

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM**

**EXPANSION OF NATURE BASED TOURISM
IN THE ACT**

REPORT NO. 2

DECEMBER 1995

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Mr Trevor Kaine MLA	(Chairman) (i)
Mr Harold Hird MLA	(former Chairman) (ii) 1995)
Mr Bill Wood MLA	(Deputy Chairman)
Mr Paul Osborne MLA	

Secretary: Margaret Jones

Assistant Secretary: Chris Papadopoulos

Administrative Support: Liz Yuncken

(i) Appointed 2 May 1995, elected Chairman 3 May 1995

(ii) Discharged 2 May 1995

TERMS OF REFERENCE

On 6 June 1995 the Committee resolved:

To inquire into and report on the benefits to the ACT economy arising from the further expansion of tourism based upon the development of the Territory's national and nature parks with particular regard to the sensitivity of these areas, and having regard for:

- i) the ecological attractions;*
- ii) the recreational and sporting potential;*
- iii) the nature of heritage and cultural aspects of these areas;*
- iv) the extent to which these aspects should be marketed;*
- v) the degree of development which may be permitted within or adjacent to the parks to facilitate tourist activity; and*
- vi) any other related matters.*

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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

3.7. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government finalise draft management plans for the Lower Molonglo, Murrumbidgee Corridor and Canberra Nature Park and Tidbinbilla, and update the management plan for Namadgi, as a matter of urgency.

Recommendation 2

5.17. The Committee recommends that ACT Forests and the ACT Parks and Conservation Service give high priority to the implementation of measures to redress the situation of weed infestation and feral animals.

Recommendation 3

5.23. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government raise the profile and attractiveness of the numerical Tourist Routes by renaming them with more attractive names which reflect local landmarks.

Recommendation 4

7.10. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government support the restoration and development of Tuggeranong Homestead and outbuildings as a tourist attraction of historical significance, and consider the mid- and long-term plans for other significant buildings such as Gudgenby Homestead.

Recommendation 5

7.16. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government invite all local Aboriginal organisations to participate in any consultation process concerning the future development of Territory national parks and nature reserves, and support them in their endeavours to establish an Aboriginal tourism industry within the ACT.

Recommendation 6

7.18. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government recognise the prior inhabitants of the Territory by placing signs at all entry points to Canberra which welcome visitors to Ngunnawal/Ngunawal country. Further the Committee recommends that these signs be designed in conjunction with the local Ngunnawal/Ngunawal organisations.

Recommendation 7

8.4. The Committee recommends that the formal links between Canberra Tourism and the ACT Parks and Conservation Service be strengthened so that the promotion and management of Canberra's ecological attractions receive a higher profile and take into account the needs of conservation as well as tourism.

Recommendation 8

8.13. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government develop a strategic plan for the development of nature based tourism in ACT national parks. The Plan needs to identify the sites that could be targeted for development, the types of infrastructure and the level of access permitted, how to generate revenue to assist in maintenance and betterment of these sites, and determine whether additional legislation and regulation would be necessary to ensure the Government maintains control over the management and protection of these sites.

Recommendation 9

8.19. The Committee recommends that prior to any further development of Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, a specific marketing plan be developed for this site, in order to guide its future development and to assess the impact of any proposed development.

Recommendation 10

9.5. The Committee recommends that Canberra Tourism diversify its approach to marketing the ACT by including aspects of Canberra's national parks and nature reserves in its marketing and advertising campaigns.

Recommendation 11

9.8. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government allocate some additional resources to enable the ACT Parks and Conservation Service to expand its marketing and promotional initiatives.

Recommendation 12

9.12. The Committee recommends that Canberra Tourism develop a plan to familiarise customer contact staff from Canberra Tourism, ACT accommodation venues and tourist attractions to ensure all frontline sales people have first hand knowledge of the ACT nature based product.

Recommendation 13

10.11. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government maintain its commitment to preserve ACT national parks and nature reserves for the purpose of conservation and ensure that any plan for development meets the requirements of the Territory Plan and the National Capital Plan.

Recommendation 14

10.18. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government conduct some assessments of the Territory's natural areas including carrying capacities and market demand for the product, to assist the Government to determine which sites could be targeted for increased visitation.

Recommendation 15

10.27. The Committee recommends that as a general rule the ACT Government restrict the development of formal accommodation venues to the periphery of the Territory's national parks; however, that it consider developments which may be appropriate under specific circumstances. Any such proposal for development must be considered through an extensive community and government consultation process.

Recommendation 16

10.28. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government explore the possibility of developing accommodation in Tuggeranong Valley and in peripheral areas of the park by using current farmhouse accommodation on rural land.

Recommendation 17

10.31. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government explore the efficacy of introducing food services along Tourist Route 5 or within Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve after considering the environmental impact of such a move.

Recommendation 18

11.12. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government allow the ACT Parks and Conservation Service to retain and manage any revenue it may generate for re-investment in maintenance and development of the sites under its control.

Recommendation 19

11.22. The Committee recommends that should the ACT Government consider the introduction of user charges, that an education campaign be conducted, prior to their introduction, to inform the public of the rationale for the need to charge.

Recommendation 20

11.31. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government explore the efficacy of the licensing system proposed by the ACT Parks and Conservation Service in its *Marketing Strategy and Options Plan*.

Recommendation 21

11.35. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government adopt an accreditation system to ensure that all guides and instructors involved in outdoor activities are accredited with qualifications and experience for the tasks they are instructing in.

1. Introduction

1.1. The Standing Committee on ACT Promotion and Tourism was formed on 9 March 1995 to inquire into and report on:

- a) the impact of tourism on the ACT economy, community and infrastructure;
- b) strategies to increase the level of activity in the tourism sector; and
- c) other matters relating to tourism in the ACT that the committee considers should be drawn to the attention of the Assembly.

1.2. On 21 April 1995 the Committee resolved to inquire into and report:

- i) *on the benefits to the ACT arising from the further expansion of nature based tourism, cultural tourism and sporting tourism; and*
- ii) *the means of facilitating that development deemed to be in the interests of the Territory.*

1.3. On 2 May 1995, the Chairman of the Committee, Mr Hird, was discharged from the Committee and Mr Kaine was appointed. On 3 May 1995 Mr Kaine was elected Chairman of the Committee. The Committee agreed that having regard to the appointment of Mr Kaine and the foreshadowed changes to the scope of the inquiry by the committee that it defer action on the proposed inquiry into nature, cultural and sporting based tourism.

1.4. On 6 June 1995 the Committee reviewed the terms of reference and resolved:

to inquire into and report on the benefits to the ACT economy arising from the further expansion of tourism based upon the development of the Territory's national and nature parks with particular regard to the sensitivity of these areas, and having regard for:

- i) *the ecological attractions;*
- ii) *the recreational and sporting potential;*
- iii) *the nature of heritage and cultural aspects of these areas;*
- iv) *the extent to which these aspects should be marketed;*
- v) *the degree of development which may be permitted within or adjacent to the parks to facilitate tourist activity; and*
- vi) *any other related matters.*

1.5. The Committee's terms of reference were amended on 22 June 1995 to the following:

To inquire into and report on:

- a) matters related to economic development and the impact of tourism on the ACT economy, community and infrastructure;
- b) strategies to increase the level of activity in the tourism sector; and
- c) other matters relating to tourism in the ACT that the Committee considers should be drawn to the attention of the Assembly.

1.6. The Committee's initial interest was in the development of ecotourism but it became apparent early in the inquiry that this term of reference was too narrow and that nature based tourism was more appropriate because it is seen as an umbrella term covering a more diverse range of nature based

experiences which occur in national parks and reserves such as sightseeing, cultural (Nolan Gallery, Aboriginal artefacts), sporting/recreational (whitewater rafting, orienteering), and educational activities.

1.7. Ecotourism is a more specific type of tourism which focuses on the natural environment, highlights the educational aspects and has a focus on ecological sustainability. The committee also noted on its interstate visits that tour operators have a wide range of interpretations of the term “ecotourism” and that sometimes it is no more than a promotional gimmick.

Conduct of the Inquiry

1.8. The inquiry was advertised in *The Canberra Times* on 10 June 1995.

1.9. On 26 June 1995 the Committee held private discussions with government officials from the Business, Employment and Tourism Bureau and the Department of Environment, Land and Planning.

1.10. The Committee wrote to a number of organisations requesting a written submission. A total of fifteen submissions were received. A list of those who provided written submissions is at Appendix A.

1.11. On 12-13 July 1995 the Committee met with New South Wales Government officials from the Southern Region District, NSW Parks and Wildlife Service and the Federal Government’s Australian National Conservation Agency (ANCA) in Jervis Bay. The Committee inspected sites at Bungonia Gorge, Fitzroy Falls, Minnamurra Falls, Greenfields Beach, Jervis Bay, NSW and Jervis Bay National Park.

1.12. On 25-28 July 1995 the Committee met with Government officials from the Department of the Environment and Heritage, Cairns, Queensland and the Far North Queensland Promotions Bureau, Cairns, Queensland. The Committee inspected a number of tourist sites in national parks in Cairns including the Daintree Rainforest, Kuranda, Lake Eacham, Lake Barrine, Cape Tribulation and Atherton.

1.13. The visits to Queensland and New South Wales provided the Committee with first hand knowledge of a range of tourist developments, some of which are recognised as world class tourist destinations, and also highlighted the impact of a massive increase in tourism on these sites. The extensive discussions with State and Commonwealth officials also provided valuable insight into the many issues which need to be addressed when considering further development in national parks.

1.14. On 28 July 1995 the Committee held an informal discussion with some representatives of local commercial nature based tourism operators.

1.15. On 31 August 1995 the Committee visited Tidbinbilla, Namadgi and the Murrumbidgee River Corridor with ACT Parks and Conservation Service officials.

1.16. The Committee held a public hearing on Thursday 7 September 1995. At the hearing representatives from the Department of Business, Arts, Sport and Tourism and the Environment and Land Bureau were questioned at length by the Committee. A list of those who appeared as witnesses is at Appendix B.

1.17. On 11 October 1995 the Committee visited the Canberra Nature Parks in Central Canberra with ACT Parks and Conservation Service officials.

1.18. On 27 October 1995 the Committee met with the Aboriginal representatives of the ACT Ngunnawal Elders Aboriginal Council Inc to discuss the involvement of Aboriginal peoples in nature based tourism. This meeting was extremely valuable in assisting the Committee to understand the cultural and heritage value of the Canberra region.

1.19. On 8 November 1995 the Committee visited Brindabella Station with Mr Brian Barlin.

1.20. On 9 November 1995 the Committee visited the wilderness of Namadgi and on 29 November 1995 inspected sites in the Brindabella Ranges and the Upper Cotter region with the ACT Parks and Conservation Service officials.

1.21. The Committee takes this opportunity to thank those organisations and individuals who arranged and accompanied the Committee on inspections of the various sites mentioned above. The visits were invaluable to the Committee in its consideration of the issues arising from the inquiry.

