

STANDING COMMITTEE ON CLIMATE CHANGE,  
ENVIRONMENT AND WATER

# **Inquiry into Current and Potential Ecotourism in the ACT and Region**

AUGUST 2012



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## Resolution of appointment

On 9 December 2008, the Legislative Assembly for the ACT agreed by resolution to establish standing committees to inquire into, and report on, matters referred to a committee by the Assembly or that a committee, itself, considers to be of community concern, including:

*....a Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water to examine matters related to climate change policy and programs, water and energy policy and programs, provision of water and energy services, conservation, environment and ecological sustainability.*<sup>1</sup>

## Terms of Reference

The Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water resolves that:

- 1) The Committee inquire into and report on the current and potential ecotourism of the ACT and region including the following matters:
  - a) The extent to which organisations currently deliver ecotourism activities in the Region.
  - b) The extent to which these organisations' ecotourism activities demonstrably contribute to, and detract from, conservation and restoration of ecosystems throughout the Region.
  - c) The extent to which these activities contribute to the Region's economy.
  - 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.
  - 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.
  - f) Any other relevant matter.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ACT Legislative Assembly, Minutes of Proceedings No. 2, 9 December 2008, pp.15–18, <<http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/downloads/minutes-of-proceedings/08MoP02.pdf>>, accessed 14 July 2011.

<sup>2</sup> The original resolution is recorded in Minutes of Meeting No.93, Tuesday 20 December 2011, p.2. The Committee Chair made a statement to the Legislative Assembly for the ACT, pursuant to Assembly Standing Order 246A, regarding the Inquiry and its Terms of Reference. For this statement, see *Legislative Assembly for the ACT: 2012 Week 2 Hansard*, 21 February, p. 464.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

### RECOMMENDATION 1

4.28 The Committee recommends that ecotourism and nature park assets be given a higher profile within future tourism marketing campaigns for the ACT and surrounding region.

### RECOMMENDATION 2

5.54 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government (a) continue to contract community groups, on basis of merit, to provide ecotourism services and (b) maintain and enhance working relationships with those groups into the future.

### RECOMMENDATION 3

5.58 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider creating a new nature park in the northern part of the ACT, in order to conserve local woodland environments and expand the ACT's range of nature park assets.

### RECOMMENDATION 4

5.60 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider creating a new nature park to preserve, maintain and make accessible Ginninderra Falls with sufficient surrounding land to constitute a sustainable nature park asset.

### RECOMMENDATION 5

6.52 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government makes the provision of appropriate tracks, signage and transport facilities a priority in its management of nature park assets and its tourism policy more generally.

### RECOMMENDATION 6

8.15 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government develop and implement, within the next 12 months, programs and tools to gather, store, analyse, and publish data on ecotourism and all nature-based tourism in the ACT and its region, on indices comparable to those used by Tourism Research Australia.

**RECOMMENDATION 7**

9.40 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government promote and facilitate certification by Ecotourism Australia for ecotourism operators in the ACT.

**RECOMMENDATION 8**

9.41 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government engage, both as a participant and facilitator, in the kind of partnership arrangements which characterise the best instances of ecotourism in the country.

**RECOMMENDATION 9**

10.10 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider ways to support the provision of environmental and sustainability education to ecotourists to the ACT, including the training of ACT ecotourism providers to deliver this education.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## Conduct of the Inquiry

- 1.1 The Committee resolved to undertake this Inquiry, and agreed to its Terms of Reference, at its private meeting of 20 December 2011.
- 1.2 On 21 February 2012, the Chair of the Committee made a statement to the Legislative Assembly for the ACT (the Legislative Assembly), pursuant to standing order 246A, on the Inquiry, which stated the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.<sup>3</sup> Shortly after, the Committee widely issued an open invitation to members of the public to tender submissions to the Inquiry and later extended the date for lodging submissions to 30 April 2012.<sup>4</sup>
- 1.3 Public hearings for the Inquiry were conducted on 17 May, 24 May, and 31 May, 2012. The Committee received 30 submissions to the Inquiry and heard testimony from 16 witnesses.
- 1.4 All submissions and witness testimony to the Committee for this Inquiry may be read in full on the Inquiry's webpage on the Legislative Assembly's website.<sup>5</sup>

## Structure of the Report

- 1.5 For the most part, this Report follows the structure of the Terms of Reference:
  - Chapter 1 is an introduction to the Report.

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<sup>3</sup> See *Legislative Assembly for the ACT: 2012 Week 2 Hansard*, 21 February, p.464.

<sup>4</sup> The Committee wrote to private-, community- and government sector stakeholders inviting them to submit on 14-16 March 2012. Then and on 4 April 2012, the Committee also widely advertised the Inquiry, inviting submissions, on the Legislative Assembly's web home page, the Inquiry webpage, and local websites such as RiotACT.

<sup>5</sup> The Inquiry website is at <http://www.legassembly.act.gov.au/committees/index1.asp?committee=112&inquiry=1052>, viewed 2 July 2012.

- Chapter 2 considers the place of tourism in the Australian economy and definitions of 'ecotourism'.
- 1.6 The next four Chapters respond to Term of Reference 1) a), the 'extent to which organisations currently deliver ecotourism activities in the Region':
- Chapter 3 considers relevant government sector activities;
  - Chapter 4, private sector activities;
  - Chapter 5, community sector activities; and
  - Chapter 6, contributions from stakeholders which are not providers of ecotourism activities, as such, but who have a significant involvement in the area.
- 1.7 The remaining Chapters are:
- Chapter 7, 'Risks and benefits to the environment', which responds to Term of Reference 1) b), 'The extent to which these organisations' ecotourism activities demonstrably contribute to, and detract from, conservation and restoration of ecosystems throughout the Region'.
  - Chapter 8, 'Contribution to the region's economy', which addresses Term of Reference 1) c), 'The extent to which these activities contribute to the Region's economy'.
  - Chapter 9, 'Regulation and accreditation', which answers Term of Reference 1) 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'.
  - Chapter 10, 'Promoting the benefits of ecological sustainability', which discusses issues regarding Term of Reference 1) 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'.
- 1.8 The last Chapter, Chapter 11, provides some concluding comments.

## 2 ECOTOURISM

### Tourism in the Australian economy

- 2.1 Tourism is an important economic activity for Australia. Tourism Research Australia's *Key Facts: Australian Tourism Sector 2012* shows the state and significance of incoming tourism to the Australian economy, as detailed below.<sup>6</sup>

### Economic significance of tourism

- 2.2 *Key Facts: Australian Tourism Sector 2012* states that in the 2010-2011 financial year:
- Consumption of tourism goods and services was \$95,653 million;
  - Tourism gross value added at basic price was \$31,495 million;
  - Tourism gross domestic product was \$34,595 million; and
  - 513,700 people in Australia were employed by the tourism sector.<sup>7</sup>
- 2.3 According to these figures, tourism amounted to:
- 2.5 per cent of Australian Gross Domestic Product;
  - 4.5 per cent of Australian Total Employment; and
  - 8 per cent of total exports.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Tourism Research Australia, Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism (2012) *Key facts, Australian tourism sector 2012* (April)  
<<http://www.ret.gov.au/tourism/Documents/tra/Tourism%20Research%20Reports/TourismDataCardApril2012.pdf>>, viewed 9 July 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Tourism Research Australia, Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism (2012) *Key facts, Australian tourism sector 2012* (April)  
<<http://www.ret.gov.au/tourism/Documents/tra/Tourism%20Research%20Reports/TourismDataCardApril2012.pdf>>, viewed 9 July 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Tourism Research Australia, Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism (2012) *Key facts, Australian tourism sector 2012* (April)  
<<http://www.ret.gov.au/tourism/Documents/tra/Tourism%20Research%20Reports/TourismDataCardApril2012.pdf>>, viewed 9 July 2012.

## Definitions of ecotourism

- 2.4      A number of submitters to the Inquiry noted that there was no definition of ‘ecotourism’ in the Inquiry’s Terms of Reference.

### ACT Flora and Fauna Committee

- 2.5      One of these was the ACT Flora and Fauna Committee, an ACT body established by the *Nature Conservation Act 1980* (ACT). This Committee suggested that:

On the negative side, ecotourism is loosely and often broadly defined, and may include a range of recreational and other activities that can come into conflict with conservation objectives. We ask that the ACT Parliamentary Inquiry reinforce explicitly in the context of making its recommendations, that a primary purpose of protected areas and their management is for conservation, and that other uses of protected areas may be permitted provided they do not unacceptably compromise this purpose.<sup>9</sup>

### Mr Michael Sim

- 2.6      Another submitter, Mr Michael Sim, suggested that ecotourism ‘needs to focus on the “way of doing things” rather than the tourism per se’ and noted that many groups, such as ParkCare and LandCare groups, and Conservation Volunteers Australia, ‘contribute to the protection and enhancement of the ecosystems without which there is no ecotourism’.<sup>10</sup>
- 2.7      He suggested that groups can be significant players in ecotourism, even if their economic profile is less apparent:

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

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<sup>9</sup> ACT Flora and Fauna Committee, Submission No.13, p.2.

<sup>10</sup> Mr Michael Sim, Submission No.22, p.1.

but provide valued contributions, and can provide valuable publicity once they return home.<sup>11</sup>

## Mr David Hogg

2.8 In his submission to the Inquiry, Mr David Hogg stated that:

A website search for such a definition indicated that there is no universally agreed definition and that the boundaries between ecotourism and other forms of tourism and recreation are somewhat blurred.<sup>12</sup>

2.9 However, he noted that:

One broad definition which appears on the website of The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism as ‘responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the wellbeing of local people’.<sup>13</sup>

2.10 Mr Hogg went on to illustrate the ways, in practice, these definitions may become ‘blurred’:

The ACT and its region contain large natural areas which are visited by people from other parts of Australia and overseas and are also important for the wellbeing of local communities. The ways in which the natural values of these areas are used are very diverse. Some people use these areas primarily to develop their appreciation of natural values at varying levels of detail (e.g. ornithologists, other naturalists, visitors enjoying nature interpretation), in keeping with what is probably the most widely accepted concept of ecotourism.

For a large proportion of visitors, however, these natural values provide the setting for activities such as sightseeing, general relaxation and active recreational pursuits, both organised and informal. While these visitors may not come primarily to appreciate the detailed natural attributes of the region, such appreciation is often a secondary benefit. This is

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<sup>11</sup> Mr Michael Sim, Submission No.22, p.1.

<sup>12</sup> Mr David Hogg, Submission No.12, p.1.

<sup>13</sup> Mr David Hogg, Submission No.12, p.1.

therefore one area where the blurring of the ecotourism definition becomes evident.<sup>14</sup>

- 2.11 Mr Hogg commented on the significance of these definitional issues for how ecotourism is regarded, particularly with respect to the 'big picture':

while the Standing Committee is considering ecotourism, it should do so in the context of the 'big picture' of natural resource management, as many of the benefits, opportunities, problems and costs associated with ecotourism cannot be divorced from those associated with other activities based around the natural environment.<sup>15</sup>

### **Professor Sara Dolnicar and Mr Emil Juvan, University of Wollongong**

- 2.12 In their submission, Professor Sara Dolnicar and Emil Juvan of the University of Wollongong, also focused on issues related to definitions of ecotourism.

- 2.13 First, they noted difficulties with understandings of the term:

There is a lot of confusion about the term Ecotourism. All it really means is that people who engage in Ecotourism enjoy experiencing and learning about nature, it DOES NOT imply that the tourism activity itself is environmentally sustainable. We strongly recommend to the Committee that it is clarified what the key motivation of the enquiry is: is it economic growth or is it environmental sustainability or economic growth with minimal environmental impact. Ecotourism offers are suitable to stimulate economic growth, environmentally sustainable tourism is required if tourism activity with minimal environmental impact is aimed at...we assume you are interested in economic growth through tourism with a minimal environmental impact.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Mr David Hogg, Submission No.12, pp.1-2.

<sup>15</sup> Mr David Hogg, Submission No.12, pp.1-2.

<sup>16</sup> Professor Sara Dolnicar and Mr Emil Juvan, Submission No.9, p.1.

- 2.14 They went on to put ‘two approaches to environmentally sustainable tourism’.  
The first of these were:

Supply sided approaches [which] assume that tourism industry makes the first step (either through self-regulation or through government regulation or government incentives).<sup>17</sup>

- 2.15 The second were:

Demand sided approaches [which] assume that a market segment of Green Tourists exist. If this is the case, offering a tourism product that minimizes impact on the environment would actually be exactly what such a segment is looking for. Sustainability measures in such a case would therefore directly respond to market demand and the reward for destinations and organisations offering environmentally sustainable products would be loyalty and word of mouth recommendation within the segment of Green Tourists and thus increased profitability.<sup>18</sup>

## **The Ecotourism Australia definition of ecotourism**

- 2.16 A number of submitters to the Inquiry referred to the definition of ecotourism provided by Ecotourism Australia, namely:

ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation.<sup>19</sup>

- 2.17 These submitters included:

- the ACT Government;<sup>20</sup>
- the Acting ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment;<sup>21</sup>
- the National Parks Association of the ACT (NPA ACT);<sup>22</sup> and
- Eurobodalla Shire Council.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Professor Sara Dolnicar and Mr Emil Juvan, Submission No.9, p.1.

<sup>18</sup> Professor Sara Dolnicar and Mr Emil Juvan, Submission No.9, p.1.

<sup>19</sup> Ecotourism Australia <<http://www.ecotourism.org.au/>>, viewed 9 July 2012.

<sup>20</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, p.2.

<sup>21</sup> Acting ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Submission No.15, p.1.

<sup>22</sup> National Parks Association of the ACT, Submission No.26, p.1.

### **Acting ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment**

- 2.18 In addition to these comments on the definition of ecotourism, the Acting Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment (the Commissioner) noted that:

More than half the land area of the ACT is zoned for conservation as national park and nature reserves, including Namadgi National Park, Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and Canberra Nature Park. Canberra also has large expanses of urban open space, which, together with urban trees, district and town parks, local parks and lakes and ponds form the bulk of Canberra's green infrastructure. As well as providing important habitat for native plants and animals, these spaces enhance the water quality of waterways and assist in stormwater management. They are important recreation and tourism resources for Canberra residents and visitors.<sup>24</sup>

- 2.19 The Commissioner also observed that:

With increasing urbanisation and more people living in medium and high density housing, there is a growing risk that people become alienated from the natural environment and less aware and concerned about protecting its values and the many services it provides. Well planned and managed ecotourism activities and facilities can provide a range of opportunities for encouraging and facilitating the engagement of local residents within the ACT and region with the natural environment. Learning and appreciation can be some of the valuable outcomes of such endeavours.<sup>25</sup>

### **National Parks Association of the ACT**

- 2.20 The National Parks Association of the ACT (NPA ACT) suggested that the Ecotourism Australia definition of ecotourism emphasises 'commercial activities' and that:

the application of such a definition would exclude many current

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<sup>23</sup> Eurobodalla Shire Council, Submission No.17, p.3.

<sup>24</sup> Acting ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Submission No.15, p.1.

<sup>25</sup> Acting ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Submission No.15, p.2.

visitations to the ACT conservation reserves as these are not commercially based.<sup>26</sup>

## Current levels of ecotourism activity

- 2.21 Several submitters to the Inquiry told the Committee about ecotourism activities currently undertaken in the ACT and the surrounding region, which this Report refers to, together, as the Australian Capital Region<sup>27</sup>.
- 2.22 Some, such as the National Parks Association of the ACT (the NPA ACT), stated that a 'low level of ecotourism' was 'currently undertaken in the Territory'. The NPA ACT recommended, in view of this, that 'any initial programs be undertaken with a monitoring program to assess potential positive or negative impacts, both environmental and social'<sup>28</sup> and the 'results of monitoring can inform the future development of ecotourism activities'.<sup>29</sup>
- 2.23 The South East Regional Organisation of Councils (SERO) also focused on future developments in ecotourism. In particular, it prioritised 'the opportunity for the ACT Government and SEROC to work together to maximise and grow the ecotourism potential of the region':

In addition to the ACT, the South East Region encompasses a number of very diverse sub regions including the Southern Tablelands, Yass Valley, South Coast and Snowy Mountains which all have many natural attractions. By marketing and promoting the attractions on a regional basis and developing an Ecotourism Trail for example, it may encourage more people to visit the region and stay longer.

A regional approach which can showcase our natural assets, build environmental awareness and promote ecological conservation will enhance the funding opportunities at all levels of Government. This in

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<sup>26</sup> National Parks Association of the ACT, Submission No.26, p.1.

<sup>27</sup> The map of the area that the Committee means when it refers to the Region in this Inquiry has been on the Inquiry's webpage, with the Terms of Reference, from the outset:  
<<http://www.legassembly.act.gov.au/committees/index1.asp?committee=112&inquiry=1052&category=13>>, viewed 2 July 2012.

<sup>28</sup> ACT Flora and Fauna Committee, Submission No.13, p.2.

<sup>29</sup> ACT Flora and Fauna Committee, Submission No.13, p.2.

turn will contribute to the Region's economy and provide incentives to protect and enhance our natural assets and attractions.<sup>30</sup>

- 2.24     In view of this, SEROC looked forward 'to further consideration of a proposed regional partnership approach' between SEROC and the ACT Government.<sup>31</sup>

### **Mr Michael Sim**

- 2.25     In his submission, Mr Michael Sim stated that:

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.<sup>32</sup>

- 2.26     He pointed out that:

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.<sup>33</sup>

- 2.27     Mr Sims went on to say that, in particular:

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.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> South East Regional Organisation of Councils, Submission No.14, p.1.

<sup>31</sup> South East Regional Organisation of Councils, Submission No.14, p.1.

<sup>32</sup> Mr Michael Sim, Submission No.22, p.1.

<sup>33</sup> Mr Michael Sim, Submission No.22, p.1.

<sup>34</sup> Mr Michael Sim, Submission No.22, p.1.

## Committee comment

- 2.28 The Committee notes that there is some controversy in relation to the definition of ecotourism. The primary distinction appears to be between definitions which emphasise economic impacts and measures, and those which prioritise those less easily quantified benefits to the natural environment and visitors, as a result of visitors' contact with the environment.<sup>35</sup> The latter view tends to stress the environmentally beneficial activities conducted by community groups.
- 2.29 The Committee also notes that the definition most consistently cited by submitters to the Inquiry is that provided by Ecotourism Australia. More information is provided about Ecotourism Australia and its understanding of ecotourism in Chapter 9 of this Report, which is entitled 'Regulation and accreditation'.
- 2.30 The Committee notes that submitters to the Inquiry appear to suggest that there is currently a relatively low base of ecotourism activity in the ACT and its region. In the Committee's view this suggestion warrants further investigation: to ascertain the true level of activity, to indicate what levels would be possible and desirable, and to adopt appropriate measures to realise these levels.
- 2.31 Most of the submitters advocate the strengthening of cooperative relationships between the ACT government-, private- and community-sector participants in ecotourism. They consistently underscore the importance of infrastructure, such as roads, signage and walking tracks, which is for the most part conventionally provided by Governments.
- 2.32 In the Committee's view, this signals the critical role for Governments in fostering the conditions for successful ecotourism activities in the Australian Capital Region. As for those areas where both private and public stakeholders are involved, the key question will be how to achieve an optimal balance between their respective efforts.

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<sup>35</sup> See Mr David Hogg, Submission No.12, pp.2-3, for further views on this.



