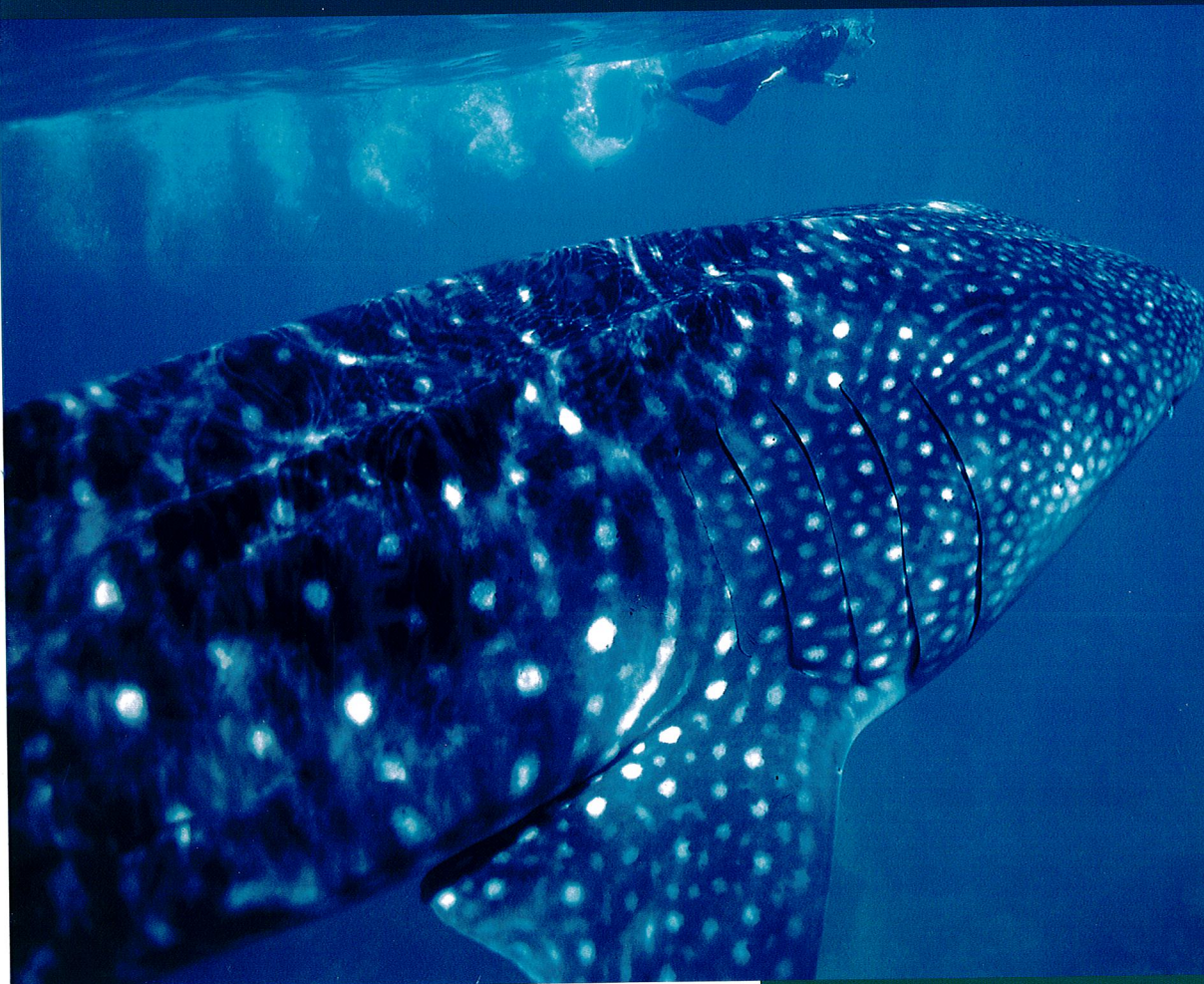


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# WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S NATURAL ADVANTAGE



Towards a Nature Based Tourism  
Strategy for Western Australia

## DISCUSSION PAPER

Nature Based Tourism Advisory Committee  
Western Australian Tourism Commission

August 1994



# FOREWORD

Western Australia is a wonderful place to live. We enjoy a magnificent climate and a lifestyle second to none in the world.

