

KEY ISSUES AND RESOLUTIONS

2nd Australian Wildlife Tourism Conference Fremantle, Western Australia 13-15 August 2006

Overall Conference Resolution

The 2nd Australian Wildlife Tourism Conference concludes that wildlife tourism is an immature but growing sector of the Australian tourism industry that provides valuable economic, social and environmental benefits at local, regional and national levels. This growth creates opportunities for enhanced benefits, given appropriate product development and marketing, as well as the potential for greater negative impacts. A key obstacle to growth is that Australians have a relatively poor appreciation of their native wildlife. Together, these issues create an urgent need for measures to facilitate the following in relation to wildlife tourism:

- enhanced product quality, including in presentation and interpretation;
- improved marketing;
- improved management of negative impacts, especially relating to tourist-wildlife interactions;
- greater conservation benefits;
- greater appreciation of Australian wildlife by Australians;
- strategic planning for sustainable development;
- improved legislation, regulatory and self management mechanisms to enhance opportunities for integrating conservation and tourism, and
- innovative funding mechanisms to finance the research and management of wildlife that are the focus of tourism activity.

Each of these aspects is examined below. Key issues relating to each aspect are identified, followed by resolutions to address these issues. For each resolution, the key stakeholders suggested to work on the identified actions are given (see list of abbreviations used in Appendix 1).

Adoption of these resolutions will facilitate creation of a high quality and sustainable wildlife tourism industry in Australia, with enhanced conservation benefits.

Products and Markets

Key issues

- Compared to international visitors, Australians generally do not appreciate the uniqueness and 'value' of Australian wildlife.
- Marketing of Australian wildlife for tourism purposes could be more effective.
- More use could be made of innovative product design and sophisticated technology to support viewing cryptic wildlife and manage impacts.

Resolutions

The conference calls upon the organisations listed below to undertake the following actions:

- improve the promotion and marketing of wildlife as a tourism product (WTA, STOs, TA);
- facilitate innovative product design and use of technology to enhance quality of viewing experience & manage impacts (DITR, STOs), and
- conduct research on product development opportunities (including use of technology), and consumer demand in relation to details of product design (STCRC, TRA).

Presentation and Interpretation

Key issues

- The quality of tour guiding is crucial in maximising visitor satisfaction and managing impacts.
- Conservation messages are often not effectively or consistently communicated.
- High service standards that are educational, inspirational and show respect for wildlife are crucial to business success.
- Personalised and professional services that offer unique experiences are important aspects of the wildlife tourism experience.

Resolutions

The conference calls upon the organisations listed below to undertake the following actions:

- develop incentives for commercial tourism operators (CTOs) to obtain business and guide certification (e.g. fee reductions) (WTA, SCOs);
- provide incentives to CTOs to attend training, workshops and conferences (e.g. grants, subsidies) (WTA, SCOs);
- expand the number and frequency of training events for quality tour guiding (FACET, STOs), and
- develop mechanisms to determine appropriate conservation messages and promote their communication by CTOs operating in natural areas, including protected areas (SCOs).

Impacts and their management

Key issues

- Data collection frameworks that are crucial to measuring the social, economic and environmental performance of (wildlife) tourism are not efficient or well integrated.
- There are inconsistencies between jurisdictions in regulations and guidelines for managing impacts on wildlife, which are an impediment to achieving a more efficient and cohesive industry.
- There is insufficient scientific knowledge on impacts of tourism on wildlife.
- Education is an important tool in managing impacts and changing perceptions about impacts.

- ‘Common pool resources’ (like wildlife) can be managed sustainably if good management frameworks and appropriate legislative measures are put in place.
- Effective tourism management requires site and species specific research.
- The impacts of external forces on the viability of wildlife tourism are significant, eg, loss of habitat, infestation by alien invasive pest species, disease, over-fishing.
- Monitoring key components of sensitive WT situations (including effectiveness of communication and management performance) is critical to sustainability.
- Strong and effective regulation of WT can be used as a marketing advantage.
- GPS based monitoring has significant potential for management and monitoring of wildlife interaction.
- Management agencies should be responsive to scientific research that indicates environmental impacts associated with specific tourism interaction having the potential to compromise long-term sustainability.

Resolutions

The conference delegates endorse and support the decision by Western Australian Minister for the Environment, Mark McGowan to reduce the number of commercial boat tour licences in Shark Bay in response to research into the impacts of tour boat activities on dolphins.