### 3 GOVERNMENT SECTOR

#### ACT Government submission

- 3.1 The ACT Government submission to the Inquiry, among other things, identified public sector ecotourism providers currently active in the ACT.
- 3.2 Those under the management of the ACT Government included:
- Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve;
  - Birrigai Outdoor School;
  - Namadgi National Park;
  - ranger guided activities;
  - Canberra Nature Park;<sup>36</sup> and
  - the National Arboretum.<sup>37</sup>
- 3.3 The Government's submission also cited the Australian National Botanic Gardens. These are managed by the Australian Government<sup>38</sup>

#### ACT Government contract with Conservation Volunteers Australia

- 3.4 The ACT Government submission also noted the contract administered by the ACT Government Territory and Municipal Services Directorate (TAMS) under which Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) delivered certain ecotourism services at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. These services were:
- operating and managing the TAMS-owned Visitor Information Centre; and
  - developing and providing nature-based tourism products and the Volunteer Interpretive Program (VIP).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, pp.2-3.

<sup>37</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, pp.4-5.

<sup>38</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, p.4.

<sup>39</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, pp.3-4.

3.5     The submission explained that the VIP involves '70 active volunteers' who are 'trained and managed by CVA to provide information on natural and cultural history to visitors to Tidbinbilla'.<sup>40</sup> The submission stated that CVA provided:

all the requirements to enable volunteers to be present on weekends and school holidays. This includes extensive training, uniforms, rostering, liaison, transport and other support.<sup>41</sup>

3.6     The submission also noted the Naturewise Conservation program at Tidbinbilla, provided by CVA, and the possible introduction of a Conservation Volunteers Naturewise Day Tour at Tidbinbilla.<sup>42</sup> It underlined that:

Since 2008, TAMS has invested substantially in the development of the existing program through its contract payments to CVA and through a cooperative, partnership approach to the development and implementation of the VIP program.<sup>43</sup>

3.7     However, the submission pointed out that these arrangements were coming to an end at the close of the 2011-2012 financial year:

The contract between CVA and TAMS expires on 30 June 2012 and will not be renewed or extended in its current form. As a result, from 1 July 2012, the Visitor Information Centre will be operated by TAMS. The nature-based tourism aspects will be subject to a separate process of market testing.<sup>44</sup>

3.8     The submission also noted that:

A formal contractual arrangement is currently (April 2012) being sought to enable CVA to continue to operate the VIP.<sup>45</sup>

## **ACT Government statement on ecotourism**

3.9     The Government's submission briefly put the Government's view on the

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<sup>40</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, p.3.

<sup>41</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, p.3.

<sup>42</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, p.4.

<sup>43</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, p.11.

<sup>44</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, p.11.

<sup>45</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, p.11.

economic benefits of ecotourism, and how ecotourism could fit into broader plans to lift the profile of the ACT. It stated:

Tourism and eco-tourism make a significant contribution to the ACT Economy. The tourism industry currently contributes around \$1.3 billion to the ACT's economy and is one of the territory's largest private sector employers. The strategic themes and their associated initiatives will benefit businesses across our industry sectors including tourism.<sup>46</sup>

- 3.10 Then the submission suggested that ecotourism could fit into a more general strategy, being developed by the ACT Government, to attract business investment and tourists to the ACT:

Canberra has the potential to become a preferred international tourist and business investment destination. A specific initiative under the Strategy is to create a 'Canberra Brand' that defines and projects the Canberra opportunity to the outside world. 'Brand Canberra' will be designed to resonate with a range of stakeholders across our economy and community and reinforce our clean economy, sustainability and eco-tourism credentials and benefits. This is an important step in building our profile and further securing the city's long term future as a key regional business and tourism hub.<sup>47</sup>

## Government witnesses

- 3.11 Responsibility for ecotourism in the ACT is distributed across a number of ACT government agencies. Witnesses from each of these appeared before the Committee in the Inquiry's public hearings. These witnesses were:

- the Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development and officers from the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate;<sup>48</sup>
- officers from the Economic Development Directorate, including officers from Australian Capital Tourism;<sup>49</sup> and

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<sup>46</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, p.11.

<sup>47</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, p.11.

<sup>48</sup> *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, pp.51-59.

<sup>49</sup> *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, pp.1-14.

- the Acting ACT Commissioner for the Environment and Sustainability and officers from the Office of the Commissioner.<sup>50</sup>

3.12 Their testimony is considered below.

## **ACT Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development**

3.13 The Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development and officers from the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate appeared before the Committee at a public hearing on 24 May 2012.

### **Coordination between ACT government agencies**

3.14 The Minister was asked which ACT government agencies involved in ecotourism took the lead in ecotourism development, given that the Territory and Municipal Services, Environment and Sustainable Development, and Economic Development Directorates were all engaged in ecotourism-related matters<sup>51</sup>

3.15 The Minister responded that he did not think there was ‘one lead’,<sup>52</sup> but rather, ‘different aspects to this area’:

Promotion of tourism and visitor activities is a tourism function. Management of nature reserves, mitigating impacts and protecting from impacts are the responsibility of land management and conservation policy areas of government. So it is a collaborative approach. There is not one area in charge of ecotourism, because it is not just one thing.<sup>53</sup>

3.16 The Minister further explained that:

Use of nature parks and reserves is driven fundamentally by the plan of management framework. The plan of management is the framework that

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<sup>50</sup> *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, pp.15-30.

<sup>51</sup> *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.56.

<sup>52</sup> Mr Simon Corbell, Member of the Legislative Assembly for the ACT (MLA), *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.56.

<sup>53</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.56.

sets out what activities are and are not appropriate and that is informed by decisions, research and policy across government, particularly from the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate and the land manager, and having regard to what is emerging in terms of tourism-related activities. The land manager itself has a dual role—obviously a nature conservation role but also a visitor access and enabling role—and then sitting alongside of that are private operators who are wanting to access public land for their own visitor businesses.<sup>54</sup>

3.17 The Minister further commented that:

It is about making sure that the framework is clear about what can and cannot happen, giving guidance to land managers about those matters, making sure the land managers have good dialogue with users such as privately-based ecotourism activities.<sup>55</sup>

3.18 He also noted the close connection between these matters and ‘the broader promotion of the city’, being ‘the brand of Canberra as a place to visit’.<sup>56</sup>

3.19 Given a number of ACT government agencies have different responsibilities for ecotourism in the ACT, the Committee asked the Minister to specify their respective roles.<sup>57</sup>

## **Responsibilities of the ACT Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate**

3.20 The Minister told the Committee about the part of the Environment and Sustainable Directorate (ESDD) in ecotourism. He said that the land management units of ESDD administered:

what is permitted in terms of activities on the ground when it comes to the zoning of land; whether or not certain activities are permitted or whether zoning needs to be changed to accommodate certain activities.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.57.

<sup>55</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.57.

<sup>56</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.57.

<sup>57</sup> *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.58.

<sup>58</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.51.

- 3.21    He also told the Committee that the 'conservation policy areas of the directorate', had input into:

the development of plans of management for areas such as Tidbinbilla nature reserve and Namadgi national park and other areas under nature reserve status in terms of looking at issues around impact on biodiversity and the general ecology of those areas. Those would be the two main areas [land management and conservation policy] where my directorate would have an engagement, but in both respects that engagement would be in the context of advice to and guidance to land managers for nature parks and reserves, for example, which would be the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate or the Education Directorate in relation to Birrigai [Outdoor School].<sup>59</sup>

- 3.22    The Minister was asked about the relationship between the land management and conservation units of ESDD. He replied that:

These functions are not sitting in isolation and only talking to each other through a committee. Our nature conservation research scientific staff are working with rangers every day, working with the land managers and the ranger staff every day, because they are out in the nature parks regularly.<sup>60</sup>

- 3.23    The Minister offered to the Committee that an example of this collaboration between the conservation research scientific staff and the ranger staff was:

the kangaroo monitoring project which people may have seen on the television program the ABC screened earlier this year. The scientific staff who are doing that program are the staff of ESDD, but for practical purposes they are on the ground with the land management staff because the land managers have custodianship of the reserves and they are facilitating access and assisting scientific staff as appropriate. That is very much the relationship. It is an ongoing, regular, almost daily, interaction

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<sup>59</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.51.

<sup>60</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.58.

between land management staff and scientific and research and policy staff.<sup>61</sup>

- 3.24 The Minister commented that this was important in order to 'get good and well-informed outcomes'.<sup>62</sup>

### **Centralisation of land management and conservation**

- 3.25 The Minister advised the Committee that the present administrative arrangements had arisen after the 2003 fires in the ACT, after which the Government had decided that 'there should be a single land manager for the territory' in order to:

address issues around fragmentation of effort, fragmentation of knowledge, understanding and responsibility for bushfire management and prevention in particular, and recognising that the land management task in the territory is an urban, peri-urban and rural function.<sup>63</sup>

- 3.26 He explained that the finer details on where particular administrative units were placed in the structure of government were less important than 'the maintenance of the relationships and the communication between the relevant parties'<sup>64</sup> and that he was satisfied that effective collaboration was occurring, because he had not seen 'any examples that there is not good collaboration, communication and engagement between conservation policy staff and land management staff'.<sup>65</sup>

### **ACT parks and facilities**

- 3.27 The Committee posed several questions to the Minister about the management and use of certain ACT parks and facilities, specifically with respect to ecotourism activities.

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<sup>61</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.58.

<sup>62</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.58.

<sup>63</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.59.

<sup>64</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.59.

<sup>65</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.59.

3.28 When asked about the Government's response to the Commissioner for the Environment and Sustainability's 2011 *Report on Canberra Nature Park (nature reserves); Molonglo River Corridor (nature reserves) and Googong Foreshores Investigation* (the Nature Reserves Report),<sup>66</sup> the Minister said that the report was still under consideration, but that it showed evidence of 'emerging conflicts in terms of use of and management of those areas of nature reserve'.<sup>67</sup>

3.29 In particular, the Minister highlighted evidence of difficulties arising from different uses of the nature reserves, such as tensions between mountain bikers and other stakeholders:

particular impacts ... can be created... where mountain bike activities occur in areas other than designated trails—that has been a common issue in Canberra nature park—and the construction of ad hoc or unauthorised trails.

The impact that has on areas of the nature park has been an emerging area of conflict between, for example, mountain bike users and their organisations and park care groups and indeed land management staff themselves.<sup>68</sup>

3.30 The Minister underlined that there were, however, encouraging signs with regard to these activities:

We are seeking to engage in those issues constructively and I know the land manager in particular has regard to ways that these different types of activities can be accommodated. For example, I know in areas around Mount Painter and the Aranda bushland where mountain bike competitions have been held they have been held in ways that have sought to constrain the activity to formal trails only, thereby reducing the

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<sup>66</sup> Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment (2011) *Report on Canberra Nature Park (nature reserves); Molonglo River Corridor (nature reserves) and Googong Foreshores Investigation*, completed by the Commissioner July 2011, released by the Commissioner on 18 October 2011 <[http://www.envcomm.act.gov.au/investigations/nature\\_reserves\\_investigation](http://www.envcomm.act.gov.au/investigations/nature_reserves_investigation)>, accessed 14 Nov. 2011.

<sup>67</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.52.

<sup>68</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.52.

impact and protecting areas of Canberra nature park that are more sensitive to impacts like that.<sup>69</sup>

3.31 When asked about the Government's interest in promoting ecotourism, the Minister replied that the Government considered ecotourism important and had, accordingly, 'taken a series of steps to provide more diversity of tourism activity in our nature parks and national parks and reserves'.<sup>70</sup>

3.32 In particular, the Minister highlighted moves by the Government to improve access to accommodation in nature parks or reserves:

The best example is the decision to open up the homestead at Tidbinbilla for overnight stays. That is an issue which is actually quite contentious, particularly amongst organisations such as the National Parks Association [of the ACT] who do not support the idea of people staying at homesteads in national parks or nature reserves. They may have a somewhat different position on Tidbinbilla, but I certainly know they have not supported proposals such as the use of the Gudgenby homestead in Namadgi for overnight stays or short conferences and so on where people live in the homestead. It is a very large and, I must say, quite beautiful homestead.<sup>71</sup>

### **Scope for public-private partnerships**

3.33 The Committee questioned the Minister about public-private partnerships in the context of ecotourism, citing Queensland examples. The Minister answered that:

The government has been exploring this issue to a limited degree in relation to, for example, Jerrabomberra wetlands and Mulligans Flat nature reserve where the establishment of the board and a trust for those two sites is a deliberate decision to establish a vehicle that could potentially attract private investment or private contribution to enhance and upgrade the visitor facilities and the visitor experience of these sites.

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<sup>69</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.52.

<sup>70</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.54.

<sup>71</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.54.

That is in its early days and it is important that we keep a watching brief on how that progresses and what level of interest there is from private contributors to investing money in upgrade of visitor facilities and general management of these two reserve sites.<sup>72</sup>

3.34     The Minister observed that the Government had also:

taken some steps in relation to providing some fee for service type visitor experiences in other nature reserves—the obvious one is Tidbinbilla; there is an entry fee to Tidbinbilla—but also use of some of the homestead sites like Nil Desperandum for overnight stays by private individuals for a fee. These are the types of things we explore.<sup>73</sup>

3.35     He pointed out that it remained that:

Overwhelmingly the responsibility for management of nature parks and reserves falls on the public purse, and that is appropriate because these are public assets. But where there are strategic opportunities to encourage private sector contribution, such as the vehicles that have been established at Jerrabomberra and Mulligans Flat, that is something that is worth trying; but it has to be done on a case by case basis and it is certainly not a substitute for public contribution to the management of nature parks and reserves.<sup>74</sup>

### **Pivotal role of government in ecotourism**

3.36     The Minister underlined other dimensions of the pivotal role of government in ecotourism in the ACT. He told the Committee that in the ACT government operated as land manager, regulator, and provider of ecotourism activities:

... many of the ecotourism activities in the ACT are, I would argue, undertaken by the territory itself. Yes, there are some private businesses involved, but there would be an equal contribution by the land management agencies themselves in terms of the range of activities that occur—as I say, going back to Tidbinbilla, going back to the access to

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<sup>72</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.53.

<sup>73</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.53.

<sup>74</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.53.

homesteads, going back to the guided walks, the tours, the events that are put on by the land managers in our nature reserves over any given year. So in many respects the land manager is acting as an ecotourism operator itself as much as it is operating as a nature conservation protection agency.<sup>75</sup>

### **Proximity of Namadgi National Park to urban centres**

- 3.37 The Minister highlighted the proximity of Namadgi National Park to urban centres in the ACT and characterised this as unique in these terms:

Namadgi is obviously readily accessible from the Canberra urban area. Compared with many other national parks, we are very fortunate to have one literally on the urban doorstep. Obviously, large parts of Namadgi are relatively inaccessible and are considered to be very fragile in terms of their ecology. A large part of Namadgi is classified as wilderness area where there are not even many, if any, formed trails. So the only way to get into the wilderness area is either by air or walking in. That is a nature-based experience in itself. To be so close to a large urban centre and in what is a formally designated wilderness area is quite a unique experience in and of itself.<sup>76</sup>

- 3.38 Moreover, the Minister commented:

I think really the proximity to the urban area of Namadgi means that, unlike other national parks that are perhaps more remote, the permanent basing of commercial activities and physical facilities in the park is just not the pressing issue it is in more remote national parks in other parts of the country.<sup>77</sup>

### **ACT Economic Development Directorate**

- 3.39 On 17 May 2012, the Director-General of the ACT Economic Development

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<sup>75</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.57.

<sup>76</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, pp.55-56.

<sup>77</sup> Mr Simon Corbell MLA, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p. 56.

Directorate (EDD) appeared before the Committee with EDD officers.<sup>78</sup>

- 3.40 He described to the Committee an ACT Government strategy 'to create a Canberra brand that defines and projects the Canberra opportunity to the outside world'<sup>79</sup> in this way:

Brand Canberra will be designed to resonate with a range of stakeholders across our economy and the broader Canberra community and reinforce our clean economy, sustainability and ecotourism credentials and benefits. This is an important step to build our profile and further secure the city's long-term future as a key regional business and tourism hub.<sup>80</sup>

- 3.41 The Director-General stated that the Government had been 'working ... very closely with industry organisations'<sup>81</sup> to develop this strategy because:

...the whole idea is not just about a logo; it is around how we engage with the broader community, both domestic and international, but more importantly domestically.<sup>82</sup>

- 3.42 A key objective of the Brand Canberra strategy, he explained, was to 'separate the image [of Canberra from] decisions that are being made in Canberra that sometimes are unpalatable for the rest of the country'.<sup>83</sup>

- 3.43 The Executive Director of EDD's Tourism, Events and Sport Division, said that the coming centenary of Canberra represented a 'great opportunity for there to be a national and international focus on Canberra the city'.<sup>84</sup> He also told the Committee that for the Brand Canberra strategy 'we have engaged with all areas of the community in the conduct of focus groups' and had 'buy-in from all areas of the community, including all areas of the business community'.<sup>85</sup> The Executive Director explained that this consultation process had also

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<sup>78</sup> *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.1.

<sup>79</sup> Mr David Dawes, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.1.

<sup>80</sup> Mr David Dawes, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.1.

<sup>81</sup> Mr David Dawes, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.8.

<sup>82</sup> Mr David Dawes, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.8.

<sup>83</sup> Mr David Dawes, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.8.

<sup>84</sup> Mr Shane O'Leary, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.8.

<sup>85</sup> Mr Shane O'Leary, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.8.

‘canvassed the views of interests outside the ACT in shaping the direction of the project’.

- 3.44 He said that what had emerged from this ‘foundation piece of work’ was that ‘Canberra does need to assert its place as the nation’s capital for all Australians’.<sup>86</sup> The Executive Director elaborated on this point, in terms of Canberra’s fortunes as an ecotourism destination:

Canberra in and of itself certainly is an ecocity. With respect to the role that ecotourism can play in shaping the perceptions— perhaps, better said, reshaping the current perceptions—that are held regarding Canberra, most of us would be aware that Robyn Archer’s recent presentation to the National Press Club obtained a lot of interest right around the country. It is exactly those sorts of perceptions that the branding exercise seeks to address.<sup>87</sup>

## Australian Capital Tourism

- 3.45 The Director of Australian Capital Tourism, a part of EDD, also spoke to the Committee.<sup>88</sup> He told the Committee that, in his view, tourism was ‘certainly fundamental’. It was ‘currently worth about \$1.3 billion to the ACT economy’ and employed ‘about 15,000 people either directly or indirectly’ in the ACT and consequently ‘a significant player’ in the ACT economy.<sup>89</sup>
- 3.46 The Australian Capital Tourism Director specified that of all tourism in the ACT:
- Nature-based tourism—a slightly broader term than the ecotourism term—makes up about 196,000 of those domestic overnight visitors in terms of their purpose or reason for visiting here.<sup>90</sup>
- 3.47 When the Committee asked for further details about those 196,000 visitors, the Director explained that:

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<sup>86</sup> Mr Shane O’Leary, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.8.

<sup>87</sup> Mr Shane O’Leary, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.8.

<sup>88</sup> Mr Ian Hill, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.2.

<sup>89</sup> Mr Ian Hill, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.2.

<sup>90</sup> Mr Ian Hill, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.2

unfortunately we are not in a position to break that down any further ourselves around how many of those exactly go to Tidbinbilla versus the Botanic Gardens or open space recreational areas ...<sup>91</sup>

- 3.48 He told the Committee that the visitor numbers data he had cited came from 'the national visitor survey which is put together by Tourism Research Australia' and that this did 'not break it down into point-to-point type places'.<sup>92</sup> The Director offered that he could say, on the basis of anecdotal information, that nature-based tourism in the ACT was comprised of people visiting Tidbinbilla, the Zoo and Aquarium, the National Botanic Gardens, and Namadgi National Park.
- 3.49 He said, though, that the 'nature-based bushwalking thing is definitely a key strength' and that Tidbinbilla and Namadgi National Park were known amongst bushwalkers as being amongst 'the best bushwalking places across Australia'.<sup>93</sup> The Director commented that there was 'a fairly broad level of inquiry from the public around those types of experiences',<sup>94</sup> and that 'Obviously the beautiful natural surrounds that we are in makes for a compelling argument to consumers as to why to visit Canberra'.<sup>95</sup>

### **Promoting nature-based tourism**

- 3.50 The Director told the Committee that Canberra and the ACT were primarily 'known for our national attractions' and that 'the blockbuster exhibitions and those things, without doubt, drive core visitation outcomes'. He noted that there was 'certainly an opportunity', in terms of 'nature-based experiences', and that these were being actively promoted by Australian Capital Tourism.<sup>96</sup>
- 3.51 He stated that nature-based tourism was:
- a ... plank in the story of Canberra that we are promoting nationally and internationally—probably even more from an international perspective,

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<sup>91</sup> Mr Ian Hill, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.3.

