

## **Ecotourism**

### **in the**

## **Australian Capital Territory**

### **Issues Paper**

#### **Contents**

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>1. Introduction .....</b>                          | <b>2</b> |
| 1.1 Why an ecotourism strategy .....                  | 2        |
| 1.2 Ecotourism and tourism.....                       | 2        |
| <b>2. Development of an Ecotourism Industry .....</b> | <b>4</b> |
| 2.1 Sustainability .....                              | 4        |
| 2.2 Integrated Planning .....                         | 4        |
| 2.3 Marketing and Promotion.....                      | 4        |
| 2.4 Training and Accreditation.....                   | 4        |
| 2.5 Involvement of Indigenous Australians.....        | 5        |
| 2.6 Viability .....                                   | 6        |
| <b>3. Natural Resource Management.....</b>            | <b>6</b> |
| 3.1 Regulation .....                                  | 6        |
| 3.2 Infrastructure and Development.....               | 6        |
| 3.3 Impact Monitoring .....                           | 7        |
| <b>4 How to contribute.....</b>                       | <b>8</b> |

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Why an ecotourism strategy?**

Travellers to and within Australia have, in recent years shown a marked preference for the attractions of our natural environment. As a result, the number of tourism operations providing an experience within this environment has increased dramatically. Four wheel drive safaris, bush walking expeditions, horse-riding, white water rafting, mountain bike riding, and many more activities have emerged to cope with the demand. The industry which has developed has become known as the "ecotourism" industry.

Pursuing a need to manage this growth industry, the Commonwealth Department of Tourism released a draft National Ecotourism Strategy in November 1993. The final strategy was released in March 1994. Many of the issues identified within that strategy fall within the responsibilities of the States and Territories. The ACT Government is among the first to identify the need, and set in place the process, for the development of an Ecotourism Policy particular to the Australian Capital Territory.

A community and tourism industry based working group has been established to assist in the development of an Ecotourism Strategy for the ACT. This group will examine the issues raised in the National Ecotourism Strategy from a local perspective in order to develop an appropriate strategy for the ACT.

This examination of the issues will include a public consultation process having the following elements.

1. This Issues Paper forms the initial point for community discussion.
2. Submissions will then be used to develop a draft strategy.
3. The draft strategy will be released for public comment
4. Following further public input the draft will be modified to incorporate community comment before being released as a final strategy.

As part of the policy development process, the Government intends to produce a marketing plan for nature and conservation areas. Considerable community consultation and a survey will be undertaken during the development of this marketing plan.

## 1.2 Ecotourism and tourism

Many definitions and differing terms exist to describe ecotourism.

*"Tourism that involves travelling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the objective of admiring, studying, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any cultural features found there."* (Ceballos-Lascurain 1991)

*"Ecologically sustainable tourism that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation."* (Ecotourism Association of Australia 1992)

*"...nature based tourism that includes an educational component and is managed to be sustainable"* (Draft National Plan, Department of Tourism 1993)

While any of these definitions could be applied to the ACT, they may not take into account local conditions. The critical factor in any definition is the scope of ecotourism. Is ecotourism restricted to commercial nature based tourism operations or does it encompass all visitors to nature based tourism facilities and resources? Should it include local residents' nature based recreation?

The Bureau of Tourism research defines tourism as *"travel involving a stay away from home for one or more nights and requiring a journey of at least 40 kilometres from home."* (Domestic Tourism Monitor, Bureau of Tourism Research 1992)

This definition excludes all of those visitors to nature based tourism resources who do not stay overnight. Canberra residents using nature based facilities for recreation are not, within this definition, ecotourists.

The strategy which will develop from responses to this paper will examine the advantages and disadvantages of an ecotourism industry for the ACT.

- The advantages will come from increased income and lifestyle enrichment flowing from tourism growth.
- The disadvantages will include increasing demand for our limited nature based resources and the management costs which will flow from that demand.

You are invited to contribute to the preparation of an ACT Ecotourism Strategy at two stages. The first is by providing a written submission towards the draft policy. You may find the following discussion of issues helpful in preparing your response. You need not limit your input to the issues identified in this paper.

You will have a further opportunity to provide input on the Draft when it is released for comment and at public forums planned for later in the year.

The closing date for submissions is 28 May 1994.

## **2. Development of an Ecotourism Industry**

### **2.1 Sustainability**

Tourism development within the ACT will have a positive impact on the ACT economy. Where that development has an ecotourism component there may be negative implications for the environment and increased natural area management costs. The draft National Ecotourism Strategy examines this issue at some length. You are invited to consider and comment upon the implications for the ACT.

### **2.2 Integrated Planning**

The ACT Draft Strategy will be an attempt to integrate Territory policy on ecotourism and the views of operators, conservation groups, and the community. There are also a range of cross border issues which impact on policy development in this area. These include the licensing of tour operators and regulations governing the use of natural resources, in both the ACT and NSW.

### **2.3 Marketing and Promotion**

How should the ACT be marketed as an ecotourism destination?

