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The Parks and Conservation Service is awaiting a consultants report on park usage fees and will no doubt wish to consider that advice before taking any further steps. However, it would appear that the best way of handling the park usage fee question in the ACT is to offer:-

- | | | |
|-----|--|--|
| (a) | a daily park usage fee to be purchased at Visitor Information Centres | Suggested - \$5.00
per car per day |
| (b) | an annual permit which will give VIP status to purchasers including a fishing licence, and other benefits such as a newsletter, half price camping fees and VIP treatment whilst in parks and reserves | Suggested - \$40.00
per car per annum |
| (c) | a coach fee on a per person basis which will have a supplement for a Ranger Guide | Suggested - \$ 2.00
per person |
| (d) | a special series number plate for vehicles owned by purchasers of annual permits | Suggested - \$50.00
per plate |

In the first year, the Government might consider offering every ACT resident two free daily park usage tickets as a marketing incentive. These could be traded in for half the cost of an annual permit fee

RECOMMENDATION

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- 8.1.1 That the ACT Parks and Conservation Service embark on a program to generate 25% of its own revenue within a reasonable period.
- 8.1.2 That the ACT Government maintains its subvention to this program for the foreseeable future
- 8.1.3 That the ACT Parks and Conservation Service be allowed to establish a trust account so that staff and the public are aware that money raised is used to enhance the experience of visitors to the properties and onservation responsibilities of the Service are met to a greater degree than currently.
- 8.1.4 That revenue be generated through the following activities:
- Park usage fees for Tidbinbilla and Namadgi.
 - Concession fees for retail outlets and food outlets where-ever commercial operators display an interest in trading. Concessions should be sympathetic with the style and the goals of the Parks and Conservation Program.
 - Camping fees be levied in all camp sites controlled by Parks and Conservation Service and ACT Forests with such fees being collected

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by way of pre purchased vouchers obtained from ACT Shopfronts and Visitor Information Centres.

- 8.1.5 That the Parks and Conservation Service investigate the desirability of retaining a fund raising company to assist it in maximising its sponsorship and revenue potential. This should not be done in such a way as it detrimentally affects any contribution that might be made by the Foundation for National Parks.

8.2 Park Usage Fees

Park usage fees can be instituted in the ACT immediately without attracting excessive criticism because the practice is common throughout Australia. There is already sufficient infrastructure at Tidbinbilla to support usage fees but the case is not as strong for Namadgi because of the lack of visitor services and the fact that a public road bisects the Park. People driving through Namadgi who do not wish to stop within the Park would not require a permit. An annual subscription which is not much more expensive than the day use fee would be relatively easy to administer and would be acceptable to visitors if it was seen as a subscription to supporting parks and reserves and gave the purchaser some real benefits and VIP status when visiting the ACT's parks and reserves.

Provided it is made clear to visitors that all revenue collected is used to improve facilities there is unlikely to be long term problems. Experience has shown that locals are offended when a charge is imposed in respect of an area that was previously free and it may be constructive to give Canberra residents one or more free passes. Interstate and overseas visitors are quite used to paying entrance fees.

Because of the difficulties of justifying fishing licence fees during the period that a viable sports fishing industry is not seen as a priority in tourism terms it seems beneficial that annual park usage fees contain a fishing licence component. A set proportion of the annual fee should be allocated to the sports fishery sub-program.

Those people purchasing an annual park use permit should be accorded a status that reflects their support for Canberra's natural resources. They should receive a newsletter and be entitled to a range of discounts on merchandise produced by the Parks and Conservation Service and such other benefits as can be arranged.

The imposition of a fee in respect of the Murrumbidgee River Corridor and Canberra Nature Park are inappropriate because these areas are an integral part of the lifestyle of Canberra. By not having a fee requirement those people who do not wish to contribute to the National Parks and Reserves Program do have somewhere else to enjoy nature. The same argument applies to the urban parks.

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When enforcement of payment of fees is required, this should be done by a service club or non-government conservation association who should be allowed to keep the bulk of any additional fees collected so that the Parks and Conservation Service's scarce resources are not used for this purpose. The emphasis should always be placed on maximising visitors' partnership in the parks and reserves rather than adopting a policeman role toward visitors.

Once facilities are up graded at Jerrabomberra Wetlands and the sports fishing industry properly established at Googong, it is appropriate to extend the park usage fee to Jerrabomberra Wetlands and Googong Dam.

Members of volunteer schemes should be entitled to a highly subsidised annual permit.

Excellent software and printing systems are now available for printing park usage fee permits. These are available commercially and would be readily applicable to the ACT situation.

It is likely that reciprocal arrangements can be negotiated in the longer term with NSW.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.2.1 That park usage fees be implemented initially at Tidbinbilla and Namadgi with levels not excluding the scale used in New South Wales for similar parks. Revenue collected should be clearly identified for the enhancement of parks and reserves.