<sup>92</sup> Mr Ian Hill, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.3.

<sup>93</sup> Mr Ian Hill, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.3.

<sup>94</sup> Mr Ian Hill, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.2.

<sup>95</sup> Mr Ian Hill, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.2.

<sup>96</sup> Mr Ian Hill, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.2

because international visitation for a nature-based experience of Australia as a whole is something that Tourism Australia pushed very heavily.<sup>97</sup>

- 3.52 The Director also observed that part of this promotional activity was borne by Australian Capital Tourism's Visitor Centre where staff:

field a number of inquiries from people looking for experiences from bushwalking to soft adventure and some of the programs that are run out of Tidbinbilla which are more of an ecotourism flavour.<sup>98</sup>

- 3.53 He said that at the Visitor Centre:

We stock a lot of information around maps, guided walks written by specialist people, guides for Namadgi and the like in the ACT region. Some of that information dissemination certainly sits with us and the visitors centre, which tracks approximately 220,000 people a year who go through that centre on Northbourne Avenue. We do stock a range of information provided by third parties around great walks and great hikes within the ACT and region.<sup>99</sup>

- 3.54 In addition, the Director said:

I think technology is starting to play a role there too. There are some applications that have been developed, provided you can get reception and those sorts of things.<sup>100</sup>

## Managing future risks of ecotourism

- 3.55 With regard to risks to the environment from ecotourism, the Director commented that:

Certainly from our perspective a robust management plan that has tourism as part of the solution, not part of the problem, is really critical. I alluded to the maturing of the tourism industry generally around ecotourism. I think sustainable operators understand that, and they

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<sup>97</sup> Mr Ian Hill, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.2.

<sup>98</sup> Mr Ian Hill, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.2.

<sup>99</sup> Mr Ian Hill, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.7.

<sup>100</sup> Mr Ian Hill, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.7.

understand how it impacts. It is not in their interest to have high impact activities going on that create community concerns or have a negative impact on potential breeding programs.<sup>101</sup>

3.56     He offered that:

Again the accreditation is probably the key to unlocking that in a way that is sustainable. So sustainable operators and sound business practices within a management plan framework are things that we would encourage.<sup>102</sup>

3.57     In terms of the consumer demand for ecotourism activities impacting on the natural environment, the Director stated 'I am not sure we are at the point at the moment where we are being inundated with people and that it is a problem', but 'proactive management' would be 'critical to ensure that we do not get into that situation down the track'.<sup>103</sup>

## **Acting ACT Commissioner for the Environment and Sustainability**

3.58     The Acting ACT Commissioner for the Environment and Sustainability appeared before the Committee at a public hearing on 17 May 2012 (the Commissioner)<sup>104</sup> The Commissioner also made a submission to the Inquiry.

### **Scope for ecotourism in the Australian Capital Region**

3.59     The Commissioner advised the Committee that there was scope for ecotourism activities in the ACT that did not conflict with environmental values. In his submission he wrote that:

The Region offers many opportunities for eco or nature-based tourism activities, both in the form of tours or activities provided by tourism operators and as self guided activities such as bush walking, fishing and

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<sup>101</sup> Mr Ian Hill, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.2.

<sup>102</sup> Mr Ian Hill, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.2.

<sup>103</sup> Mr Ian Hill, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.9.

<sup>104</sup> See *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012.

kayaking. The 2011 State of the Environment Report highlights the importance of access to urban open space, nature reserves and bush landscapes to the health and wellbeing of residents of the ACT region and beyond. It also noted the importance of opportunities to develop an appreciation of the natural environment that can result from direct engagement.<sup>105</sup>

3.60 Moreover, the Commissioner wrote:

Both the Tidbinbilla and Namadgi Plans of Management refer to the potential of these areas for eco tourism based activities and it seems likely that eco tourism activities and operations in the Region will continue to increase in diversity, size, number and location.<sup>106</sup>

### **Significance of community groups**

3.61 When appearing before the Committee, the Commissioner noted findings from his 2011 Nature Reserves Report regarding community environment groups.

There is a wide variety of interested groups but they never seem to be able to get together collectively. It would be beneficial to organise a forum where all of these [private-, community- and government-sector] groups get together, have their say, have their input, and it is a better mechanism I think for government because they have all the players in the place at one time. I would suggest that it would be all three, if and when the tourism operators express an interest in becoming part of that sort of forum.<sup>107</sup>

3.62 By way of example, the Commissioner stated that the Australian Reptile Park held ‘enormous knowledge’ about the local environment.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Mr Robert Neil, Acting ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Submission No.15, p.2.

<sup>106</sup> Mr Robert Neil, Acting ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Submission No.15, p.2.

<sup>107</sup> Mr Robert Neil, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.16.

<sup>108</sup> Mr Robert Neil, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.17.

- 3.63     A Senior Manager of the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, stated to the Committee that ‘one of the standout items from the recent ACT state of the environment reporting exercise’ was:

just how much valuable information is held within the community environmental groups, particularly. We are well aware of the academic and research institutions that we have in the ACT, but sometimes I think we could overlook the fact of how much knowledge is held within the community and the status of that knowledge.<sup>109</sup>

### **Proposal for regular ecotourism forum**

- 3.64     The Commissioner told the Committee that one of the recommendations of the report into Canberra Nature Park was:

to hold a biennial nature reserves forum. There are Parkcare and conservation groups. There is a recreational users group. But some of those groups are not represented on that. The general feeling was that if you could get them all together you would have a far larger representation of community values and some of the ideas that they have about how the reserve should be managed.<sup>110</sup>

### **Commissioner’s support for ecotourism**

- 3.65     In both his submission and testimony, the Commissioner affirmed his support for ecotourism. When he appeared before the Committee, the Commissioner said that ‘ecotourism opportunities exist provided they are complementary to the natural and cultural values of our reserve system’<sup>111</sup> and that:

well-managed, well planned ecotourism that is complementary to the natural and cultural values of our reserve system offer enormous opportunities for not just the ACT but the region more broadly. I think they should be supported.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Dr Aileen Power, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, pp.16-17.

<sup>110</sup> Mr Robert Neil, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.17.

<sup>111</sup> Mr Robert Neil, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.15.

<sup>112</sup> Mr Robert Neil, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.20.

- 3.66 However, the Senior Manager observed that care would need to be exercised in view of the diversity of conditions across the ACT's natural assets:

more than half of the ACT is nature park or open space, green space, but they are considerably different in character and what they have to offer. So I think we do need to be careful when we talk about the opportunities that are available that we talk fairly specifically around particular locations rather than slipping into making a general statement about access and opportunities across the board. If we do not do that, we will tend to forget the particular ecology, social, cultural values that attend to each of those different types of space.<sup>113</sup>

## Australian National Botanic Gardens

- 3.67 The agencies and assets considered in this Chapter, up to this point, are ones that are all under the administration of the ACT Government. The Australian National Botanic Gardens (ANBG), a further significant public sector player in ecotourism in the ACT, is administered by the Australian Government.
- 3.68 The ANBG made a submission to the Inquiry and gave testimony at a public hearing on 24 May 2012.<sup>114</sup> When he appeared before the Committee, the General Manager of the ANBG made an opening statement in which he spoke about the ecotourism role and assets of the ANBG:

The Australian National Botanic Gardens is a commonwealth reserve, national institution and significant tourist attraction, managed by the Director of National Parks, a commonwealth corporation. The mission of the gardens is to inspire, inform and connect people to Australian flora. The National Botanic Gardens is a major scientific, educational and recreational resource; one of the first botanic gardens in the world to adopt the study and display of a nation's native species as a principal goal.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Dr Aileen Power, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.20.

<sup>114</sup> See Australian National Botanic Gardens, Submission No.2, and *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012.

<sup>115</sup> Mr Peter Byron, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.43.

- 3.69     The General Manager described the actual gardens of the ANBG in these terms:

The gardens comprise 35 hectares of developed gardens and 50 hectares of underdeveloped bushland on the southern slopes of Black Mountain. Approximately one-third of the known flowering plant species that occur in Australia are represented in the living collection. The gardens are a national showcase for the horticultural use of Australia's native plants, including special collections of local and regional flora. This unique living collection provides visitors with recreational and learning experiences that enhance the understanding and appreciation of Australia's flora and landscapes.<sup>116</sup>

- 3.70     He also spoke about scholarship associated with the ANBG that could be instrumental to ecotourism:

A lesser known role of the gardens is our partnership with CSIRO to manage the Centre for Australian National Biodiversity Research and this includes the Australian National Herbarium, the world's largest collection of Australian plant specimens. The herbarium provides a range of services including plant identification for clients and the general public. Together with the gardens, it is an important knowledge base that can be used by the ecotourism industry.<sup>117</sup>

## **Visitation rates**

- 3.71     In respect of visitors to the ANBG, General Manager observed that 'The gardens is a place of learning and we play an important role in connecting people with Australia's flora and natural environment'.<sup>118</sup>
- 3.72     He told the Committee that the ANBG hosted 'approximately 450,000 visitors a year', including '10,000 school students from over 200 schools throughout Australia'. He also said that the ANBG was 'a major attraction for visitors to Canberra', which attracted '52 per cent of visitors [to Canberra] from interstate

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<sup>116</sup> Mr Peter Byron, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.43.

<sup>117</sup> Mr Peter Byron, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.43.

<sup>118</sup> Mr Peter Byron, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.43.

or overseas' and that in addition, the ANBG had 'a strong connection with the local community through 1,600 registered friends of the gardens', who played 'an important role in delivering visitor experiences'.<sup>119</sup>

- 3.73 The Committee asked further questions about visitor numbers to the ANBG. The General Manager responded that the ANBG held detailed data on visitor numbers 'for the last 15 years' and that indicated that '52 per cent of all our visitors are interstate or overseas visitors'.<sup>120</sup> He said that visitor numbers over the past 10 years had increased in a steady trend 'by about 16 per cent'<sup>121</sup> and that the ANBG had 'very high return rate for visitors and some quite high rates of satisfaction and recommendation to other visitors'.<sup>122</sup>
- 3.74 An Assistant Director of the ANBG added that there could be 'a bit of a drop' in visitor numbers, but 'it comes back up again' and that these fluctuations could stem from variations in weather conditions. She also pointed out that the statistics on visitor numbers for the first three months of 2012 were '13 per cent higher than they were last year'.<sup>123</sup>

### **Nature-based tourism products**

- 3.75 The General Manager advised the Committee about the 'nature-based tourism products' offered by the ANBG:

The gardens has several existing nature-based tourism products. Free guided tours are conducted twice a day seven days a week and they provide participants with knowledge on Australian plants and the natural environment. Specific day and night tours are also available for education groups, tour groups and other interest groups. We are currently implementing a range of initiatives to attract new audiences to the gardens and to increase the public's knowledge of Australian plants and landscapes. After-dark family adventure tours were successfully

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<sup>119</sup> Mr Peter Byron, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, pp.43-44. The Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens made a submission to the Inquiry, Submission No. 21.

<sup>120</sup> Mr Peter Byron, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.46.

<sup>121</sup> Mr Peter Byron, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.46.

<sup>122</sup> Mr Peter Byron, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.49.

<sup>123</sup> Dr Lucy Sutherland, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.46.

launched as part of ACT Tourism's Enlighten festival in March 2012.

These tours are now offered to the public each month and can be booked by tour groups, providing an ecotourism experience.<sup>124</sup>

3.76     The General Manager also noted that:

The Friends of the Gardens have produced a birds of the gardens booklet for selfguided bird watchers and they also conduct breakfast with the birds tours at specific times throughout the year.<sup>125</sup>

3.77     He also detailed forthcoming products and services that would serve visitors to the ANBG:

An electric people mover will start operating guided tours in late May 2012. This is expected to attract a new audience to the gardens and enhance accessibility to some of our more remote areas of the gardens. A smartphone application on birds found in the gardens will be launched in spring 2012 and this will target the independent ecotourist, including those from the younger age group and the technically-minded grey nomads.<sup>126</sup>

3.78     Furthermore, a 'new tourism initiative' at the ANBG, the Red Centre Garden, would be launched in October 2013. In it:

Visitors will experience a selection of plants and landscapes from central Australia's iconic plant communities including mulga country, desert oaks, ghost gum woodlands, spinifex gardens and saltbush scrub.<sup>127</sup>

## **Education programs**

3.79     The ANBG's submission to the Inquiry advised the Committee that:

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

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<sup>124</sup> Mr Peter Byron, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.44.

<sup>125</sup> Mr Peter Byron, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.44.

<sup>126</sup> Mr Peter Byron, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.44.

<sup>127</sup> Mr Peter Byron, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.44.

understand and contribute more responsible environmental stewardship.<sup>128</sup>

- 3.80 It also advised the Committee of ANBG education programs ‘for Canberra and region school students and interstate students visiting Canberra as part of the National Capital Educational Tourism Project’ and that these:

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.<sup>129</sup>

### **Transport and other linkages with other ecotourism sites**

- 3.81 The ANBG’s submission stated that benefits would accrue from enhancing transport linkages between ecotourism sites and the synergies between them:

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.<sup>130</sup>

- 3.82 In the public hearing, the Committee invited the ANBG to comment further on this. The General Manager told the Committee that:

Basically we do not have a regular public transport service that drops visitors right at the Botanic Gardens. The closest stop is near the ANU. It is a relatively short walk to the gardens, but we see the opportunity for enhanced public transport services, particularly with the arboretum [the ACT Government’s National Arboretum] opening up in 2013, and

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<sup>128</sup> Australian National Botanic Gardens, Submission No.2, p.1.

<sup>129</sup> Australian National Botanic Gardens, Submission No.2, p.1.

<sup>130</sup> Australian National Botanic Gardens, Submission No.2, p.2.

developing a shuttle bus system between the two attractions. We think the demand would be there once the arboretum is up and running.<sup>131</sup>

- 3.83 The General Manager also offered that the ANBG had raised ‘the possibility of a walking track from the Australian National Botanic Gardens, through Black Mountain, to the arboretum’:

We think it is quite feasible...We can interpret the flora and the landscape along the way.<sup>132</sup> I see lots of opportunities between us and the arboretum.<sup>133</sup>

- 3.84 The General Manager observed that the ANBG had an arboretum, the Pryor Arboretum ‘within that precinct’.<sup>134</sup>

## Committee comment

- 3.85 As noted, towards the close of Chapter 2, the ACT Government not only has administers much of the ACT’s nature parks and reserves, whether they be national or other kinds of parks, and provides ecotourism services associated with them, it is also provides the infrastructure which allows these parks to be visited and enjoyed. As contributors to the Inquiry noted, the quality of this infrastructure plays a key role the success of any ecotourism venture in the ACT.
- 3.86 Further, the ACT Government is also the ecotourism regulator and policy maker both with respect to planning and to protecting environmental assets. All of these roles add up to the Government being a substantial participant in the ecotourism sector of the Australian Capital Region. The Committee hopes that, in time, appropriate policies and optimal marketing will lead to a greater diversity of ecotourism providers in the Region, including more private sector providers such as those considered in the next Chapter.

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<sup>131</sup> Mr Peter Byron, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.44.

<sup>132</sup> Mr Peter Byron, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.48.

<sup>133</sup> Mr Peter Byron, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.48.

<sup>134</sup> Mr Peter Byron, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.48.

## 4 PRIVATE SECTOR

### Introduction

- 4.1 This Chapter considers private sector ecotourism providers in the Australian Capital Region.

### Scope and awareness of private sector ecotourism

- 4.2 In its submission to the Inquiry, the ACT Government identified the following private sector ecotourism providers:
- Real Fun Adventures;
  - Lake Burley Griffin Cruises;
  - the National Zoo and Aquarium; and
  - the Australian Reptile Centre.<sup>135</sup>
- 4.3 In its submission, the Eurobodalla Shire Council, a New South Wales local government in the Australian Capital Region, listed the following in its 'sample of tourism businesses who would identify themselves as ecotourism based' within Eurobodalla Shire:
- The Bower, luxury accommodation;
  - The Beachcomber Holiday Park;
  - Region X kayaking;
  - Whale Watching tours;
  - Total Eco Adventures; and
  - Montague Island.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, pp.4-5.

<sup>136</sup> Eurobodalla Shire Council, Submission No.17, p.2.

## **Private sector providers**

- 4.4     None of these providers lodged submissions with the Committee. However, two other private sector ecotourism providers did lodge submissions, specifically:
- Thredbo Valley Distillery; and
  - Gondwana Dreaming.

## **Thredbo Valley Distillery**

- 4.5     Thredbo Valley Distillery (TVD) is situated on the Alpine Way in Thredbo, New South Wales. This places it within the Australian Capital Region, and thus within the scope of the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry.

## **Ecotourism in the Australian Capital Region**

- 4.6     In relation to ecotourism in the Australian Capital Region, TVD stated that:
- Thredbo Valley Distillery is one of just two commercial businesses who promote themselves as eco-tourism operations in the Thredbo Valley. The other, Alpine Habitats, is located next door to TVD and offers luxury accommodation in eco-friendly cabins. Alpine Habitats was built as a direct result of Thredbo Valley Distillery's success in attracting tourist to the region.<sup>137</sup>

## **Impacts of ecotourism on the Region's ecosystems**

- 4.7     TVD said in its submission that it had taken considerable care to minimise its impact on ecosystems, particularly with regard to effects on water, soil quality and biodiversity:
- Water. Potable water is sourced on site from rainwater catchment and non-potable water collects in a dam for use in agricultural irrigation (via drippers) and toilets. No external water supply is accessed. Waste water

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<sup>137</sup> Thredbo Valley Distillery, Submission No.8, p.1.

is treated on site and returned to the ground via transpiration trenches. Water quality has been tested annually and remains of the highest purity. Soil quality. Thredbo Valley Distillery operates 3 commercial-scale worm farms. Worms compost all organic waste including the by-products of schnapps production and produce organic solid and liquid fertilizer. This is used throughout the property to improve soil microbial activity, production yields and resilience in crops. Regular testing shows steady increases in soil quality.

Biodiversity. Thredbo Valley Distillery and Alpine Habits have created a fauna and flora reserve which spans both properties. The [sic] have constructed a walking track which links both properties and provides visitors with a chance to experience the enormous diversity of plant-life, birds and animals native to the region. When we bought our property it was predominantly grazing pastures. Over several years we have undertaken plantings of native species to create windbreaks and native vegetation corridors. These activities have seen both plant and animal biodiversity increasing.<sup>138</sup>

## Contribution of ecotourism to the Region's economy

4.8 The TVD submission advised that:

Thredbo Valley Distillery is one of two significant tourist attractions between Thredbo Village and Jindabyne. Novotel Lake Crackenback, a 46 suite resort, is the other. Thredbo Valley Distillery is a destination drawcard, bringing significant numbers of tourists to the region in its own right, and adding to the destination experience of those already in the region.<sup>139</sup>

4.9 The submission highlighted the significance of TVD as a:

- local employer;
- procurer of locally-sourced skilled trades and ongoing maintenance contracts from local providers; and

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<sup>138</sup> Thredbo Valley Distillery, Submission No.8, pp.1-2.