1.22. The Committee also thanks the many people who offered advice and comment on the matters under inquiry. The many issues raised highlighted that there is a need to plan for any development prior to an increase in tourist numbers to a region and to ensure that legislation governing the type of access and level of activity within Canberra's National parks and nature reserves, is in place before any development is undertaken. These issues are discussed in the report.

2. Tourism - Ecotourism

2.1. A close association has always existed between tourism and national parks and with the community's increasing value on the natural environment, national parks are being more actively sought by today's tourists:

“Tourism is now the most profitable industry in Australia, and it is fair to say that much of the industry is based on National Parks.”¹

In fact, an estimated 24 million visitors visit national parks in Australia annually, and many of these parks, such as Kakadu, Northern Territory, the Daintree, Queensland, the Blue Mountains, NSW, and Jervis Bay, have become household names.²

2.2. Tourism is also one of the most profitable industries in the ACT, recording an estimated turnover of \$580 million and employing some 9,700 people in 1992/93.³ It is also becoming more specialised and segmented with development and interest occurring in nature based tourism and ecotourism.

Ecotourism

2.3. Ecotourism emerged in response to public concern over increasing degradation of the Earth's environment and as a reaction against mass tourism.⁴ Definitions of ecotourism vary, but the most acceptable contain three elements: travel to a natural environment; education and interpretation about the cultural and biological aspects of that area; and ensuring the conservation or ecological sustainability of the area so it can be enjoyed by future generations. Ecotourism is synonymous with green tourism, nature tourism and ecotravel and has become “the new catchphrase in the travel industry”.⁵

2.4. According to the Australian Tourism Commission (ATC) over 412,000 ecotourists, approximately 18% of total tourist numbers, spent more than \$24 million in Australia in 1990 and this particular niche industry is growing by 30% per year.⁶ The profile of an ecotourist is one who is well-educated, with a high disposable income, an interest in becoming more educated about the environment and wanting to be catered for in small personalised groups.⁷

2.5. As the major goal of the managers of national parks is to ensure protection and conservation of the natural resources of the parks, the way visitation is managed in these parks determines whether tourism is compatible or in conflict,⁸ for

“at the heart of ecotourism is a paradox: popularity can destroy the environmental ambience that underpins the operation.”⁹

¹ *Ecotourism in National Parks- Impacts and Benefits* - Louise Duff, National Parks and Development Journal, June 1993, p 18

² *ibid*

³ Submission No 18, p1

⁴ *Con or Conservation*, The Bulletin, June 7, 1994 p 37

⁵ *Con or Conservation*, The Bulletin, June 7, 1994 p 37

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ *Ecotourism in National Parks- Impacts and Benefits* - Louise Duff, National Parks and Development Journal, June 1993, p 18

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ *ibid*, p 38

The National Ecotourism Strategy

2.6. The Federal Government has committed \$10 million over the next four years to assist in the development of programs to implement a *National Ecotourism Strategy*. The Strategy is the result of a nation-wide consultation process to develop an overall policy framework for the planning, development and management of ecotourism in Australia. It is underpinned by the concept that

“ecotourism provides an opportunity for Australia to take advantage of its unique natural environment by targeting the growing domestic and international market for environmental tourism experiences.”¹⁰

2.7. The definition also recognises that cultural components are aspects of the natural environment; and that to be “ecologically sustainable” involves an appropriate return to the local community and the long-term conservation of the resource.

2.8. The Committee was advised that many tourism operations marketed as “ecotourism” experiences are operating outside the National Strategy ecotourism definition. So when assessing ecotourism initiatives it is well to remember that

“...whether a tourism operation is correctly defined as ecotourism or nature-based tourism, if it is operating in a national park or nature reserve, then it must abide by the over-riding objective of such areas which is conservation of the natural environment. All tourist operations in natural areas must, in the long run, be ecologically sustainable.”¹¹

Nature Based Tourism

2.9. Nature based tourism refers to an extensive range of activities that may be undertaken in a natural environment including bushwalking, sightseeing, picnicking, fishing, canoeing, camping, horseriding, orienteering, four wheel drive safaris, bird-watching, white-water rafting, rock climbing and mountain bike-riding. Further, during the course of a nature based tourism experience a tourist will move in and out of a range of these activities within the course of a single trip.¹²

2.10. A study conducted by the Department of Tourism in November 1994 highlighted that in Australia there is a strong demand “for nature based holidays which cater for families, are affordable and are not too physically intimidating”.¹³ Nature-based tourists also tend to show a preference for a limited amount of exertion, as indicated by a 1994 Tasmanian survey which showed that while 55.1% of tourists went bushwalking, of those bushwalkers 64.2% went for walks under two hours in length and only 5.3% of bushwalkers went for walks which involved overnight camping or longer.¹⁴

The ACT Ecotourism Strategy

2.11. In 1994 Canberra Tourism established an ecotourism working group, made up of private and public sector representation, to develop a draft ecotourism strategy. The draft strategy is based on the *Commonwealth Department of Tourism’s National Ecotourism Strategy*; however, unlike the national strategy its focus is on nature based tourism, because that was the focus of issues raised in the consultation process. The strategy focuses on issues raised within the local context of nature based tourism in the ACT and ‘views Ecotourism as a sub-set of that industry’.¹⁵ It is expected to be released in late 1995.

¹⁰ *National Ecotourism Strategy*, Commonwealth Department of Tourism, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1994, piii

¹¹ Submission No 13, p 7

¹² *ibid*, p 2

¹³ Submission No 18, p 2

¹⁴ *ibid*, p 2-3

¹⁵ *Nature Based Tourism in the Australian Capital Territory - Draft Strategy - Canberra Tourism Commission p 2*

3. Planning and Management of ACT Land

Territory Plan

3.1. Two planning Acts govern the management of land in the ACT: the Commonwealth's *Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988*, which manages National Capital land; and *the ACT's Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991*, which provides for the management of local ACT land.¹⁶

3.2. The National Capital Planning Authority (NCPA) is the Commonwealth agency responsible for the preparation and administration of the National Capital Plan, which establishes land use and broad planning policies for the Territory. The ACT Planning Authority (ACTPA) controls all planning and infrastructure development in the ACT through the administration of the Territory Plan, a document which defines planning policies and principles for all Territory land other than Designated Areas, which is land identified as having special characteristics of the National Capital.¹⁷ It defines the type of land use permitted and details the environmental, design and transport conditions that must be met before a new use can be permitted. The Territory Plan must be consistent with the National Capital Plan.

3.3. ACT land is held under leasehold title and is managed by the ACT Executive. The lease may be subject to specific requirements, some of which may require the lessees to perform certain obligations.¹⁸ The ACT Executive may grant licences to use or occupy unleased Territory land. Licences specify the period for use, lists the conditions which must be complied with, and, unlike a lease, "[do] not give an interest or estate in the land".¹⁹

3.4. The management of the public land reserved under the categories Wilderness Area, National Park, Nature Reserves, and Urban Open Spaces, such as Namadgi National Park, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, and the Canberra Nature Park, are managed by the Conservation and Wildlife Section of the Environment and Land Bureau, Department of Urban Services (formerly the Department of the Environment, Land and Planning, DELP).²⁰

A Plan of Management

3.5. A draft Plan of Management outlines how the Conservator intends to manage the land.

3.6. The Committee was concerned to learn that the ACT only has two management plans in place, one for Namadgi, prepared nine years ago and one for Jerrabomberra, which was the only one completed in the last four years. Further, the Namadgi Management plan does not cover the additional 25,000 hectares by which the park has grown.²¹ Management Plans for the Lower Molonglo, Murrumbidgee Corridor and Canberra Nature Park are currently in draft form but Tidbinbilla, which was highlighted as being the area targeted for further development, does not have a draft management plan.²²

¹⁶ *The Guide to the Australian Capital Territory's Land (Planning and Environment) ACT 1991* - Department of the Environment, Land and Planning, ACT Government Printers, Canberra 1992, p 10

¹⁷ *ibid*, p 11-12

¹⁸ *ibid*, p 29

¹⁹ *ibid*, p 33

²⁰ *ibid*, p 35

²¹ Transcript, p 22

²² *ibid*, p 106

Recommendation 1

3.7. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government finalise draft management plans for the Lower Molonglo, Murrumbidgee Corridor and Canberra Nature Park and Tidbinbilla, and update the management plan for Namadgi, as a matter of urgency.

Draft ACT and Sub-Region Planning Strategy

3.8. Representative of the ACT, NSW and Commonwealth Governments and five local Councils have prepared a *Draft ACT and Sub-Region Planning Strategy*, which outlines future planning development and management of the ACT and Sub-Region. The Strategy aims to guide development and resource management within the ACT and Sub-region until the year 2021 and beyond.

3.9. The Planning Strategy consists of a series of Position Papers which address the extensive range of issues which impact on a region, such as the natural and cultural resources, transport, employment, metropolitan growth and rural areas. One of the papers proposes further expansion of the recreational areas of the *Murrumbidgee River Corridor* through the development of commercial facilities at suitable locations but highlights that prior to any development careful investigation will need to be undertaken, especially with regard to the further development of horseriding activities, canoeing, or camping.²³ It also identifies that the Corridor may require scenic protection, especially in ACT areas where large numbers of people visit recreation sites and walk along the river.²⁴ The Strategy is expected to be released later in 1995.

²³ *Draft ACT and Sub-region Planning Strategy*, p 23

²⁴ *ibid*, p 25

4. ACT National Parks and Nature Reserves

4.1. Canberra earns its nickname, the “bush capital”, from its close proximity to vast protected natural land reserves. In fact almost two-thirds of the Australian Capital Territory is composed of national parks and nature reserves. The most well-known and well-used areas include:

- Namadgi National Park, which is the largest and most pristine region. Namadgi comprises natural grassland and ranges with the highest point Mt Bimberi, which is 300 metres short of Mt Kosciusko. It also has a heritage value which is a legacy of the early settlers and local Aboriginal peoples. A visitor facility sits just outside its north eastern boundary;
- Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, which has well-developed forest walks and can guarantee sightings of Australian animals in “zoo-like” enclosures. It is also site hardened with an interpretative visitor centre staffed by rangers;
- Murrumbidgee River Corridor, which is a recreation reserve where families enjoy a barbecue and picnic like activities. It encompasses a range of sites including the Cotter Reserve which is site hardened and offers service facilities (hotel, food), and Pine Island, a popular swimming hole which has no established services;
- Canberra Nature Park, which consists of local nature reserves in the local hills and hollows between the town centres. Proximity to the city and suburbs makes the various reserves popular sites for general recreational activities such as walking the dog, ranger guided walks and jogging. Of particular interest is Jerrabomberra Wetlands, a very accessible bird watching site, which is the winter home of the Snipe, a Japanese migratory bird; and
- ACT Pine Forests, which has a large network of unsealed tracks, picnic sites and some camping facilities.

