

Secretary
Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water
GPO Box 1020
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Secretary

Please accept the following submission from the Australian National Botanic Gardens for the Inquiry into Current and Potential Ecotourism of the ACT and Region.

The Australian National Botanic Gardens (ANBG), on the lower slopes of Black Mountain in Canberra, is the world's most comprehensive display of living Australian native plants. The diverse living collection provides an inspirational place for learning, quiet contemplation and passive recreation.

The ANBG is valued for its scientific and horticultural research on Australian plants and related flora, as well as its role in plant conservation and its contribution to knowledge and dissemination of information about Australian plants. The ANBG has an important role in providing learning experiences focusing on Australia's unique flora and landscapes and influencing public attitudes towards plant conservation and the environment.

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

The ANBG is recognised for its significant heritage values and listed on the Commonwealth Heritage List. Around 35 hectares of the ANBG site have been developed to display native flora in a natural bushland setting. Several areas within the Gardens have been developed to represent Australian landscapes, including temperate and subtropical Eastern Australian rainforests, Sydney region flora, grassy woodland, Tasmanian region flora and Eastern and Western Australian mallees. These areas provide the ANBG opportunity to deliver ecotourism-based programs that recognise the intrinsic value of nature and promote and foster the conservation of the natural environment in these landscapes.

The ANBG education (school-based) and public programs strive to connect people with Australia's rich natural and cultural heritage in ways that will stimulate them to value Australia's plants and ecosystems and understand and contribute more responsible environmental stewardship.

The Gardens provide twice daily free guided tours for the public to learn about and value Australian plants, nature conservation and Australian ecosystems.

Education programs for Canberra and region school students and interstate students visiting Canberra as part of the National Capital Educational Tourism Project, provide learning opportunities for young Australians to be active and informed citizens on intrinsic value of natural systems and conservation of the Australian environment. Programs such as Around Oz in an Hour – Discovering Australia's Biodiversity, Climate Change Investigation and evening Twilight Forest Adventure are nature based environmental education programs delivered by the ANBG.

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

In 2011, 5,253 students from outside Canberra participated in an education program at the ANBG that reflected ecotourism principles. These students visited Canberra as part of the National Capital Educational Tourism Project.

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

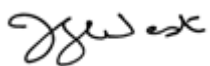
As Australia's only national institution to have a living collection, the gardens can be used to promote understanding of Australia's diverse flora, avifauna and cultural connections to Australia's landscapes. The Gardens has the potential to deliver an introductory 'close up' biodiversity experience to ecotourists and support small to medium sized commercial ecotourism operators who focus operations in the ACT and region. The Gardens' collections represent the diversity of Australia's flora throughout the vast continent, as well as having special collections from the ACT and surrounding Alpine regions. Consequently, the Garden provides a gateway to Australian flora, local flora, Australian Alps and the region's rich birdlife.

Through industry and government support to integrate *ex situ* collections, such as the Australian National Botanic Gardens, into the ecotourism industry there will be an opportunity to diversify, enhance and add value to the local and regional ecotourism experiences. This will also help to ensure a strong and successful partnership between government and commercial businesses to increase understanding of the value of Australian biodiversity by drawing on Australian experts in local and regional flora and fauna.

For independent ecotourists, local and regional public transport shortfalls need to be addressed to improve connections and regularity of services between nature-based destinations including the Australian National Botanic Gardens and the National Arboretum Canberra. The improvement of such services will arguably contribute to the Region's economy and diversify ecotourist opportunities for a broad range of travellers.

Industry measures for the training and certification of commercial ecotourist operators and tour guides need to consider how local and regional expertise in biodiversity education can be strengthened.

Yours sincerely



Judy West
Executive Director

28 March 2012