<sup>139</sup> Thredbo Valley Distillery, Submission No.8, p.2.

- purchaser of supplies, including drygoods, fruit, vegetables and meat, from local suppliers.<sup>140</sup>

4.10 In relation to this, the submission advised the Committee:

the business attracts tourism dollars to the region and injects them into the regional economy where, via the economic multiplier effect, their value is amplified by a factor of 2.5 : 1. (In other words, \$2.50 worth of economic activity is generated for every tourism dollar spent in the region).<sup>141</sup>

### **Ecotourism regulation and accreditation**

4.11 In relation to regulation and accreditation, the TVD submission stated that:

Tourism operators have a long history of leveraging external accreditation systems to market their business. Operators turn to external accreditation to combat the wide variation in standards within specific categories of the industry. The most ubiquitous would be the AAA Touring 'Star Rating' system. Also highly valued is the Tourism Industry Council's 'Tick' Accreditation. The recent development of the T-Qual Tick provides a high-quality non-commercial accreditation system for the industry and will be of considerable benefit to operators and consumers alike.<sup>142</sup>

4.12 The submission went on to say that:

When considering eco-certification specifically, it is important to note that there are wide variations in the scope and quality of schemes on offer. Some set the bar quite low, others are of international quality. We welcome the endorsement of the Climate Action Australia Eco-Certification scheme within the T-Qual Tick scheme as we are currently seeking certification within this framework. For a business to achieve Eco-Certification it must clearly demonstrate a strong commitment to the ecosystem in which it operates. This endorsement in turn attracts

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<sup>140</sup> Thredbo Valley Distillery, Submission No.8, pp.2-3.

<sup>141</sup> Thredbo Valley Distillery, Submission No.8, pp.2-3.

<sup>142</sup> Thredbo Valley Distillery, Submission No.8, p.3.

patronage from the target market the business is seeking to attract – socially and environmentally aware eco-tourists.<sup>143</sup>

## Measures to promote responsible ecotourism

- 4.13 In relation to industry and government measures that promote the benefits of responsible operations by ecotourism providers, the TVD submission stated that:

As the recipient of the Sustainable Tourism award for the region in 2011, we strongly endorse the Canberra and Capital Region Tourism Awards scheme as a vehicle to promote eco-tourism businesses. As noted above, T-Qual's endorsement of Eco-Certification is also significant.<sup>144</sup>

- 4.14 Further, the submission suggested:

It would also be beneficial if national, state and local tourism organisations could display accreditations for properties they list and include a search criteria specifically targeted at highlighting eco-friendly tourism businesses. For example, when searching for accommodation via [www.visitcanberra.com.au](http://www.visitcanberra.com.au), in addition to the existing criteria (accommodation type, rating etc.) people could nominate 'Eco-friendly' as search criteria.<sup>145</sup>

## Gondwana Dreaming

- 4.15 In her submission to the Inquiry, the co-director of Gondwana Dreaming describes the company as an ecotourism operator with a specialisation in 'geotourism'. Among several definitions that the submission provides for geotourism is the following:

A form of natural area tourism that specifically focuses on landscape and geology. It promotes tourism to geosites and the conservation of geo-diversity and an understanding of Earth sciences through appreciation

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<sup>143</sup> Thredbo Valley Distillery, Submission No.8, p.3.

<sup>144</sup> Thredbo Valley Distillery, Submission No.8, p.3.

<sup>145</sup> Thredbo Valley Distillery, Submission No.8, p.3.

and learning. This is achieved through independent visits to geological features, use of geo-trails and view points, guided tours, geo-activities and patronage of geosite visitor centres" (Newsome and Dowling, 2010).<sup>146</sup>

4.16     The submission also detailed the different products offered by Gondwana Dreaming, including the:

- Geology and Wine Tour;
- Canberra Geology Tour;
- Geology Tour of the New Parliament House;
- Wee Jasper Geology Tour;
- South Coast Geology Tour; and
- Alpine Geology Tours.<sup>147</sup>

4.17     In her submission, the co-director of Gondwana Dreaming stated that in 'recent years' she had been 'heavily involved' in activities outside the Region and her 'involvement in the ACT Region has been limited to running tours for visiting groups and conferences rather than actively promoting my tours in the ACT'.<sup>148</sup> She explained that she would:

dearly love to go back to doing more tours in the ACT Region, but this would require a different marketing strategy on my part combined with more support and promotion from local government for the "Nature" part of the ACT Region.<sup>149</sup>

4.18     She stated that her 'defection ... or change of focus' away from the ACT had to do with:

what I felt was very poor marketing [by] the ACT Government of the ACT as a "Nature" destination. Capital Attractions and Events have always been marketed as a priority and this meant that people who come to the ACT focus on these icons (Parliament House, National Library,

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<sup>146</sup> Ms Monica Yeung, Gondwana Dreaming, Submission No.18, p.1.

<sup>147</sup> Ms Monica Yeung, Gondwana Dreaming, Submission No.18, p.2.

<sup>148</sup> Ms Monica Yeung, Gondwana Dreaming, Submission No.18, p.3.

<sup>149</sup> Ms Monica Yeung, Gondwana Dreaming, Submission No.18, p.3.

High Court, National Gallery, National Museum, War Memorial, BM [Black Mountain] Tower) and if they feel adventurous, they may venture up to Mt Ainslie and the Botanical Garden (a big thank you to the Explorer bus to give these visitors a chance to see these). Self Drive people may even venture out to Tidbinbilla, but by the time they find out about local Tour Operators, it is either too late to book a tour or it turns out to be too expensive because there are only a couple of people interested.<sup>150</sup>

4.19 The co-director went on to say that this was:

the crux of the matter – the people who do come to the ACT don't even think that there is more to this place than it being the capital of Australia with its National Attractions mentioned above, they do not associate Canberra with "Nature".<sup>151</sup>

4.20 As a result:

For now, people who want to experience "Nature" do not come to the ACT for this purpose, they have no concept of what they might be missing. Instead they go to the "Mountains" or to the "Coast".<sup>152</sup>

4.21 She suggested that the ACT's current tourism marketing only appealed to a segment of the potential visitors to the ACT:

People not coming to the ACT have possibly a lot in common with me: I have no interest in going to Washington DC to see the White House and the town's National (built) Attractions – and since I have no concept of there being anything else to see and do in Washington DC, I will not bother going there ...<sup>153</sup>

4.22 The co-director also stated that there were significant adverse consequences for local tour businesses:

Canberra has seen a procession of local small Tour Operators come and go over the last 20 years and if I am not mistaken, there are only two who

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<sup>150</sup> Ms Monica Yeung, Gondwana Dreaming, Submission No.18, p.3.

<sup>151</sup> Ms Monica Yeung, Gondwana Dreaming, Submission No.18, p.3.

<sup>152</sup> Ms Monica Yeung, Gondwana Dreaming, Submission No.18, p.3.

<sup>153</sup> Ms Monica Yeung, Gondwana Dreaming, Submission No.18, p.3.

have been here since then and for the duration (Gondwana Dreaming and Hire-a-Guide)...<sup>154</sup>

- 4.23     The co-director stressed that ‘The ACT and the Capital Region have so much to offer in terms of Nature Tourism! It would benefit the ACT if visitors came here for this reason as well so let’s promote it seriously!’<sup>155</sup>

## **Committee comment**

- 4.24     The Committee’s comment in the previous two Chapters noted the apparent low base of ecotourism activity in the Region, and the need for optimal marketing. In the Committee’s view, these two points are borne out in the contributions canvassed in this Chapter. It would not be an exaggeration to say that private sector ecotourism in the Region is, at present, under-developed.
- 4.25     The achievements of the Thredbo Valley Distillery are notable, from environmental and economic points of view. The Committee would hope to see, over time, a diversity of such businesses, each adding to the environmental and economic prosperity of the Region.
- 4.26     The contributions considered in this Chapter indicate that ecotourism has a low profile within marketing campaigns designed to attract visitors to the Region.
- 4.27     As indicated in evidence to the Inquiry and as discussed in this Chapter and Chapters 2 and 3, marketing of the ACT has, to date, generally focused on ‘national attractions’, such as the Australian Parliament. Future marketing should provide a clearer articulation between these national attractions and the Region’s natural assets. This is important not least because contributors have told the Committee, the Australia’s natural assets are a key attraction for many overseas visitors.

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<sup>154</sup> Ms Monica Yeung, Gondwana Dreaming, Submission No.18, p.3.

<sup>155</sup> Ms Monica Yeung, Gondwana Dreaming, Submission No.18, p.3.

## RECOMMENDATION 1

- 4.28 **The Committee recommends that ecotourism and nature park assets be given a higher profile within future tourism marketing campaigns for the ACT and surrounding region.**



## 5 COMMUNITY GROUPS

- 5.1 The previous Chapter considered private sector participants in ecotourism in the Australian Capital Region. This Chapter discusses the community groups involved in activities related to ecotourism.

### National Parks Association of the ACT

- 5.2 The National Parks Association of the ACT (NPA ACT) lodged a submission to the Inquiry and also appeared before the Committee at a public hearing on 24 May 2012.<sup>156</sup> The NPA ACT's submission highlighted a number of issues.

#### Basic principles

- 5.3 First, it advised the Committee that 'there should be some basic principles underlying any ecotourism strategy in ACT parks and reserves'. These were:

Investment in maintaining, improving and promoting existing good quality, low-impact park facilities, experiences and basic services. Greatly improving and expanding information and promotion. Such actions provide the basis for enjoyable park visitation and nature based tourism, and always will.

Undertake an experience audit of the park system. Identify opportunities for improved presentation of existing experiences. Consider any need for additional basic facilities such as walking tracks, picnic areas and lookouts across the ACT and identify the most appropriate locations.

Analyse existing visitation patterns in spatial, demographic and trend terms. Compare against park condition audits and focus promotion on those parks that are accessible to markets and able to cope environmentally.

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<sup>156</sup> National Parks Association of the ACT, Submission No.26, and *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012.

Ensure that any initiatives are commercially sound and will return to the government sufficient funds to justify the risk and expense of their development.

- 5.4 The NPA ACT concluded that these 'principles should be implemented in conjunction with an [sic] comprehensive outdoor recreation strategy'.<sup>157</sup>

### **Outdoor recreation strategy for the ACT**

- 5.5 The NPA ACT also suggested that there were two existing frameworks under which an outdoor recreation strategy could be devised. First:

The ACT has a nature based tourism strategy which was published in 2000. This covers ecotourism as well as a broad range of non-commercial activities. Many of the proposals put forward in this strategy have not been implemented, although some are well underway such as the emphasis on Tidbinbilla as a nature based tourism destination and the development of a walking trails strategy.<sup>158</sup>

- 5.6 Second:

The ACT also has plans of management in place for all of its conservation reservations and each of these have tourism and recreation management objectives consistent with the primary conservation objectives for these reserves.<sup>159</sup>

- 5.7 In the public hearing, the NPA ACT said that it was:

particularly interested in the development of a recreation strategy, an outdoor recreation strategy, for the ACT that will guide how best to manage our resources for recreation across the ACT and potentially reduce some of the pressure that our conservation reserves are feeling at the moment with the demands they have from recreation.<sup>160</sup>

- 5.8 In its submission, the NPA ACT stated that its arguments emphasised the need

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<sup>157</sup> National Parks Association of the ACT, Submission No.26, p.2.

<sup>158</sup> National Parks Association of the ACT, Submission No.26, p.2.

<sup>159</sup> National Parks Association of the ACT, Submission No.26, p.2.

<sup>160</sup> Mr Rod Griffiths, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.70.

for an all-embracing strategy for the management and preservation of natural heritage in the ACT. It said that there was a:

need for the ACT to have an outdoor recreational strategy that identifies areas for all recreation and reduces the pressure of recreation on the ACT's conservation reserves. While the ACT does have some recreation strategies there is no overall recreational strategy that provides an overall framework across the ACT.<sup>161</sup>

## **Risks of commercialising ACT conservation reserves**

5.9 In its submission, the NPA ACT expressed concerns about risks arising from potential development on ACT conservation reserves. In particular, it raised issues with the construction of accommodation in these reserves.<sup>162</sup>

5.10 The NPA ACT proposed that:

- such activities may often be contrary to the legislative management objectives for the ACT's conservation reserves;
- Government subsidies should not be used to support such activities;
- independent analysis of the viability of such activities must be completed;
- the local community is best served by having accommodation outside of conservation reserves;
- all ecotourism activities should be conducted by certified ecotourism operators; and
- allocation of Government concessions to ecotourism providers must be subject to licensing fees.<sup>163</sup>

5.11 In relation to proposals to build further accommodation in the reserves, the NPA ACT said that it:

would contend that the vast majority of visits to the ACT's conservation reserves are from ACT residents or tourists from outside of the high-end

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<sup>161</sup> National Parks Association of the ACT, Submission No.26, p.3.

<sup>162</sup> National Parks Association of the ACT, Submission No.26, pp.3-4.

<sup>163</sup> National Parks Association of the ACT, Submission No.26, pp.3-4.

market spectrum. There is a focus by these visitors on recreation or other low impact activities.<sup>164</sup>

- 5.12 It went on to suggest that the risks associated with this kind of development would be unlikely to be off-set by commercial benefits, underlining that:

the ACT has few nature-based tour operators and that initiatives to attract “high end” tourists through exclusive access tours to our conservation reserves have not been successful. This would not augur well for any proposal to develop significant accommodation infrastructure within the ACT’s conservation reserves.<sup>165</sup>

### **Need for information on ecotourism**

- 5.13 The NPA ACT highlighted the need for further information about the effects of ecotourism activities on natural assets. In its submission, it referred to a study of the NPA ACT and Orienteering ACT<sup>166</sup> on ‘the impact on the environment arising from the Australian orienteering championships’,<sup>167</sup> commenting that ‘Such research is required across the breadth of the ACT’s conservation reserves in which significant recreation events are planned’.<sup>168</sup>

- 5.14 Overall, however, the NPA ACT suggested that currently:

There is not any research program, any collection of data, as to what people expect from that nature reserve or whether they think there should be more facilities or that some activities should be more proscribed or whether they should be allowed to do a range of other things. Some nature reserves allow dog walking; others do not. There has probably been a bit of work done on that but not on very many other things. So we are looking to get a better feel for what people want and how this affects their overall experience of the park system, whether they think that they are getting all the enjoyment they expected from it or

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<sup>164</sup> National Parks Association of the ACT, Submission No.26, p.2.

<sup>165</sup> National Parks Association of the ACT, Submission No.26, pp.2-3.

<sup>166</sup> Orienteering ACT made a submission to the Inquiry, Submission No. 01.

<sup>167</sup> National Parks Association of the ACT, Submission No.26, p.3.

<sup>168</sup> National Parks Association of the ACT, Submission No.26, p.3.

whether there are some shortcomings. The tracks that they expected to be able to walk their children along may be too rocky or have too many sharp rocks. If they are a bicycle rider, the fire trail may have had too many large rocks on it, so they thought about making their own tracks.<sup>169</sup>

5.15 The NPA ACT offered that these were:

the sorts of things on which we would like to see some collection of satisfaction or experience information, which would be very useful to the park managers and it would also be of interest to us in our promoting of activities within the park system.<sup>170</sup>

5.16 The NPA ACT told the Committee that if this data were collected, it would support a better means to assess proposals for the use of nature park resources in the ACT and its region:

Again, it would come back to that data collection. How do we justify various things that are being put forward to us? There are numerous enterprises in the past that have been put forward. Let me give you an example. Within Tidbinbilla there was a proposal to have luxury tours — “inside knowledge to Tidbinbilla” — put forward by an organisation. They would get exclusive use of Tidbinbilla and access after hours. It was not able to attract participants. There was something wrong with their marketing there. They did not do their marketing research. It comes down to, certainly within the ACT, a strategy talking about, “Here’s a number of ideas that we can put forward,” but underneath that there needs to be that research. You have to say, “If we’re going to put forward a strategy or a proposal, how do we assess it so that we know exactly what the outcomes are going to be and that the marketing is not just spin but actually substantiated through a quite rigorous scientific basis for marketing research?”<sup>171</sup>

5.17 In the view of the NPA ACT, the need for more information of certain kinds was critical to ecotourism planning:

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<sup>169</sup> *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, pp.72-73.

<sup>170</sup> *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, pp.72-73.

<sup>171</sup> Mr Rod Griffiths, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.74.

With ecotourism we often hear very grand claims about the impact it will have on the ACT, the number of tourists that it will bring in and how that will help our economy, how it will not affect various bits and pieces, amenities or people or the conservation values of areas. We are very keen to see some way of quantifying what are the actual impacts of ecotourism. It is not a big sector within the ACT. I am sure people look at it as a growth area. But it does not seem to have been able to grow, so there must be reasons for that, despite the claims that we hear from various tourism organisations that say they can really make a big difference to the ACT.<sup>172</sup>

### **Proposal for a new national park**

- 5.18 The NPA ACT put forward its 'vision' for a new national park in the ACT. It summarised that the new park would be:

basically an arch that flows right across the top of the ACT. It would be existing reserves; it could actually be established from existing reserves initially. But there are significant areas of woodlands that still need to be reserved in the Gungahlin rim. It would cover the Gungahlin rim, starting from near Hall and going right across the top of the ACT, flowing down through to Mount Majura and Black Mountain. Then there would be a southern section, a slightly lower section, still part of the northern national park, where you could take in the fantastic woodlands of Mount Mugga, Red Hill, Callum Brae, Wanniasa Hills et cetera. These sorts of things would connect. There is potential there to really raise the ACT's and Australia's awareness of how important these grassy woodlands are.<sup>173</sup>

- 5.19 The NPA ACT explained that the concept of the new national park was:  
based on the need to recognise that the ACT is a holder of key woodland ecosystems in Australia and that we are very lucky to have these. The

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<sup>172</sup> Mr Rod Griffiths, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.73.

<sup>173</sup> Mr Rod Griffiths, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.78.

examples that we have are already better than you would find in New South Wales—so the quality of these examples is there.<sup>174</sup>

5.20 With respect to time-frames for the park, the NPA ACT told the Committee that ‘...some of the land that we foresee needs to be within this reserve, this new national park, is actually leasehold, so it is not going to happen instantly’.<sup>175</sup>

5.21 The NPA ACT told the Committee that the benefits of such a park would be to ‘achieve connectivity between the low and grassy woodlands and significant areas within the ACT’<sup>176</sup> and that it would be ‘a key asset for Australia as well’:

The ACT has this amazing ecosystem of which we are custodians for Australia. It would be a fantastic spot for a visitors centre. Think about the location. It is in the northern part of the ACT. The ACT’s national parks visitors centre is right down the south. Here it would be very close to one of the major access points for the ACT and would raise the standard and the understanding of the community of how precious this natural reserve is for both the ACT and Australia.<sup>177</sup>

## Ginninderra Falls Association

5.22 The Ginninderra Falls Association appeared at the Committee’s public hearing on 24 May 2012.<sup>178</sup> The Association also lodged a submission to the Inquiry.<sup>179</sup>

### National park proposal

5.23 During the hearing witnesses from the Association argued in favour of a new national park, comprised of Ginninderra Falls, which are currently on privately-owned property, and areas of land surrounding the Falls:

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<sup>174</sup> Mr Rod Griffiths, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.77.

<sup>175</sup> Mr Rod Griffiths, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, pp.77-78.

<sup>176</sup> Mr Rod Griffiths, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.78.

<sup>177</sup> Mr Rod Griffiths, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.78.

<sup>178</sup> *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012.

<sup>179</sup> Ginninderra Falls Association, Submission No.4.