4.2. ACT national parks and nature reserves are managed by the ACT Parks and Conservation Service, part of the Environment and Land Bureau. In its submission the ACT Parks and Conservation Service stated that while the ACT has “no single outstanding spectacular feature such as Uluru, Kakadu or Fitzroy Falls”²⁵ it has a range of other features which contribute to its attractiveness as a nature based tourism destination in keeping with its “bush capital” image; and the easy access to an extensive range of natural areas which encompass a range of ecosystems.²⁶

4.3. While conservation is the key reason for protection and maintenance of ACT natural areas, an extensive range of activities is permitted across ACT national parks and nature reserves. Activities undertaken in the parks and reserves vary in accordance with their compatibility with the nature of the site. For example, well established picnic sites with on-site food services are deemed acceptable at the Cotter, but are seen as incompatible with the wilderness of Namadgi.²⁷

ACT Visitation Rates

4.4. Ease of access and close proximity to Canberra’s urban areas has contributed to local residents being the major users of ACT national parks and nature reserves. The ACT Parks and Conservation Service puts visitation figures to the Murrumbidgee River Corridor at more than 900,000 visitors per

²⁵ Submission No 18, *Executive Summary*

²⁶ *ibid*

²⁷ *ibid*, p 6

year, and Tidbinbilla at more than 160,000 visitors per year; while the nature reserves are estimated to receive more than 1,000,000 visits.²⁸

4.5. When compared with more high profile tourist destinations, such as Kakadu, which has approximately 400,000 visitors per year, these ACT sites are quite at saturation point.

4.6. ACT sites attract different types of visitors ranging from day visitors who travel by car to enjoy a picnic to those seeking a wilderness experience, who walk to more isolated sites, possibly camping for a few nights under canvas.

4.7. The services provided in ACT national parks include camping facilities (Namadgi, Cotter Reserve), toilets, drinking water, interpretative visitors centres (Tidbinbilla, Namadgi). No hotel, dormitory or hut accommodation is provided in any of the national parks.

4.8. The “self driver” makes up approximately 80% of ACT market to these sites. The “self driver” requires interpretation of areas through signage, visitor centres and tracks. This is in contrast to Kakadu where the harsh and remote nature of the region results in the majority of visitors selecting a commercial tour.

²⁸ *ibid*, Attachment, p 3

5. The Nature of Ecological Attractions

5.1. Almost all submissions to the inquiry agreed that the ACT contains a wide and unique range of ecological attractions. The submissions stated that the ACT was perfectly positioned to take advantage of its proximity to a variety of different geological landforms and environments, “from lowland grassy woodlands, through tall forests and fern gullies, to alpine snow plains”.²⁹

5.2. Several submissions also highlighted that the undeveloped nature of the ACT’s parks and reserves is one of the most important drawcards of the region, as is their proximity to Canberra. These submissions expressed the belief that it is imperative that this aspect be preserved. Dr Kevin Frawley was one of those who stressed the importance of the natural areas of the ACT, such as the Brindabellas, which “present wilderness landscapes and...imposing landforms and carry interesting flora and fauna”³⁰ and have “retained their natural values through lack of development.”³¹ Dr Frawley also noted that past development of the lowland areas of the ACT has produced sites of cultural significance.

5.3. Canberra Tourism listed a number of sites of ecological attraction in and around Canberra including: Namadgi National Park; Canberra Nature Park (particularly Jerrabomberra Wetlands); Murrumbidgee River Corridor; Googong Foreshores and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve.

5.4. Canberra Region Tours’ advised that its day trips to Tidbinbilla have been the most popular of their seven tours and cited the koala enclosure and the planned rock wallaby enclosure as very important and unique features of Tidbinbilla.

5.5. The Australian National Botanic Gardens was also recognised as being an important ecological attraction because it houses the world’s finest collection of Australian native plants, and provides interpretative functions, a full educational program and self-guided tour packages.

5.6. Minders of Tuggeranong Homestead (MOTH) proposed that Tuggeranong Homestead was a site worthy of promotion and development because it reflects past land uses in the region, boasts original buildings, and features a rich array of native and introduced tree species, pockets of native savanna grassland and over 100 species of birds.

5.7. Environment Tours drew the committee’s attention to Mount Ginni and Mount Clear, as sites worthy of recognition because of their proximity to the suburbs and also highlighted an “extensive section of beautiful wet forest and creek gullies below Bulls Head” which is “intersected with old forestry roads”.³²

5.8. ACT Forests listed several sites with ecological attractions including the Gibraltar area along the Corin Road (Gibraltar Falls and mountain scenery), Molonglo Gorge/Kowen Escarpment (which offers geological and ecological interpretation, bird watching and walks) and pockets of remnant woodland and mountain forest within the plantations.³³

²⁹ Submission 13

³⁰ Submission 10, p 4

³¹ *ibid*, p 5

³² Submission 11, p 1

³³ Submission No 17, p 1

5.9. The interpretative facilities provided at the Botanic Gardens, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and Namadgi are also recognised as playing an important role in educating and informing the visitor about the biological diversity of the ACT.

5.10. Some areas which may have future potential include: Mulligan's Flat, a new attraction; Brandy Flat, at the Southern end of Googong with London Bridge; and Mt Franklin.³⁴

Endangered Species

5.11. The Committee was advised that an ACT Flora and Fauna Committee was established early in 1995 with the primary function to recommend to the Minister "the declaration of those species and ecological communities which are at risk of extinction in the ACT, and processes which are threatening the survival of species or ecological communities".³⁵ The Committee was impressed with the research being conducted on one of the ACT's most endangered species - the legless lizard, by the ACT Parks and Conservation Service in grasslands at Mulligan's Flat. The Committee recommends that the impact of any nature based tourism development take into consideration the need to preserve the conservation and biodiversity of the ACT.

Transport

5.12. Concern was expressed that there was inadequate transport in Canberra for tourists and in particular for backpackers who are indicated as a group with a high interest in visiting the ecological attractions in and around the ACT. The ACT Democrats proposed that an innovative service of public minibuses could be trialed to meet this gap.³⁶

5.13. The ACT Parks and Conservation Service also stated that it saw a role for private operators in the future development of park activities in the provision of transport to and from the sights.³⁷

Degradation

5.14. Attention was also drawn to the perceived degradation of the Territory's national parks and nature parks by weed infestation and the escalation of feral animals such as feral cats, foxes, rabbits and wild pigs. Mr Brian Barlin, of Brindabella Station, stated that the feral weeds and animals "seem to be totally out of control"³⁸ and also advised the Committee that blackberry seems to have infested large areas of Namadgi and the biological controls seem not to be working as well as expected.

5.15. Mr Barlin accompanied the Committee on an inspection of the pine forests and national park areas along Brindabella Road to the ACT/NSW border. The Committee was able to confirm the presence of noxious weeds in these areas. Of particular concern to the Committee was the proliferation of blackberry bush, especially in land administered by ACT Forests. Although there appears to be a program to remove blackberries from the roadside, the weed seems to be thriving a short distance from the edge of the road.

5.16. The Committee is concerned about weed infestation and recommends that in the interests of conservation and in an attempt to make the area more attractive, the status of weed infestation and feral animals needs to be regularly assessed and the situation rectified. The Committee notes the report by the Standing Committee on Conservation, Heritage and Environment in March 1994 - *Feral Animals and Invasive Plants in the ACT* - and the development of a weeds strategy.

³⁴ Transcript, p 51

³⁵ Submission No 16, p7

³⁶ Submission No 2, p 5

³⁷ Transcript, p 50

³⁸ *ibid*, p72

Recommendation 2

5.17. The Committee recommends that ACT Forests and the ACT Parks and Conservation Service give high priority to the implementation of measures to redress the situation of weed infestation and feral animals.

Signage

5.18. On the Committee's inspection on 8 November 1995, Mr Brian Barlin, of Brindabella Station, drew attention not only to the absence of helpful signage in certain parts of local roads but also the inadequacy of some signage which does exist in these areas. The Committee observed, for example, that many place names on maps do not correspond with directional signs; that some distances given on signs are inaccurate (a sign to Wee Jasper in the Duffy area shows the distance to Wee Jasper as 2 kilometres when it is actually 82 kilometres); and inadequate signage, such as that on the Cotter Road which gives directions to Canberra and Wee Jasper, but does not indicate that the road continues to Brindabella and Tumut. The Committee was advised that these factors combined to make the area confusing to drive through, particularly for tourists.

5.19. In his submission, Mr Barlin advised that there was a need to implement some simple safety measures such as creating road turning points and clearing the road of snow with a plastic blade on a four wheel drive rather than waiting two weeks for a grader to arrive from the other side of the ACT. It was also highlighted that there is a need to educate visitors about the dangers of these wilderness areas and to ensure that they are well-prepared for adverse weather conditions, as the climate can change at a dramatic pace in these areas.³⁹

5.20. Lack of signage was an issue also raised by Minders of Tuggeranong Homestead (MOTH), who highlighted that there are no signs to indicate the existence or historical significance of the homestead even though it is on Tourist Drive 5.⁴⁰ MOTH also suggested the development of a tourist map at the Johnson Drive intersection with Were St, Calwell, and the expansion of Richardson and Calwell shops to provide eco-based accommodation and food.

5.21. The method of numerical labelling Tourist Drives also provides no information for the tourist about the area they are travelling through or the significance of the route.⁴¹

5.22. The Committee support the idea of giving Tourist Drives more appropriate and attractive names in an effort to raise the profile and attractiveness of these routes.

Recommendation 3

5.23. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government raise the profile and attractiveness of the numerical Tourist Routes by renaming them with more attractive names which reflect local landmarks.

³⁹ Transcript, p 73

⁴⁰ *ibid*, p 62

⁴¹ *ibid*, p 75

6. Recreational and Sporting Potential

6.1. The Committee noted general agreement about the types of activities seen as acceptable in ACT National Parks. The activities listed include a range of passive, contemplative and low impact pastimes such as bushwalking, birdwatching, nature study, picnicking, camping, canoeing and fishing.

6.2. Organised sport was seen to be an inappropriate activity for a national park. Environment Tours expressed concern about the impact of such activity “on the park’s natural and cultural values and on other park users”⁴² and cautioned the committee that even “relatively benign activities”⁴³ such as orienteering and mountain bike riding had the potential to disrupt other users’ enjoyment and to damage environmental aspects of the park.