One of the primary reasons for our good fortune is the natural environment in which we live. Our wide open spaces, unusual plants and animals, beautiful beaches, unique landscapes, and relatively unspoiled natural areas are all treasures of which we can be justifiably proud.

Increasingly, tourists from all over the world are recognising these values and choosing Western Australia as a holiday destination because of the experiences our natural environment has to offer. Western Australians themselves are also travelling more in their State as they increasingly come to value its natural beauty.

The rapidly growing nature based tourism industry has the potential to provide great benefits for the State and its economy.

It is important that this emerging industry develops according to sound principles which will not only provide the greatest benefits to the State, but ensure the long term protection of the unique natural attractions on which the industry is based.

To this end, the Government is seeking your views to help us develop a nature based tourism strategy which will maximise the social, environmental and economic benefits this sector of the tourism industry offers Western Australia.

Following public comment on this discussion paper and consultation with industry and other interested people, a strategy will be finalised which will put Western Australia's nature based tourism industry on a firm footing to compete in the competitive international tourism market.

Most importantly, we can ensure that not only will tourism not threaten the environment, but that the industry can contribute to protecting our special areas and conserving our unique plants and animals.

The Government is committed to the sustainable development of the nature based tourism industry, and to capitalising on Western Australia's natural advantage for the benefit of every person in this State.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Court', followed by a long, sweeping horizontal stroke.

RICHARD COURT MLA  
PREMIER

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# INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an established part of the Western Australian economy and is one of the State's fastest growing industry sectors.

In 1992/93 tourism injected \$1.9 billion into the Western Australian economy, generated 62,200 employment opportunities (7.8 per cent of the State's total workforce) and contributed approximately 4.7 per cent to Western Australia's Gross State Product

By the year 2000, it is estimated that 6.7 million visitors (including Western Australians travelling around their own State) will visit Western Australia. Interstate and international visitors will account for 1.06 million or 15.8 per cent of this total. A significant proportion of this growth will be in nature based tourism.

Nature based tourism is recognised globally as one of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry.

Western Australia is uniquely placed to capitalise on the rapidly increasing demand for the nature based tourism experience. This state has outstanding natural features, unique plants and animals, and open spaces - we have a natural comparative advantage.

We will not be able to develop the full potential of the nature based tourism industry or ensure that it is sustainable, however, if we do not recognise its unique characteristics and develop strategies to accommodate them.

## A Nature Based Tourism Strategy for Western Australia

The Government has formed the Nature Based Tourism Advisory Committee comprising Government and private sector representatives. The Committee will oversee the development and implementation of a Nature Based Tourism Strategy for Western Australia which will provide the framework for the advancement and promotion of the industry in this State. The Strategy will:

- ☐ help to establish this State as a major national and international nature based tourism destination;
- ☐ maximise the social and economic benefits for Western Australia;
- ☐ identify ways that the industry can contribute to conservation and management of the natural phenomena on which it is based;
- ☐ address infrastructure requirements;
- ☐ examine the establishment of industry standards aimed at encouraging environmentally sensitive behaviour;
- ☐ identify current and potential market demands for nature based tourism, and provide direction on how these burgeoning markets may be tapped;
- ☐ identify barriers to the development of commercially viable nature based tourism businesses;
- ☐ streamline the planning and regulation processes, and integrate approaches across government boundaries and between agencies;
- ☐ identify tourism destinations and investment opportunities;
- ☐ identify opportunities for the involvement of Aboriginal people and communities;
- ☐ foster developments which are ecologically sustainable;
- ☐ recognise the potential to 'add value' to the unique natural attractions of Western Australia by providing high quality information to the visitor.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF NATURE BASED TOURISM



The World Tourism Organisation has predicted that the 450 million tourists in 1991 will have increased by 50 per cent by the end of the decade and doubled by 2010. This represents an average of 3.7 per cent growth in tourism in the 1990s (*The West Australian*, 1992). But even more significant for Western Australia is the prediction by a Stanford Research Institute study which estimates there will be a 10-15 per cent increase per annum in adventure or cultural tourism and a 25-30 per cent increase per annum in nature tourism (*A Sense of Place*, 1992).