8.3 Licence Plates

Adding a fee of say fifty dollars to ACT motor registration costs, at the volition of motorists, to further augment the Parks program revenue, would be an appropriate way for ACT residents to support their parks and reserves. It is suggested that a special series of number plates with a distinctive design bearing an inscription "*I support National Parks*" be offered.

To obtain the special series number plate would require the motorist paying an additional fifty dollars, with that sum going directly into the Parks and Conservation trust account.

- 8.3.1 The Government considers authorising a distinctive series of number plates from which \$50 per issue goes to supplement Parks and Conservation revenue.

8.4 Promotion

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Relatively simple and low cost options are available to lift visitation to any level required. The ACT has excellent nature based tourism areas which are quite under utilised. The following are some examples of low cost promotion options:

- . Appoint a tourism development officer within the Parks and Conservation Service who would work directly with the Canberra Tourism Commission in negotiating with tourism operators at trade shows within and outside Australia on how to access the ACT's parks and reserves in a responsible and appropriate way.
- . Have a permanent display at the Visitor Information Centre on Northbourne Avenue promoting Tidbinbilla and Namadgi and other areas of conservation interests to visitors. The display should concentrate on promoting conservation values and be aimed at attracting those visitors who are amenable to the conservation message and willing to make a financial contribution to the economy in respect of their visit.
- . Enhance the signage on Canberra's main entrances directing visitors to Tidbinbilla and Namadgi and other appropriate areas.
- . Provide an appropriate conference facility within Tidbinbilla particularly catering to the public service market that will encourage conferencing activities there rather than at the South Coast, Kosciusko National Park or other interstate venues. Having a group of people who would not normally visit nature parks become aware of what they have to offer would ensure a significant level of return visitation with families.
- . Preparation of a short video aimed at international nature based tourism operators or general operators seeking a nature based element for their general itineraries.
- . Preparation of a practical "how to" publication for tour operators informing them of the options and responsibilities they may acquire in offering their visitors a nature based experience in Canberra.
- . Rename Tourist Drive 5 "*Tidbinbilla Tourist Drive*" and promote extensively within the normal tourist publications and through ACT residents encouraging them to take their interstate visitors around the enhanced tourist drive. By concentrating tourist infrastructure around Tidbinbilla Tourist Drive a regular bus service will become viable in about five years time.
- . Co-operative marketing, with the Canberra Tourism Commission in all the Commission's day-to-day activities is a cost effective method of promoting the ACT's nature based facilities.

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Further detail is contained in Chapter 6.

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RECOMMENDATION

- 8.4.1 That the Government concentrate its efforts on those areas adjacent to Tourist Drive 5 which should be retitled Tidbinbilla Tourist Drive.
- 8.4.2 That large signs should be erected on all the entrance roads to Canberra directing attention to Tidbinbilla and Namadgi. This will increase the recognised ability of these easily marketable names.
- 8.4.3 That a marketing plan be instituted as a result of the consultancy recently let by the Parks and Conservation Service to promote the program. In the meantime the low cost initiatives contained in the Marketing Chapter in this Report should be implemented.

8.5 Infrastructure

Over a ten year period there is considerable potential for increasing the number of attractions that have a nature based element within the ACT and to expand our tourism product to the point where we attract those visitors who would seek such an experience elsewhere as part of their travel itineraries. These include the elements listed below.

- . A four star chalet, with conference facilities for one hundred people within or adjacent to Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. There is an unfulfilled need for accommodation in which visitors can wake up in natural surroundings unlike anything that can be part of their day-to-day life. Successful precedents indicate that four star cabins, linked to conference facilities and normal hotel/lodge refinements would suit this area. To maximise economic viability it is necessary to access the business market during the week and the short break holiday market during the weekends. It is essential that such an establishment be constructed and operated using the world's best practice in environmental responsibility.
- . A two star YHA style hostel adjacent to Tidbinbilla, Tharwa or somewhere else along Tidbinbilla Tourist Drive. Properties catering to this market in Canberra and at Thredbo are extremely successful and attract exactly the sort of visitor who would be interested in having a nature based experience incorporated into their longer than average stay.
- . A small but exclusive chalet style resort complex at Googong Dam with extensive views over the water. This would cater to the romantic weekend market but should also have conference facilities similar to those described above. The exclusiveness of the proposed resort would be enhanced by the fact that only its patrons would be able to stay overnight within the Googong Foreshores Nature Reserve. This may also be attractive to the Federal Government and other organisations needing to

hold secure conferences. It would be appropriate for the chalet operator to also have a concession for sailing boat rental. Because of the water quality issues at Googong, sewerage disposal would need to be by way of pump out septic tanks so that the effluent is placed into the Queanbeyan sewerage system rather than finding its way into Googong Dam. This is despite the fact that the majority of the catchment area for Googong is in rural and domestic hands with the water drawn from Googong Dam being tertiary treated.

An old style high country guest house adjacent to the Visitor Information Centre outside Namadgi National Park. This would provide comfortable lower priced accommodation for people wishing to walk in the Park or have access to the Bicentennial Equestrian Trail and the Australian Alps Walking Track which passes close by the Visitor Information Centre. It would also provide Canberra residents with an economical place to stay, close to Namadgi where a range of activities can be undertaken.

