

Designing and Managing Wildlife Tourism Interactions

Presented by Ian Tranter

Ian Tranter is the Manager of Sustainable and Indigenous Tourism in the Australia Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources. He is responsible for implementing the Government's Tourism and Conservation Initiative.

Background

Nature based tourism is a large segment of the Australian tourism industry. Even non-nature tourism significantly relies on the natural backdrop of the local environment. The \$4.6m Tourism and Conservation Initiative seeks to overcome the structural, regulatory and attitudinal constraints to expanding this sector.

One of Australia's key potential tourism drawcards is its unique wildlife. Visitors wish to get 'up close and personal' with kangaroos, koalas, crocodiles and other charismatic fauna. For the visitor, interaction with wildlife often becomes a highlight of their tour, and improving wildlife interactions is likely to be the key to developing profitable enterprises that can support conservation.

However, many wildlife businesses have faced an uncertain and inconsistent regulatory environment. This is especially true for private land and unprotected public land where interaction with wildlife is often tightly controlled but destruction of the same individuals or their habitat is relatively straightforward. Feeding, petting or managing wildlife for show is not allowed in protected areas, and is not encouraged by animal rights groups. Should the same apply to all not-at-risk species, or on private land?

We wish to develop appropriate principles that should underpin regulation of wildlife interaction on private lands and on public unprotected lands. The aim is to establish an agreed social and regulatory framework which will provide the certainty for investment in wildlife tourism. WTA has already started to develop guidelines for industry operators. What elements should be left to operators, what should be regulated, and what existing regulations need to change?

Growth of the sector also requires better and more sophisticated products. To simply 'see' most animals provides limited customer engagement, understanding or repeat business. This is exacerbated by the difficulty of seeing many marsupial species, which have been selected to be small, cryptic, afraid of humans, and in many cases nocturnal. Feeding and petting improves the close observation of the animals and a few of their behaviours, but may not increase the customer engagement or understanding beyond a generic warm fuzzy feeling. How can we identify opportunities for more effective and enjoyable interactions with Australian wildlife?

Questions for discussion:

What principles are appropriate for interaction with wildlife on private land (or unprotected public land)?

What regulations are needed to create the certainty to allow investment in wildlife tourism?

What existing regulations need to change or be removed?

How can we design wildlife interactions that better match tourist demand?

Questions: What principles are appropriate for interaction with wildlife on private land (or unprotected public land)?

Possible underlying principles

- 1. No cruelty to individuals and where possible improve its circumstances.**
- 2. No significant harm to any native species, and where possible improve its circumstances.**
- 3. No significant harm to any native ecosystem type, and where possible improve its circumstances.**
- 4. Duty of care proportional to level of interference.**
- 5. These should apply also to the total of interactions by all individuals.**
- 6. Preference should be for interactions that the relevant individuals from both species want, given a free choice.**
- 7. Outcomes and actions to be measured against the probable alternatives.**
- 8. Principles should apply equally to all industries and activities.**

What regulations are needed to create the certainty to allow investment in wildlife tourism?

Table of principles and what is appropriate n regs, industry standards, already covered

Possible underlying principles

1. No cruelty to individuals and where possible improve its circumstances.

- first already covered by RSCPA principles and enabling legislation
- second part – limited incentive

2. No significant harm to any native species, and where possible improve its circumstances.

- first is partly covered by EPBC and state mirror legislation, (provided harm is commission rather than omission, large actions rather than many small actions, and provided species is listed as threatened)
- second part – limited incentives

3. No significant harm to any native ecosystem type, and where possible improve its circumstances.

- first is partly covered by EPBC, NRM and state mirror legislation, (provided harm is commission rather than omission, and large actions rather than many small actions)
- second part – some incentives and NRM planning

4. Duty of care proportional to level of interference.

- not adequately articulated for native animals that are managed, habituated, or tame
- inconsistencies between regulations for different industries and purpose of actions

5. These should apply also to the total of interactions by all individuals.

- inconsistencies in regulations with individual actions sometimes being judged as if actions were happening to all individuals, and sometimes reverse.
- need for better regulation on incremental consequences and clarification of sacrificial zones vs broad low level interaction

6. Preference should be for interactions that the relevant individuals from both species want, given a free choice.

- current controls tend to be on preventing disturbance from natural patterns of behaviour. Is this appropriate for private lands and unprotected lands, or should free choice prevail?