Western Australia is a vast State covering almost a third of the Australian continent. Within the State are some of the most outstanding wilderness areas in the world - the World Heritage area of Shark Bay, the Ningaloo Reef, the Bungle Bungle (Purnululu National Park), the tall timber forests of the South West, the Kimberley coastline and the 258,000 square kilometre Great Sandy Desert to name a few.

The distinctive Western Australian environment is a major draw card for both domestic and international visitors. Most of the State's precious ecosystems and unusual landforms are contained in national parks and other conservation reserves, but there are also vast tracts of Western Australia outside of the reserve system which are appealing to visitors.

As demand to visit these areas increases, so will increased pressure come to bear on the environment. Tourism will be self-destructive if it damages the environment which it sells as an attraction. The release of the Western Australian Tourism Commission's document "Eco Ethics of Tourism Development" in 1989 was an important step forward in recognition of this issue (O'Brien, 1989). It is now generally accepted that tourism should be planned and developed with a sensitivity to the environment. In other words, it should be sustainable.

The benefits are significant. By marketing and providing visitors with an opportunity to travel to these areas and to discover the natural ecosystems, we have the opportunity to create new jobs and stimulate economic growth.

Another major benefit for the State in encouraging nature based tourism is that it integrates tourism development and conservation, providing an economic incentive for protection the environment.

Tourism is a global industry. There are many strong competitive forces at play. By focusing on our strengths and overcoming our weaknesses, the Nature Based Tourism Strategy will provide a five year strategic direction which will help position Western Australia as a unique destination in the minds of our customers, who demand and deserve truly authentic tourist experiences.

## What is Nature Based Tourism?

There has been much discussion about nature based tourism and ecotourism in recent times. "Ecotourism" has been defined as "that kind of tourism which is based on undisturbed natural areas, is non-damaging or degrading, contributes to protecting and managing areas used and is subject to an adequate and appropriate management regime" (Valentine, 1991). Ecotourism goes beyond sight-seeing to enhancing visitors' understanding of the scientific and ecological features of our natural attractions.

In this discussion paper we have called the type of tourism that features nature, "nature based tourism". Nature based tourism also encompasses culture because the cultures that visitors find attractive, particularly Aboriginal culture, are to a large extent shaped by the natural environment in which they are developed. Ecotourism is in effect nature based tourism that includes an educational component and is managed to be sustainable. Whatever term is used, it is clear that the number of people wanting to experience and understand natural areas, and the cultures which are associated with them, is increasing rapidly.

Nature based tourism can be as inexpensive as the cost of a "billy of tea" and the petrol for a half day visit to the bush. But nature based tourism also lends itself to high value low volume tourism. There are examples world-wide where nature based tourism commands premium price for participants. Much of the willingness of tourist to pay is based on the exclusive or unique nature of the activity involved.

Nature based tourism is a niche market experiencing extraordinary growth world-wide. It is widely regarded as being one of the fastest growing segments in international tourism and will contribute an ever-increasing proportion of the tourist dollar to the economy.



# WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S NATURAL ADVANTAGE

The Centre for International Economics in its report on the Economic Effects of International Tourism (CIE 1988) stated "We see Australia as a niche market, offering a particular and 'special' product. While the reasons for a foreign visitor visiting Australia may be many and varied, the principal ones appear to be:

- ☐ unique landscapes and wildlife (there is only one Great Barrier Reef, one country with kangaroos);
- ☐ safe, secure places (in particular, compared with other destinations where terrorism and tensions exist);
- ☐ sunny, favourable climate (with seasons opposite to the Northern Hemisphere);
- ☐ open spaces and beaches (in particular, compared with other destinations which are becoming overcrowded);
- ☐ relatively unspoilt and 'new' destination."