6.3. Dr Frawley reiterated this view and stated that national parks should not be used for activities “unrelated to the intrinsic features of the natural environment”.⁴⁴ Brindabella Station also stated that ACT bush parks should be off-limits to motor car racing, motor bike riding, off-road vehicles and shooters.⁴⁵ The sport or recreation of hunting was also generally regarded as an unwelcome and inappropriate recreational activity.⁴⁶

ACT Forests

6.4. It was put to the Committee that many of the activities listed as unacceptable in national parks and nature reserves were already provided for in less sensitive land sites such as ACT Forests, timber plantations and local rural lands. The ACT Parks and Conservation Service value the role ACT Forests play in reducing visitation pressures on national parks and nature reserves by catering for incompatible activities, such as four wheel driving and trail bike riding.⁴⁷ The National Parks Association of the ACT also valued the major role ACT Forests plays in reducing the load on the nature conservation areas and felt they should be encouraged to continue to do so.⁴⁸

6.5. The Committee was impressed by the dual role ACT Forests plays in maintaining the reserves and providing for a wide range of recreational activities including those activities excluded from Canberra Nature Park, eg dog walking. The extensive range of activities conducted in the forests includes: orienteering; mountain bike riding; horseriding; motor-sports events; camping, in three main sites; and some high profile events such as the ESANDA Rally, the National Cross Country Championships, and the National Field Archery championships which also attract interstate competitors and support staff.⁴⁹

6.6. ACT Forests have some 730,000 visitors per year, usually Canberra residents, who participate in a wide range of activities. ACT Forests also charges camping fees and fees for the exclusive use of an area and encourages visitors to book the facilities in an attempt to reduce any conflicting use. ACT Forests operates its own trust account and channels any fees collected back into the maintenance and expansion of its facilities.⁵⁰

⁴² Submission No 11, p 1

⁴³ *ibid*, p 2

⁴⁴ Submission No 10, p 5

⁴⁵ Submission No 4, in *Policy on commercial and Organised Group Use of ACT Bush Parks*.

⁴⁶ Submission No 2, p 2

⁴⁷ Submission No 18, p 13

⁴⁸ Transcript, p 107

⁴⁹ Submission No 17, p 3

⁵⁰ Transcript, p 82-87

6.7. The Committee was also informed that the pine plantations in the ACT are not increasing and that a major restoration program is planned for converting the Boboyan plantation in Namadgi back to a natural area. The conversion of plantations back to natural areas is very expensive and ACT Forests hopes to gain an idea of the total cost involved by monitoring this particular conversion process.

6.8. While the forest areas are recognised to be a more “robust ecosystem”⁵¹ than other natural areas, they can still be damaged and this damage must be restored to ensure sustainability; hence, the charges for use.

Sports Tourism

6.9. Sports tourism was identified as being one of the largest potential growth markets and three components of sporting tourism were listed, including national and regional sporting events (eg Masters Games); social sporting teams and groups (eg bowls, golf); and individual travellers with sporting interests (eg golfing, fishing, cycling). The Committee considered the individual sports person as the most likely to “find most appeal within our natural areas, although the potential exists to attract the first two to events within national parks, natural reserves or nature parks”.⁵² However, improved public transport or the close siting of potential sports to Canberra urban areas is also necessary to ensure accessibility for the public and to attract backpackers.⁵³

6.10. The Committee noted advice that the issue of recreational and sporting potential within ACT national parks and nature reserves was an issue which should be addressed by the ACT Bureau of Sport.⁵⁴

Expansion of Sporting and Recreational Activities

6.11. Sporting and recreational activities identified as having future development potential include rock climbing, fishing, canoeing, archery, four-wheel drive safaris (limited to suitable areas) and orienteering.⁵⁵

6.12. Minders of the Tuggeranong Homestead (MOTH) also believe there is great potential in promoting and developing the historical sporting aspects of the homestead. Activities suggested include developing the historic concrete cricket pitch (Canberra’s oldest, laid on 1.4.1921) and the former tennis area; line dancing in the new shed; kite flying; a cycle ride across a heritage loop; field days with wood-chopping and sheep shearing; and facilitating some equestrian events. The Homestead was a popular visitation site during Heritage Week activities in April 1995.⁵⁶

6.13. ACT Forests informed the Committee that it had partly funded the establishment of a combined running sports, recreation and demonstration sports area called *Deek’s Forest Park* and the establishment of a Demonstration Forest, with its own funds, after unsuccessfully applying for a *Forest Ecotourism Grant*. ACT Forests has also submitted a second proposal to fund the establishment of a Forest Integrated Equestrian Trail Network through Stromlo Forest which currently includes a few kilometres of the National Bicentennial Horse Trail.

6.14. Other suggestions for the expansion of recreational tourism in the ACT include the establishment of a native flora and fauna park on the Ginninderra Peninsula,⁵⁷ and the addition of electric powered boats, which are quiet and non-polluting, to ACT lakes.⁵⁸

⁵¹ *ibid*, p 87

⁵² Submission No 3, p 8, 9

⁵³ Submission No 7, p 1. No 2, p 3

⁵⁴ Submission No 3, p 8

⁵⁵ Submission No 2, p 2-3

⁵⁶ Submission No 5, p 2-3

⁵⁷ Submission No 8, p 4

Fishing

6.15. Fishing is one of the most popular recreational pursuits in Australia, with a 1984 survey estimating that some 4.5 million Australians participate in this outdoor activity each year.⁵⁹

6.16. Recreational fishing in the ACT occurs freely on all ACT Lakes, but is restricted in all other waters which are classified as “open”, “trout” or “prohibited” waters in an attempt to protect the native fish species. Fishing is prohibited upstream of Bendora Dam, the Cotter Dam Wall, and the Orroral River where the Orroral Tracking Station road crosses the river, and all waters in the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve.

6.17. Most of the ACT Lakes were established to act as “environmental buffers which protect ACT Streams from the impacts of urban development, as well as providing a pleasant aesthetic backdrop for our city centres”.⁶⁰ They are too small to support recreational fisheries so they are regularly stocked with native and introduced angling species, which “may also aid the conservation status of native species by relieving fishing pressure on the more fragile rivers and streams in the Canberra Region.”⁶¹ In recent years ACT lakes have also become the breeding ground for many undesirable fish species, especially carp.

6.18. The ACT Parks and Conservation Service currently uses a combination of measures to manage recreational fishing, including imposing daily bag, possession and size limits; restricting the type of equipment used; instigating closed seasons for certain fish during their breeding periods; prohibiting fishing in certain waters; protecting specific species; and releasing hatchery bred fish to maintain and enhance the stocking of fisheries.⁶²

6.19. The ACT Democrats informed the Committee that some of the existing tracks leading to favourite fishing spots are dangerous and also require improvements in their fish stocks, roads, signage, and toilet facilities.⁶³

6.20. The Committee notes that the ACT Government recently released a paper, *A Review of Recreational Fishing in the ACT*, which seeks: to review the adequacy of ACT freshwater fishing laws; public comment on proposed changes to this legislation; and to recommend changes to this legislation to ensure “fair, equitable, enjoyable and sustainable recreational fishing in the ACT”,⁶⁴ and awaits the outcome of the community consultation process. The closing date for comments is 1 December 1995.

⁵⁸ Transcript, p 54

⁵⁹ *A Review of Recreational Fishing in the ACT - A Discussion Paper - ACT Parks and Conservation Service - August 1995*, p 1

⁶⁰ *ibid*, p 7

⁶¹ *ibid*, p 8

⁶² *ibid* p 13-15

⁶³ Transcript, p 54 - 56

⁶⁴ *ibid*, Preface

7. The Nature of Heritage and Cultural Aspects of these Areas

7.1. In their submission, Canberra Tourism defines three levels of “culture”- areas which hold appeal for the cultural tourist. These three levels are Politics and Government, the National Collections and Local Culture.⁶⁵ It is this last category into which “nature-based” culture and heritage tourism fits.

7.2. Culture and Heritage sites encompass both Aboriginal and European elements, and the ACT is rich in both. Namadgi National Park and other areas of the ACT have sites of Aboriginal importance, “and the local Aboriginal communities are moving towards providing interpretative resources for tourism”.⁶⁶ European historical sites can offer a “window into earlier times”⁶⁷ and can “provide examples of the harshness of the early settlers’ lives and of the relationship between the native environment and introduced species”.⁶⁸

7.3. Even apparently undeveloped bush can be important, historically and culturally. Dr Frawley, in his submission, stated that “the vegetation in itself can be interpreted or ‘read’ to show the history of human use and impact and the differing ideas and concepts of management”.⁶⁹

7.4. There was agreement that these aspects of the ACT’s plans for nature-based tourism must be carefully and sensitively managed. However, submissions without exception expressed the opinion that sites must be protected and preserved in a way that takes account of the “potential impacts from visitors, and of sensitivities of people who may have particular connections to the sites;”⁷⁰ and further agreed that “areas of major heritage value must be controlled to keep damage and vandalism to a minimum”.⁷¹

7.5. The Committee’s field trips to Namadgi confirmed that buildings which are not used for any purpose and offer relatively access are prone to vandalism. Those buildings which encourage legitimate use (eg Gudgenby Homestead, which presently has a resident caretaker) and Frank’s Hut (overnight emergency accommodation for bushwalkers) fare much better.

7.6. The Minders of Tuggeranong Homestead (MOTH) advised the Committee that the homestead has “strong heritage and cultural associations, reflecting over 160 years of continuous pastoral use. It has iconographic significance to the community as a whole...There is an abundance of historical evidence on the site pertaining to pioneers of the district”.⁷² Further, this site also has some pockets of remaining native Savanna grassland which are preserved under the ACT Heritage Register.⁷³

7.7. The Committee was informed that the lease for the Homestead had expired on 30 June 1995 and the ownership of the Homestead has now reverted to the Territory.⁷⁴ MOTH also advised that the current Minister has formed a community consultation committee which is currently discussing the future uses of the Homestead site and they would value any further input into the process.⁷⁵ MOTH strongly supports regular use of the site to discourage vandalism and also suggested that there may be

⁶⁵ Submission 3, section (iii)

⁶⁶ *ibid*, section (iii)

⁶⁷ Submission 10, p 5

⁶⁸ Submission 3, section (iii)

⁶⁹ Submission 10, p 6

⁷⁰ *ibid*, p 4

⁷¹ Submission 7, p 2

⁷² Submission 5, p 4

⁷³ Transcript, p 61

⁷⁴ *ibid*, p 62

⁷⁵ *ibid*, p 60

the possibility of developing a community museum at the site and extending the visiting hours in the summer daylight saving period.⁷⁶

7.8. The Committee supports the restoration of Tuggeranong Homestead and its development as a tourist site.

7.9. The Committee invites the Government to consider the mid- and long-term plans for significant sites or buildings, such as Tuggeranong and Gudgenby Homesteads, having regard to their heritage value and their role in the promotion of the ACT as a tourist attraction and an appreciation of the region's pastoral history. It is the Committee's view that more imaginative use of these buildings would not only enhance their appeal and increase the public's access to them, but may well generate revenue for the Government.

Recommendation 4

7.10. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government support the restoration and development of Tuggeranong Homestead and outbuildings as a tourist attraction of historical significance, and consider the mid- and long-term plans for other significant buildings such as Gudgenby Homestead.