During the preparation of this Report, a number of potential developers approached the writer, indicating their interest in financing, building and operating a nature based attraction in the ACT.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.5.1 That the Government consider making leases available to support the infrastructure proposals listed in the body of the Report over a ten year period in an orderly fashion based on the degree of commercial interest displayed in each of the proposals. Should commercial interest be displayed in proposals not listed above, the Government should also consider these.
- 8.5.2 Amongst the proposals the Government could consider are:
- A four star chalet with conference facilities in or adjacent to Tidbinbilla.
 - A two star hostel adjacent to Tidbinbilla or somewhere else along Tidbinbilla Tourist Drive.
 - An exclusive five star chalet at Googong Dam.
 - A short stay good quality caravan park below Googong Dam but within the Foreshores Reserve.
 - An old style high country guest house adjacent to the Visitor Information Centre outside Namadgi National Park.
 - Cafe facilities at the Visitor Information Centres at Tidbinbilla and Namadgi and eventually at Googong Dam, Pine Island and Jerrabomberra Wetlands.

- Purpose built farm stay accommodation on several rural leases close to Tidbinbilla Tourist Drive.

8.6 Upgrading of Jerrabomberra Wetlands

The current Jerrabomberra Wetlands facility is a very interesting facility with enormous potential. To realise this potential requires an Interpretation Centre to be built on the Mandairing Drive side near the Causeway.

The Interpretation Centre should contain accommodation for some conservation groups and facilities for education of visitors. It would also benefit from having a shop similar to that conducted by the Environment Centre in Civic which would enable non-government conservation groups to sell their merchandise and raise funds to a steady flow of visitors. The Centre also needs to have refreshment facilities for visitors and these could be part of non-government conservation groups opportunity to raise some funds.

8.7 Concessions

There is potential for concessions to be let in a number of places, particularly at the Visitor Information Centres at Tidbinbilla and Namadgi for the sale of publications and other material relating to conservation generally and the ACT material in particular. Each of the Visitor Information Centres has room for incorporation of a small shop within the current buildings which could be let to a private concessionaire thus relieving professional parks officers from sales and other non professional activities. The concessionaires could also sell park usage fee vouchers on a commission basis. There is no reason why a full range of commercial material and merchandise produced by other state parks services could not be included. A good precedent is the Minnimurra Visitor Centre in New South Wales.

The ACT Parks and Conservation Service does not favour the use of concessions, preferring activities to be conducted by Parks and Conservation Staff, using the vehicle of a subsidiary company owned by the Parks and Conservation Service or a partnership arrangement with individual business people.

The alternative view is that we should learn to manage concessions well. NSW has recently prepared a manual on concession management which they would be prepared to share with us.

Some officers of the Parks and Conservation Service prefer that any commercial activity on nature parks or reserves be operated by public servants or on a partnership basis or by a wholly owned subsidiary company of the Parks and Conservation Service. There are precedents for all three of these options working well and working badly and each situation should be judged on its merits.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.7.1 That the Government authorise a system of concessions in those areas managed by the ACT Parks and Conservation Service and ACT Forests where these are appropriate to the revenue generation goals of the Government and in keeping with the general program goals.

8.8 Food Outlets

The most common complaint encountered during the research for this Report was from visitors to Tidbinbilla and Namadgi who were unable to purchase any refreshments whilst enjoying their visit. Cafe facilities similar to those at the National Botanic Gardens and at Minnimurra Visitor Information Centre form suitable precedents. It may be that food outlets and the bookshops mentioned above would be held by the same person.

Within the ten year scope of this report, concessions of a different type would also be appropriate at Pine Island, Jerrabomberra Wetlands and Googong Dam.

Some Parks and Conservation staff object to visitors having access to refreshments while visiting parks and nature reserves unless such refreshments are brought by the visitor.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.8.1 That the Government instruct the Parks and Conservation Service to allow food outlets at any nature reserve where such a service would be attractive to visitors and commercially viable.

8.9 Fishing

The ACT is very well placed to benefit from the vastly underrated recreational fishing industry. The ACT currently has no system of fishing licences and attracts no direct income from fishing. Recreational fishermen consider the ACT's fishery to be of poor standard and would be happy to buy fishing licences if they could have access to a managed sports fishery. There is a strongly held view by conservationists that introduced sports fish such as trout should not be used for stocking ACT waterways.

Employing a fisheries biologist to manage a sporting fishing industry, upgrading the ACT's Fisheries Act and involving the ACT fishing clubs in the processes would contribute a significant increase to tourism for very little expenditure. Although some funds would need to be appropriated in the short term (about \$200,000) this could rapidly be recovered via a fishing licence component of the park usage fee and the industry's contribution to the ACT's economy.

The statistics available, relating to the sports fishery industry are very positive and there are significant gains to be made for the ACT tourism industry in establishing a good quality sports fishery. Sports fishermen in the ACT are of the view that the quality of the fishery has diminished to the point where very few interstate fishermen pursue their sport in the ACT.