The uniqueness of our natural environment is one of this State's greatest tourist strengths. The mixture of attractions which include the natural features of climate, plants and animals, scenery, openness and unspoilt landscapes are found in a higher degree in Western Australia than elsewhere in Australia, and arguably most other places in the world. This is a consequence of a combination of factors which do not occur anywhere else in the world.

Western Australia is one of the oldest places on earth. Many of our landscapes have been subjected to more than 2 billion years of weathering and erosion. The stromatolites that occur at Shark Bay and Lake Clifton are the world's oldest living fossils. Our soils have been heated, cooled, drenched, desiccated and leached of nutrients for billions of years.

Western Australia is also an island in an island continent. The genes of our plants and animals have been effectively isolated from the rest of Australia and the rest of the world for millions of years. That is one of the reasons why we have a plant flora as diverse as any place on earth and it is why so many of our plants and animals grow and live only in Western Australia. There are over 12,000 different flowering plants in Western Australia. One of our national parks has more plant species than occurs in the whole of the United Kingdom.

The State also has a vast range of habitats: remnant rainforests, karri and jarrah forests, mangroves, heathlands, coral reefs and deserts. These are combined with bizarre landscapes, beautiful beaches and gorges, masses of wildflowers and features such as striped beehive domes of the Bungle Bungle massif and the meteor. crater at Wolfe Creek. In addition, there is relatively easy access to wild animals.

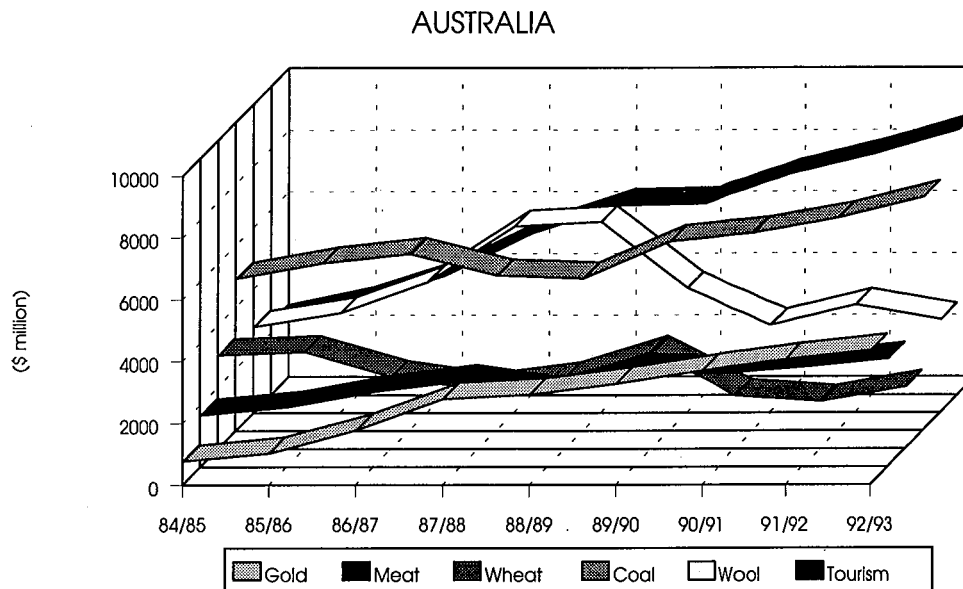
This great diversity, combined with our magnificent climate and the unique Aboriginal culture, gives Western Australia a distinct advantage as a destination competing for tourists.

With an effective and responsible strategy, Western Australia will be able to capture a significant proportion of Australia's nature based tourism market and become a key destination in the global market.

# ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Tourism is Australia's largest single export earner (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 - Comparative Export Earnings



Source: ABS & BTR

Australians themselves are travelling more within the country. The total trips within Australia rose from 45 million in 1984/85 to nearly 50 million in 1990/91. Between 1985/86 and 1989/90 intrastate travel in Western Australia grew by 5 per cent, interstate 2 per cent and overseas travel by 18 per cent (Western Australian Tourism Commission, 1991). The majority of visits within Western Australia are intrastate travel accounting for 87 per cent of all trips. Interstate and overseas travel accounted for 7 per cent and 6 per cent respectively of total visits in 1990/91 (Figure 2). However, interstate and overseas visitors spend significantly more than local tourists (Figure 3).

Figure 2 - Visitors to Western Australia  
(BY ORIGIN - 1992/93)

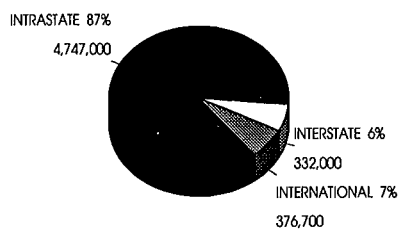
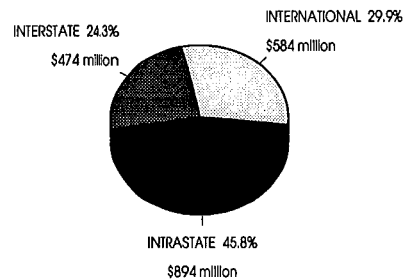



Figure 3 - Visitors to Western Australia  
(BY VALUE - 1992/93)







Clearly there is the potential to significantly increase the number of external visitors and disproportionately increase the economic contribution per visit by capitalising on what is unique to Western Australia. The challenge is to achieve the increase in numbers while increasing the value of the tourist product and at the same time ensuring that the natural environment which underpins our uniqueness is sustained in perpetuity.

Nature based tourism offers particular economic advantages to local communities. It encourages the dispersion of income directly to regional areas by substantially increasing the number of visitors to national parks and other nature based tourism destinations. The preference of the nature based tourism market is for less obtrusive developments which reflect environmental values. In many cases, the relatively low level of capital investment needed to satisfy this demand will provide increased opportunities for community based service providers.

Fostering this niche market could add thousands of new jobs to the State's tourism industry over the next decade.

Tourism is an employment intensive industry. For each one million dollars spent by tourists in Western Australia, 14 jobs are created in a range of industries which may, or may not be directly associated with tourism.

Given this estimate, spending by international visitors alone to the year 2000 will generate over 6200 new jobs in Western Australia. In addition, domestic tourism will contribute to the creation of many thousands of new jobs. A significant proportion of these will be in the nature based tourism sector.

## CONSERVATION BENEFITS

The development of a strong nature based tourism industry will make a major contribution to protecting the State's unique ecosystems.

Giving tourist good information and high quality experiences of the environment will foster greater understanding and sympathy for the environment, which is the most powerful force that can be unleashed to protect our natural heritage.

Importantly, nature based tourism will also generate additional funds which will help to protect and manage the conservation estate. Much of these new funds will come from direct interactions with tourists, however the general economic boost which an active tourism market provides will allow the Government to continue to invest in protection of our natural assets.

# REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

Each region of the State has environmental strengths of great appeal to nature based tourists. There are, however, some constraints to nature based tourism requiring positive solutions to be found.

## Zones of Opportunity

A Zone of Opportunity is a geographic area that preferably, but not essentially, encompasses an endemic resource as its core, as well as particular resources. An integral part of the Nature Based Tourism Strategy will be the identification of Zones of Opportunity.

Zones of Opportunity will be defined in terms of:

<i>Geographic area</i>	What is the area of the zone?
<i>Rationale</i>	Why should the area be declared a zone of opportunity? What are the resources?
<i>Basic Strategy</i>	What should be developed and how?
<i>Endemic Resources</i>	What are the unique features that form the very basis of the zone?
<i>Other Attractions</i>	What are the underlying attractions that are going to distinguish the zone from other zones? There would be the particular and constant attractions.
<i>Market Position</i>	What position does the zone currently hold in the market place?
<i>Traffic patterns</i>	How can the zone be accessed?
<i>Major development initiatives</i>	What significant developments, if any, are required for the zone to realise its potential?
<i>Infrastructure needs and limitations</i>	Are there any infrastructure deficiencies that need to be overcome?
<i>Aboriginal participation</i>	Are there opportunities for Aboriginal involvement?
<i>Management initiatives</i>	Who has responsibility for initiating management programs?