Involvement of Indigenous Peoples in Tourism

7.11. Indigenous people are under-represented in the tourism industry in the ACT. The Committee was informed that Koori Aboriginal Culture Tours intend to redress the imbalance by developing a project which will facilitate the active involvement of Aboriginal peoples in all aspects of the Aboriginal tourism industry; establish sustainable Aboriginal business enterprises, and provide training opportunities.⁷⁷ Koori Aboriginal Culture Tours, an Aboriginal-owned passenger transport company, will play a key role in linking the stakeholders in the Aboriginal tourism industry by "identifying desirable tourist experiences, opening access to Aboriginal communities, and promoting the cultural, historical and geographical attractions of various communities and regional areas".⁷⁸

7.12. To achieve their goals, Koori Aboriginal Culture Tours propose to establish a central coordinating business enterprise and are currently developing the finer details of this proposal in conjunction with the relevant Aboriginal communities and Government agencies. Koori Aboriginal Culture Tours envisage major involvement of the local Ngunnawal/Ngunawal people, as business operators, in the provision of all aspects of the local Aboriginal tourism industry including the provision of food, transport and accommodation and related services such as tour guides and the development of promotional material.⁷⁹

7.13. Koori Aboriginal Culture Tours also advised the Committee that there are a number of Aboriginal sites in the Territory which are just as interesting as Yankee Hat, which to date has been the major drawcard.⁸⁰

7.14. Representatives of the ACT Ngunnawal Elders Aboriginal Council Inc. informed the Committee that they supported the full involvement of local Aboriginal people in the nature based tourism industry in the ACT, as it had great potential for allowing greater self-determination and providing increased employment for all Ngunnawal/Ngunawal people in the ACT and for other

⁷⁶ *ibid*, p 65

⁷⁷ Submission No 12, Part II p 9

⁷⁸ *ibid*

⁷⁹ Transcript, p 101

⁸⁰ *ibid*, p 99

Aboriginal people across the States. The ACT Ngunnawal Elders Aboriginal Council Inc also advised the Committee that they fully supported Koori Aboriginal Culture Tours in their endeavours to assist the local Ngunnawal/Ngunawal people to become involved in and to eventually manage their own tourism business enterprise. The ACT Ngunnawal Elders Aboriginal Council Inc also expressed concern that the paper - *ACT Tourism Development Strategy - Volume 1 - Vision Statement and Action Plan*- February 1995 - commissioned by Canberra Tourism and undertaken by Price Waterhouse, contained no reference to Aboriginal peoples.

7.15. The Committee supports the Koori Aboriginal Culture Tours in their endeavours to assist in the establishment of an Aboriginal tourism industry within the ACT and strongly urges the Government to invite all local Aboriginal organisations to participate in any consultation process concerning the future development of tourism in Territory national parks and nature reserves.

Recommendation 5

7.16. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government invite all local Aboriginal organisations to participate in any consultation process concerning the future development of Territory national parks and nature reserves, and support them in their endeavours to establish an Aboriginal tourism industry within the ACT.

7.17. ACT Ngunnawal Elders Aboriginal Council Inc also expressed concern that the signs at the entry points to Canberra welcome visitors to the National Capital, but do not indicate the prior inhabitants, the Ngunnawal/Ngunawal people. The Committee agrees with this concern and recommends that the ACT Government recognise the prior inhabitants of the Territory by placing signs which welcome visitors to Ngunnawal/Ngunawal country.

Recommendation 6

7.18. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government recognise the prior inhabitants of the Territory by placing signs at all entry points to Canberra which welcome visitors to Ngunnawal/Ngunawal country. Further the Committee recommends that these signs be designed in conjunction with the local Ngunnawal/Ngunawal organisations.

8. Tourism and the ACT

8.1. After visiting world recognised tourist destinations in Queensland and New South Wales, the Committee is of the view that the ACT has nature based tourist attractions on par with the interstate destinations visited. However, most promotional campaigns about Canberra focus on highlighting the historical, political and monument aspects of the ACT, so it is not surprising that the majority of visitors to Canberra come to see the national monuments such as Parliament House or the War Memorial. The result of this lack of promotion of the ACT as a destination with national parks and nature reserves is that tourists do not contemplate visiting these areas because they are unaware of the existence of the parks.⁸¹

8.2. This lack of awareness of the Territory's natural attractions is reflected in the *Canberra Visitor Survey 1993-1994 Annual Report* which stated that only 1% of visitors to the ACT in 1993-94 visited Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve.⁸² Further the ACT Parks and Conservation Service informed the Committee that the facilities in Canberra national parks and nature reserves have "had primarily a resident focus".⁸³

8.3. The Committee noted that the ACT Parks and Conservation Service is now working with Canberra Tourism to redress the lack of promotion of ACT nature reserves and national parks to the local and international tourist markets. The Committee strongly supports the development of more formal links between Canberra Tourism and the ACT Parks and Conservation Service so that the promotion of Canberra and the management of visitation to its many sites, including the ecological attractions, is a joint initiative and that it takes into account the needs of conservation as well as tourism.

Recommendation 7

8.4. The Committee recommends that the formal links between Canberra Tourism and the ACT Parks and Conservation Service be strengthened so that the promotion and management of Canberra's ecological attractions receive a higher profile and take into account the needs of conservation as well as tourism.

8.5. The Committee also noted the need, when managing popular tourist destinations, to consider how to continue catering for the local market as well as the tourist market, as displacement of local residents from popular local venues could affect their attitude towards tourists and lead to encroachment on other undeveloped sites.

Nature Based Tourism Operators in the ACT

8.6. The ACT Parks and Conservation Service views itself as the largest nature based non-commercial tourism operator in the ACT. It provides an extensive range of services including: ranger guided walks; interpretative activities; and ranger assistance to assist commercial tour operators, at no cost, or for a small charge. Ranger guided walks and interpretative services are highly valued and well utilised, handling almost 16,000 people per year, and are considered to be a future possible source for increased revenue.

8.7. The ACT Parks and Conservation Service informed the Committee that it is currently focussing on upgrading the picnic facilities to a higher quality in order to provide greater satisfaction to the visitors who access those areas. The ACT Parks and Conservation Service believes that at

⁸¹ Transcript, p 88

⁸² *Canberra Visitors Survey 1993-1994 Annual Report*, p 26

⁸³ Transcript, p 41

present there is a reasonable number of sites open for visitation and that opening up additional areas will bring with it additional management responsibility and the need for more resources to manage those areas.⁸⁴

8.8. There are currently fourteen commercial nature based tourism operators in the ACT. Most of these are small businesses, some of which use national parks and reserves from within and outside the ACT. The ACT Parks and Conservation Service receives little or no direct financial benefit from these commercial operations although they are dependent upon the use of ACT natural areas for their livelihood.

Potential Market

8.9. The Committee is of the view that there is future potential in promoting the Territory's nature reserves and national parks. However, before opening up these sensitive areas the Committee believes a strategic plan for the development of nature based tourism in ACT National Parks would need to be developed. The plan would need to identify the sites that could be targeted for development, the types of infrastructure and the level of access permitted, how to generate revenue to assist in maintenance and betterment of these sites, and determine whether additional legislation and regulation would be necessary to ensure the Government maintains control over the management and protection of these sites.

8.10. In addition, the management plan would need to strike a balance between attracting visitors to these sites and preserving the natural state and long term ecological sustainability of the natural resource. The ACT Parks and Conservation Service supported this view and stated that:

“Some of these functions (conservation, tourism, environmental education, research, recreation and protection of water catchments) are at least partially incompatible with others; a major challenge for managers is to reduce and avoid these potential conflicts.”⁸⁵

8.11. Further, the ACT Parks and Conservation Service argued that we must ensure these attractions tourists come to see are not “loved to death”,⁸⁶ and that “the potential returns from increased visitation are not at the cost of conservation, equity or safety of Canberra's water supply”.⁸⁷

8.12. A report by the Standing Committee on Tourism and ACT Promotion in 1993 - *ACT Region and Tourism June 1993* - stated that promotion of environmental attractions such as the Namadgi National Park would have potential for expanding tourism in the ACT. However, it cautioned that any expansion of the tourist industry into these areas would require proper management and licensing of tour operators to supervise visitor groups and to avoid damage to the Park.⁸⁸ This report also highlighted that while Canberra was already promoted quite well by NSW in conjunction with the Snowy Mountains Region, it also needed to be promoted by the ACT in its own right as a destination worth visiting.

⁸⁴ *ibid*, p 43

⁸⁵ Submission No 18, *Executive Summary*

⁸⁶ *ibid*

⁸⁷ *ibid*

⁸⁸ *ACT and Region Tourism* - Report by the Standing Committee on Tourism and ACT Promotion, June 1993, p 21, 27

Recommendation 8

8.13. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government develop a strategic plan for the development of nature based tourism in ACT national parks. The Plan needs to identify the sites that could be targeted for development, the types of infrastructure and the level of access permitted, how to generate revenue to assist in maintenance and betterment of these sites, and determine whether additional legislation and regulation would be necessary to ensure the Government maintains control over the management and protection of these sites.

8.14. The ACT Parks and Conservation Service recognises that nature based tourism is one of the fastest growing forms of tourism which could contribute enormously to the ACT economy and predicts that if tourists with an average expenditure of \$53 per day stayed an extra day to visit Tidbinbilla, the revenue gained would be in the vicinity of some \$1.8m per annum.⁸⁹

8.15. The ACT Parks and Conservation Service also advised that as “even our most popular feature, in local terms, is barely known outside”⁹⁰ the focus of its initial development would be on providing better service rather than investing in developments requiring major capital outlays.

Potential Sites for Development

8.16. Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve was cited as having the greatest potential for promotion because it is “accessible on a tight itinerary, ... relatively site hardened and provide(s) an opportunity for quality interpretation within a small area”.⁹¹ Tidbinbilla’s animal enclosures also guarantee access to Australian Fauna with the “illusion that the animals are free”.⁹² However, the National Parks Association of the ACT advised that prior to any further development of Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve managers should consider the impact of increased visitation to the site in terms of carparking space and in terms of maintaining the current relaxed contact with the animals in the enclosures. A major increase in tourism, say some 100,000 people, to this site would require an increase in both facilities and hence change the nature and appeal of the site.⁹³ A plan which outlines the long-term management philosophy for Tidbinbilla is needed to assist in determining how the site will develop and assist in projecting the carrying capacity of this site.

8.17. Canberra Tourism saw a future in the promotion of Canberra Nature Park and Jerrabomberra Wetlands. Canberra Tourism also suggested that the promotion of Namadgi National Park should be kept at a low focus level, and that there be restricted promotion of Murrumbidgee River Corridor which already suffers from extensive use.⁹⁴ This notion received general support in a number of submissions. The National Parks Association of the ACT Inc also supported the promotion of Namadgi National Park and nature reserves and parks for their current qualities but highlighted that developments must be consistent with existing values and management objectives of natural areas, and must avoid promoting activities or infrastructure which are more appropriate in other areas.⁹⁵

8.18. The Committee acknowledges that Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve should be targeted for future development; however, prior to any development of this site the Committee recommends that a specific marketing plan be developed to outline what development is proposed for Tidbinbilla and the impact of these developments on the site.