- By simply catering for an existing demand or by creating demand?
- What target markets are best for the ACT?
- What style of ecotourism activities are best for the ACT?
- Who are the ACT's competitors?
- What competitive advantages does the ACT have?

Submissions on this issue will assist the development of the marketing plan mentioned earlier.

## **2.4 Training and Accreditation**

The recent growth of the ecotourism industry has raised questions about the quality of delivery, the practices of operators and individuals, the licensing of operators, and the qualifications of guides.

- How necessary and practical is training and accreditation?
- Should it apply to all staff who lead eco-tours, or just supervisors?
- Who does the word "operator" encompass? Government, non-profit organisations, private enterprise operators?
- What level of knowledge should be included in training and accreditation?

**Knowledge of flora and fauna?**

**Knowledge of Aboriginal history?**

**Knowledge of park management practices?**

**Knowledge of basic ecological principles?**

**Understanding of basic environmental political issues relevant to the area?**

**Knowledge of and commitment to sound ecological practices relating to energy and water conservation, soil and habitat protection?**

- Should training and accreditation be general to all national parks, or specific to particular regions or parks?
- Who should carry out training and accreditation? Who should pay for it?
- What role should existing tourism and environmental education training resources play?

## **2.5 Involvement of Indigenous Australians**

Many ecotourists are also cultural tourists. Development of an ecotourism industry must consider the history and culture of indigenous Australians, especially as Aboriginal sites of significance are located within our park systems.

Submissions from individuals and groups with a particular interest in the relationship between ecotourism and Aboriginal sites history and traditions are encouraged.

## 2.6 Viability

Apart from the question of sustainability, the Draft ACT Ecotourism Strategy will examine the level of activity which is commercially viable. Any examination of this topic may need to consider the range of possible operations and the market potential of each. Submissions discussing the viability of ecotourism operations are invited.

## 3. Natural Resource Management

Effective management of natural resources is essential if ecotourism is to develop. The very nature of ecotourism depends on the conservation of our natural resources. Any development of an ecotourism industry for the ACT must consider the implications for natural resource management and the role of ACT and Commonwealth Government agencies responsible for managing these resources.

### 3.1 Regulation

A number of questions have been raised as a result of the growth of ecotourism.

- Should ecotourist operators establish their own industry codes of conduct?
- Should government develop further regulations to control the increased activity that may be expected from ecotourism?
- Should ACT regulation of the industry be consistent with national standards and with other States and Territories?
- How will regulations and standards be enforced?
- Should quasi-commercial operations run by non-profit organisations be included in any specific ecotourism regulations?
- Should principles such as sustainability apply to all tour operators and groups?

### **3.2 Infrastructure and Development**

**Ecotourism infrastructure and development includes**

- Roads
- Cycleways
- Walking paths
- Horse riding routes
- Buildings
- Toilets
- Fireplaces
- Information and interpretive centres
- Accommodation
- Conference centres

Development needs to integrate reasonable access with sustainable management of the environment. Facilities must be designed with this in mind.

Information about environmentally sensitive development, suggested circumstances when developments should be permitted or refused and suggestions for appropriate infrastructure will be considered by the working group.

### **3.3 Impact Monitoring**

If ecotourism is to remain viable and the natural resources of the ACT are to be conserved, the impact of many existing and potential ecotourism activities must be monitored. New methodologies have developed but it is generally accepted that more needs to be done in this area. Submissions on this issue will assist the process.

### **3.4 Funding and Equity**

Ecotourism is an industry which has the ability to attract interstate and overseas visitors to the region, injecting significant funds into the ACT economy and contributing to the employment of Canberrans. These benefits should flow largely to the ACT as host community.

The issue of maintaining park areas and not diverting funds away from park conservation is an important element of this issue.

The Government will examine the various revenue collection and management options during the production of a marketing plan for nature and conservation areas.

#### **4 How to contribute**

Submissions for the initial draft should be sent by 28/5/1994 to:

Ms Elisabeth Matthews  
ACT Tourism Commission  
GPO Box 744  
CIVIC ACT 2601.  
Phone (06) 2050666

Information about the National Ecotourism Strategy is available from:

Ms Alison Allcock  
Nature Based and Indigenous Tourism  
Department of Tourism  
GPO Box 1545  
Canberra 2601  
Phone (06) 2797111

Your submission should address each issue on a separate page. Please attach the following information coupon to your submission.

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| Name:   | Phone       |
| Address:  |             |
|   | Facsimile   |
| Issues Addressed                                | Please Tick |
| 1. Sustainability                               |             |
| 2. Integrated Planning                          |             |
| 3. Marketing and Promotion                      |             |
| 4. Training and Accreditation                   |             |
| 5. Involvement of Indigenous Australians        |             |
| 6. Viability                                    |             |
| 7. Regulation                                   |             |
| 8. Infrastructure and Development               |             |
| 9. Impact Monitoring                            |             |
| 10. Other Issues                                |             |
| more views about environment and social issues  |             |
| other views about environment and social issues |             |
| other views about environment and social issues |             |