One of the purposes of the final Nature Based Tourism Strategy is to identify Zones of Opportunity and prioritise these.

Your input into this process is welcome. Can you (or your local community) identify any Zones of Opportunity?

## Issues and Constraints

The key issues and potential constraints confronting nature based tourism can be assessed in terms of:

<i>Economic Development</i>	What are the issues affecting investment, marketing research, relationships between private and public sectors, and promotion?
<i>Operators</i>	What issues are there specific to operators currently involved in nature based tourism?
<i>Infrastructure, Community and Social (including Aboriginals)</i>	What are the infrastructure needs? What are the potential impacts on local communities?
<i>Natural Environment</i>	What are the potential impacts on the natural environment?
<i>Sustainable Alternatives</i>	Are there alternative ways to develop?

Can you identify any constraints confronting nature based tourism?

# THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

The State Government is committed to the development of a nature based tourism industry based on the following principles:

1. Protection of the State's natural assets through minimal impact.
2. Sustainable development.
3. Returning benefits to the environment.
4. Ensuring visitor satisfaction.
5. Creating opportunities for local communities.
6. Encouraging Codes of Practice.
7. Promoting an understanding of the environment.
8. Understanding the link between nature and our cultural heritage.
9. Supporting and promoting the affinity between Aboriginal people and the land.
10. Recognising and exploiting national and international linkages.
11. Value-adding - increasing the value of the tourism experience by adding quality information and interpretation of our natural environment.

These principles will be pursued through the following strategies:

1. **Raising Awareness**
  - ☐ Raising awareness in the community of Western Australia's unique and beautiful environment;
  - ☐ Stimulating awareness in the tourism industry nationally and internationally of Western Australia's competitive advantage as a nature based tourism destination.
2. **Market Identification**

Finding out where nature based tourists are coming from and which are the best opportunities or market sectors for Western Australia to develop.
3. **Infrastructure**

Determining the transport needs, the types of accommodation and the facilities required to capitalise on the tourism opportunities offered by our natural wonders, and to cater for the demands and preferences of potential tourists.
4. **Product Development**

Stimulating product development through

  - ☐ identifying regional opportunities which have not been taken up;
  - ☐ streamlining the processes involved in development, eg. environmental assessment, management planning, collection of scientific data.
5. **Information**

Making scientific information about our plants, animals and landforms more readily accessible to tour operators so the quality of the nature based experience is enhanced for visitors.
6. **Promotion**

Promoting the State's nature based tourism industry through the publication of high quality brochures and other material, and strategic advertising.
7. **Standards**

Encouraging industry groups to establish standards and self-regulation for the quality and safety of the nature based tourism product.
8. **Providing Security**

Providing security to tour operators and creating the right environment for sound tourism investment.

## Key Government agencies

Many Government agencies impact on the pace of tourism growth, however the key agencies are the Western Australian Tourism Commission and the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM).

The role of the Tourism Commission is to accelerate sustainable development of the tourism industry for the longer term social and economic benefits of the State.

The Tourism Commission supports the orderly development of the industry in addition to providing many marketing opportunities for the industry to participate in.

CALM also plays a vital role in fostering nature based tourism. CALM is committed to the development of a sustainable nature based tourism industry in this State, and sees it as an essential partner in achieving its conservation objective.

CALM manages, on behalf of the community, 20 million hectares of lands and waters in Western Australia which contain many of the State's nature based tourism attractions. CALM is also responsible for the care and management of the State's native plants and animals.

## Creating the Right Environment for Investment in Nature Based Tourism

The Government has a valid role in regulating commercial activities within potentially sensitive natural areas. A completely free market situation would result in destruction of the natural assets. This is why there have been limits placed on the number of tour operators in sensitive areas such as Ningaloo Marine Park.