There is a need for a fishery facility where people who simply want to catch a fish (probably on a catch and release basis) can do so without going into sensitive wilderness areas of the ACT. It is considered that Cotter Dam would be the ideal venue for this purpose as it is on Tidbinbilla Tourist Drive, is already located close to other facilities and is unlikely to be the source for Canberra's water supply in the future.

A fishing facility of the type described above would probably support a concession that would rent fishing tackle, provide basic refreshments and offer casting lessons.

Amongst the specific ideas suggested during the preparation of this report were:

- . The installation of an oxygen pump at Googong Dam to improve the quality of the fishery in that body of water (\$70,000).
- . Increased stocking of ACT waters with native fish and trout.
- . The construction of a glass platform and window to enable visitors to view spawning beds, platypus and water rats. Some funding for this project could be sought from the Federal Department of Tourism's Ecotourism Grant Scheme.
- . Making a fishing licence a component of the annual park usage fee with a set proportion being allocated to the sports fishery sub-program mentioned above.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.9.1 That a program be initiated to establish a sports fishing industry, headed by a fisheries biologist, with the cooperation of the ACT fishing clubs and funded in the long term by the sale of an annual park usage permit, a set proportion of which is allocated to the sports fishery sub-program.
- 8.9.2 That some research be undertaken to find an appropriate place in the Territory for the construction of an aquatic viewing area to enable people to view spawning beds, platypus and water rats.
- 8.9.3 That Cotter Dam be managed as a catch and release fishing facility, financed by the fishing licence component of park usage fees and with the advice of the local fishing clubs.

8.10 Googong Ferry

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A steam vessel, preferably one with some heritage significance which could be used as a ferry on the Dam could be a viable proposition within ten years. There is a market for a morning/afternoon tea and lunch cruise from one end of the Dam to the other which would be an experience for Canberra people as well as visitors particularly during weekends. The cruise would be a welcome addition to conference facilities during the week. The boat would also provide transport to the far end of the Dam, allowing walkers to do a day walk back to the dam mouth. It is not practicable for ordinary walkers to walk right round the Dam in one day. Walkers would have the choice of walking through the wooded country on one side of the dam or the open grass lands on the other side. Changing the name from Googong Dam to Lake Googong would provide a marketing advantage.

It will probably be necessary for the vessel chosen for this function to be steam driven rather than diesel because of the sensitivity to hydrocarbons of the filters in the water treatment plant.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.10.1 That the Government invite expressions of interest from commercial operators who would wish to run a cruise vessel on Googong Dam.

8.11 Caravan Park Below Googong Dam

The Tourism Manager of the Queanbeyan City Council has suggested that there is a significant shortage of high quality, short term caravan park sites in the ACT and Queanbeyan area which could best be met by a caravan park below Googong Dam. Constructing the park below the outflow obviates any water catchment quality questions.

Such a park would provide a different form of facility which does not exist in the area at the present time. The type of tourists who would use such a park are looking for pleasant surroundings from which to access the National Capital and the surrounding region and would not find the current caravan parks suitable for their needs.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.11.1 That a site be identified for a short term caravan park in the Googong Foreshores Reserve below the outflow.

8.12 Order of Development

See Appendix 'A'

8.13 Farm Stay Accommodation

The most commonly unfulfilled request in the ACT tourism market is for farm stay accommodation. This lack is partly met by properties in the area surrounding the ACT but farm stay accommodation for school children, particularly from Japan cannot be provided. Specially constructed accommodation blocks on rural leases in the ACT could be allowed to meet this need with the Government accepting applications from current rural leasees for variation of lease purpose clauses such as will allow this development. Demountable dormitory blocks constructed to a style sympathetic with current buildings would be suitable. It would be necessary to ensure that wastes from these establishments could be properly disposed of whilst the opportunity is taken to educate visitors in recycling and waste management issues.

Such facilities would be an ideal way to educate visitors in land management and environmental responsibility matters and to teach them something of Australia's rural pursuits.

Visitors using this class of accommodation would visit Tidbinbilla and Namadgi as part of their school conservation education program

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.13.1 That the Government accept applications from rural leasees for a change in lease purpose such as would enable a form of Farm Stay Accommodation to be constructed to suit a complete coach load of school children.

8.14 Merchandising

Some of the merchandise produced by the Parks and Conservation Service and other government agencies to date have been excellent and would bring a small but reliable revenue flow. There is potential for an increase in this activity. Most visitors to national parks seek high quality merchandise which is unique to Australia or to the immediate area. There is little interest in cheap souvenirs or in material not designed and produced locally.

Books, posters, postcards, video and audio cassettes, clothing, aboriginal artefacts and craft are the most sought after merchandise but anything that has significance to the area and is well produced will prove attractive to visitors to national parks.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.14.1 That the Parks and Conservation Service should be enabled to retain revenue from its commercial activities to expand its merchandising capacity by producing books, postcards, posters, video and audio cassettes and other associated materials to a much greater degree. These should be sold through a wide range of retail outlets but particularly through the concessions in the ACT 's own properties.