The proposal from the Ginninderra Falls Association ... links up to the Woodstock reserve—so along the Murrumbidgee and back up Ginninderra Creek—as a fairly significant linear reserve. The long-term size of the park could be anywhere, but from a catchment group perspective we would see that the immediate falls area—which is Hyles’s and Manny Notaras’s place across the other side—would be areas that we would consider a high priority to protect as well as enable us to continue working back up the creek for that linkage between the falls and Mulligans Flat.<sup>180</sup>

- 5.24 The Association told the Committee that Ginninderra Falls were inherently suited to being an ecotourism attraction. A member of the Association, who co-owns the property on which the Falls are located, explained how she and her co-owner had previously operated their property as the Ginninderra Falls Park until a visitor had an accident in 2004. She said that subsequently, the co-owners found it impossible to secure public liability insurance and ceased to operate the Park.<sup>181</sup>
- 5.25 The co-owner also said that without the revenue from visitors’ entrance fees, the infrastructure on the property has fallen into disrepair. As a result, there was ‘so much that needs to be done [that it] is way beyond our [the co-owners’] capability’.<sup>182</sup>

### **Challenges to establishment of the proposed national park**

- 5.26 The Association detailed a number of challenges for establishing the proposed new national park. In particular, it noted the need for cross-border cooperation, as the proposed national park would extend over the ACT border into New South Wales. The Association hoped that ‘some sort of government committee between the ACT and New South Wales’ could be set up, and that the recently created position of NSW Cross-Border Commissioner would have a role to play in the proposal.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Mr Damon Cusack, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.33.

<sup>181</sup> Mrs Anna Hyles, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.32.

<sup>182</sup> Mrs Anna Hyles, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.32.

<sup>183</sup> Dr Chris Watson, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.33.

- 5.27 Another challenge was that parcels of land envisaged as part of the new national park were under private ownership, and while some owners welcomed the proposal, others did not. The Association suggested that it might be possible to establish a compromise in which a critical mass for the park could be achieved without all private owners divesting themselves of their land-holdings.<sup>184</sup>
- 5.28 Further, the Association observed that pressures on the land on which the Falls are situated would increase as population density rose in surrounding areas. It also suggested that the increasing population would elevate the demand for park facilities around the Falls. This made it more necessary to establish some kind of formal arrangement to control access and visitation to the sites under discussion.<sup>185</sup>
- 5.29 The Association reported that people were visiting the land on an informal basis already.<sup>186</sup> This, together with current problems regarding invasive species, could be managed effectively if a national park were declared.<sup>187</sup>
- 5.30 A further obstacle envisaged by the Association was securing sufficient funds for the proposed national park. One option for gaining these funds discussed by the Association was a parcel of land being sold for a commercial housing development and the resulting revenue invested in the establishment of the national park. The Association stated that was a variation on a model that had been used to establish Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve.<sup>188</sup>
- 5.31 Another avenue for funding was to access the National Reserve Scheme:
- You need a little bit of money to contribute to that before the federal government will contribute their two-thirds. Knowing that people support it and everyone is on board, you can go ahead with costings. You can find out how much it would cost, what we would need and how we

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<sup>184</sup> Mr Damon Cusack, Mrs Anna Hyles, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, pp.34-35.

<sup>185</sup> Mr Damon Cusack, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.39.

<sup>186</sup> Mr Damon Cusack, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.39.

<sup>187</sup> Dr Chris Watson, Mr Damon Cusack, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.40.

<sup>188</sup> Mr Damon Cusack, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, pp.39-40.

would go about it.<sup>189</sup>

- 5.32 In addition, the groups took the view that ‘there should be an entry fee if the national park became a reality’,<sup>190</sup> and that this would make a substantial contribution to the costs of the park:

Say it was 15,000 visitors a year, that is \$150,000. If it goes up to 600,000, it is a million dollars. Although the initial costs of purchasing land and fixing up trails and that sort of thing may be a reasonable amount of money, you could imagine that the revenue would certainly offset any maintenance and salary costs year by year by year ...<sup>191</sup>

### **Response to Question Taken on Notice**

- 5.33 At its public hearing on 17 May 2012, the Committee asked for information on the status of discussions about the proposed national park encompassing Ginninderra Falls.<sup>192</sup> The Question was taken on notice and the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation subsequently provided the following written response:

The Chief Minister and Cabinet Directorate has advised that the Ginninderra Falls Association is a community organisation advocating for the establishment of the Murrumbidgee-Ginninderra Gorges National Parks, which proposes to incorporate the Ginninderra Falls.

As the proposed National Park is predominately located with NSW it is not a matter the ACT Government can progress. Following a recent meeting with representatives from the Ginninderra Falls Association, the Chief Minister wrote to the NSW Premier, the Mayor of Yass Valley Council and the Member for Burrinjuck, Ms Katrina Hodgkinson MP.

The Chief Minister has sought from Premier O’Farrell the NSW Government’s views on the proposal, and to consider establishing a working group to explore options for the establishment of the Park. The Chief Minister highlighted the benefits the National Park would provide

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<sup>189</sup> Mr Damon Cusack, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.40.

<sup>190</sup> Mr Graeme Barrow, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.40.

<sup>191</sup> Mr Graeme Barrow, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.40.

<sup>192</sup> *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.13.

NSW and the ACT and the willingness of the ACT Government to explore opportunities to make the proposal a reality.

The Chief Minister also acknowledged that various cross-border issues would need to be discussed, including future urban development, infrastructure and use of services associated with the proposal.

It is understood that the Ginninderra Falls Association has also met with officials from the Yass Valley Council, and that there were positive indications from the council.<sup>193</sup>

## Capital Region Fishing Alliance

5.34 The Capital Region Fishing Alliance made a submission to the Inquiry.<sup>194</sup>

5.35 The submission characterised trout fishing as an ecotourism activity, and stated that despite a long history of trout fishing in the ACT, it had fallen into disuse in recent times:

The ACT and Region has a long history with trout fishing as a valued and valuable enterprise. However over the last 20 years trout fishing in the ACT has dwindled to a point where it is neither widely practiced nor valued as an ecotourism opportunity.<sup>195</sup>

5.36 There was a contrast between the ACT and the level of trout fishing activity in nearby areas of New South Wales:

Across the border in NSW, and more particularly in the Snowy Mountains Region, trout fishing is a valuable and respected recreational activity. A 2001 survey conducted by Dominion Consulting established that in the year 2000, 170,000 anglers fished in the Snowy Mountains, with the value of the trout fishery to the Snowy Mountains economy of \$70million and providing over 300 jobs directly and indirectly. This figure would be considerably more today. To the North of the ACT, the Goulburn-Mulwaree Shire have recommenced the stocking of trout into

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<sup>193</sup> Mr Andrew Barr MLA, Minister for Tourism Sport and Recreation, Response to Question Taken on Notice dated 18 June 2012.

<sup>194</sup> Capital Region Fishing Alliance, Submission No.20.

<sup>195</sup> Capital Region Fishing Alliance, Submission No.20, p.3.

Pejar Dam; a further acknowledgement of the value of recreational fishing and another source of competition for ecotourism expenditure from ACT residents.<sup>196</sup>

- 5.37 This, the Alliance advised the Committee, represented significant lost opportunities for the ACT:

Despite the history of trout fishing in the region and the value of the trout fishery to our immediate south, the ACT no longer provides any trout fishing of significance. Each weekend thousands of anglers from the greater Sydney region pass through Canberra en route to the Snowy Mountains in search of trout fishing destinations. Many local anglers also travel to the Snowy Mountains in pursuit of quality trout fishing opportunities. The ACT misses a great opportunity to capture some of this trade as it no longer provides any opportunity for trout anglers.<sup>197</sup>

- 5.38 Moreover, the Alliance advised the Committee, there were environmental benefits to be achieved through setting a higher priority on trout fishing:

The ACT would benefit if it was to reconsider its policy position on trout and allow trout in waterways currently dominated by carp, redfin and gambusia to see if they can bring some additional ecotourism benefits to the ACT.<sup>198</sup>

## **Scope of ecotourism activities in the Region**

- 5.39 With regard to the extent to which organisations deliver ecotourism activities in the Region, the Alliance advised the Committee that:

The Australian Capital Region supports a vibrant trout fishery in the Snowy Mountains, serviced by a range of fishing-related businesses. These include boat and fishing equipment sales and hire, as well as a number of fishing guides offering a range of services which would be considered as “ecotourism activities”. There are also a number of guides

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<sup>196</sup> Capital Region Fishing Alliance, Submission No.20, p.3. The Submission states that the Dominion Survey is available at <[http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/151971/snowy-mountains-survey.pdf](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/151971/snowy-mountains-survey.pdf)>, viewed 3 July 2012. It is also attached to the Submission, after p.9.

<sup>197</sup> Capital Region Fishing Alliance, Submission No.20, p.3.

<sup>198</sup> Capital Region Fishing Alliance, Submission No.20, p.3.

operating outside of the Snowy Mountains, offering “wilderness fishing” and similar ecotourism opportunities. There are no known guiding services within the ACT, due to the current poor state of the region’s trout fishery and relatively limited native fishing opportunities.<sup>199</sup>

## **Ecotourism’s impacts on ecosystems**

- 5.40 On the extent to which ecotourism contributes to, or detracts from, the conservation of ecosystems, the Alliance observed that:

Recreational fishing is considered to be a sustainable activity, thanks to fisheries regulations and self-regulation by the vast majority of anglers. No species of fish has been known to be made extinct from recreational fishing or is under threat of extinction from recreational fishing. This is contrary to the views held by certain conservation and animal welfare groups who consider fishing at odds with the notion of conservation. Most recreational anglers consider themselves to be the “true conservationists”, with the future of fishing being dependent on the sustainability of the resource.<sup>200</sup>

- 5.41 The Alliance advised the Committee:

The CRFA [Capital Region Fishing Alliance] believes that recreational fishing opportunities within the ACT can be greatly enhanced without increasing the risks to aquatic ecosystems. The CRFA is committed to the ongoing conservation and restoration of aquatic habitats and ecosystems for the benefit of both anglers and the environment. Building awareness and appreciation of ecosystem sustainability is a key conservation initiative of the CRFA.<sup>201</sup>

## **These activities’ contributions to the Region’s economy**

- 5.42 With regard to the economic contribution of recreational fishing, the Alliance stated that:

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<sup>199</sup> Capital Region Fishing Alliance, Submission No.20, p.7.

<sup>200</sup> Capital Region Fishing Alliance, Submission No.20, p.7.

<sup>201</sup> Capital Region Fishing Alliance, Submission No.20, p.7.

... recreational fishing, for both trout and native species is a valuable contributor to the economy of the broader Australian Capital Region, with trout fishing worth an estimated \$70million to the Snowy Mountains region alone. Successful native fisheries, such as Burrinjuck Dam near Yass, are also significant contributors to regional economies.<sup>202</sup>

5.43 Moreover, the Alliance counselled, again, that:

The ACT is missing out on a greater share of this contribution due to the lack of recognition and funding for recreational fishing in the ACT and the resultant state of local fisheries.<sup>203</sup>

### **Self-regulation and government regulation**

5.44 The Alliance advised the Committee that the sustainability of recreational fishing is managed through various regulations, including:

- legislated minimum size limits below which fish cannot be kept by anglers and maximum size limits for certain species to protect large breeding fish.
- maximum quantities of a species that may be kept by an angler in any one day, also known as ‘bag limits’.
- closures of certain waters to fishing during certain times of the year to allow fish to breed unhindered.
- some waters being closed to fishing altogether to protect fragile environments, breeding areas, or water supplies.
- prohibitions on destructive or indiscriminate fishing gear such as nets and limits on the quantity of fishing gear that can be used.<sup>204</sup>

5.45 The Alliance further observed that:

In addition to these government regulations, many anglers also “self-regulate” to ensure sustainability of the resource. “Catch & Release” fishing is growing in popularity, with more and more anglers choosing not to keep fish caught, or to voluntarily keep less than the allowable bag

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<sup>202</sup> Capital Region Fishing Alliance, Submission No.20, p.7.

<sup>203</sup> Capital Region Fishing Alliance, Submission No.20, p.7.

<sup>204</sup> Capital Region Fishing Alliance, Submission No.20, p.8.

limits, as appreciation for the natural environment grows. Fishing is increasingly seen as a legitimate means of connecting with, experiencing and enjoying the natural environment.<sup>205</sup>

- 5.46 It also provided examples of where government regulation had had positive implications for fishing as an ecotourism activity:

Anglers fishing in NSW waters are required to purchase a Recreational Fishing License, with license funds being used for enhancing recreational fisheries and funding various recreational fishing programs such as education and compliance.<sup>206</sup>

- 5.47 It also considered the kinds of similar approaches that could be appropriate and viable for the ACT:

There is currently no fishing license in the ACT. Whilst the CRFA can see the potential benefits, we concede the argument put forward by government that the cost to administer an ACT license makes it unviable. However, the CRFA does not consider the level of education, monitoring and compliance activities to be adequate within the ACT and would like to see additional resources committed to these activities. A dedicated Fisheries Officer should be employed, particularly in the summer months most popular for fishing.<sup>207</sup>

## Committee comment

- 5.48 In view of the submitter and witness contributions considered in this Chapter, the Committee wishes to comment on two areas.
- 5.49 In previous Chapters, the Committee noted the high level of engagement by government in tourism in the ACT and region, and the relatively low level of private sector involvement. Given this, the role of community groups as providers of ecotourism activity takes on a heightened importance,

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<sup>205</sup> Capital Region Fishing Alliance, Submission No.20, p.8.

<sup>206</sup> Capital Region Fishing Alliance, Submission No.20, p.8.

<sup>207</sup> Capital Region Fishing Alliance, Submission No.20, p.8.

particularly because these groups add diversity and a critical mass in ecotourism activity that could otherwise be lacking.

5.50      Moreover, these community groups appear to largely be predicated on pro-environmental activities. This, too, makes them an important component of the ecotourism sector in the Australian Capital Region.

5.51      As the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment noted in its contributions to the Inquiry, these groups also add two further important factors to the sector, in that they:

- provide an interface between government, private sector entities and the community; and
- are significant repositories of local knowledge and expertise as regards the natural environment in the Region.

5.52      The Committee notes the recommendations by the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, that every two years there be a formal meeting of these organisations to facilitate the development of a more coordinated learning and shared approaches across ACT government agencies, community groups, and private sector participants in ecotourism.

5.53      At the same time, the Committee notes that TAMS signalled, in spite of the positive results reported in the ACT Government submission, a decrease in use of community groups as contracted providers of ecotourism services. The Committee is concerned about this apparent change of policy, and makes the following recommendation.

## RECOMMENDATION 2

5.54      **The Committee recommends that the ACT Government (a) continue to contract community groups, on basis of merit, to provide ecotourism services and (b) maintain and enhance working relationships with those groups into the future.**

5.55      In relation to the NPA ACT's and the Ginninderra Falls Association's respective proposals to create new national parks in the ACT, the Committee's view is that the following considerations should be taken into account:

- whether it can be established that the proposed national parks would protect and preserve a distinctive environmental asset;

- the proportion of ACT land area already occupied by national parks and other nature parks; and
- the ability of the ACT to administer and resource the proposed national parks.

5.56 The Committee also notes that areas can be preserved and protected using frameworks other than national parks, such as those that underpin the Canberra Nature Park.

5.57 In the Committee's view there is a case worthy of consideration in the NPA ACT proposal for an additional national park to conserve and make available the distinctive woodlands environments identified in its submission and witness evidence.

### RECOMMENDATION 3

5.58 **The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider creating a new nature park in the northern part of the ACT, in order to conserve local woodland environments and expand the ACT's range of nature park assets.**

5.59 The Committee also considers that there is a case worthy of further inquiry regarding the creation of a framework to preserve, maintain, and make accessible Ginninderra Falls with sufficient surrounding land to constitute a sustainable nature park. In this case, the Committee considers that thought should be given to establishing a nature park other than a national park, particularly taking into account cross-border issues.

### RECOMMENDATION 4

5.60 **The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider creating a new nature park to preserve, maintain and make accessible Ginninderra Falls with sufficient surrounding land to constitute a sustainable nature park asset.**



## 6 COMMENTS FROM OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

6.1 Previous Chapters have considered the involvement of government, private operators and community groups in ecotourism. This Chapter discusses the contributions from three other stakeholders:

- Ms Penelope Figgis AO, who appeared in a private capacity;
- Threesides, 'a marketing agency based in Canberra with a specialisation in the tourism and leisure sector';<sup>208</sup> and
- Making Trax, a specialist builder of walking tracks for parks.<sup>209</sup>

### Ms Penelope Figgis AO

6.2 Ms Penelope Figgis AO appeared before the Committee at a public hearing on 31 May 2012. She has extensive experience as Director of the Australian Committee for the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Vice-President of the Australian Conservation Foundation.<sup>210</sup> Ms Figgis has lectured<sup>211</sup> and written<sup>212</sup> on ecotourism. She is also a former Director of the Australian Tourist Commission.<sup>213</sup>

6.3 Ms Figgis told the Committee that:

In that capacity [as Director of the Australian Tourist Commission] I became very interested in the whole issue. I developed a great understanding of the importance of the tourism industry to Australia, including its potential to be a great force for conservation in the sense that its basic infrastructure, its basic resource, in many cases was not just

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<sup>208</sup> Threesides, Submission No.19, p.1.

<sup>209</sup> Makin Trax, Submission No.23.

<sup>210</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.62.

<sup>211</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.65.

<sup>212</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.61.

<sup>213</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.60.

the friendliness and openness of Australia, the safety of Australia and the vibrancy of cities. Certainly, an absolutely core part of its brand was the protected areas of Australia and our thriving wildlife and the beauty of our landscapes.<sup>214</sup>

### **Positive and negative potential of ecotourism**

- 6.4 Ms Figgis advised the Committee that in her former role at the Australian Tourist Commission she had been party to debate on the ‘two sides of the sword’ of ecotourism. She said that:

tourism does have a high potential to present the natural world to people, to give them wonderful experiences, and hopefully, through those experiences, to enhance their commitment to long-term conservation.<sup>215</sup>

- 6.5 She also said that:

The other side of the sword, of course, has been seen in many parts of the world where people take a beautiful place, whether that be natural or cultural, it becomes very popular and it becomes a popular commodity, but the development around that area, or servicing that area, is not done with sensitivity. It grows out of control and in the end, I suppose, using the cliché, it kills the golden goose in that the area becomes degraded or overrun and it is not as attractive and ecologically valuable as it was before.<sup>216</sup>

### **Overseas examples**

- 6.6 Ms Figgis provided the Committee with overseas examples of where ecotourism had resulted in negative impacts on the natural environment. She explained that Thailand’s Phang Nga Bay and similar settings:

...are really of world heritage quality with magnificent past landscapes, but the entire infrastructure that is going in for tourists has no sewerage,

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<sup>214</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.60.

<sup>215</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.60.

<sup>216</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.60.

for example. All the restaurants are on stilts and all the waste goes directly into the bay itself. Ha Long Bay in Vietnam is another good example of a world heritage, natural environment with quite a strong ecology where the same sort of thing is happening—a very large scale resort development but very poor environmental practices.<sup>217</sup>

- 6.7 Ms Figgis described the positive effects of ecotourism in Costa Rica which, she said, was ‘a very different story indeed’:

...They found in the 1960s that they, like all other Central American nations, were losing their forests and they put a levy on petrol. That ended the dramas. We have had our mining taxes et cetera. They used that to pay farmers to plant trees and to hold their forests. They have increased their forest cover. It had got as low as 21 per cent and it is now up to 56 per cent.<sup>218</sup>

- 6.8 Ms Figgis told the Committee that, consequently, Costa Rica:

...reaped the benefits from ecotourism, nature-based tourism. They are known all over the world for their magnificent birds and the beauty of their landscape. They have done things very well. They do have more commercial development near their parks, but very often it is on private land adjacent to parks, which the government has strongly encouraged. It is a really outstanding example. They have a lot of private, protected areas that are run by foundations. The most famous of the Costa Rican reserves is Monte Verde, or the green mountain. They have accommodation there on half the park, but it is very simple and inexpensive and any family could afford to stay there.<sup>219</sup>

## Ensuring responsible ecotourism

- 6.9 Ms Figgis advised the Committee that to achieve such desirable ecotourism it was necessary:

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<sup>217</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.63.