But at the same time, the nature and way in which regulation occurs must take account of the needs of the industry. In other words, we need to create the right conditions for commercial involvement while at the same time maintaining the integrity of the environment.

This raises questions such as:

- ☐ how long should leases or licenses be?
- ☐ should they be transferable?
- ☐ how do you reward people who have pioneered a nature based tourism opportunity?

There is also a 'critical mass' problem. Can government help to overcome the problems of getting a business venture started in a new area, or assist broader industry investment, so that it becomes self-perpetuating?

Obtaining the views of the industry and other interested groups and individuals on the role that Government should take will be a vital aspect of the development of the Nature Based Tourism Strategy.



# THE ROLE OF THE INDUSTRY

Without the private sector there can be no tourism industry.

Government fully recognises the vital role played by industry in providing the customer with enriching, exciting and unique tourism experiences while at the same time earning just economic reward.

The input of the tourism industry into this Strategy is vital.

## THE FUTURE OF NATURE BASED TOURISM

Western Australia is unique and is well placed to capitalise on the rapid growth in nature based tourism.

We live on the oldest part of earth. It is the reason why we have a treasure trove of natural places, plants and animals.

Nature based tourism can contribute to the economic well-being of the State and at the same time to the conservation of the plants, animals and places which are critically important to the quality of life of all Western Australians.

You can contribute to the sustainable development of this industry by informing us of your views on the principles and strategies outlined in this discussion paper, and the future directions you believe the industry should take. You may also be able to identify regional opportunities, constraints and any other issues confronting nature based tourism.

Comments from interested members of the public and the tourism industry are now being sought.

**Please send your submissions to:**

**Kevin Harrison  
Chairman  
Nature Based Tourism Advisory Committee  
16 St Georges Terrace  
PERTH WA 6000**

For further information and assistance contact Renata Zmak on (09) 220 1700



# GLOSSARY

<b>Conservation</b>	'the management of human use of the biosphere so that it may yield the greatest sustainable benefit to present generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations' (National Conservation Strategy for Australia)
<b>Constant Attractions</b>	Attributes that are widespread or have an intangible quality about them. (eg. good weather, safety etc)
<b>Development</b>	'the modification of the biosphere and the application of human, financial, living and non-living resources to satisfy human needs and improve the quality of human life' (World Conservation Strategy)
<b>Ecologically Sustainable Development</b>	'Using, conserving and enhancing the community's resources so that ecological processes, on which life depends, are maintained and the total quality of life, now and in the future, can be increased' (Ecologically Sustainable Development Working Groups 1991)
<b>Ecotourism</b>	Ecotourism is nature-based tourism that includes an educational component and is managed to be sustainable.
<b>Endemic Tourism</b>	Broadly defined as tourism which recognises <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>that each individual locality or community has its special character, and</li><li>that particular character or identity may well constitute its major attractiveness to tourists.</li></ol>
<b>Environment</b>	'All aspects of the surroundings of human beings as individuals or in social groups'. (Commonwealth Environmental Protection (IOP) Amendment No.12, 1987)
<b>Interpretation</b>	An educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, first hand experience and illustrative media, rather than simply by communicating factual information.
<b>Natural</b>	existing in or formed by nature
<b>Tourism Industry</b>	'the collection of all collaborating firms and organisations which perform specific activities directed at satisfying the particular needs of tourists' (Stear, Buckley and Stankey, 1989)
<b>Particular Attractions</b>	Attractions that are not in themselves unique, however have a high intrinsic value to particular areas of the State. (eg Stirling Ranges)
<b>Tourists</b>	'all visitors travelling for whatever purpose involving at least an overnight stay 40 km from their usual place of residence' (World Tourism Organisation)
<b>User Pays</b>	the principle that management and maintenance costs for individual parks should be borne (either partially or fully) by those using them.
<b>Zones of Opportunity</b>	Is a geographic area that ideally encompasses an endemic core resource, as well as particular resources/attractions.

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