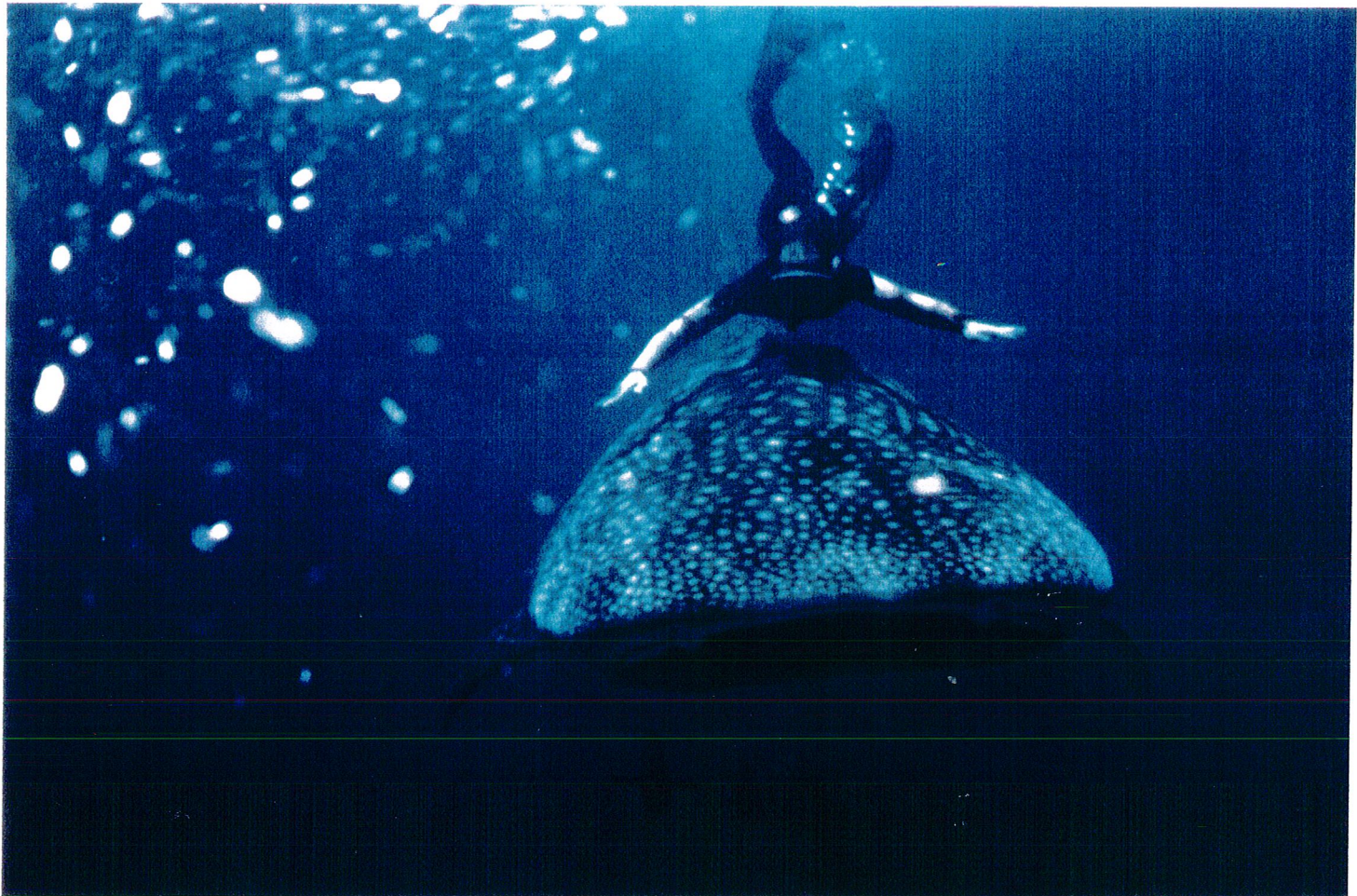

WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S NATURAL ADVANTAGE - CAPITALISING ON THE NATURE BASED TOURISM POTENTIAL OF THE NORTH

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INTRODUCTION

Western Australia already has a significant tourism industry which makes a major contribution to the State's economy. It has good infrastructure for the continuing development of tourism including airports, transport systems, range of accommodation as well as a skilled friendly people to service the needs of visitors and a safe environment.

But there are other tourist destinations throughout the world which have these assets. What differentiates Western Australia, and in particular the north of the State, as a destination is the uniqueness of its natural environment - its unusual plants and animals; its culture, bizarre landscapes and its vastness, which can be packaged into a tourist experience which is second to none in the world. There are great opportunities to capitalise on this uniqueness. But we won't realise on these natural assets if we don't market and manage them. It is not just a case of increasing the tourist throughput significantly; although even to do that will be difficult in a world deluged with competitive tourist products : 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.