<sup>218</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, pp.63-64.

<sup>219</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.64.

to ensure that ecotourism does bring benefits to regional economies, benefits to climate and all the economic benefits that tourism can bring without damaging the basic resource which it rents ...<sup>220</sup>

6.10    She further explained that the means of attaining this end are:

basically good planning and ensuring that it is what I call “nature centred”, in the sense that the tourism is a constrained activity within the natural area rather than the leading activity or the shaping activity.<sup>221</sup>

6.11    Ms Figgis observed that ecotourism operators in Australia generally adopted a high standard in their environmental stewardship:

I think we are very lucky in this country in the main. Most of our tourism operators in the environmental field have gone into it because they love nature themselves. Most of them are people who are not just exploiting something. They are people who want to showcase things they find beautiful and wonderful. Most of them, I am sure, do not want to do any damage.<sup>222</sup>

6.12    However, she also said she believed that it is ‘incumbent upon governments not to presume that everybody is going to be so well motivated and, I guess, to make policy to prevent the entry of people who may be less well motivated’<sup>223</sup> and that ‘we have come up with a fairly good system in Australia. It is not too onerous but people do have to meet certain standards.’<sup>224</sup>

6.13    Ms Figgis explained the salutary effects of ecotourism accreditation in this way:

I think the good thing about accreditation is that if people put a badge on their bus, on their cabins or on whatever the product happens to be, interestingly enough they also raise the expectation of their clients. They know that there is a certain accountability with that.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, pp.60-61.

<sup>221</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.61.

<sup>222</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, pp.64-65.

<sup>223</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.65.

<sup>224</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.68.

<sup>225</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.68.

6.14 She concluded:

If you are saying, “I’m green, I’ve got good standards, I don’t damage the environment,” you are certainly adding respect for your product but you are also creating an expectation. It is a bit like a restaurant having a Michelin star or whatever. Once you have that badge on your property, you had better meet those expectations. So I am very much in favour of accreditation.<sup>226</sup>

## Ecotourism and entertainment

6.15 Ms Figgis noted that there are significant tensions between ecotourism imperatives and ‘the wish for infrastructure to be put into parks to make them entertaining’,<sup>227</sup> offering that:

The classic example of that is the zip line...

I do not know whether you know what a zip line is. It is basically what we would all call a very large flying fox...somehow or other I have to say that I felt it kind of missed the point. Here we were in a magnificent globally important rainforest and most of the kids there were zipping along on a zip line, which I am sure had nothing to do with the environmental values of the area. I just felt it could have been somewhere else. I have no hang-ups about kids having fun—there is nothing wrong with that—but I did not see why it had to be in the middle of a really magnificent area. When you are zipping along at a very fast pace, you are not actually looking for hummingbirds; you are having a bit of an adrenalin rush.

6.16 Ms Figgis concluded:

if we are going to have infrastructure it should be to help people enjoy the experience, enhance it and to celebrate the values for which we have set those areas aside.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, pp.68-69.

<sup>227</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.65.

<sup>228</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, pp.64-65.

## Prospects for ecotourism in the ACT

- 6.17 Ms Figgis spoke about the prospects for ecotourism in the ACT. She told the Committee that she believed that Canberra was particularly ‘well positioned’ for long-range walking:

It is an unusual place in that it is fairly accessible. You have wildlife that is accessible from a major city. There are not too many capital cities in the world where, within about 10 to 15 minutes, you can actually see wildlife, and Canberra has that.<sup>229</sup>

- 6.18 Ms Figgis underlined that:

The fact that you have a lot of wildlife quite nearby is something that a lot of people in the rest of the world, or even Australians, are very keen to see.<sup>230</sup>

- 6.19 In respect of this potential, Ms Figgis observed that there could be significant benefits in auditing a Region’s ecotourism opportunities. When the Committee asked about what methodology she would suggest for this, Ms Figgis replied:

There are a lot of issues there. It is not just the pretty bits; partly it is the pretty bits, whether they be a waterfall, a gorge, lovely places like Tidbinbilla or whatever. There is certainly your infrastructure. There are your access points. So it is about putting everything together—putting together your seasonality. It is even about putting together things like: when do most people come to the ACT? Can you have add-on events? If you have a big tourism product like Floriade, for example, are there ways that you could add in to that?<sup>231</sup>

- 6.20 Ms Figgis went on to say that, accordingly:

You really need an experienced nature tourism person to look at the totality. I would give them the brief to come up with what are the potential products. What are potential economically and ecologically viable products that could be developed, whether that be a long-range

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<sup>229</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.67.

<sup>230</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.67.

<sup>231</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.69.

walking track, an additional facility like Tidbinbilla, an expansion of an existing area, a different presentation of a particular area, a new access road or something that will make a product viable that was not viable now. That is what I would be looking to do.<sup>232</sup>

## Threesides

- 6.21 The Committee received a submission from Threesides, which described Threesides as ‘a marketing agency based in Canberra with a specialisation in the tourism and leisure sector’<sup>233</sup> that provides:

marketing advice, training and project management services for a range of private sector and government tourism organisations. Over the past 4 years this has included ACT Tourism, Tourism Snowy Mountains, Eurobodalla Tourism, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, National Gallery of Australia, National Capital Attractions Association, Ride Canberra and a range of accommodation and tour service companies.<sup>234</sup>

## State of nature-based tourism in the ACT

- 6.22 In its submission, Threesides offered its view that ‘the ACT is largely unrecognised as a nature-based tourism destination despite having a range of compelling experiences to attract interstate and international visitors’<sup>235</sup>, but that with ‘the right policies, and investment in infrastructure and marketing’ the ACT ‘could realise its identity as the Bush Capital and increase its share of visitors from the lucrative and growing nature-based tourism sector’.<sup>236</sup>
- 6.23 The submission focused on opportunities for the development of ecotourism which were present in the Australian Capital Region:

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<sup>232</sup> Ms Penelope Figgis AO, *Transcript of Evidence*, 31 May 2012, p.69.

<sup>233</sup> Threesides, Submission No.19, p.1.

<sup>234</sup> Threesides, Submission No.19, p.1.

<sup>235</sup> Threesides, Submission No.19, p.1.

<sup>236</sup> Threesides, Submission No.19, p.1.

The region surrounding the ACT offers a diverse range of compelling nature based destinations and tourism experiences focussed mainly around coastal and snowy mountains areas in state and national parks. This includes bushwalking, cycling, boating, surfing, sightseeing, snow-sports, educational tours, photography, 4WD touring, camping and caravanning. In these coastal and snowy mountains areas, the tourism industry use nature as the key drawcard for tourists providing a range of services including accommodation, tours and guides, food and beverage, equipment rental and supplies.<sup>237</sup>

### **Relationship with national attractions**

6.24    Threesides also underlined, in its submission, that:

The focus of tourism promotion for the ACT is national attractions, exhibitions and events such as Australia's War Memorial, National Gallery and events such as Floriade. These attractions and events draw a significant number of tourists to Canberra with a significant economic impact on the local economy and should continue to be a focus for tourism promotion.<sup>238</sup>

6.25    It went on to suggest that nature-based tourism in the Region could build on the rates of tourists arriving to visit these attractions:

Enhancing the focus on nature-based tourism in the ACT will provide the opportunity to extend the length of stay and spend of the current visitor, and attract a new type of visitor to the ACT. Locals are aware of and enjoy the ACT's unique status as the Bush Capital with easy access to a range of nature-based recreation experiences, though this is something that the ACT tourism industry has yet to take advantage of.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Threesides, Submission No.19, p.2.

<sup>238</sup> Threesides, Submission No.19, p.2.

<sup>239</sup> Threesides, Submission No.19, p.2.

## Role for government

- 6.26 Threesides told the Committee that there was a significant role for government in developing the conditions in which nature-based tourism can expand. To ‘attract the nature-based tourist’:

the ACT Government will need to increase its focus on nature-based experiences in its marketing. Partnering with nearby regions that focus their marketing on attracting nature-based tourists the ACT also has potential by building itineraries and touring routes that include the ACT.<sup>240</sup>

- 6.27 In connection with this, Threesides noted that:

The tourism industry is a highly competitive marketplace and with minimal current investment in marketing the ACT’s nature based tourism offering, it struggles to compete against other destinations. The opportunity exists for the ACT government to partner with industry in creating promotions that raise its profile as a nature-based tourism destination.<sup>241</sup>

- 6.28 Threesides proposed that government should be a major player in delivering the necessary infrastructure for nature-based tourism. It stated that the ACT Government had already acknowledged that ‘infrastructure is an important aspect of providing exceptional nature-based experiences for locals and tourists alike’ in its upgrade of Tidbinbilla and ‘development of the Gibraltar Track and Stromlo Forest Park and the upcoming Centenary Trail project’.<sup>242</sup>

- 6.29 However, the submission suggested ‘a clear plan for accommodation options for nature-based tourists is lacking and impacting the development of the industry’.<sup>243</sup> There was:

a severe lack of accommodation options for campers, caravanners and cabins in ACT nature areas. These are the preferred accommodation options for nature-based tourists and with limited options available, have

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<sup>240</sup> Threesides, Submission No.19, p.2.

<sup>241</sup> Threesides, Submission No.19, p.3.

<sup>242</sup> Threesides, Submission No.19, p.2.

<sup>243</sup> Threesides, Submission No.19, p.3.

created a barrier to attracting them to the ACT. The opportunity exists for the ACT government to partner with private industry to create and run these accommodation options, providing a revenue stream for future investment in infrastructure. A similar model has been used by NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service who run accommodation operations in national parks.<sup>244</sup>

## **Research**

- 6.30 Threesides recommended consulting Tourism Australia, as it had ‘previously commissioned research into the nature based tourism sector and have access to a range of data on the economic impact of the nature tourist’.<sup>245</sup> The submission provided one 2009 Tourism Research Australia report as an appendix. That report is discussed in Chapter 8 of this Report.<sup>246</sup>

## **Makin Trax**

- 6.31 In its submission, Makin Trax described itself as ‘a specialist in the field of designing and constructing walking, mountain bike and multi-use trails’.<sup>247</sup>
- 6.32 This submission advised that Makin Trax has ‘has had the opportunity to observe and follow developments in other regions around Australia and the world’ and ‘It is our firm belief that eco tourism is a growing and profitable market for those jurisdictions that implement and roll out quality initiatives.’<sup>248</sup>

## **Ecotourism opportunities in the Australian Capital Region**

- 6.33 The submission suggested that ‘Effectively done, Canberra has the potential to be known as a national and international destination for eco / nature based tourism’.<sup>249</sup> It explained that:

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<sup>244</sup> Threesides, Submission No.19, p.3.

<sup>245</sup> Threesides, Submission No.19, p.3.

<sup>246</sup> Threesides, Submission No.19, p.3.

<sup>247</sup> Makin Trax, Submission No.23, p.1.

<sup>248</sup> Makin Trax, Submission No.23, p.1.

<sup>249</sup> Makin Trax, Submission No.23, p.1.

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.<sup>250</sup>

## Role of infrastructure

6.34 The submission argued that the provision of appropriate infrastructure is critical for ecotourism, citing examples in the ACT construction of infrastructure that resulted in increases in ecotourism activity.

6.35 One example was Stromlo Forest Park, which was, the submission suggested 'a great example of legacy building for the community that also attracts national and international visitors but first and foremost serves the local community'.<sup>251</sup> This Park had:

almost single handedly put Canberra on the radar as a great place to visit to mountain bike. There is not a that [sic] 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!<sup>252</sup>

6.36 Further:

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.<sup>253</sup>

6.37 Makin Trax also argued that at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve:

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<sup>250</sup> Makin Trax, Submission No.23, p.1.

<sup>251</sup> Makin Trax, Submission No.23, p.2.

<sup>252</sup> Makin Trax, Submission No.23, p.2.

<sup>253</sup> Makin Trax, Submission No.23, p.2.

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* [sic], an 1800s cottage to the public and it is [consistently] 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"! <sup>254</sup>

6.38 It broadly observed about these developments that:

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. <sup>255</sup>

## Development and coordination of ecotourism

6.39 While Makin Trax found that these developments were positive, it noted that:

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 [sic] been exploited in any meaningful way with an eye on tourism. <sup>256</sup>

6.40 In relation to this, the submission advocated that it was critically important that current infrastructure be connected and shaped cohesively, taking 'Canberra closer to the point where its hidden treasures can be exploited'. <sup>257</sup> It stated that:

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 [infrastructure] by gaining an

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<sup>254</sup> Makin Trax, Submission No.23, p.2.

<sup>255</sup> Makin Trax, Submission No.23, p.2.

<sup>256</sup> Makin Trax, Submission No.23, p.2.

<sup>257</sup> Makin Trax, Submission No.23, p.2.

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.<sup>258</sup>

- 6.41 By way of example of better practice infrastructure development, Makin Trax offered that Tidbinbilla, 'the bridge between Kosciusko and Canberra City', needs:

...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.<sup>259</sup>

- 6.42 More broadly, Makin Trax advised that:

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.<sup>260</sup>

- 6.43 The means to do this, the submission suggested, was to follow through with the Trails Strategy:

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.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Makin Trax, Submission No.23, pp.2-3.

<sup>259</sup> Makin Trax, Submission No.23, p.3.

<sup>260</sup> Makin Trax, Submission No.23, p.3.

<sup>261</sup> Makin Trax, Submission No.23, p.3.

## Committee comment

- 6.44 In the Committee's view, the contributions considered in this Chapter add to and underscore those considered in previous Chapters.
- 6.45 Details of instances overseas where ecotourism has adversely impacted on the environment bring into sharp relief the need to impose appropriate controls on ecotourism, and to achieve a successful balance between access to, and preservation of, the natural environment. Positive examples also provide an important lead on how to establish an approach that is commensurate with protection of the environment.
- 6.46 In the Committee's view, these lessons are perhaps all the more pertinent considering the present low base of ecotourism activity in the Australian Capital Region. That is, there is an opportunity to set and further develop an appropriate balance before the ecotourism sector in the Region expands.
- 6.47 A critical point, in the Committee's view, is the need for further research on the significance and impacts of ecotourism in the Region. This forms the basis for Recommendation 6 of this Report, in Chapter 8. That Recommendation asks the ACT Government to enhance its information gathering, processing, and reporting on ecotourism in the Region.
- 6.48 As in other Chapters, the contributors considered in this one, concentrate on the importance of marketing and infrastructure. Significantly, they also address achieving a more coordinated approach to the development of ecotourism, particularly effective infrastructure and marketing.
- 6.49 Again, contributors noted that visitors to the Region often come to see 'national attractions' and may remain less aware of the Region's natural attractions. They also underline the possibility that, with an appropriate response, this could be changed so that visitors in the Region to visit national attractions visit natural ones too or visitors comes especially for the Region's natural attractions. This would benefit the Region's economy.
- 6.50 The Committee notes the important role of the ACT Government in providing infrastructure, such as transport, signage, and nature park tracks, that is necessary if the Region is to enhance its ecotourism sector.

- 6.51 In light of these matters, the Committee makes the following recommendation:

**RECOMMENDATION 5**

- 6.52 **The Committee recommends that the ACT Government makes the provision of appropriate tracks, signage and transport facilities a priority in its management of nature park assets and its tourism policy more generally.**



## 7 RISKS AND BENEFITS TO THE ENVIRONMENT

- 7.1 The Committee considered the potential risks and benefits to ecosystems as a result of ecotourism. These are discussed below.

### Risks of ecotourism to the environment

- 7.2 In its submission to the Inquiry, the ACT Government referred to the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment's 2011 *Report on Canberra Nature Park (nature reserves); Molonglo River Corridor (nature reserves) and Googong Foreshores Investigation* (the Nature Reserves Report).<sup>262</sup>
- 7.3 The submission advised the Committee that the Nature Reserves Report had 'identified nine nature reserves as being affected by visitor use', and that:
- Major impacts were evident on Mount Pleasant, Mount Ainslie, Mount Majura, Mount Taylor and The Pinnacle. Minor impacts were evident on Aranda Bushland, Black Mountain, Jerrabomberra Wetlands and Mount Mugga Mugga. Bruce Ridge Nature Reserve also has evidence of impacts.<sup>263</sup>
- 7.4 According to the submission, the specific effects included:
- vehicle, horse and human track disturbance leading to bare ground and erosion;
  - impacts by bike riders and trail bike riders on designated walking tracks and unofficial tracks;

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<sup>262</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, pp.6-7; Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment (2011) *Report on Canberra Nature Park (nature reserves); Molonglo River Corridor (nature reserves) and Googong Foreshores Investigation*, completed by the Commissioner July 2011, released by the Commissioner on 18 October 2011  
<[http://www.envcomm.act.gov.au/investigations/nature\\_reserves\\_investigation](http://www.envcomm.act.gov.au/investigations/nature_reserves_investigation)>, accessed 14 November 2011.

<sup>263</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, p.6.

- weed dispersal on vehicles and footwear; and
- rubbish dumping.<sup>264</sup>

7.5     The Acting ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment (the Commissioner) also commented in his submission that:

This Office has had limited involvement with the assessment of eco tourism activities in the ACT and region. However, in 2010/11 the Office investigated concerns over proposed commercial tours to be conducted by Conservation Volunteers Australia in Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve.<sup>265</sup>

7.6     The Commissioner then focused on risk mitigation:

This investigation demonstrated that there are processes that should be put in place when planning for eco tourism ventures to minimise any potential negative impacts. One of the recommendations to come out of the investigation [resulting in the Nature Reserves Report] was that a comprehensive policy for commercial operations on land zoned as National Parks, Nature Reserves and the Googong Foreshore be developed. This policy should be supported by guidelines for assessing tourism applications including protocols for communication, especially with the community.<sup>266</sup>

7.7     In addition to this recommendation that there be an overarching framework for the regulation of all commercial activities on reserves, the Commissioner emphasised the importance of engaging and educating the community:

The Office has made several recommendations around the management of the ACT's natural areas, in particular, the education and engagement of the community in planning and management. One of the recommendations to come out of the 2011 Canberra Nature Parks Investigation [the Nature Reserves Report] was to strengthen community awareness and involvement in management through measures such as holding nature reserve forums and developing and implementing a

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<sup>264</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, pp.6-7.

<sup>265</sup> Acting ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Submission No.15, p.2.

<sup>266</sup> Acting ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Submission No.15, p.2.

community education and awareness program promoting the ecological, health and social values and benefits, and appropriate uses of our nature reserves.<sup>267</sup>

7.8 The Commissioner went on to say that:

The development of such policies, protocols and guidelines toward eco tourism activities within the ACT and Region are vitally important in establishing consistent and comprehensive standards so that such activities are conducted in a sustainable manner and any negative impacts on the conservation values of the ecosystems (including landscapes, soils, waterways, flora and fauna and their connectivity) are minimised.<sup>268</sup>

### **Role of community groups**

7.9 In its submission, the Ginninderra Falls Association advised the Committee its view that ‘community-based groups play a significant part in promoting and contributing towards ecotourism goals’, and that that the maintenance of ‘the health of wilderness areas and national parks is driven by community demand’.<sup>269</sup> These statements are consistent with the views put by the Commissioner, above, regarding the role of community engagement in mitigating risks to nature park assets.<sup>270</sup>

### **Benefits of ecotourism to the environment**

7.10 The ACT Government’s submission indicated ways in which the Government believes that ecotourism-related activities in the ACT were making a positive contribution to the natural environment. These included the:

- endangered species breeding programs at Tidbinbilla.

