



Australian Mountain Running Association

www.mountainrunning.coolrunning.com.au

ACT Legislative Assembly Inquiry into Current and Potential Ecotourism in the ACT and Region

Meredith Hunter MLA

Chair

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Dear Meredith

Australian Mountain Running Association (AMRA) activities and issues relevant to each of the Terms of Reference:

a) The extent to which organisations currently deliver ecotourism activities in the Region.

The Australian Mountain Running Association is a national organisation based in Canberra that organises more than 30 trail running and walking events in the ACT each year. These include low key monthly runs and walks up Mt Ainslie and Black Mountain all year round and several major events that attract significant numbers of interstate participants and some overseas visitors. These showcase Canberra Nature Park reserves and Namadgi National Park while being totally impact free on the environment.

The events include:

- Bush Capital Bush Marathon Festival on the last weekend in July from Campbell High School on management trails in Mt Ainslie, Mt Majura, Goorooyarroo and Mulligans Flat Nature reserves with 2k, 5k, 10k, 16k, 25k, 42k and 60k runs and 5k, 10k, 16k and 25k walks. 530 participants in 2011 with about 150 from interstate and overseas.
- Deep Space Mountain Marathon Festival in November on the fire trail between Honeysuckle Creek and Orroral picnic areas with 42k, 21k, 10k and 8k runs and walks. 120 participants in 2011, 40 from interstate.
- Mt Majura Vineyard One Peak 12k and Two Peaks 20k in October. Almost 200 entries in 2011 with about 60 from interstate. Includes the Australian Defence Force Mountain Running Championships.
- Tour de Ridges from Mawson in December over the hill tops of the Woden Valley with 10k, 15k and 25k running and walking events. Almost 200 participants in 2011 with 40 from interstate.
- Orroral Valley Classic 8k and 20k trail runs and walks on the

Cotter Hut fire trail in January. About 70 participants with about 10 from interstate.

- Mt Tennent Trails runs and walks over the Mt Tennent and Bushfold Flats fire trails in January and March, with about 70 participants, several only from interstate.
- Stromlo Stomp 4km and 11km trail runs and walks on Mt Stromlo in March. 50 to 80 participants, with interstate participation varying from year to year.
- Australian Mountain Running Championships. These are regularly conducted by AMRA in the ACT and will next be held in Canberra in 2013 in June on Mt Majura with 150 competitors, over 100 from interstate.

b) The extent to which these organisations' ecotourism activities demonstrably contribute to, and detract from, conservation and restoration of ecosystems throughout the Region.

When AMRA President John Harding first started organising off road long distance trail runs on management 4WD roads in Canberra Nature Park in the 1980s, then CNP Manager Tony Brownlie said that this was a very good thing because organised groups using CNP helped provide him with an argument to seek funding to maintain the CNP reserves. He said if no one used the reserves, he had a much weaker case to put to argue for funding for maintenance of the reserves. This argument still holds: that environmentally friendly ecotourism events in Canberra's parks, reserves, forests and national park help provide a justification to ACT Treasury on economic, health and well-being grounds for the upkeep of these reserves in addition to the reasons of environmental maintenance and passive recreation.

Back in the 1980s organised events were not charged; currently PCL charges AMRA \$1.95 per participant for each organised event and Stromlo Forest Park \$2 per participant.

AMRA events have no adverse impact on the environment:

- courses are signposted using plastic red signs with black arrows that are tied to posts and branches or attached to tent pegs then removed immediately after each event
- nearly all courses are on 4WD management trails with some events also including some sections of well-maintained walking trail
- the average age of the runners is around 50 years of age and many of these run/walk events rather than running all the way.

AMRA events have a positive education benefit in exposing many runners and walkers from both Canberra and interstate to considerably beautiful nature areas in the reserves, forests and national park that they would not experience other than through an organised event. Many people are fearful of getting lost if they venture out in these areas on their own, or are fearful for the safety of their car (with good reason because of break ins and theft).

c) The extent to which these activities contribute to the Region's economy.

AMRA events nearly all have early morning starts, necessitating a minimum overnight stay of at least one night for interstate and overseas visitors, and many come for a full weekend and visit tourist attractions, dine out etc. The per visit outlay would be similar to that believed to have been measured for visitors to other Canberra sports participation events.