The development of the nature based tourist industry in this State, and in particular the north, will require the integration of the effort of private companies (large and small) and public agencies.

The Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) does not have the responsibility for tourist promotion in this State, nor is it in competition with the tourist industry. But it is responsible for management, on behalf of the community, of a vast area of the north of Western Australia, which includes many of the natural attractions which form the basis for the tourism industry and the State's native animals and plants.

CALM believes that it has a role to play, not only ensuring that the natural environment is protected, but in working with all sections of the community to develop the tourism industry by providing infrastructure, identifying and enhancing the tourist product and the marketing of that product.

Contrary to what might have been assumed, given that CALM is a conservation agency, the Department not only believes that nature based tourism can be developed without conflicting with conservation objectives, but that the development of a nature based tourism industry will make a major contribution to protecting the unique ecosystems of the north of the State and conserving its unique animals and plants.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TOURISM TO THE ECONOMY

There has been a dramatic growth in tourism in Australia in the last decade. The number of overseas visitors grew from 904,600 in 1980 to 2,370,00 in 1991, an increase of 160%. The Bureau of Tourism Research (1992) projects that overseas arrivals will increase to 4.8 million by the year 2000. Tourism is Australia's largest single export earner (Figure 1).

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%, interstate 2% and overseas travel by 18% (WATC 1991). The majority of visits within Western Australia are intrastate travel accounting for 87% of all trips. Interstate and overseas travel accounted for 7% and 6% respectively of total visits in 1990/91 (Figure 2). However, overseas and interstate visitors spend significantly more than local tourists (Figure 3).

There is thus the potential to significantly increase the number of external (including interstate visits to Western Australia) visitors and disproportionately increase the economic contribution per visit by capitalising on what is unique to the visitor to Western Australia.

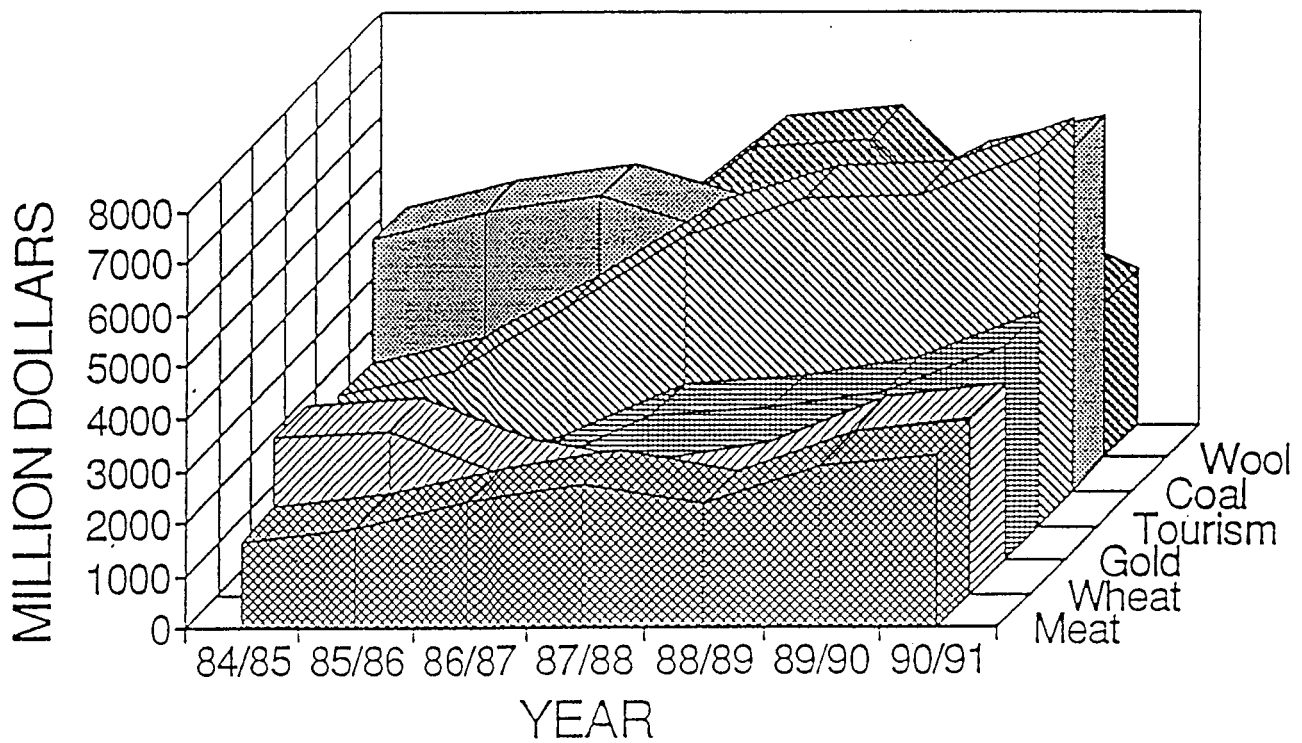
NATURE BASED TOURISM

Many terms have been used to describe elements of nature based tourism. In recent times the word 'ecotourism' has been used. Valentine (1991) suggests that ecotourism be 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. PATA (1992) in its discussion paper on ecotourism has coined the phrase 'endemic tourism'. Endemic tourism broadens the scope of ecotourism to include cultural characteristics and values of communities which should be linked to the natural values. 'Nature based tourism', in our view, 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 have developed. Ecotourism is just one of the colours in the nature based tourism rainbow. 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.

