

SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO CURRENT AND POTENTIAL ECOTOURISM IN THE ACT AND REGION

Thankyou for the opportunity to comment on the subject of ecotourism in the ACT region. Ecotourism, if pursued sensitively can have many benefits. Equally, its misapplication can have the opposite affect. One consistent outcome is the long lasting consequences of its affects – be they good or bad.

The perception of ecotourism is important and will vary depending on the nature of the location in which it is being undertaken. One popular activity will serve as an example.

Horse riding is a popular activity that is seen by its adherents as a positive one. Given its natural environment and capacity to bring its adherents closer to nature it could be perceived as an ecotourism activity. However, it has an affect, inter alia, on vegetation, stream banks (and therefore water quality) and stability of land in sloping areas. These affects, when assessed on private land or Crown Land may not be considered significant, but in national parks they will be viewed more seriously. Although the objectives in law of national parks may vary slightly between the ACT and NSW, they are primarily in place as reserves for native flora and fauna and as places of refuge and retreat for humans. Accordingly, I believe that this difference in land use should be reflected in the terms of reference, particularly a) and b), by assessing national parks (including State Conservation Areas and Nature Reserves in NSW) apart from other land tenures.

The above example also highlights some of the interpretations that might be put on ecotourism, given its links to land and culture and the rural nature of the Capital Region. I suggest that the terms of reference should include, or make reference to, a recognised definition of ecotourism so that activities that are unsympathetic to ecosystem conservation can be eliminated.

Recent tourism developments in NSW have seen land excised from national parks for the purpose of five star and purportedly low impact tourism developments. Activities of this type fly in the face of ecotourism because they do not seek to integrate with the environment in such a way that allows tourists to connect with the environment. Arguably, they also cater to a small section of the community and limit the economic benefits that flow on to local communities. I suggest that term of reference e) captures my concerns in this area and would encourage its retention.

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