

Ecotourism Inquiry

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry into ecotourism.

I am the coordinator of the Isaacs Ridge Mount Mugga Mugga ParkCare Group. In addition I volunteer with Conservation Volunteers Australia and with other environmental groups. I have provided submissions to the review of Canberra Nature Park and the Canberra Centenary Trail project, and am currently involved with input to the final trail route through Isaacs Ridge and Mount Mugga Mugga. Thus I see the ACT and region from an environmental aspect that includes both local and visitor activities, awareness and enjoyment.

Many organisations provide or support ecotourism in the ACT and region. It is important to consider that ecotourism needs to focus on the 'way of doing things' rather than the tourism per se. Many groups contribute to the protection and enhancement of the ecosystems without which there is no ecotourism.

As most ParkCare and LandCare groups are locally based they do not figure in ecotourism activities, but if they did not exist there would be more degraded ecosystems and decreased biodiversity.

Conservation Volunteers Australia is one environmental group that can be considered as delivering ecotourism activities. Volunteers pay to come from overseas and work in conservation activities in the ACT and region. They would not feature highly in accommodation and food expenditure but provide valued contributions, and can provide valuable publicity once they return home.

Some years ago it was proposed to develop an ecotourism route from Canberra to Tidbinbilla and beyond. This has not happened but Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve does provide a range of activities. Namadgi National Park provides the resource rather than the activities – though the Visitor Centre is a vital part of the tourism infrastructure.

The proposed Canberra Centenary Trail is intended to showcase Canberra and its surroundings. The studies indicate tourism value but it is yet to be seen whether it will assist in protection and enhancement of the ecosystem. Users will include walkers and bike riders, with a range of financial benefits.

Ecotourism activities include visits to vineyards, orchards and farms. This can be a commercial or educational venture.

Car trips and tourist drives are important parts of increasing the tourist stay in the region. These activities benefit from the existing road infrastructure which needs to be supplemented by lookout points and signage. One factor that is neglected is the state of the environment, bushland and farmland. Active conservation and restoration is critical; invasive plants need to be controlled in the parks and reserves and farms also need weed management and appropriate conservation measures. Pest plants and animals do not recognise land boundaries so an integrated approach is necessary. The government needs to recognise tourism's contribution to the economy and invest more resources in pest management, so that locals and visitors can enjoy a biodiverse native ecosystem and sustainable agricultural activities.

The ecotourism industry should contribute to environmental measures taken on farms and government-managed land. Sustainable farming is not incompatible with conservation but the long history of land use means that current users could use help in restoring native pasture and associated natural environments.

Government support is given to sports and arts activities as they contribute to the Region's economy. The ecotourism industry is probably not such a specific target but can be supported through advertising and marketing. But the major support should be through contributing to conservation and restoration of the region's natural environment; this would be a good opportunity for regional cooperation and benefits both residents and visitors.

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