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<sup>267</sup> Acting ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Submission No.15, pp.2-3.

<sup>268</sup> Acting ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Submission No.15, pp.2-3.

<sup>269</sup> Ginninderra Falls Association, Submission No.4, p.2.

<sup>270</sup> Acting ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Submission No.15, pp.2-3.

- inclusion of Namadgi and Tidbinbilla as ‘an integral part of the Australian Alps national parks cooperative management program’ and their promotion within the Australian Alps National Landscape initiative.
- ranger guided activities and programs at Tidbinbilla, which include ‘wildlife-focussed activities in the Sanctuary, guided walks, European cultural history and indigenous cultural interpretation’.
- Better Earth program, operated by Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) ‘which provides opportunities for volunteers to undertake environmental work’. The submission characterised this as ‘a small but growing sector of the inbound tourism industry as it caters for international visitors who wish to have a hands-on experience in an environmental project’.
- Australian National Botanic Gardens’ contributions to the conservation of the Region’s ecosystems by holding free guided walks, holiday workshops, and weekly talks; by making available classroom resources; and via its research into ‘plant classification and biology’.
- National Arboretum, by virtue of it including plantings of threatened species, and its future role as an ‘information centre for visitors’, an ‘an educational research facility’, and a ‘tourist destination’.<sup>271</sup>

7.11 Other facilities mentioned in this regard were the National Zoo and Aquarium, the Australian Reptile Centre, and the Canberra Nature Park.<sup>272</sup>

7.12 In its submission, the Eurobodalla Shire Council stated that there were a number of examples of where ‘tourism businesses have directly improved the ecosystems on which they operate’. In one instance, the Council advised the Committee:

land that was un-managed was purchased from a grazier and with the economic incentive of a tourism business, it has been improved by the removal of a [cannabis] plantation, several bird traps and a number of noxious weeds like bitou bush and asparagus fern.

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<sup>271</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, pp.5-6.

<sup>272</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, p.6.

The next stage of development, if approved, will result in the operator committing to a Property Vegetation Plan which will effectively make this a Private National park.<sup>273</sup>

7.13 The Council went on to note that this ‘operator is also a passionate advocate encouraging others to adopt similar principles although not an [accredited] ecotourism business’.<sup>274</sup>

7.14 The Council underlined how:

Many tourism businesses in the Shire seek to educate people directly about the environment they are in. Still more inspire people to take enjoyment from nature based experiences that they would not see in their normal city based lives.<sup>275</sup>

7.15 It also said that ‘These people can become advocates for preserving the natural environment and thus contribute to the conservation and preservation of [ecosystems]’.<sup>276</sup>

7.16 The Council went on to say that most ‘tourism operators in the region are focused on the sustainability of tourism because they know that’s what their customers want’<sup>277</sup> and that:

The big opportunity for ecotourism is to “seriously” engage the public with conservation and thus make a positive contribution in protecting wildlife habitat and reducing consumption of finite resources.<sup>278</sup>

## Balance between risks and benefits

7.17 In his submission, Mr David Hogg advised the Committee that:

Viewed objectively, there is little evidence of ecotourism and related activities detracting from the conservation and restoration of ecosystems

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<sup>273</sup> Eurobodalla Shire Council, Submission No.17, p.2.

<sup>274</sup> Eurobodalla Shire Council, Submission No.17, p.2.

<sup>275</sup> Eurobodalla Shire Council, Submission No.17, p.1.

<sup>276</sup> Eurobodalla Shire Council, Submission No.17, p.1.

<sup>277</sup> Eurobodalla Shire Council, Submission No.17, pp.1-2.

<sup>278</sup> Eurobodalla Shire Council, Submission No.17, pp.1-2.

throughout the region. The greatest impacts tend to be associated with the provision of physical infrastructure (e.g. roads, parking, walking tracks, visitor centres) but such impacts, if well planned and managed, are a small price to pay for the substantial social benefits of enabling natural areas to be used and appreciated.<sup>279</sup>

## **Committee comment**

- 7.18     In the Committee's view, the recommendation of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment is well made. The examples of risks and benefits to the environment from ecotourism highlight the need for a comprehensive framework to regulate all commercial activities across nature park assets. They also highlight the need, identified by other contributors to the Inquiry, to raise both the quality and quantity of information gathered about impacts on nature park assets.
- 7.19     While it may be the case that negative impacts currently appear to be isolated and moderate, it is vital to improve the comprehensive understanding of impacts if ecotourism is to be expanded and promoted as part of the overall tourism strategy for the Australian Capital Region.

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<sup>279</sup> Mr David Hogg, Submission No.12, p.3.

## 8 CONTRIBUTION TO THE REGION'S ECONOMY

### Scope of ecotourism's economic contributions

- 8.1 With regard to the economic contributions of ecotourism, the Director of Australian Capital Tourism told the Committee that 'there are about 1.8 million domestic overnight visitors to the ACT each year', of which 'nature-based tourism' visitors make up 'about 196,000 of those domestic overnight visitors...'<sup>280</sup>
- 8.2 In its submission, the ACT Government drew on data provided by Tourism Australia for the 2009 calendar year to advise that Australia-wide, the:
- total number of domestic overnight 'nature' visitors for the 2009 calendar year was 12.46 million, and they constituted 19 per cent of all domestic overnight trips in Australia.
  - total spend from these visitors was \$12.6 billion, with an average spend of \$178 per night.
  - Domestic Daytrip 'Nature' Visitors were 12.55 million and they comprised nine per cent of all domestic daytrips in Australia and spent, in total, \$1.2 billion, with an average spend of \$99 per trip.
  - International 'Nature' Visitors were 3.3 million, they were 64 per cent of international visitors to Australia, and they spent in total spend \$19.5 billion, with each spending, on average, \$141 per night.
  - international and domestic day visitors' most popular activity was visiting national parks/state parks, while more domestic overnight visitors chose bushwalking.
  - international nature visitors to Australia have been increasing at an average annual rate of three per cent since 2003, but despite this, international

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<sup>280</sup> Mr Ian Hill, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.2.

nature visitors have formed a decreasing part of market share, down from 69 per cent in 2005 to 64 per cent by 2009. This means that growth in consumption of experiences other than nature based ones by international visitors has been growing at a faster rate. Participation in nature activities has remained flat in both the domestic overnight and domestic daytrip markets.<sup>281</sup>

8.3 The ACT Government submission also provided more recent data, for the calendar year ending 2011. This provided a picture of numbers of nature-based visitors to the ACT and some elements of the resulting contributions to the ACT economy for the year ending December 2011:

- the National Visitor Survey, undertaken by Tourism Research Australia, indicated that a total of 196,000 domestic overnight visitors to the ACT undertook outdoor/nature activities. This represents 11 per cent of total domestic overnight visitors to the ACT during this period.
- there were 85,000 domestic day trip visitors to the ACT who undertook outdoor/nature activities. This represents five per cent of total domestic daytrip visitors to the ACT during this period.
- of all international visitors to the ACT in 2011, 172,926, a total of 28,440 or 16 per cent of the ACT's international visitors, stated that they visited ACT national parks/natural bushland.
- total visitation to Tidbinbilla reached 220,000 in 2011-12. The respective percentages of interstate and international visitors to Tidbinbilla is not known. Revenue from entry passes and retail sales at the Tidbinbilla Visitor Centre amounted to approximately \$300,000.
- Birrigai Outdoor School's operations generated revenue of almost \$1 million in the same period.<sup>282</sup>

## Tourism and Transport Forum Australia

8.4 In its submission, the Tourism and Transport Forum Australian stated that:

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<sup>281</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, p.7.

<sup>282</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, pp.7-8.

Nature-based tourism makes a significant contribution to the Territory tourism economy. In 2010-2011, 393, 500 international and domestic overnight visitors participated in some form of nature-based activity in the territory, including visiting national parks, botanical gardens and wildlife parks. This represents 6 per cent of domestic overnight travellers and 7 in 10 international visitors, making the nature-based sector particularly important for the territory's tourism exports.<sup>283</sup>

- 8.5 The Forum also stated that nature-based tourists to Australia spend more than other tourists:

Nature-based visitors are a high-yield segment of the visitor economy, with international nature-based visitors to Australia spending \$3,841 per trip in 2010-2011, \$497 more than the average international visitor. Meanwhile, domestic overnight nature-based visitors spent \$945 per trip, \$321 more than the average domestic overnight visitor. Nature-based visitors also stay longer per trip, with international nature-based visitors staying an average 7 nights longer and domestic nature-based visitors staying 2 nights longer.<sup>284</sup>

- 8.6 However, the Forum expressed concern at trends in international nature-based tourism to the ACT. While it noted 'the relatively steady performance of domestic nature-based tourism in the ACT over the past decade',<sup>285</sup> it advised the Committee that:

international visitor participation in nature-based tourism has declined in the ACT over the past decade in contrast to the national trend which has seen steady growth in this market segment.<sup>286</sup>

- 8.7 In light of this, the Forum counselled that:

Increasing the ACT's market share of domestic nature-based tourism and growing its share of international nature-based visitation to the ACT must therefore be a key priority for the ACT.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Tourism and Transport Forum Australia, Submission No.24, p.1.

<sup>284</sup> Tourism and Transport Forum Australia, Submission No.24, pp.1-2.

<sup>285</sup> Tourism and Transport Forum Australia, Submission No.24, p.2.

<sup>286</sup> Tourism and Transport Forum Australia, Submission No.24, p.2.

- 8.8 It also suggested that this was 'especially important given the significant role nature-based tourism plays in encouraging conservation and appreciation of the natural environment'.<sup>288</sup>

## Committee comment

- 8.9 It is a matter of concern to the Committee that the ACT Government and other submitters have apparently not been able to provide the Committee with more exact figures, first, on the value of ecotourism to the ACT economy and, second, on its value to the Australian Capital Region generally.
- 8.10 Although the lack of comparable data makes exact calculations difficult, the above figures cited by the ACT Government allow an approximate calculation of the value of nature-based tourism to the ACT. Using the 2009 overnight spend for 'nature' visitors of \$178 and multiplying it by the 2011 figure of 196,000 incoming domestic nature-based overnight visitors results in a figure of \$34,888,000.
- 8.11 This almost certainly underestimates the true revenue from nature-based tourism in the ACT because it:
- relies on an overnight visitor expenditure amount that is, at the time of this Report, three years out of date;
  - only counts domestic overnight stays, not those by international visitors; and
  - only counts visitation to the ACT, not to the Australian Capital Region.
- 8.12 The difficulties encountered in making this calculation highlight the need, already discussed in this Report, for a higher quality information about ecotourism in the Region.
- 8.13 The other matter of concern to the Committee is that while Tourism Research Australia gathers detailed data Australia-wide, the data presented by the ACT Government, does not appear to be collected against the same variables. In the

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<sup>287</sup> Tourism and Transport Forum Australia, Submission No.24, p.2.

<sup>288</sup> Tourism and Transport Forum Australia, Submission No.24, p.2.

Committee's view it is vital that the ACT Government collect data that is comparable to the Tourism Research Australia data so that the Region's experience can be accurately benchmarked against that of other states and territories.

- 8.14 In the Committee's view, this dearth of comparable, detailed data on ecotourism in the Region constitutes a serious obstacle to developing appropriate policies on ecotourism. This is because it frustrates gauging the scale of visitor numbers, what activities the visitors are engaging in and for what portion of their visit, and the associated economic implications. For this reason, the Committee makes the following recommendation:

#### **RECOMMENDATION 6**

- 8.15 **The Committee recommends that the ACT Government develop and implement, within the next 12 months, programs and tools to gather, store, analyse, and publish data on ecotourism and all nature-based tourism in the ACT and its region, on indices comparable to those used by Tourism Research Australia.**



## 9 REGULATION AND ACCREDITATION

### ACT Government submission

#### Regulation

- 9.1 With regard to regulation of ecotourism providers, the ACT Government submission detailed the 'criteria that commercial tour operators must address for the issue of a licence', if they are applying for permission to operate at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and Namadgi National Park. These criteria are provided for under the Tidbinbilla and Namadgi Plans of Management, and include conditions regarding the:
- size of commercial groups, including guides, for dispersed overnight camping;
  - size of commercial groups in relation to areas proposed to be visited and the activities to be undertaken;
  - frequency of visits;
  - the potential for the visits impacting on the environment, given current uses of, and impacts on, the area(s) to be visited;
  - potential impacts on other visitors, including exclusion of visitors as the result of commercial tours;
  - level of professional knowledge, training and indemnity of the operator;
  - accreditation of the operator, by, for example, Ecotourism Australia or another accreditor;
  - submission of trip plans and emergency evacuation procedures in case of emergency;
  - safety of participants and other visitors; and

- consistency of the proposed operation with the objectives and policies of the Tidbinbilla and Namadgi Plans of Management.<sup>289</sup>

9.2     In its submission, the ACT Government also detailed conditions that were specific to Tidbinbilla or Namadgi, including a provision under the Namadgi National Park Management Plan 2010 that new ‘commercial tour operators will be subject to an initial one year trial period. Satisfactory performance during this period will be a prerequisite to issuing a longer term licence’.<sup>290</sup>

9.3     With regard to this last point, the Government suggested in its submission:  
          that the committee consider an initial trial period for any new ecotourism activity or operation and that this trial period include research and monitoring of the activity to assess potential positive or negative impacts, both environmental and social.<sup>291</sup>

9.4     The submission observed that the ‘results of monitoring can inform the future development of ecotourism activities’. It also asked the Committee to consider ‘whether revenue raised from any new ecotourism activity could support research and monitoring of ecotourism’.<sup>292</sup>

### **Ecotourism provider accreditation**

9.5     The ACT Government submission referred to the eco tourism accreditation program administered by Ecotourism Australia:

The [Ecotourism Australia] ECO Certification program assures travellers that certified products are backed by a strong, well managed commitment to sustainable practices and provides high quality nature-based tourism experiences.<sup>293</sup>

9.6     The submission noted that the ‘[ECO] Certification Program was developed to address the need to identify genuine nature and ecotourism operators. It is

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<sup>289</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, p.8.

<sup>290</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, pp.8-9.

<sup>291</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, p.10.

<sup>292</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, p.10.

<sup>293</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, p.10.

accessible to all eco tourism businesses in Australia.’<sup>294</sup> The submission also pointed out that:

Tidbinbilla is accredited under the [ECO] Certification program as an Advanced Ecotourism provider. Tidbinbilla display the [ECO] Certification logo, which is a globally recognized brand. The brand assists travellers to choose and experience a genuine and authentic tour, attraction, cruise or accommodation that is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable.<sup>295</sup>

## Ecotourism Australia

### The organisation

- 9.7 The Chief Executive Officer of Ecotourism Australia gave her testimony to the Committee at a public hearing on 17 May 2012. She told the Committee that:

Ecotourism Australia is a national, not-for-profit industry association that is focused on development and support for the ecotourism, sustainable tourism, nature based tourism industry in Australia. This organisation was formed 21 years ago and was one of the first ecotourism organisations in the world.<sup>296</sup>

- 9.8 The Chief Executive Officer went on to say that:

In 1996 we developed and launched the first environmental certification for the tourism industry in the world. That certification program is now recognised by the UN sponsored Global Sustainable Tourism Council and we are one of only 10 organisations in the world who are recognised for their environmental certification for the tourism industry. So I guess that positions us as an organisation that is certainly at the forefront in the world when it comes to ecotourism, particularly certification and recognition of standards for the ecotourism, sustainable tourism and

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<sup>294</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, p.10.

<sup>295</sup> ACT Government, Submission No.30, p.10.

<sup>296</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.22.

nature tourism industries.<sup>297</sup>

## Certification programs

- 9.9 The Chief Executive Officer told the Committee about programs conducted by Ecotourism Australia. This included the Ecotourism Certification (ECO) program which, she explained, was:

the first program that we started in 1996. It used to be called the national tourism accreditation program and was renamed in 2003. It is a triple bottom line program so we are looking for economic business management criteria, environmental management criteria and also community social sustainability, so how the tourism operators deal in their community. It is a program that has the most tourism operators who have participated in that program and it is focused on a full nature base, so to achieve ecotourism certification 50 per cent of the experience has to be nature based. As I said, that is the program that most of our operators are involved in.<sup>298</sup>

- 9.10 Another Ecotourism Australia certification program was the Respecting Our Culture (ROC) program, 'for Indigenous tourism':

The respecting our culture program is for Indigenous tourism. Aboriginal Tourism Australia developed this certification when they were in operation and developed it in consultation with Indigenous people around the country. It is a certification based on authentic, credible Indigenous tourism experiences. We were invited to take that program over in 2008 when Aboriginal Tourism Australia lost a substantial amount of funding and ceased to exist. We have some operators who have taken on the ROC program in addition to ECO. We have turned ROC into a triple bottom line program as well.<sup>299</sup>

- 9.11 The Chief Executive Officer advised the Committee that:

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<sup>297</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.22.

<sup>298</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.22.

<sup>299</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.23.

Both ECO and ROC were pilot programs in the national tourism accreditation program by the federal government and were two of the three accreditation programs that were recognised at the launch of the T-QUAL tick in April last year at the Australian Tourism Exchange by the federal government. So we have been at the forefront of the national tourism accreditation framework process as well.<sup>300</sup>

- 9.12 The Chief Executive Officer noted that the other programs administered by Ecotourism Australia were the Climate Action Certification and EcoGuide Certification programs.<sup>301</sup>

### **Certification process**

- 9.13 The Chief Executive advised the Committee about the ECO program certification process:

The certification is a self-certification process. We have it online, which is what we prefer, for those people who are lucky enough to have good internet. We have a lot of remote and regional operators, as you would understand, so we have a workbook as well, a PDF version, that they can use. They work through the certification program. Within the certification we ask for operation plans, business plans, customer service, marketing plans. We have sections on responsible marketing. They need to have an environmental management plan. As they get up into the other levels they need to have interpretation plans et cetera. They need to provide us with all of that information.<sup>302</sup>

- 9.14 The next step in the process was to bring in external assessors:

These are assessors who carry environmental qualifications as well as having experience in the tourism industry. The environment assessors will then assess their application. In that assessment there is reference

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<sup>300</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.23.

<sup>301</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.23.

<sup>302</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.28.

checking, there are full reviews of websites, TripAdvisor et cetera. So it is quite comprehensive but it is still a desktop assessment.<sup>303</sup>

9.15 The Chief Executive Officer described the certification process as 'extensive':

Our certification is 165 pages in a workbook format. A lot of the operators find as they go through the process that it is a business development tool. So they do have to develop, they have to implement and they have to change processes and procedures to meet the criteria. Once they have gone through that assessment process they do become certified.<sup>304</sup>

9.16 Once certification was achieved, Ecotourism Australia conducted audits to ensure the certification requirements were complied with on a continuing basis:

We then do audits on them, face-to-face audits, once every three years. We have a complaints process. If they have an audit and they have corrective action, they have a period in which to adjust and respond to those corrective actions. If we are not happy with their response to the corrective actions, they will be suspended. They will then have to fund another audit. If we are not happy with the outcome of that, they will lose their certification. We have a complaints [from ecotourism consumers] process which also involves suspension, and having to fund a face-to-face audit...<sup>305</sup>

9.17 In respect of the complaints process, the Chief Executive Officer explained that:

With our complaints process we have more than 1,400 tourism experiences, so we certify experiences, not operators. Some operators have multiple products that they certify. We have more than 1,400 experiences, which equates to about 700 tourism operators around the country. We would probably get four or five complaints a year. We have an online mechanism for people to complain or it can come directly

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<sup>303</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.28.

<sup>304</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.29.