8.15 Accreditation of Tour Operators

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The ACT would be prudent to wait until the Federal Department of Tourism's consultancy on ecotourism operators is produced at the end of 1994 before deciding how to control tour operators using the parks and nature reserves.

Accrediting responsible and properly prepared specialist nature-based tourism operators advantages the park managers by providing them with additional eyes and ears in the parks. Because accreditation is highly sought after and gives the operator a marketing edge over competitors accredited operators can be relied upon to expand the park managers' law enforcement capability. In return for this special status, it would be appropriate to give accredited operators some special privileges as decided by the Park managers.

Where unaccredited tour operators wish to bring a coach into an ACT park or reserve they should be required to arrange for a park ranger or accredited person to accompany their party during their visit. This ensures that impact is minimised, educational aspects are maximised and law enforcement problems eliminated. The cost of providing a ranger or accredited person should be on a user pay basis. It would be appropriate for organisations such as the National Parks Association to provide such people with the payment going to the Association for its purposes.

RECOMMENDATION

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- 8.15.1 That the ACT adopts an eco tourism operator accreditation scheme consistent with the other States following the release of the consultancy report commissioned by the Federal Department of Tourism (due November 1994). In the meantime that coach operators using Tidbinbilla and Namadgi be required to have a Ranger or suitably qualified volunteer on board on a user pays basis.

8.16 Registration of Tour Vehicles

Tour vehicles in the ACT are registered in a manner disadvantaging operators compared to those in other states. The ACT should bring about a situation that removes the penalties imposed on ACT operators and preferably place them in a situation similar to their interstate counterparts. Particular problems include:

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.16.1 That the Government reviews its policies in respect of licensing tour vehicles and places ACT operators in a position as favourable as interstate operators.

8.17 Resort Accommodation of a Non Eco Tourism Type

During the preparation of this Report, interest was expressed in resort accommodation which fell outside any known ecotourism definition. Proponents envisaged a resort with open air activities such as golf, horse riding and other sporting activities with but a minor connection with nature-based conservation areas.

It would be inappropriate for such a resort to be within or adjacent to national parks or reserves. Additional protection for sensitive areas can be acquired by proceeding immediately with a resort complex based on the Yarralumla Brick Works. This will dissuade visitors who would be more comfortable in a conventional resort environment from seeking to utilise more sensitive areas in the southern end of the Territory.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.17.1 That the Government consider releasing the Yarralumla Brick Works site for a conventional (non eco tourism) resort to attract that part of the market that would not gain from visiting the southern part of the ACT.

8.18 Siddha Yoga Foundation: National Ashram

Our ecotourism mix and its contribution to the Territory's economic base would be significantly enhanced if we could attract a major national/international organisation to establish a conference/retreat centre in rural A.C.T.

The Siddha Yoga Foundation is a non-profit international organisation with major centres of this type in other countries. They are currently exploring the feasibility of establishing a national centre in Australia. They have previously approached the ACT Government but without proceeding to the acquisition of a lease.

In broad terms their needs are:

- . a 20-40 hectare site set in a significantly natural landscape environment
- . a centre accommodating up to 500 people initially, and up to 1000-12000 people later. The estimated capital expenditure is in the order of \$10 million.
- . As occupants would predominantly come from interstate and overseas, a location within 20 minutes of Canberra airport.

One possible site has been identified within the Murrumbidgee River Corridor. Exploratory discussions with the Foundation have shown that it is attracted to

having its National Centre in Australia's national capital. They would be happy to explore the matter further.

RECOMMENDATION

- Has been told to drop this >> Nicholas.*
- 8.18.1** That the Government offer a suitable site to the Siddha Meditation Foundation for the construction of a high quality rated facility. Although this falls outside the definition of ecotourism the contemplative nature of the pursuits at such a facility would be quite compatible with the area. The site sought by the Foundation is in the Murrumbidgee River corridor above the Cotter Dam and close to the Green Hills Uniting Church complex and the Cottermouth Scout facility.

8.19 Corin Forest Development

The proprietors of the recreation facility at Corin Forest are preparing an application to expand their facility to include residential accommodation for one hundred people in high quality cabins and a mountain style lodge. If the environmental problems with this proposal can be satisfactorily overcome, it would be appropriate for it to proceed and it would add to Canberra's nature based tourism infrastructure.

The problem with this attraction appears to be that the recreation facilities have not been completed to a level that will attract sufficient patronage to ensure commercial viability.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.19.1** That the Government encourage the proprietors of the Corin Forest recreation facility to proceed with developing their proposals on a commercial basis. The proprietors should be encouraged to complete the recreation facilities before proceeding to accommodation facilities.

