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# **Assessment of the Economic Value of Recreation and Tourism in Western Australia's National Parks, Marine Parks and Forests**

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Natural areas are important components of the recreation and tourism industry and contribute significantly to attracting tourists to Australia's regions. The annual growth in international participation in natural area tourism in Australia is 4.5% per annum (Chua 2001) with over 50% of all international visitors visiting a national park during their stay (Blamey 1995). Of international visitors surveyed 23% reported that the opportunity to experience Australia's natural landscapes and wildlife particularly influenced their decision to travel to Australia (Chua 2001). In the domestic market, over 9.9 million, nearly 6% of day trips and 13% of overnight trips included a visit to a national park and/or a bush walk (Chua 2001). This increase in demand has been reflected in the tremendous growth in the commercial nature, 'eco' and adventure tourism (NEAT) sector in Australia (Buckley 2000; Font and Tribe 2000).

The economic returns generated from the sustainable management of tourism in natural areas can be maintained over a long period of time for the benefit of a wide range of users and stakeholders. Investment in resources and infrastructure that support and encourage tourism and recreation in natural areas therefore provide opportunities for significant benefits to state and regional economies.

The contribution of natural area tourism to Western Australia's economy, however, has had little recognition and is under-valued. This is partly due to the fact that tourism and recreation to these areas has not previously been assessed or measured in an objective systematic way. The agencies responsible for the management and marketing of these natural areas, the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) and the Western Australian Tourism Commission (WATC) respectively, are constantly seeking the levels of recognition and resources to support and sustain these areas.

In an environment where public funds are finite, these agencies need to support their annual budget applications with the research information that justifies their allocation in the budget process. This study focuses on two case study regions, determined by the Co-operative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism node partners (CALM and WATC) as priority areas for economic assessment, namely the Gascoyne Coast Region and the Southern Forest Region. The economic assessment carried out as part of this project is intended to provide a tool for future assessments of natural areas.

The anticipated outputs of the this study are:

### Case Study Reports

- Final Case Study Report on the Economic Value of Cape Range National Park and Ningaloo Marine Park for Tourism and Recreation in WA in 2003.
- Final Case Study Report on the Economic Value of National Parks in the South West Forest Region of WA for Tourism and Recreation in 2003.
- Final report for the project.

### Rapid Assessment Toolkit

The rapid assessment toolkit will provide a step-by-step guide to replicate the process undertaken in the assessment of the case study regions together with the tools utilised to complete the assessment.

The tools will include:

- Visitor surveys in hard and soft copy format.
- Templates for analysing the surveys in software format.
- Report format templates for reporting results.

Conferences, Seminars and Publications on natural area evaluation for tourism and recreation

- Local stakeholder seminars/presentations will be conducted on the findings of the research. For example the regional tourism associations, local shires, and Chamber of Commerce associations in the case study regions.
- Tourism industry seminars will be targeted.
- Node partner agencies (CALM and the WA Tourism Commission) will release findings in media statements.