

**From:** [on behalf of Heather Stewart](#)  
**To:** [Salvaneschi, Sam](#)  
**Subject:** Submission re Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water - Eco tourism inquiry  
**Date:** Monday, 30 April 2012 3:23:28 PM

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Secretary  
Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water  
Eco tourism inquiry

30 April 2012

Thank for the invitation to contribute to this Committee.

Overview:

At Makin Trax we hold a firm belief that the ACT is in a very unique position to be a leader in eco tourism by exploiting its location, particularly in relation to biking, bush walking / hiking and running opportunities. The great advantage of this is that the infrastructure that is needed for such initiatives would also be available for every day use by the Canberran public for generations to come.

The key, we believe, is to build on the great work already being done in piecemeal fashion, by completing and implementing the overarching Trails Strategy endorsed by the Chief Minister in 2010, which in its charter should recognise the intrinsic value of eco tourism / nature based tourism.

Makin Trax background

As a specialist in the field of designing and constructing walking, mountain bike and multi-use trails, Makin Trax has had the opportunity to observe and follow developments in other regions around Australia and the world. It is our firm belief that eco tourism is a growing and profitable market for those jurisdictions that implement and roll out quality initiatives. Effectively done, Canberra has the potential to be known as a national and international destination for eco / nature based tourism.

Makin Trax has developed a system of sustainable track building that ensures our tracks will last for generations (as evidenced by our work at the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve including the recently completed Gibraltar Peak Trail, and at Stromlo Forest Park). We have also been consulting to NSW National Parks (NSWNPS) regarding some of their current initiatives. So we believe that all tracks considered in light of eco tourism also need to be of value in the long term for the local community.

The great advantage of constructing tracks and trails and related infrastructure for a tourism initiative is that they can also be used on a daily basis for the recreation of the Canberra community - not many tourism initiatives can boast

this outcome.

Where Canberra is now:

We believe that Canberra is already on the right track in making eco tourism inroads with the development of:

- Stromlo Forest Park
- Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, including the Gibraltar Peak Trail
- Centenary Trail Project

Stromlo Forest Park is a great example of legacy building for the community that also attracts national and international visitors but first and foremost serves the local community. Stromlo has almost single handedly put Canberra on the radar as a great place to visit to mountain bike. There is not a that week goes by that I don't see visitors from all around the country in the carpark remarking on what a great place Canberra is for riding. Stromlo has hosted the biggest events in the mountain bike world and continues to be a place that people want to visit, all with little or no advertising!

The existence of Stromlo Forest Park has enabled small businesses of all types to start and prosper. There are at least 6 interstate companies, not to mention the multitude of local businesses now using Stromlo Forest Park on a regular basis, bringing interstate visitors to Canberra to experience what we have to offer.

Another great example is the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. The management is developing a fine network of tracks and trails and visitor numbers are up year after year. They are now renting out Nils Desporandum, an 1800s cottage to the public and it is consistantly booked out. The Chief Minister recently opened the much awaited Gibraltar Peak Trail which will enable Gibraltar Rocks to become an iconic tourist destination in the region, and which has already been publicly recognised in the media as a "Canberra classic"!

The feasibility study for the Centenary Trail project already enthusiastically endorses the value and potential of an eco tourism brand for Canberra. The Centenary Trail project is exactly the type of project that should be extended upon to take the ACT one step closer to being a world class destination for eco tourism. The model and studies have already been done, its just a matter of extending the scope and making sense of what infrastructure already exists and linking it together.

Where Canberra needs to be:

Canberra is known as the bush capital for one reason only and that is its position in relation to the natural environment. To date this has NOT been exploited in any meaningful way with an eye on tourism. When I met with the Chief Minister in the last couple of years to recommend initiatives (including the Centenary Trail and the need for an over arching Trail Strategy) it was with a view to achieving what would take Canberra closer to the point where its hidden treasures can be exploited.

As mentioned above the Centenary Trail project is a great start. The over arching trails strategy that has been endorsed is intended to work on a few levels. First to build a narrative around the purpose, future direction and uses of our trails infrastucture by gaining an understanding of what the city already has and then to combine them in a meaningful network that will add to the overall concept.

From there any proposed future track infrastructure should refer to the strategy

as a guiding light to gain the best outcome in line with the agreed direction outlined in the strategy. This is in stark contrast with what currently takes place.

Tidbinbilla sits as the bridge between Kosciusko and Canberra City. An example of what needs to happen is constructing an off road track to link urban Canberra to Tidbinbilla. This would enable visitors to get to Tidbinbilla and with a bit more work access Kosciusko National Park! Corin Forest is another obvious link and is just over the hill from Tidbinbilla. Tidbinbilla on its own has the potential to be a very major contributor to eco tourism in Canberra.

In addition a track/s between Stromlo Forest Park and the Cotter Reserve would link two favourite recreational destinations.

An effective eco tourism strategy starts with a plan and infrastructure. Canberra possesses a lot of infrastructure but often it is not linked in a meaningful way.

Not only will an investment in eco tourism benefit the city's bottom line but will provide infrastructure for future generations of Canberrans to own and use.

What others are doing:

There are countless examples of trail related eco tourism initiatives happening around the world. Here are a few examples that come to mind:

- A recent article in the NZ Herald refers to a study which found that mountain biking now brings in more money to the Rotorua community than the forestry industry in Rotorua. See Footnote 1.

- The Murray to the Mountains Rail Trail (repurposing of old rail way corridors/lines into cycle/walking/hiking touring paths) is an extremely successful rail trail initiative in Victoria that has reinvigorated the towns through which it runs, as they have focussed their efforts on this initiative. There is a significant and comprehensive proposal for a rail trail from Queanbeyan to Captains Flat.

- NSWNP is investing much time and money into eco tourism. It has recently updated its plan of management and is focussed now on getting the community to experience its parks through targeted tourism experiences. We are currently involved in the scoping project for the first sanctioned mountain bike tracks in NSW National Parks, in particular to assess and recommend sites in Sydney. These sites are of high heritage and environmental values but will now be accessible to the public on mountain bikes. NSWNP is actively working to increase eco tourism in our region.

Summary:

The ACT would be remiss in not exploiting the abundance of its natural assets. Canberra could also take advantage of work being done by NSWNP by providing links to their tourism opportunities.

Canberra could be positioned as a regional hub for eco tourism in relation to walking and biking recreational opportunities, while still being THE destination for eco tourism nationally and internationally.

It is time that Canberra seriously focused on the value of eco tourism and what it can offer the City not only in tourism but for the local community's triple bottom line - people, planet, profit.

Eco tourism is already operating in Canberra without any assistance. Imagine the potential this City has, if we invest and place a concerted effort on eco tourism.

From an infrastructure perspective, the key is to build on the work already being done in piecemeal fashion, by completing and implementing the overarching Trails Strategy endorsed by the Chief Minister in 2010, which in its charter should recognise the intrinsic value of eco tourism / nature based tourism.

I am happy to be a witness to the Committee and/or would be willing to offer a field trip to Tidbinbilla to experience the new Gibraltar Peak Trail as an example of the opportunities that exist for eco tourism in Canberra.

Darren

Darren Stewart  
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Makin Trax Australia

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Footnote 1

View article in the NZ Herald 17 January 2012 "Bikes bring more money than wood from Rotorua forest" at [www.nzherald.co.nz/business/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=3&objectid=10779299](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/news/article.cfm?c_id=3&objectid=10779299)