8.20 Administration of Parks and Conservation and Canberra Tourism Commission within the Same Organisation

During the period where ecotourism is publicly popular, the ACT would gain from being the only jurisdiction in Australia to combine its Parks Service and its Tourism Commission within the same agency. Currently there is little cooperation between the two organisations (although this has improved dramatically in the past few months). Combination of the two organisations would make each of them consider issues from a wider perspective. The conservation values related to tourism industry decisions would automatically be considered whilst the Parks Service would be inclined to take a more pragmatic view of its policy decisions.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.20.1 That the Government consider locating the Parks and Conservation Service and the Canberra Tourism Commission within the same Agency with a view to maximising the cooperation between the two organisations.

8.21 Foundation for National Parks

The Foundation operates most effectively in New South Wales and raises over two million dollars a year to augment government funding of the National Parks Program. The Foundation raises money from private corporations for specific projects in national parks and assists parks administrators in other ways. Initial discussions with the Foundation indicate that they would like to have a permanent presence in the ACT and could probably contribute \$200,000 a year to special projects in the ACT.

As is the case in NSW, it would be necessary for the ACT Government to make available suitable premises such as a small heritage building preferably in a park or nature reserve (e.g the cottage at Weston Park or Tuggeranong Homestead).

The ACT would be very much the richer for having this worthy organisation operating within its boundaries.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.21.1 That the Government formally invite the Foundation for National Parks to operate in the ACT on an agreed basis.

8.22 Sponsorship

There is significant potential in attracting sponsorship for infrastructure and programs within nature reserves and national parks. Sponsorship is a major feature in such circumstances in the other states and territories. The proposed brushed tail rock wallaby enclosure, the night house, education facilities and programs and audio-visual productions are examples of appropriate targets for sponsorship.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.22.1 A program of seeking sponsorship for new initiatives and an invitation to the Foundation For National Parks to establish itself in the ACT and contribute funds to the Parks and Conservation Service.

8.23 Combination of Eco Tourism with Cultural Tourism

Some would argue that nature based tourism is in fact a sub-set of cultural tourism. Regardless, the combining of the two types of experience brings about a significant advantage. Most visitors want more experiences during their holiday than they did a decade ago. Extending visitor stay by one night can

frequently be achieved by offering a nature based experience to a visitor attracted by Canberra's cultural attractions and vice versa.

It is quite possible to direct visitors from one attraction to another even though the focus of the attraction is quite different. For example a display in Old Parliament House showing visitors how to get to Tidbinbilla and why they should make the visit is a very effective way of lengthening visitor stay. Conversely a display in the Tidbinbilla Visitor Centre encouraging eco tourists to visit the Parliamentary Triangle and enjoy Old Parliament House, the National Science and Technology Centre and the National Gallery would be an effective marketing approach.

Conducting some performances (such as a Shakespearean play or even a prom concert) at Tidbinbilla would draw to that property a range of visitors they may not otherwise think to visit. This opens up a whole new market segment to the nature based areas and can also encourage visitation in the evenings, particularly during daylight saving.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.23.1 That the Department of Environment, Land and Planning devise ways of co-operating in ways that will maximise the benefits to the ACT with the Canberra Tourism Commission being involved in promotion of co-operative efforts as appropriate.

8.24 Volunteer Services

All states and territories are now incorporating a major contribution by volunteers into their programs. The ACT is no exception but there is significant opportunity to extend this input to the program. The type of people attracted to make this contribution tend to be extremely sincere and practical about their input. The ACT could be advantaged further if it extended its volunteer program and sought opportunities for volunteers to attract some revenue to fund their own activities. In other states this is achieved through giving volunteers the responsibility for collecting park usage fees on a commission basis and acting as guides on a commercial basis.

Weed control and guiding activities as well as flora and fauna monitoring are appropriate areas for this expansion. Volunteers should have an enhanced role in the management of the properties as well. Recognition at ministerial level and in specific and general awards should be directed towards this important contribution.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.24.1 That the Parks and Conservation Service explore a major increase in the volunteer service approached to extra development of the properties controlled by the Service.

8.25 School Holiday Packages

Some New South Wales parks have had success with allocating rejuvenation areas to particular school groups. This work tends to be carried out in school holidays but also as part of environmental studies courses. It gives students an opportunity to make a practical contribution as part of their science education and attracts suitable recognition for the school and the students. Such a program tends to develop and almost proprietorial interest in parks and reserves on the part of students.

Running conventional school holiday care programs in these properties, supervised by community groups such as the YMCA and YWCA enables older children to have a lot of fun, to concentrate on learning about their environment and to make a worthwhile contribution all at the same time.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.25.1 That the Government direct that a school holiday package program be instituted that will enable senior school students to learn about and contribute to the conservation of natural resources in the ACT.
- 8.25.2 That the Parks and Conservation Service and the Department of Education develop a program of regeneration of degraded areas by schools groups as part of environmental education curriculum.

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8.26 Ranger Guided Walks Program

The Parks and Conservation Service currently runs an excellent program of Ranger Guided Walks. These enable residents and visitors to really appreciate the treasures on their door step by seeing them through the eyes of appropriately educated professionals who have a genuine love for the environment.

The potential exists to commercialise this service and to promote it extensively. Nothing would be more powerful than an expanded Ranger Guided Walks Program in educating large numbers of residents and visitors in matters of environmental concern.