⁸⁹ Submission No 18, *Executive Summary*

⁹⁰ Transcript, p 48

⁹¹ Submission No 3, p 11

⁹² Submission No 6, p 1

⁹³ Transcript, p 110

⁹⁴ Submission No 3, p 4-8

⁹⁵ Submission No 13, p 2

Recommendation 9

8.19. The Committee recommends that prior to any further development of Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, a specific marketing plan be developed for this site, in order to guide its future development and to assess the impact of any proposed development.

9. Marketing and Promoting the ACT Nature Based Product

9.1. The overall consensus on marketing was that Canberra needs to change the image it promotes in advertising in order to attract visitors with an interest in exploring the natural environmental attractions of the ACT. A proven successful marketing strategy involves connecting the new product with the well-established or core product of a destination.⁹⁶

“...the idea of linkages is important...We need to let tourists know that Canberra is not just politics, public servants and national institutions ... No matter how appealing our nature-based attractions are, they will not sell themselves ...”⁹⁷

9.2. Thus the core appeal of Canberra, the National collections and monuments such as the National Art Gallery, Parliament House, and the War Memorial, must be marketed with the nature based attractions of the ACT as a component of the package. This may encourage visitors to extend their length of stay by one or two additional days and so bring significant economic returns to the Territory.

9.3. River Runners suggested that Canberra, which is well-suited for outdoor activities such as canoeing, white water rafting and horse-riding, needs to change its image to “The Place for Adventure”⁹⁸ in order to capture more of the 18-35 year old market, who currently bypass Canberra because of its image as a “place with boring sterile buildings”.⁹⁹

9.4. Canberra Tourism informed the Committee that it is of the opinion that as the ACT Parks and Conservation Service “owns” the nature reserves it is the Service’s responsibility to develop a nature based product and service. Canberra Tourism’s role is to promote the subsequent product as part of the total Canberra destination.¹⁰⁰ To assist the ACT Parks and Conservation Service in their product development, Canberra Tourism are currently undertaking market research - *the Canberra Market Opportunity Study* - to determine what type of product tourists, in particular nature based tourists, want from the Canberra experience. The study is scheduled for completion later in 1995.

Recommendation 10

9.5. The Committee recommends that Canberra Tourism diversify its approach to marketing the ACT by including aspects of Canberra’s national parks and nature reserves in its marketing and advertising campaigns.

Promotional Material

9.6. The availability of promotional material and access to this information also contributes to the successful marketing of a product. Canberra Tourism runs a cooperative marketing approach, whereby it advertises a particular element such as the National Gallery, and shares the cost of promotion and advertising with that agency.¹⁰¹ Canberra Tourism also highlighted that the average print run of the ACT Parks and Conservation Service is some 10,000 - 20,000 pamphlets which is

⁹⁶ Transcript, p 34

⁹⁷ Submission No 5, Intro

⁹⁸ *ibid*, p 1

⁹⁹ Submission No 9, p 1

¹⁰⁰ Transcript, p 33

¹⁰¹ *ibid*, p 32

quite insignificant when compared with Canberra Tourism's print run of 250,000 pamphlets, and the NRMA's print run of never less than a million.¹⁰²

9.7. The Committee believes that the success of any future promotion of the Territory's national parks and nature reserves will rely on the availability of promotional material and the quality of the distribution outlets used. To ensure success the Committee recommends that the ACT Government allocate some additional resources for the marketing and distribution of promotional material. Useful distribution outlets suggested for marketing the Territory's nature based experiences includes: recognised holiday marketing agents in other states who sell short break holiday packages to the Canberra Region; the Canberra Visitor's Information Centre; ACT accommodation venues; and the National attractions such as Parliament House.

Recommendation 11

9.8. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government allocate some additional resources to enable the ACT Parks and Conservation Service to expand its marketing and promotional initiatives.

9.9. The Minister for Business, Arts, Sport and Tourism has advised the Committee that Canberra Tourism will produce a brochure on nature based tourism in the ACT during 1995, and that future promotion and marketing will include a nature based element. The Committee was also advised that a proposal to provide a permanent nature based interpretative display at the existing visitor information centre site is currently before the Government.

9.10. The Committee believes that the expansion of the nature based tourism industry in the ACT is dependent on marketing these aspects of Canberra in conjunction with the city's recognition as the national capital, and recommends that the Government allocate additional funds to assist such promotional initiatives. This promotion of the Territory's nature based products will be particularly significant if the ACT is to capitalise on the forthcoming 2000 Olympics and the 2001 Centenary of Federation celebrations.

Service Standards

9.11. Many submissions highlighted that while the interpretative facilities offered in ACT national parks are generally considered to be of a high standard, there was a need to develop a customer service attitude. Of particular importance was the need for all frontline sales staff and customer contact staff from the Canberra Visitors Centre, ACT accommodation venues and tourist attractions to have first hand knowledge of the ACT nature based product. Private operators will also need to be encouraged to have high service standards and to present quality promotional material.

Recommendation 12

9.12. The Committee recommends that Canberra Tourism develop a plan to familiarise customer contact staff from Canberra Tourism, ACT accommodation venues and tourist attractions to ensure all frontline sales people have first hand knowledge of the ACT nature based product.

9.13. Canberra Tourism identified a range of initiatives which may assist in raising service standards, including establishing a code of practice and standards of presentation of equipment and personnel;¹⁰³ conducting familiarisation tours for customer contact staff; conducting more formalised market research aimed at uncovering the service attributes important to visitors and to understand the

¹⁰² *ibid*, p 33

¹⁰³ Submission No 3, p13

motivations which underpin the visitor's destination choice; and encouraging agencies to meet regularly to consider ways to fulfil unsatisfied visitor needs and to solve problems.¹⁰⁴

9.14. It was also raised that amenities such as toilets should be of a high standard and reflect ecologically sustainable practices. The Committee witnessed a range of ecologically sustainable practices on its interstate visits. Of particular note were the Downmus composting toilets at Fitzroy Falls, NSW, which use earthworms to convert the sewage to compost. The factory that produces this equipment operates from Queanbeyan.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*, p 14

10. The Degree of Development which should be permitted

10.1. One of the most contentious issues in park management is the degree of development which should be permitted. Some schools of thought strongly advocate no development in national parks, because they regard national parks as being solely existent for the purpose of nature conservation; while others consider that development may assist in controlling the impact of increased tourist visitation and assist in better management of sites.

Developments in Other National Parks

10.2. The Committee witnessed a range of developments in national parks during its visits to NSW and Queensland, including extensive boardwalk systems, a range of visitor centres, composting toilets, a cable car over a rainforest, and environmentally sound accommodation in the heart of the Daintree. New South Wales Parks and Wildlife Service officials outlined aspects of their detailed management plan, and highlighted how specific sites had been targeted for large scale infrastructure development in order to cater for increasing tourist numbers and in an attempt to focus numbers away from more sensitive areas, so that they remained protected. Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage officials also emphasised the importance of having a management plan, supported by legislation and controls, in place before promoting or opening up tourist destinations in national parks, in order to ensure that the government retains control of the developments in national parks and is not forced to approve development because of the pressure brought to bear by the tourism industry.

10.3. “The danger of ecotourism becoming just another threat to the environment if not planned and controlled are well-illustrated by the Cape Tribulation or Daintree area north of Cairns...rather than providing a major impetus to enlarge and protect national parks, ecotourism is providing an excuse for a push by the tourist industry for facilities and access within parks which could severely compromise their values.”¹⁰⁵

Developments in ACT National Parks

10.4. A number of submissions acknowledged that the major value of ACT national parks is their inherent undisturbed state and their nature conservation role and expressed outright opposition to any development in the Territory’s national parks. Canberra Tourism informed the Committee that the act of placing any permanent construction in a national park “can affect the natural values of an experience”,¹⁰⁶ but conceded that some developments such as boardwalks over sensitive areas may enhance the environmental protection of the area.

10.5. Dr Frawley believes that development often generates more development and cited the impact of skiing on Kosciusko National Park and the Victorian Alps as a local example of a situation where tourist pressure for development had outstripped the planning and management of these sites.¹⁰⁷ The Committee also noted that any increase in site visitation also increases the cost of maintaining a site and strains the capacity of the facilities provided, eg parking spaces, toilets, tracks, boardwalks and campground facilities.

Planning for Future Development

10.6. The ACT Parks and Conservation Service supports the need to have a strategic approach to any development undertaken and to heed the experience of overseas and interstate national parks in an

¹⁰⁵ *Ecotourism - Special Interest or Major Direction?* - Penny Figgis, Habitat Australia, February 1993, p 10

¹⁰⁶ Submission No 3, p 16

¹⁰⁷ Submission No 10, p 6

effort to ensure that the ACT does not experience the negative side of the tourism industry.¹⁰⁸ The ACT Parks and Conservation Service also recognises that, because “there is a spectrum of values in parks: what is acceptable in one area may be totally unacceptable in another”,¹⁰⁹ there is a need to determine the appropriateness of development for every site. In addition, the ACT Parks and Conservation Service stresses that the promotion of nature based tourism in the ACT must be ecologically sustainable, have a holistic approach, encourage incremental changes, allow for user pay systems where appropriate, ensure a rational capital investment process, return benefits to its source and monitor all activity and its impact.¹¹⁰

10.7. The National Parks Association of the ACT recognises that the management planning process is imperative in providing information and defining the extent of the opportunities in individual sites; and in determining the policies and procedures needed to be put in place prior to any increased visitation.¹¹¹

10.8. Canberra Tourism proposed that ecotourism activities which involve infrastructure should aim to:

- involve the land manager at the planning stages;
- ensure land managers can effectively manage impacts and controls;
- give substantial benefits back to the natural resource;
- meet the requirements of park management plans, the Territory Plan and the National Capital Plan;
- increase the capacity of an area without increasing damage to the natural value by keeping within the lowest level of development that meets tourism and educational objectives of the project; and
- ensure there is demonstrated demand for the facility.¹¹²

10.9. The Committee witnessed the results of increased visitation on sites in and around Cairns, and strongly supports adherence to the Territory Plan and the development of a long range park management plan for all ACT national parks and nature reserves.

10.10. The Committee also acknowledges that while this report focuses on identifying the potential for appropriate tourism opportunities, the overriding concern is the need to maintain the environmental integrity of Namadgi National Park and Canberra Nature Park. The Committee strongly asserts that nothing should be done that is not in the interests of the natural environment.

Recommendation 13

10.11. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government maintain its commitment to preserve ACT national parks and nature reserves for the purpose of conservation and ensure that any plan for development meets the requirements of the Territory Plan and the National Capital Plan.