There is a considerable demand for trail runs in the bush, with the most popular interstate events (Six Foot Track from Katoomba to Jenolan Caves, the North Face 100km in the Blue Mountains, the Wild Endurance 100km in the Blue Mountains, the Two Bays 56km and 28km in Melbourne, the Cradle Mountain 80km in Tasmania) having fields of up to 850 competitors sold out in only a few hours of going online. If trail runs are not permitted in the ACT, the ACT economy not only loses out on the economic benefit of interstate and overseas participants coming here, but also suffers a net loss of increased numbers of ACT runners going to interstate events instead of staying in Canberra.

d) The industry self-regulation and government regulation, including, but not limited to, accreditation and licensing, which is most likely to incentivise ecotourism activities that assist in the protection and enhancement of the Region's ecosystems.

Kosciuszko National Park has a professional ecotourism Business Management Unit at its headquarters in Jindabyne. This sets out the ground rules for, facilitates and approves applications for events in a reasonably expeditious process. The only equivalent in the ACT is the Canberra Events Corporation which is very professional in facilitating quite large events and events conducted at Stromlo Forest Park.

Smaller ecotourism events of the type conducted by AMRA fall within the auspices of Parks Conservation and Lands where the application and approval process can be quite long and slow as the priority of CNP and Namadgi rangers is to their day to day field activities, and to processing thousands of applications annually received from builders and plumbers and others to access properties backing onto CNP etc. The ideal arrangement might be to centralise the application and approval process for ecotourism events with Canberra Events Corporation.

e) The industry and government measures that are most likely to promote understanding of the biodiversity and other benefits of ecotourism organisations explicitly basing their processes and outcomes on principles of ecological sustainability.

This appears to be a piece of bureaucratic mumbo jumbo straight out of Yes

Minister.

Here are some plain English recommendations:

- 1) The ACT government does not appear to have an ecotourism policy and needs to get one, supported by effective strategies. Go to the North or South Islands of New Zealand or Tasmania or the Northern Territory where, in each case, a significant part of the local economy is ecotourism which is well promoted. The ACT has an abundance of natural environment attractions which are just not marketed.
- 2) The most popular ecotourism attraction in the ACT is the walk from Remembrance Park to the summit of Mt Ainslie. Several hundred people do it every day, starting before dawn right through to after dusk, and many tourist buses each day also drop their occupants off to use the plentiful number of picnic shelters in the Park for lunch and other meal breaks. There are no toilet facilities in either Remembrance Park or on the summit of Mt Ainslie. This is a disgrace. If AMRA or any other community organisation wants to organise an event with hundreds of participants, we are required to provide toilet facilities through expensive portaloos unless there are onsite facilities such as those at Stromlo Forest Park. Yet the ACT government allows several hundred people a day to walk up and down Mt Ainslie with no toilet facilities.
- 3) A great attraction of going to places like the Barossa Valley or Perth is that there are well known, high profile trails such as the Heysen Track which are well maintained and well sign posted. The same applies in New Zealand where there are a multitude of famous tracks which contribute greatly to ecotourism.
In the ACT the Bicentennial Trail is not only not signposted, but finding out its route is like searching for a state secret. Its route is not even readily available on the internet.
The 2013 Canberra Centennial Trail has the potential to be great for ecotourism in the ACT but only if it is well maintained, well sign posted, and well publicised.
- 4) The Brindabella Road for the last several kms up to Piccadilly Circus and Bulls Head is a dangerous, windy dirt road with a slippery surface, while the access road to the southern end of Namadgi also is a less than desirable dirt road. There would be a considerable ecotourism benefit in improving access to these areas of Namadgi through sealing the dirt roads.
- 5) Ecotourism activities need car parking areas. Car parking in Namadgi only caters for small events while in Canberra Nature Park there has been a lot of work in recent years to down size access car parks to small facilities for only a handful of cars.
- 6) Ecotourism promotion needs to be funded. For example, the Canberra Tourist Centre should be resourced to provide ecotourism resources to visitors to Canberra: maps of nature park and Namadgi walking trails in each motel and hotel room etc The CNP maps on the PCL website should be kept up to date and made more tourist friendly and then used for a campaign such Walk on the Wild Side in Canberra.

f) Any other relevant matter.

Nil.