<sup>305</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.29.

through numerous different ways to us for managing complaints, and then we have a process. So we have quite a comprehensive compliance process.<sup>306</sup>

## **Certified ecotourism providers in the Australian Capital Region**

- 9.18 The Chief Executive Officer was asked about accredited ecotourism operators in the Australian Capital Region. She told the Committee that there was only one Ecotourism Australia accredited operator in the ACT, which was Tidbinbilla.<sup>307</sup>
- 9.19 However, she advised that there were a number of certified operators in the Region. The Chief Executive Officer indicated that in the Snowy Mountains there were five certified operators: Alpine Habitats, Kosciuszko Thredbo, K7, Reynella Rides and Thredbo Valley Distillery.<sup>308</sup> There were also 'three other operators that are in your area on the south coast [of New South Wales]'.<sup>309</sup>
- 9.20 On follow-up after the hearing, it emerged that while all the Snowy Mountains operators are within the Australian Capital Region, only one of the South Coast ones is, namely Beachcomber Holiday Park at Potato Point.<sup>310</sup>

## **Successful models of ecotourism**

- 9.21 The Chief Executive Officer told the Committee that successful instances of ecotourism occurred where:

you have a local government, a tourism organisation, a protected area manager, the regulatory framework and the tourism operator. The combination of all of those players in the success of this is absolutely crucial ... [you] kind of need to have all the sides combined.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.29.

<sup>307</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.23.

<sup>308</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.29.

<sup>309</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.30.

<sup>310</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, Email to Committee Secretary, 4 June 2012, published on Inquiry webpage.

<sup>311</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.26.

9.22 She elaborated that:

If you just want to do it as a marketing push, you need to be careful that you have the delivery behind the scenes and with the right experiences. Those right experiences need to have a regulatory framework that supports them and gives them longevity so that your destinational brand and marketing have longevity as well as credibility, authenticity and integrity. There is no point in developing a marketing strategy around ecotourism if you do not have the products but then you need the products to actually have a regulatory framework that allows them to flourish and work in partnership with the protected area manager. So if you get all of those lined up, that is the most successful model, from what I have seen.<sup>312</sup>

### **Example of an effective ecocertified operation**

9.23 The Chief Executive Officer told the Committee that a particularly successful example of these principles consisted in arrangements made between the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) and ecotourism providers operating in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. She told the Committee that GBRMPA:

certainly consider [these arrangements] as one of their most successful programs. It has multiple benefits, and I think there are some that they perhaps did not predict would happen. The immediate benefit is that about 55 per cent—the last figure that I saw—of tourists that go to the Great Barrier Reef are travelling with what they call a high standard tourism operator. They are operators that have achieved ecotourism or advanced ecotourism certification. A majority of the visitors are travelling with one of these operators, so that they are actually getting the experience that the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority are wanting the visitors to have on the reef. So that is a success.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.26.

<sup>313</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.24.

- 9.24 The Chief Executive Officer explained to the Committee that GBRMPA had enjoyed a high level of support for the program:

In a survey that they did last year, talking to tourism operators and people in communities up and down the Great Barrier Reef—local government, tourism offices et cetera, so not just the tourism operators themselves but the communities around the tourism operators—the high standard tourism operators program was rated at 75 per cent successful by all of those people surveyed. That was the highest of any of the programs that GBRMPA participates in. So communities around the tourism operators as well as the tourism operators themselves recognise the importance of the high standard tourism operators program.<sup>314</sup>

- 9.25 The Chief Executive Officer commented that:

The other benefit that I do not think they predicted would be as successful is the relationship with the tourism operators. Those high standard tourism operators are incredibly supportive of the Great Barrier Reef and now actively participate in a number of conservation activities with the Great Barrier Reef. They participate in Eye on the Reef. That is where the tourism operators actually report back to GBRMPA any changes in the environment that they see—change in species, outbreak of crown of thorns et cetera. The reef operators are going to the reef every day and in effect they extend the Great Barrier Reef custodianship of that environment. There is a huge amount of reef to be covered by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.<sup>315</sup>

- 9.26 The Chief Executive Officer advised the Committee that, in this way:

the tourism operators have become an extension of that custodianship, and they play an active role in conservation, in Eye on the Reef, in Beachwatch, and they keep an eye on crown-of-thorns outbreaks. They are even doing things like reporting back to the Great Barrier Reef the GPS coordinates when they sight whales moving up and down the Great Barrier Reef. So they are helping the marine park authority to build their

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<sup>314</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.24.

<sup>315</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.24.

scientific basis and knowledge about what is happening with species and with the conservation of the reef. That perhaps is an outcome that they did not expect to be as successful. That relationship has been phenomenally successful.<sup>316</sup>

9.27 She explained that:

I talk about the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority because it was such a landmark arrangement and it actually set the benchmark. It is perhaps a little less about what the natural attraction is and it is more about the relationship between the government agency and the permitting, the licensing and the tourism operator. What makes that program successful is that it is a partnership between the government and the private operator in that they are partners in the custodianship of a natural asset.<sup>317</sup>

### **Tourism operators' contributions to the environment**

9.28 The Chief Executive Officer of Ecotourism Australia concluded that this collaboration between the tourism operators and GBRMPA reflected requirements built into the Ecotourism Australia certification process:

Part of our certification requirements for new operators coming on is that they have to participate in those programs. To achieve ecotourism or advanced ecotourism certification you have to participate in some form of conservation in local and also international conservation.<sup>318</sup>

9.29 She also advised that one of the 'core principles of ecotourism is that the commercial operation helps to financially support the conservation of the protected area', and when 'the International Ecotourism Society started in 1990, that was a core premise of what ecotourism was about.'<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.24.

<sup>317</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.25.

<sup>318</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.24.

<sup>319</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.24.

## Extended permits granted by governments

- 9.30 The Chief Executive Officer told the Committee that in some jurisdictions governments had given extended permits to tourism operators who had been able to achieve higher levels of ecotourism accreditation. By way of example, she offered that 'Victoria are certainly rolling out extended permits for operators that have achieved certain levels of certification, to give them longevity.'<sup>320</sup>
- 9.31 The Chief Executive Officer noted that from 'a commercial operators' point of view':
- to have that opportunity, that certainty of having a 10-year or a 15-year permit as opposed to a three-year permit, allows them to make a business case for investment in additional or improved capital expenditure. It gives a value to their business, if they want to sell their business. Obviously with the permitting it depends on the jurisdiction but most of them allow a transfer of a permit to a new owner, ensuring that the standards and credibility criteria that they look at are transferred as well.<sup>321</sup>
- 9.32 She elaborated that for 'a tourism operator':
- to have that certainty and longevity for their marketing, to allow them to go into an international market and know that they have some certainty of business going forward, has a lot of benefits. That is why other jurisdictions are moving to that, because they recognise that with the good tourism operators that they are permitting, they want to keep them in the area. They also realise that the continual relicensing is a cost to government as much as a cost to the commercial tourism operator. It is almost like a risk management model that is being run over the licensing.<sup>322</sup>
- 9.33 The Chief Executive Officer told the Committee that an important component of effectively managing this process was to distinguish between low and high

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<sup>320</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.25.

<sup>321</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.25.

<sup>322</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.25.

risk tourism operators and to adopt different management approaches for each:

We do not have to manage as tightly the low risk operators as the high risk operators. There is the matter of how we decide who they are; therefore we put our resources into managing the high risk, and we create a partnership with the low risk operators.<sup>323</sup>

## Growth in ecotourism accreditation

- 9.34 The Chief Executive Officer told the Committee that the ECO program in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park had led to an expansion in ecotourism accreditation across Australia:

The success of that program has been borne out in the variations that have been duplicated around the country. In WA there are extended permits given by DEC WA [Western Australia Department of Environment and Conservation] to operators who carry certain levels of certification. Victoria is in the process of rolling out a similar program. South Australia has adopted a similar kind of process recognising that certification, permitting and giving access. They are rolling that process out. That program with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority has become a benchmark. Other protected area managers are now looking to that as a success. In Queensland they are rolling out the tourism and protected areas program. ECO certification is going to be mandatory to get a commercial tour operators licence in the parks in Queensland.<sup>324</sup>

## Effective branding

- 9.35 The Chief Executive Officer offered that there were particular elements of marketing for ecotourism that were critical to its success. In particular, she said that:

the brands that work best for destinations are the ones that are intuitive and easily understood without explanation. That is a key issue about a

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<sup>323</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.25.

<sup>324</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.25.

destination brand. But the other definition is that it has to be irreplaceable, which means it has to be something you cannot get anywhere else.<sup>325</sup>

9.36 She underscored this by relating that:

I have had people say to me: "One of the problems Australia is having with international tourism is that we don't have enough five-star hotels. If we had another decent five-star hotel in Sydney, we'd be right." I do not think there is anyone sitting in San Francisco saying, "Gee, I'd love to go to Australia but there's just not enough five-star hotels." Or, "There's not enough casinos." These amenities are important to people when they travel but it does not make their decision to travel.<sup>326</sup>

9.37 The Chief Executive Officer explained:

We get a bit bored with it because we are close to it and we find it all a little clichéd, and there is jingoism and some issues around that. But if you speak to people from overseas, there are some immutable truths about Australia's natural assets that are irreplaceable. I mentioned the Great Barrier Reef. Then there are kangaroos and Uluru. With Tidbinbilla, there is the corroboree frog. These are absolutely irreplaceable natural assets and icons.<sup>327</sup>

9.38 She said this was central, both to achieving successful levels of ecotourism and generating economic benefits from it:

From my point of view at Ecotourism Australia, with respect to everything that you know about Australia as a place to visit from overseas, it is about what they know without explanation are our natural icons. If you understand that, as much as we get a bit bored with it, that is what works for them. That is what they want to see, and then we leverage off that to extend stays, expenditure and all the other things. They are going to eat, they might go to casinos and they might stay in five-star hotels. All of that kind of stuff is where they create the economic

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<sup>325</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.27.

<sup>326</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, pp.27-28.

<sup>327</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.28.

impact, and that is what you want from them.<sup>328</sup>

## Committee comment

- 9.39 It is the view of the Committee that the regulation and accreditation issues raised in the submissions and testimony are of great importance to ecotourism in the Australian Capital Region. It is clear that successful models exist for ecotourism in Australia, and that this provides a clear path to follow for the ACT. In light of this, the Committee makes the following recommendations:

### RECOMMENDATION 7

- 9.40 **The Committee recommends that the ACT Government promote and facilitate certification by Ecotourism Australia for ecotourism operators in the ACT.**

### RECOMMENDATION 8

- 9.41 **The Committee recommends that the ACT Government engage, both as a participant and facilitator, in the kind of partnership arrangements which characterise the best instances of ecotourism in the country.**
- 9.42 It is also clear to the Committee that there are challenges in marketing ecotourism activities in the Region. There is some way to go before the Region's ecotourism destinations are, to borrow the words of the Chief Executive of Ecotourism Australia, 'intuitive and easily understood without explanation'.<sup>329</sup>
- 9.43 The Committee believes that despite the competition from other natural assets in Australia which have well-established profiles, it is, indeed, possible for the Region to develop, over time, a similarly high profile. The Committee also believes that while the Region's natural assets themselves are important, and provide critical components of brand recognition for tourist marketing, there are other subsidiary components which can favourably 'brand' natural assets.

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<sup>328</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.28.

<sup>329</sup> Ms Kym Cheatham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 17 May 2012, p.27.

- 9.44 One of the unique qualities of the Region's natural assets that has become evident in the course of this Inquiry is their proximity to urban centres. The Committee believes that this represents an opportunity for the ACT to increase tourists' access to the Region's natural assets, and that this, together with effective marketing, will raise the Region's ecotourism profile.
- 9.45 As has been the subject of other recommendations in this Report, this profile can be lifted by the ACT ensuring that tourists seeking a nature experience can be transported seamlessly between their point of entry to the ACT, their accommodation, and natural destinations. This enhanced access also requires, as several submitters have told the Committee, a coordinated approach to the recognition, management and linking of all of the Region's ecotourism assets.
- 9.46 The Region's profile as an ecotourism destination can also be improved by ensuring that visitors receive high quality education about the ecotourism sites they visit. The Region is well positioned to provide this given it hosts the Australian National Botanic Gardens. The notable educational services delivered by the Australian National Botanic Gardens are an example of what the ACT should expand on, if it wishes to establish ecotourism as a strong component of its tourism sector.
- 9.47 This forms the basis of Recommendation 9 in the following Chapter.



## 10 PROMOTING THE BENEFITS OF ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY

### Introduction

- 10.1 This Chapter responds to the Inquiry's Term of Reference 1) e), which reads:
- 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.

### Stakeholder comment

#### Acting Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment

- 10.2 The Acting ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment (the Commissioner) advised the Committee in his submission that it was important that:
- effective monitoring and review procedures need to be developed for all eco tourism ventures, whether conducted by government agencies, commercial enterprises or volunteer groups. Such monitoring needs to include an assessment of stated objectives, impacts on the areas of visitation and the sustainability of the activities.<sup>330</sup>
- 10.3 He noted that:
- Many of the eco tourism activities taking place in the ACT and region are self guided. The development of measures to educate the public about

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<sup>330</sup> Acting ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Submission No.15, p.3.

their responsibilities in using these areas is important in their effective management.<sup>331</sup>

10.4 The Commissioner advised that an example of this was:

as part of the management of the Australian Alps National Parks a “leave no trace” guide and a number of “codes” have been developed to inform visitors to the park about practical measures they can take to minimise their impact on the areas they are visiting.<sup>332</sup>

10.5 He advised the Committee that:

Such educational initiatives need to be continued and expanded to other ACT and regional locations. In addition, the development of linkages with community environmental groups such as ParkCare and Landcare, as well as with schools and universities, are recommended.<sup>333</sup>

10.6 The Commissioner argued that:

In order to promote ecologically sustainable practices, it is important for the managers of areas where eco tourism may occur to be actively involved in providing input to the development, promotion and conduct of activities that can educate members of the public and enhance and sustain the environment.<sup>334</sup>

## **Australian National Botanic Gardens**

10.7 Representatives of the Australian National Botanic Gardens (ANBG) also commented on the need for an expansion in the education provided to ecotourists. An Assistant Director of the ANBG told the Committee that she thought that there were:

opportunities in Canberra to enhance the tourism training using such facilities as CIT [the Canberra Institute of Technology]. They do have some tourism training at the moment but it is not specifically focused on ecotourism and it does not currently link in with something like training

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<sup>331</sup> Acting ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Submission No.15, p.4.

<sup>332</sup> Acting ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Submission No.15, p.4.

<sup>333</sup> Acting ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Submission No.15, p.4.

<sup>334</sup> Acting ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Submission No.15, p.4.

that would support something like the Ecotourism Australia accreditation. So I think there are opportunities to look at that. Obviously that has to link with the demand within the region for that. Recognising how wide the region is with the map that you provided us, I think there would be a demand for that, particularly as Canberra is on the doorstep of the Australian alps and the Australian alps national parks.<sup>335</sup>

## Committee comment

- 10.8 In line with the Committee's comment in the previous Chapter, the Committee believes that further enhancement of the educational part of ecotourism is an important part of an effective branding of the Australian Capital Region. The Region cannot change its landscapes, but it can change the level of ecotourism services that it provides, including delivery of information about the environment to ecotourists.
- 10.9 In light of this, the Committee makes the following recommendation:

### RECOMMENDATION 9

- 10.10 **The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider ways to support the provision of environmental and sustainability education to ecotourists to the ACT, including the training of ACT ecotourism providers to deliver this education.**

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<sup>335</sup> Dr Lucy Sutherland, *Transcript of Evidence*, 24 May 2012, p.45.



## 11 CONCLUSIONS

- 11.1 The Committee has identified a number of priorities that require attention if the Australian Capital Region is to advance its current capacities to attract ecotourists.
- 11.2 In summary, and as recommended in this Report, this effort will involve:
- strengthening research, information-gathering, and reporting on the amount and nature of ecotourism activity in the Region;
  - planning coordinated approaches to the development and implementation of development and management of ecotourism sites and activities in the Region;
  - providing suitable infrastructure to support ecotourism, particularly transport between urban centres and ecotourism destinations and between these destinations;
  - training students in ecotourism in ways that enable them to educate ecotourists to the Region about the natural environment; and
  - mounting enhanced marketing that positions ecotourism as a significant component of the Region's tourism sector and establishes the Region as a brand and attraction for both domestic and overseas visitors.
- 11.3 The Committee believes these actions would be logical and beneficial extensions of the current capacities of the Region to attract visitors and of the Region's governance which is geared toward respecting and enhancing the natural environment. In the Committee's view, these are important objectives, which warrant further attention, investment, and follow-through.

Ms Meredith Hunter MLA

Chair

22 August 2012



## APPENDIX A: Witnesses

The following witnesses appeared before the Committee.

### Thursday, 17 May 2012

- Ms Kym Cheatham, Chief Executive Officer, Ecotourism Australia.
- Mr David Dawes, Director-General, Economic Development Directorate.
- Mr Ian Hill, Director, Australian Capital Tourism, Tourism, Events and Sport Division, Economic Development Directorate.
- Mr Robert Neil, Acting ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment.
- Mr Shane O'Leary, Executive Director, Tourism, Events and Sport Division, Economic Development Directorate.
- Dr Aileen Power, Senior Manager, Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment.

### Thursday, 24 May 2012

- Mr Graeme Barrow, Member, Ginninderra Falls Association Committee.
- Mr Peter Byron, General Manager, Australian National Botanic Gardens.
- Mr Damon Cusack, Member, Ginninderra Falls Association Committee.
- Mr Simon Corbell, MLA, Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development.
- Mrs Anna Hyles, Member, Ginninderra Falls Association Committee.
- Dr Lucy Sutherland, Assistant Director, Australian National Botanic Gardens.
- Dr Chris Watson, President, Ginninderra Falls Association Committee.

### Thursday, 31 May 2012

- Ms Penelope Figgis, private citizen.
- Mr Rod Griffiths, President, National Parks Association (ACT).
- Mr Clive Hurlstone, Committee Member, National Parks Association (ACT).



## APPENDIX B: Submissions

The Committee received the following submissions to the Inquiry:

- Submission No. 01, Orienteering ACT.
- Submission No. 02, Australian National Botanic Gardens.
- Submission No. 03, Mr Bruce Gibbs, Cuppacumbalong and Mr Geoff Hyles, Castle Hill.
- Submission No. 04, Ginninderra Falls Association.
- Submission No. 05, Australian Wildlife Protection Council.
- Submission No. 06, Ms Naomi Henry.
- Submission No. 07, Australian Mountain Running Association.
- Submission No. 08, Thredbo Valley Distillery Pty Ltd.
- Submission No. 09, Professor Sara Dolnicar and Mr Emil Juvan, University of Wollongong.
- Submission No. 10, Mr Martin Chalk.
- Submission No. 11, Walter Burley Griffin Society Inc.
- Submission No. 12, David Hogg Pty Ltd.
- Submission No. 13, ACT Flora and Fauna Committee.
- Submission No. 14, South East Regional Organisation of Councils.
- Submission No. 15, Acting ACT Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment.
- Submission No. 16, Professor Keith Lyons, University of Canberra.
- Submission No. 17, Eurobodalla Shire Council.
- Submission No. 18, Ms Monica Yeung, Gondwana Dreaming.
- Submission No. 19, Threesides.
- Submission No. 20, Canberra Region Fishing Alliance.
- Submission No. 21, Friends of Australian National Botanic Gardens.
- Submission No. 22, Mr Michael Sim.
- Submission No. 23, Makin Trax Australia.
- Submission No. 24, Tourism and Transport Forum Australia.

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- Submission No. 25, Queanbeyan City Council.
- Submission No. 26, National Parks Association of the ACT.
- Submission No. 27, Yass Valley Council.
- Submission No. 28, Cooma-Monaro Shire Council.
- Submission No. 29, Outward Bound Australia.
- Submission No. 30, ACT Government.