10.12. Ginninderra Wetlands Care Group expressed the view that environmental legislation cannot be viewed as separate and distinct from planning or social issues and suggested that there be a 90-day cooling-off period after a proposal to build or develop is put forward, to allow the government and community time to examine the full potential and likely impact of the development, before it is

¹⁰⁸ Submission No 18, p14

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*, p 15

¹¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹¹ Transcript, p 106

¹¹² *ibid*, p 15

allowed to proceed. Ginninderra Wetlands Care Group also wants the community, and not just the developers, to be recognised as stakeholders.¹¹³

Determining Park Carrying Capacity

10.13. While many respondents suggested that prior to any development being undertaken, it was important to assess the carrying capacity of a site, there was no clear method suggested on how this could be achieved. A range of capacities referred to in submissions includes: carrying capacity, which refers to the actual people numbers a site can manage; social capacity, which refers to the physical numbers tourists feel comfortable with and still gain the experience they were seeking; ecological carrying capacity, which refers to the physical numbers a site can manage and still be ecologically sustainable; and visual capacity, which refers to the visual impact of the numbers on others in the area.

10.14. The National Parks Association of the ACT highlighted how many of the submissions assumed that all parks had excess carrying capacity although no assessment had been made of the capacity of any ACT parks. The National Parks Association of the ACT also highlighted that once an area is opened and people are aware of it and visit in increasing numbers, it is very difficult to stem the tide. Invariably the numbers change the experience of the park.¹¹⁴

10.15. The Committee was advised by interstate officials that carrying capacity varies with each site and that new technology can also increase the carrying capacity of a particular site. The extensive boardwalk system at Fitzroy Falls is a good example of how to increase capacity with minimal environmental impact.

10.16. Queensland officials informed the Committee that the “social carrying capacity of a site is often well reached before the physical capacity is reached”,¹¹⁵ and because of this they had restricted the number of rafting licences on the Barron Falls to four to reduce the visual and social impact of the number of tour participants on the local residents also using the site.

10.17. The New South Wales Parks and Wildlife Service informed the Committee that it was targeting specific sites for development in preparation for the impact of increased numbers expected in the lead up to the 2000 Olympics. In addition, the New South Wales Parks and Wildlife Service advised that other key sites were being selected for development in order to channel tourists away from the more sensitive areas. The Queensland Department of Heritage and the Environment is also looking to target additional, less recognised sites, in an attempt to spread the tourist load and to reduce the impact on the Daintree.

Recommendation 14

10.18. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government conduct some assessments of the Territory’s natural areas including carrying capacities and market demand for the product, to assist the Government to determine which sites could be targeted for increased visitation.

Developments in or outside the Park

10.19. Controversy exists over the siting of future development: should one develop outside the park to “retain the ‘integrity’ of the park or ... (develop) inside to ensure closer control and perhaps some

¹¹³ Submission No 8, p 4

¹¹⁴ Transcript, p 105

¹¹⁵ Submission No 18, p 14

financial return”¹¹⁶ However, this debate is not seen as so major an issue in the ACT, where the leasehold land tenure system ensures, in theory, the government’s control over land use by stipulating relevant conditions in contracts.

10.20. Tourism Council Australia, Canberra Region Branch, also proposed that site development be restricted to “already ‘site-hardened’ areas, which usually lie close to entry points ...(this) will limit development to peripheral areas of the parks and thus ensure the inherently attractive qualities of the parks are not diminished”.¹¹⁷

Accommodation

10.21. Most submissions opposed the location of accommodation within ACT national parks because nearly all parts are within one hour’s drive of accommodation in the city. However, the expansion of camping at Orroral Valley and near Namadgi Visitor’s Centre was considered appropriate. The ACT Democrats believe that existing accommodation, such as rural homesteads, should be utilised where possible, and that any developments should use “environmentally benign technologies”¹¹⁸ such as composting toilets.

10.22. Canberra Tourism stated that large developments are controversial and suggested that any accommodation facilities should demonstrate a high educational value that was otherwise unobtainable. Canberra Tourism also highlighted that the Territory Plan already restricts land use for “Mountains and Bushlands” and in particular states that tourist facilities should be low rise, integrated with the landscape, compatible with related sensitive areas, kept to a minimum and confined to the perimeter of environmentally sensitive areas.¹¹⁹

Construction of a Conference Facility

10.23. Canberra Tourism indicated that there may be a strong market for a low level conference/training type facility.¹²⁰ However, the ACT Parks and Conservation Service suggested that such a proposal would require more detailed market research and would also be approached with caution because apart from the major investment of scarce capital, such a proposal would need to be considered in accordance with the uses identified for that area under the management plan and the Territory Plan.¹²¹

10.24. Tourism Council of Australia, ACT Branch, stated that it would endorse the construction of a conference facility, if it was built in accordance with environmental guidelines and sited on the periphery of a national park,¹²² as this type of facility would address the increasing demand by tourists for more interpretative and educational experiences and could also assist in attracting new business to Canberra.

10.25. While the Committee considers that any proposal for development within national parks should be treated with caution, the Committee can imagine certain limited circumstances where the construction of facilities sensitive to the natural environment might be appropriate. Such construction might include, for example, facilities dedicated to public education on the importance of preserving the Territory’s natural assets or to promoting knowledge of specific features of the areas in which these structures are located.

¹¹⁶ Submission No 18, p16

¹¹⁷ Submission No 16, p 3

¹¹⁸ Submission No 2, p 4

¹¹⁹ Submission No 3, p 16

¹²⁰ Transcript, p 36

¹²¹ *ibid*, p 47

¹²² *ibid*, p 92 - 93

10.26. The Committee is receptive to the development of accommodation venues on the periphery of Territory national parks and in Tuggeranong Valley. While the Committee is extremely cautious about developing accommodation in ACT national parks, it is willing to explore proposals to build accommodation in the parks in particular circumstances and on their merits. The Committee is also supportive of the proposed extensions to camping facilities in Orroral Valley and Namadgi, and is interested in exploring any suggested development of current farmhouse accommodation on ACT rural land. While interest was muted in developing a conference facility on the periphery of Tidbinbilla, the Committee would like to see a market assessment conducted, and community and shareholder input canvassed, before any such proposal receives Government support.

Recommendation 15

10.27. The Committee recommends that as a general rule the ACT Government restrict the development of formal accommodation venues to the periphery of the Territory's national parks; however, that it consider developments which may be appropriate under specific circumstances. Any such proposal for development must be considered through an extensive community and government consultation process.

Recommendation 16

10.28. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government explore the possibility of developing accommodation in Tuggeranong Valley and in peripheral areas of the park by using current farmhouse accommodation on rural land.

Future Developments in ACT Parks

10.29. The ACT Parks and Conservation Service advised that the future development of ACT parks would focus on expanding the Service's facilities such as walking tracks, picnic grounds and walking trails and assessing the viability of providing commercial food service facilities. The ACT Parks and Conservation Service stated that it would support government management of any retail and food services provided within ACT parks to ensure that the park managers could control "the image, the service and any infrastructure involved (eg shop, cafeteria, etc)".¹²³

10.30. The Committee acknowledges that there is a lack of food services along Tourist Route 5 and supports the ACT Parks and Conservation Service's consideration of a proposal to include food services as an aspect of the Tidbinbilla Visitors Centre. However, the Committee believes that any proposal submitted must restrict the type of food services permitted, identify rubbish disposal practises, indicate the impact on any other facilities at the site, for example carparking, picnic areas and toilet facilities, and indicate if this initiative would be financially viable.

Recommendation 17

10.31. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government explore the efficacy of introducing food services along Tourist Route 5 or within Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve after considering the environmental impact of such a move.

¹²³ Submission No 18, p 16-17

11. Generation of Revenue

11.1. Given the limited funds available for the management and preservation of ACT national parks and nature reserves, the Committee recognises that the managers of the Territory's assets must look to develop ways of generating their own revenue. The Committee is aware that this move is in line with the States, which already have an array of charges in place.

11.2. General support was received for a user pays system as long as the funds generated go to maintenance and management of parks, and not Consolidated Revenue.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, charging is a difficult and complex issue and "is highly sensitive, particularly to the people who are being charged".¹²⁵ The ACT Parks and Conservation Service sees charging as a major step, one which should be

"part of an overall package of measures involving the commercialisation of the organisation ...and that any concerted program of revenue generation ... is a firm commitment by the ACT Government that any funds so derived will be retained by the Service and directed towards achieving the nature conservation and visitor service goals."¹²⁶

11.3. In support of this statement the ACT Parks and Conservation Service has recently completed and released the *Marketing Strategy and Options Plan*, which identifies a promotional plan for ACT nature parks and details some options for raising revenue such as an annual park pass, service fees and a licensing system. The options presented are currently being considered by the Government and the people affected. The Committee has not considered the information provided in this paper in totality in this report.

11.4. The ACT Parks and Conservation Service also advised that if charges are implemented it is vital that private operators "see themselves getting a definite benefit from any charges which are extracted",¹²⁷ and that the cost of collecting the charges does not cost more than the revenue returned.

11.5. In considering ways to generate increased revenue from the parks themselves, it must be acknowledged that the true value of the national parks and nature reserves cannot be fully assessed in monetary terms, because the national parks also contribute by providing a supply of cheap water to Canberra; a recreational facility; a natural backdrop, which makes Canberra an aesthetically pleasant city in which to reside; and a wilderness on the doorstep.¹²⁸

Fees and Charges

11.6. Many submissions recognised that the charging of fees would not generate enough revenue to cover park management and development costs.

"Funds collected from park visitors will never be sufficient to cover the full costs of national and nature park management, and nor should they be. It must be recognised that the whole community is a beneficiary of the presence of natural areas, and should therefore contribute to the cost of management of these areas, even though many of the benefits are intangible and not obvious to many people."¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Submission No 15, p 2

¹²⁵ Transcript, p 50

¹²⁶ Submission No 18, Attachment C, p 8

¹²⁷ Transcript, p 68

¹²⁸ Submission No 18, p 12

¹²⁹ Submission No 13, p 8

11.7. The National Parks Association of the ACT highlighted that commercial tour operators may find it difficult to afford the fees and these charges may well be the factor that determines a small business's viability.¹³⁰

11.8. Ginninderra Wetlands Care Group raised the idea of setting an environmental levy of say \$5.00 per head, with all funds raised being returned directly to environmental improvements in that area.¹³¹

11.9. Tourism Council of Australia, while not advocating the ACT move to a system of fees and charges, stated that instigating fees for wilderness areas, which are likely to suffer detriment if some sort of preventative action is not taken, may be useful as it will limit access to these sensitive areas and thus afford greater protection.¹³² Tourism Council of Australia also highlighted that the level of demand for a particular resource needs to be taken into account when considering initiating charges.