Payment should be way of the purchase of vouchers from ACT Government Shopfronts, accommodation houses and other tourist attractions. It is likely that the major hotels would be very happy to include vouchers in their special package offers. This makes it unnecessary for rangers to have to collect money. Where customers turn up for walks without vouchers an honour system for purchasing vouchers later would be quite appropriate. Sales of vouchers through conservation organisations on a share of revenue basis would be a most useful way to generate funds for non-government environment groups. Where insufficient rangers are available, specially accredited volunteers could be involved.

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RECOMMENDATION

- 8.26.1 That the Ranger Guided Walks Program be upgraded and commercialised using a voucher system. Purchasers of annual permits should be given a free voucher for one or more Ranger Guided Walks as part of the benefits of buying an annual permit.
- 8.26.2 That the Service and the Canberra Tourism Commission promote the Ranger Guided Walks Program to visitors through existing publications and through the schools visits program.

8.27 Spotlighting Program

Canberra's nature parks, being close to urban areas, are ideal venues to introduce residents and visitors to the bush that surrounds them in a measured and educational way. Although people are used to visiting nature conservation areas during the day, the opportunity of seeing nocturnal animals and learning about the bush at night is an attractive proposition for city dwellers and is an ideal extension of the Ranger Guided Walks Program which is likely to boost its financial viability.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.27.1 That the Spotlighting Program be incorporated in the marketing of the Ranger Guided Walks Program and promoted.

8.28 Night House

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Plans are well advanced towards the construction of a Night House within the Visitor Information Centre at Tidbinbilla. This will be a big improvement to the range of attractions and makes usage fees a more practical proposition. The Night House is an ideal subject for sponsorship which could provide the Parks and Conservation Service with additional funding for enhancement or the commencement of a subsequent project.

Many visitors are quite unaware of the rich population of nocturnal animals that can best be seen through the construction of such a facility.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.28.1 That the Government further support the Night House and that a private sector sponsor be sought to fund this valuable new initiative.

8.29 Walk Through Avairy At Tidbinbilla

Significant work has been done over the years for a walk through Avairy at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, to widen the Reserve's ability to meet its

educational goals and to increase its ability to attract visitors. It is understood that the proposal has never been successful in attracting Capital Works funding.

The introduction of park usage fees may well change the economics of this project and such a project would also be likely to attract significant sponsorship interest from commercial organisations.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.29.1 That the Parks and Conservation Service seek a commercial sponsor for a walk through aviary at Tidbinbilla.

8.30 Performance Centre

Funds have already been allocated for the construction of a Performance Centre at Tidbinbilla in conjunction with the Federal Government. This is a useful step forward in giving visitors and residents some extra benefits in visiting Tidbinbilla. Having an area suitably site-hardened where performances can be enjoyed attracts a range of visitors who might not otherwise come into contact with the other attractions available in the Reserve.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.30.1 That discussions be instituted with ACT theatre groups with a view to using the Performance Centre for general arts audiences who might not otherwise visit Tidbinbilla.

8.31 ACT Forests

Those areas administered by ACT Forests can also contribute to nature based tourism in the ACT in the following ways:

- . The camping areas at Woods Reserve and Gibraltar Falls could easily attract camping fees, via a voucher system with vouchers purchasable at ACT Shopfronts.
- . The Pierce's Creek Forestry Village could support a tea-room and craft centre and could draw on the fact that is close to the Laurel Creek Wartime Internment Camp and the rich aboriginal sites in the area. Adding a forestry interpretation centre, which could be jointly funded by ACT Forests, the Federal Government and the National Federation of Forestry Associations would make a unique, additional tourist attraction which would further improve Tidbinbilla Tourist Drive.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.31.1 That Forestry and the Parks and Conservation Service establish a joint voucher system for camping fees throughout the ACT.

- 8.31.2 That Forestry investigate establishing a jointly funded Forestry Interpretation Centre at Pierce's Creek Forestry Village.

8.32 Festival of Australian Flora and Fauna

An annual festival celebrating Australian flora and fauna would be a most welcome addition to the ACT's events calendar. During the inaugural Autumn Fest, there was a body of opinion in the conservation movement opposing in support for exotic flora. A constructive way to deal with this criticism would be to hold a festival dedicated to native plants and animals.

Such a festival would be immensely popular with both visitors and residents and would give the conservation movement an excellent opportunity to sell its message. The festival should follow Floriade in late Spring and occupy the month surrounding the National Botanic Gardens event.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.32.1 That the Government's new events organisation should have, as one of its first tasks, the support of a festival of Australian flora and fauna with the organising group comprising the National Botanic Gardens, the Parks and Conservation Service and the Canberra Tourism Commission with the first event being held in late Spring 1995.

8.33 National Botanic Gardens

The National Botanic Gardens is a valuable part of nature based experiences in the ACT. It is extremely well designed and administered. Visitors can gain an appreciation of Australian Flora very quickly and pleasantly at the Gardens and with a greater level of coordination between our Parks and Conservation Service and the Gardens, visitors could be directed to other nature based attractions that would appropriately suit their needs.