The conference calls upon the organisations listed below to undertake the following actions:

- conduct research to support identification, evaluation and monitoring of environmental impacts associated with wildlife tourism (STCRC, universities, SCOs);
- review legislation relating to wildlife tourism, with a view to achieving ‘uniform’ national regulations and focusing more on positive outcomes;
- develop specific sustainability indicators for WT to ensure identification and management of (priority) environmental impacts (STCRC, SCOs);
- Build better coordination and cooperation in data collection mechanisms and systems (STCRC, STOs, SCOs);
- develop and promote broad uptake of national guidelines for managing impacts, especially of sensitive interaction types/ species (WTA, SCOs, STCRC, universities);
- undertake more long term research and monitoring involving “sensitive” species/interactions and integrate this with management (STCRC, universities, SCOs);
- prioritise research on species and sites of most concern in relation to impact management (STCRC, WTA);
- promote support for conservation of wildlife and habitats by the wildlife tourism industry (WTA);
- improve community education and non-personal interpretation at the site level where visitors interact with wildlife (SCOs), and

- continue to encourage decision makers to take a staged precautionary approach when approving new wildlife tourism ventures that include a contribution by operators to research and monitoring.

Conservation and management

Key issues

- Reintroduction of threatened species on private land, linked to tourism, can make important contributions to conservation, but government policies/legislation and culture currently inhibit rather than encourage such activities.
- The attitudes of much of the scientific community to social science constrain financial and political support for wildlife tourism research.
- The potential conservation benefits of wildlife tourism cannot be achieved without the active involvement of private landholders.
- “Ownership’ of wildlife is controversial but creates an incentive for conservation and deserves greater consideration.

Resolutions

The conference calls upon the organisations listed below to undertake the following actions:

- conduct research to quantify the social, environmental and economic benefits of wildlife tourism (STCRC, universities,);
- actively promote partnerships for sustainable WT between the private sector, government and community (DITR, SCOs, NGOs);
- strategically increase links between wildlife tourism and conservation (DITR, WTA);
- improve effectiveness & dissemination of conservation-related education messages eg as part of CTO licence conditions (SCOs), and
- explore opportunities to change legislation, policy and culture to support rather than inhibit responsible initiatives to reintroduce threatened species to private land and to link this with tourism and education. (DITR, WTA, SCOs)

Wildlife Interaction

Key issues

- Managing WT equitably between free independent travelers and CTOs is difficult.
- Generic and specific (case by case) interaction guidelines that are nationally uniform and provide certainty to operators and visitors need to be developed and widely disseminated.
- There is a need to improve public education regarding wildlife interactions.
- Much of the current wildlife legislation that is relevant to wildlife interactions as part of tourism is outmoded, making enforcement difficult.

Resolutions

The conference calls upon the organisations listed below to undertake the following actions:

- develop generic and specific (case by case) interaction guidelines that are nationally uniform (WTA, DEH, SCOs);
- initiate public education on wildlife interaction and feeding via schools and media, airlines/airports (WTA, SCOs, STOs, Leave no Trace);
- review legislation relating to wildlife interaction, with a view to achieving 'uniform' national regulations and to focusing more on positive outcomes (DEH, SCOs), and
- promote increased adoption of certification for operators involved in wildlife feeding or other wildlife interaction (SCOs).

Planning and Development

Key issues

- Planning and development of a sustainable wildlife tourism industry are in their infancy.
- There is a need for strategic planning of wildlife tourism (WT) at the national level.
- There is a need to develop awareness of the importance and value of Australian wildlife (intrinsic and instrumental).
- There is a need to build better links between captive and free-ranging wildlife tourism.
- There are unmet opportunities for integrating wildlife tourism and indigenous tourism.
- The value of collective (stakeholder and community) planning should not be underestimated.
- Wildlife Tourism Australia cannot do the job of coordinating and developing WT on its own.

Resolutions

The conference calls upon the organisations listed below to undertake the following actions:

- establish a working group to progress support and funding for a scoping study to investigate the feasibility of developing a national WT Strategy or similar initiative. This study would develop aims and scope of the strategy, determine the level of support from key stakeholders, consider relationship to other strategies and initiatives and explore resourcing opportunities (WTA);
- develop a promotional program to raise awareness of the tourism industry and public regarding the value of Australian wildlife (WTA, DITR, DEH), and
- promote the role that zoos play in conservation, education, research and tourism.

APPENDIX 1

ABBREVIATIONS

CTO	COMMERCIAL TOUR OPERATOR
DEH	DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE
DITR	DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY TOURISM AND
RESOURCES	
FACET	FORUM ADVOCATING CULTURAL AND ECO TOURISM
NGO	NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATION
SCO	STATE CONSERVATION ORGANISATION
STCRC	SUSTAINABLE TOURISM COOPERATIVE RESEARCH CENTRE
STO	STATE TOURISM ORGANISATION
TA	TOURISM AUSTRALIA
TRA	TOURISM RESEARCH AUSTRALIA
WTA	WILDLIFE TOURISM AUSTRALIA