

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

### **Eurobodalla Shire Council Submission – April 2012**

#### **General**

The definition of ecotourism is an important issue and whilst the definitions used by Ecotourism Australia are good, many non-accredited businesses would also meet the definitions.

These definitions are also not widely known or understood by industry.

Indeed, it seems Eurobodalla Shire has only 1 accredited ecotourism business but it is a shire which markets itself as a nature based destination and the vast majority of activities in the shire would be based around nature. The shire has 54% of its area as National Park or bushland with a further 30% as state forest and nature is therefore one of its unique selling points.

Most local businesses are very small, over 85% have less than 5 employees and many have only owner / managers . It will always be extremely hard for these businesses to find the time to formalize accreditation. Accreditation should not therefore be the main point of Ecotourism but rather it should be more about making more tourism businesses adopt more of the accreditation criteria. A scheme which encourages voluntary accreditation would therefore have some merit.

In addition, the promotion of some standard definitions outside of a formal accreditation scheme would help operators and stimulate discussion

Eurobodalla Visitor Centres don't categorise businesses as Ecotourism based currently and have no criteria for the purpose. Nor do they get any consumer enquiries for 'Ecotourism' whereas they get many enquiries for nature based experiences.

In general the enquiry might like to consider what the aim of Ecotourism is. Are we aiming to force our visitors to limit their resource usage for the few days or weeks they are on holidays? Or, are we aiming to engage and educate our guests in the importance of the connection between our natural habitats and the ecology it supports, so that they go away enlightened and more likely to adopt similar principles in their everyday lives?

#### **Indirect contribution to ecosystem conservation (criteria b)**

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.

These people can become advocates for preserving the natural environment and thus contribute to the conservation and preservation of ecosystems. One local operator promotes itself as follows:

“Showcasing the NSW South Coast's pristine natural areas through Snorkelling, Kayaking, Surfing and Bushwalking allows people to experience the unique beauty of the region, fostering appreciation of natural environments and motivation to protect species within these ecosystems.

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Divisional Manager, Tourism & Economic Development  
Eurobodalla Shire Council

We hope this appreciation in turn contributes to wider environmental protection and support of creating a sustainable future, motivating individuals and groups to live more inline with ecologically sustainable practices.”

Most tourism operators in the region are focused on the sustainability of tourism because they know that’s what their customers want.

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.

#### **Direct contribution to ecosystem conservation (criteria b)**

Local operators can cite examples of where tourism businesses have directly improved the ecosystems on which they operate. In one example, 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 marijuhana plantation, several bird traps and a number of noxious weeds like bitou bush and asparagus fern.

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.

This operator is also a passionate advocate encouraging others to adopt similar principles although not an accredited ecotourism business.

#### **Economic contribution (criteria c)**

An approximate estimate would that nature based tourism is worth \$200 million in direct expenditure per year to the Eurobodalla Shire (using DNSW Nature & LGA based snapshot data)

#### **Ecotourism Products**

Below are a sample of tourism businesses who would identify themselves as ecotourism based:

The Bower, Luxury accommodation

Beachcomber Holiday Park Ecotourism Australia

Region X kayaking

Whale Watching tours

Total Eco Adventures

Montague Island

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## **Appendix – Ecotourism Australia definitions**

The definition of ecotourism adopted by Ecotourism Australia is:

"Ecotourism is ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation".

The 3 levels of ECO Certification are:

### **Nature Tourism:**

Tourism in a natural area that leaves minimal impact on the environment.

### **Ecotourism:**

Tourism in a natural area that offers interesting ways to learn about the environment with an operator that uses resources wisely, contributes to the conservation of the environment and helps local communities.

### **Advanced Ecotourism:**

Australia's leading and most innovative ecotourism products, providing an opportunity to learn about the environment with an operator who is committed to achieving best practice when using resources wisely, contributing to the conservation of the environment and helping local communities.