11.10. Dr Frawley also stated that the ACT needs to learn from the experience of Kosciusko National Park which experienced a massive increase in the costs of maintaining the roads and infrastructure in the park as a result of the impact of massive increase in visitation brought about by the ski trade.¹³³

11.11. The Committee was informed that the parks currently return some \$20,000 per annum in minor revenue, from the sale of items from the Namadgi and Tidbinbilla Visitor Centre shops; and that the ACT Parks and Conservation Service, which owns and manages this asset, receive no return from the facility.¹³⁴ The Committee also noted that not only does ACT Forests charge camping fees and fees for the exclusive use of an area, but it also has its own trust account, and allocates any fees received to the maintenance and extension of its facilities.

Recommendation 18

11.12. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government allow the ACT Parks and Conservation Service to retain and manage any revenue it may generate for re-investment in maintenance and development of the sites under its control.

Current Charges

11.13. River Runners advised the Committee that while it pays an annual license fee of \$300 and \$3 per person to enter Kosciusko National Parks for rafting trips, it pays no fees to access any ACT National Parks.¹³⁵

11.14. Brindabella Motor Sport Club expressed concern about the new charging policies by ACT Forests. The Club also advised that the fees charged in the ACT are the highest in Australia and that if these new charges are to continue the ACT will be unable to compete with events organised in NSW Forests. This would mean a direct loss of revenue of some 1,400 person nights in accommodation and services, especially in the winter months.¹³⁶

11.15. The Committee noted that the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage has a comprehensive range of fees for visitors to their National Parks including charges for still photography, movie making, and camping. Commercial tourist operators are charged a fee of \$1.15

¹³⁰ Transcript, p 107

¹³¹ Submission No 8, p3

¹³² Transcript, p 91

¹³³ *ibid*, p 70

¹³⁴ *ibid*, p 52

¹³⁵ *ibid*, p 4

¹³⁶ Submission No 1, p 1,2

per hour per visitor. Government officials regard the fee as a charge levied on the profit tourist operators gain from accessing a natural resource, although the operators refer to it as an entry fee.

Entry Fees

11.16. Canberra Region Tours stated that “real financial benefit should not come from admission charges, which should be low enough so as not to deter, but from the extra day the visitor might spend”¹³⁷ so they can visit nature parks or reserves.

11.17. Dr Frawley expressed concern that the increasing trend to charge entry fees to national parks may impact on local access and further suggested that the responsibility for the conservation of these natural areas with their biological diversity and catchment protection role should be borne by the taxpayer who directly benefits from their preservation. Further, Dr Frawley expresses his objection to paying entry fees if the purpose is to pay for the upgrading or building of facilities that are not needed; and adds that:

“...it probably irks economists that access to the bush in Australia has largely been free. Charging can be seen as attempting to take away a ‘birthright’.”¹³⁸

11.18. Dr Frawley also highlights that as all governments in Australia are committed to the conservation of biological diversity funding it is not unreasonable to expect that national parks be supported by funds from the taxpayer base and also perhaps from other services, such as ACTEW, which benefit from the preservation of these areas.¹³⁹

11.19. Canberra Region Tours preferred that fees be charged on a per head basis rather than per vehicle so as not to disadvantage the larger operator. Canberra Region Tours also stated that when considering charges the Committee needs to take into account that most of the National Monuments, such as the War Memorial, the Mint and Parliament House, are free, which makes it harder for other attractions to compete.¹⁴⁰

11.20. The Committee was advised that the issue of charging fees for entry to a site frequented by the locals was a major concern in the Cairns region. In addition, the increase in tourists to a particular site had resulted in displacement of the locals from that favoured spot.

11.21. Further, the ACT Parks and Conservation Service advised that prior to the introduction of any user charges it is imperative that an education campaign be conducted “to advise the public of the rationale for the introduction of charges and the nature in which the proposed system would operate”.¹⁴¹

Recommendation 19

11.22. The Committee recommends that should the ACT Government consider the introduction of user charges, that an education campaign be conducted, prior to their introduction, to inform the public of the rationale for the need to charge.

¹³⁷ Submission No 6, p 2

¹³⁸ Submission No 11, p

¹³⁹ Transcript, p 67 - 68

¹⁴⁰ Transcript, p 29

¹⁴¹ Submission No 18, Attachment C, p 10-11

Collection of Fees and Charges

11.23. The actual collection of entry fees is seen as a difficult and expensive route to follow as most parks and reserves in the ACT, other than Tidbinbilla, have a multi-entry/exit point. Collection of fees would also incorporate additional costs in terms of staff, and the establishment of collection sites.

11.24. In Committee discussions with both the NSW Parks and Wildlife Service and the Queensland Department of the Environment and Heritage, officials put forward the idea of revenue generation by establishing a National Park Card. The National Park Card would be purchased by individuals or families for a set annual fee (\$50 -\$100) and be promoted as a way to protect and maintain the national parks. It seems visitors are happy to pay a fee if the money is returned to the park sites for their maintenance or betterment. The ACT Parks and Conservation Service also suggested the introduction of a similar annual pass for entry to ACT national parks.¹⁴²

11.25. The issue of charging is a sensitive and complex one and the Committee is not convinced that the introduction of entry fees across all sites will generate significant income. However, the Committee recognises that it is time for the ACT community to acknowledge the value of the Territory's nature reserves and national parks by contributing to their conservation and is supportive of charging for ranger services and other services provided. The Committee also recommends that any funds generated by the parks themselves be returned to the parks to assist in their management for ecological sustainability.

Penalties

11.26. Some submissions supported the introduction of penalties to ensure that commercial tour operators and service providers were made accountable.¹⁴³

11.27. The Committee was informed that interstate national parks had a range of penalties; however, a major difficulty was ensuring that the breach was upheld in court and that the fine was substantial enough to deter the offender repeating the offence. Interstate officials stressed the need to ensure that the majority of park management laws were enshrined in legislation to avoid protracted legal battles. Without the legislative basis the permit application process becomes unwieldy, prosecution is not always successful, and the policing of activities requires excessive personnel resources and occurs too infrequently to act as a major deterrent.

Licensing and Permits

11.28. The ACT Parks and Conservation Service have outlined a simple three tier system of licensing which details the rights and obligations of both park management and park users in their *Marketing Strategy and Options Plan*. The Committee commends the intention of the plan which aims to develop "a constructive, respectful and mutually beneficial partnership"¹⁴⁴ with all stakeholders who use the parks.

11.29. River Runners believe that the costs of administering a licensing system in the ACT would outweigh any financial return and would also single out commercial operators to pay costs for access to and maintenance of areas which are accessible at no charge to the general public.¹⁴⁵ Further, River Runners expressed concern about educational and non-profit organisations being exempt from a range of licensing and registration fees.

¹⁴² *ibid*, p10

¹⁴³ Submission No 8, p 2

¹⁴⁴ *Marketing Strategy and Options Plan* - August 1995, p 9

¹⁴⁵ Submission No 9, p 5

11.30. The introduction of licensing was also seen as one way to ensure that tour operators use and promote environmentally sustainable practices.

Recommendation 20

11.31. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government explore the efficacy of the licensing system proposed by the ACT Parks and Conservation Service in its *Marketing Strategy and Options Plan*.

Accreditation

11.32. Environment Tours supported the introduction of accreditation and licensing of tour operators as it felt it had “far more to gain than to lose by such a system”;¹⁴⁶ and that such a system would only inconvenience those who did not operate as bona fide nature based tour operators.

11.33. River Runners expressed concern about groups, especially educational groups, who engage in outdoor recreation activities within the Territory parks, with instructors who do not possess formal qualifications equivalent to those of a guide working for a commercial tour operator. River Runners also welcome the introduction of a policy or licensing system to monitor the commercial, non-commercial, educational and voluntary tours or activities which had the safety of the general public as the bottom line. In addition, River Runners informed the Committee that a project to establish national competency standards for outdoor recreation training was being established by NORLD (National Outdoor Recreation Leadership Development) with a view to implementing multi-skilling and portability of qualifications across Australia.¹⁴⁷

11.34. The Committee was concerned to learn that educational and non-profit organisations together with privately organised tours, which are exempt from fees and industry standards (accreditation) and offer tours cheaper than the commercial tour operators, have the highest rate of accidents and death.¹⁴⁸ The Committee considers that all guides and instructors leading outdoor recreational activities should have experience and qualifications commensurate with the level of activity they are instructing in.

Recommendation 21

11.35. The Committee recommends that the ACT Government adopt an accreditation system to ensure that all guides and instructors involved in outdoor activities are accredited with qualifications and experience for the tasks they are instructing in.

TREVOR KAINÉ MLA
CHAIRMAN

December 1995

¹⁴⁶ Transcript, p 23

¹⁴⁷ Submission No 9, p 4

¹⁴⁸ *ibid*, p 5

APPENDIX A - Written Submissions Received

1. Mr Adrian Dudok Brindabella Motor Sport Club
2. Ms Lyn Forceville ACT Australian Democrats
3. Mr Tony De Domenico MLA Canberra Tourism
4. Mr Brian Barlin Brindabella Station
5. Ms Lyn Forceville Minders of Tuggeranong Homestead (MOTH)
6. Mr Steven Brumby Canberra Region Tours
7. Mr Ralph Clissold Mt Seaview Safaris
8. Mr Maurice Griffen-Warwicke Ginninderra Wetlands Care Group
9. Mr Nick Boylan River Runners
10. Dr Kevin Frawley
11. Mr Ian Fraser and
Ms Margaret McJannett Environment Tours
12. Paul Chittleborough Koori Aboriginal Culture Tours
13. Ms Eleanor Stodart National Parks Association of the ACT
14. Ms Lil Bryant Canberra Festival
15. Ms Gemma Stone Tourism Council of Australia, Canberra Region
Branch
16. Ms Lyn Nelson Flora and Fauna Committee
17. Mr Graham McKenzie Smith ACT Forests
18. Mr Brian Weir ACT Parks and Conservation Service

APPENDIX B - List of Witnesses

Mr Nick Boylan	River Runners
Mr Steven Brumby	Canberra Region Tours
Mr Ian Fraser	Environment Tours
Ms Margaret McJannett	Environment Tours
Graeme Chambers	Canberra Tourism
Chris Hamon	Canberra Tourism
Alex Nicolson	ACT Parks and Conservation
Brian Weir	ACT Parks and Conservation
Lyn Nelson	ACT Parks and Conservation
Lyn Forceville	Australian Democrats
Lyn Forceville and Ian French	Minders of Tuggeranong Homestead (MOTH)
Dr Kevin Frawley	
Brian Barlin	Brindabella Station
Graham McKenzie Smith	ACT Forests
Alan Davey	ACT Forests
Gemma Stone	Tourism Council Australia, Canberra Region Branch
Paul Chittleborough	Koori Aboriginal Culture Tours
Bill Allen	Koori Aboriginal Culture Tours
Clive Hurlstone	National Parks Association of the ACT
Nicki Taws	National Parks Association of the ACT
Ray Polglaze	National Parks Association of the ACT
Matilda House	ACT Ngunnawal Elders Aboriginal Council Inc
Colin Williams	ACT Ngunnawal Elders Aboriginal Council Inc