The cafe at the Botanic Gardens is a good model for cafes at the Visitor Information Centres at Tidbinbilla and Namadgi.

The shop at the Botanic Gardens, which is run by a contractor, is successful, particularly in the range of merchandise it offers the public and the messages it delivers in educational terms.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.33.1 That the Government encourage a greater degree of joint activity by the National Botanic Gardens, the Parks and Conservation Service and the Canberra Tourism Commission in promoting the National Botanic Gardens as a first point of call for ecotourism visitors.

8.34 Electric Boats

The National Capital Planning Authority does not allow conventional motors to be used on Lake Burley Griffin other than for administrative and safety purposes. However, it does allow electric outboard's to be used. Electric outboard motors are also allowed on Googong Dam.

Given this unusual situation there is an opportunity here for the ACT to develop the technology relating to electric outboards which may have a significant future as the world becomes more considerate of its aquatic environment.

Such an industry could bring excellent publicity to the ACT if it was supported by an annual electric outboard regatta with significant prizes. Getting the event started may require some initial support from governments (both Federal and ACT) and the private sector which may not be commensurate with the immediate returns. The annual solar powered road race between Darwin and Alice Springs, shows the enormous television coverage and other publicity that an event that enhances the environment can bring.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.34.1 That the Government instructs the new events organisation to examine the possibility of Australia's first, regular electric outboard event. The event should be directed by a group comprising the ACT Government, the National Capital Planning Authority and the scientific community of Canberra.
- 8.34.2 That the necessity for a permit system for the use of an electric boat on ACT water ways be abolished.

8.35 Aboriginal Cultural Centre

There is a trend in other jurisdictions to locate aboriginal cultural facilities in nature reserves. Given that the Government has already allocated funds from the Casino premium for an Aboriginal Keeping Place and associated facilities there would be merit in locating any such facilities within or adjacent to Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. This would enable a commercial element to be established for the sale of genuine aboriginal artefacts and aboriginal culture to a captive market.

Because Canberra's Diplomatic Corps has displayed an interest in aboriginal culture and in purchasing aboriginal artefacts, an Aboriginal Culture Centre at Tidbinbilla would have a reasonable chance of being self supporting financially whilst at the same time creating an opportunity for aboriginal culture to be available to national and international visitors in an appropriate setting and format.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.35.1 That the Government approach local aboriginal interests through the Chief Minister's Aboriginal Consultative Committee with a suggestion

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that an Aboriginal Cultural Centre be constructed within or adjacent to Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve so that the Aboriginal Community can have an opportunity to educate the rest of the community in aboriginal traditions and culture. That centre should also be a retail outlet for certified aboriginal artefacts from all over Australia.

8.36 Upgrading of Facilities and Interpretation

In order that the Parks and Conservation Program can be put on a more commercial basis it is essential that the Service have access to additional funds to enable it to provide those facilities that visitors can reasonably expect.

Although some funds will be required in the short term to enable a reasonably quick updating to take place, there is no reason why funds should not be provided on a loan basis to the proposed Parks and Conservation trust account and repaid out of future revenue.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.36.1 A general upgrading of park facilities and interpretation services at Tidbinbilla, Namadgi, Jerrabomberra Wetlands, Canberra Nature Park and Murrumbidgee River Corridor be funded on a one-off basis

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8.37 Plans of Management

The lack of formal plans of management for each of the areas controlled by the Parks and Conservation Service is a cause for concern. Most of the recommendations in this report would need to be developed in accord with the appropriate Plan of Management.

Below is a list of the current status of each Plan of Management:

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About \$100,000 would be required to complete the process in respect of every reserve. Because of the public consultation requirements imposed by the Act it will take two years to complete the process.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8.37.1 That the Government make an additional payment to the Parks and Conservation Service spread over the next two years to enable a proper Plan of Management to be in place for every appropriate area.

CHAPTER 9

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The contribution of officers of the Parks and Conservation Service in providing their valuable assistance in the preparation of this Report is acknowledged. It is interesting to note that none of the ideas herein are new or particularly controversial. Every element has been considered at one time or another and postponed until the visitors' market and the resources of the Service have expanded sufficiently.

People involved in the conservation movement have been very generous in providing their views of what might be appropriate in terms of allowing their fellow citizens access to the natural areas of the Territory for which they feel a special responsibility. Although many conservationists would like to preserve the whole of the southern half of the ACT as pristine wilderness, they acknowledge that their fellow citizens also have a right to experience these areas and they wish to be involved in the planning of that access so that impact can be minimised and conservation education can be maximised.

The tourism industry has displayed an interest in widening the ACT tourist product range. The industry acknowledges that the ACT has enormous, unrealised potential in providing visitors with an experience that is difficult to obtain in other parts of Australia or overseas and understands clearly that access to sensitive areas requires an appropriate and conservative approach.

Below is a list of people consulted during the preparation of this Report.

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