7. Outcomes and actions to be measured against the probable alternatives.

- Inconsistencies in regulations enforce stricter controls on non-harmful activities than harmful activities. Wildlife tourism counts as ‘use’ whereas culling or habitat destruction does not.
- Wildlife tourism outside of protected areas should not be judged against pristine wilderness but against other legitimate uses open to the landholder

8. Principles should apply equally to all industries and activities.

- regulation should be on the consequence, not whether the statistical code is agriculture, property development or wildlife tourism

What existing regulations need to change or be removed?

Attached is draft table of wildlife legislation that WTA could consider reviewing and influencing. Also attached is the 2004 Productivity Commission summary of native vegetation and biodiversity legislation in the States and territories.

Possible issues:

- In some jurisdictions, tourism does not count as a productive use of the land for lease-hold retention, even if it earns more money than clearing for agriculture.
- Additional animals created through better land management or breeding programs are treated the same as base level individuals
- ‘Non-harmful use’ should not be penalised over ‘harmful non-use’
- Habituated, tamed and domesticated individuals should not be regulated as if they are wild.
- Regulations should facilitate community and private sector actions that improve conservation, rather than through over-regulation discourage such actions.
- Correct feeding of native animals in disturbed habitat should be encouraged as part of the duty of care rather than discouraged.
- Extend rural support programs to land in the same area used for native animal tourism
- Need for dispensation from detailed regulation for large private wildlife reserves that add to conservation.
- Breed and release on private land should not be more controlled than destruction of the original populations
- Objectives of regulations should be specified, and actions contrary to regulations permitted if they meet the objectives
- Without some form of property rights and trading available, businesses increasing numbers of native animals are not creating tangible business assets.

How can we design wildlife interactions that better match tourist demand?

What products are missing?

- Major products showing off many of our iconic species
 - Kangaroo and wallaby species
 - Platypus, echidna and wombats
 - Quolls and numbats
 - Possums and gliders
 - Bandicoots and bilbies
 - Emus, cassowaries and mallee fowl
 - Magpies and kookaburras
 - Cockatoos, corellas and budgerigars
 - Dragons, monitors and goannas

- Tame free-range interactions
- Opportunities for detailed observations
- Effective observation of many nocturnal behaviours
- Broad-scale animal reserves for tourists
- Extensive interactions or great variety
- Seasonal differentiation
- Animal playfulness
- Experience of native pets (other than birds)
- Training for the public on how to interact/bond with their landmates and managing land for particular species

What basic information is needed?

- Behaviour of *Homo sapiens ssp touristii*
 - Favoured behaviours and locations?
 - What elicits positive responses?
 - What combination of facilities and nature is desired?

- Behaviour of native animals
 - Which species are capable of enjoying/tolerating interaction in habituated, tame, or domesticated state?
 - Favoured behaviours and locations?
 - Characteristics or behaviours of interest to humans?
 - Adaptability to man managed environments?

- What pairs of voluntary behaviours from the two species could form interactions?
 - Evidence of successful experiments with this combination?

- Which combinations are likely to be viable business propositions?
 - Associated money making enterprises.
 - Scale of local vs Australian vs International demand
 - Synergies with other tourism operations

The Immediate Challenge?

- Who are the groups/people that have this information at the moment?
 - Animal behaviouralists and scientists, wildlife carers, wildlife operators, zoos, tourism marketers, park rangers?

- What is the best way of bringing these people together and generating ideas for additional wildlife products?
 - Workshop, or Delphi technique followed by analysis papers by experts?
 - Broad trawl or test process on few species?
 - Combined effort or needing a funded project leader?

- When could this be done and how much would it cost?

- Who is interested in participating?