Natural values are important to mass tourists as well as the most avid ecotourist. The natural phenomena may be essential to the tourist experience or may be what enhances that experience. In some instances, natural features may be incidental to the visitor's experience but critical to the decision to visit.

FIGURE 1

COMPARATIVE EXPORT EARNINGS AUSTRALIA

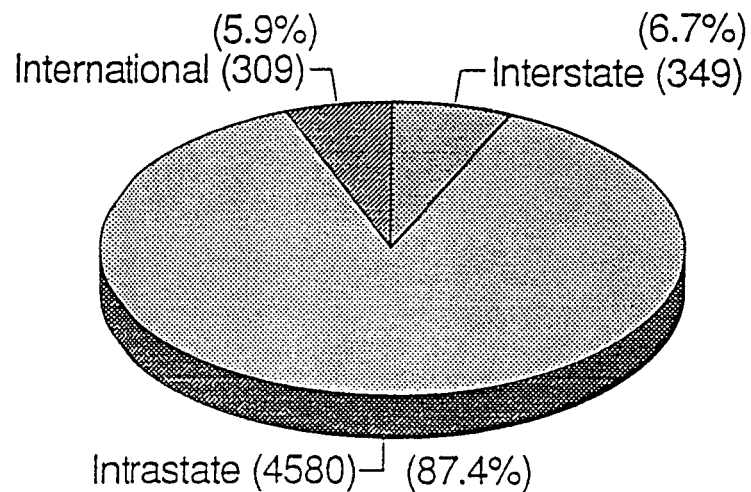


Source: ABS and BTR

FIGURE 2

VISITOR TRIPS TO W.A.

Visitors by Origin (thousands) - 1990/91

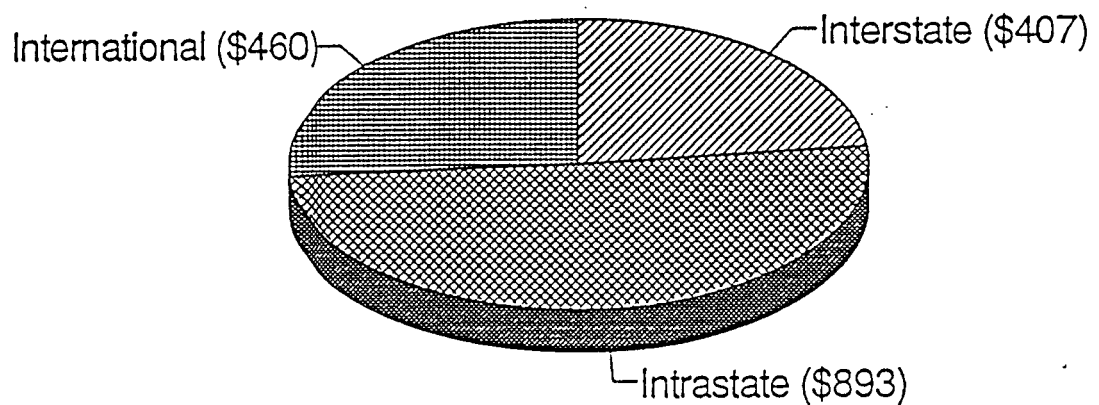


Total visitor trips - 5,238,000

FIGURE 3

VISITOR TRIPS TO W.A.

Visitor Spending (\$ millions) - 1990/91



Total expenditure - \$1,760million

Source: WA Tourism Commission

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 prices for participants. Much of the willingness of tourists to pay is based on the exclusive or unique nature of the activity involved. There are specific segments of the natural tourism product which can be designated for relatively small numbers of people having high quality experience.

The quality of experience is, to a large degree, dependent upon the information and understanding given to the tourist. It is not dependent just upon the unique natural feature itself. It is interpretation of that natural phenomena which adds great value to the experience. We are now seeing significant numbers of tourists who are willing to pay for value adding, particularly if they have made large expenditures to reach their destination.

Nature based tourism often has an inbuilt 'repeat visit' button because it involves an activity as part of the product. There are undoubtedly many tourists who will repeatedly revisit a famous monument. But there are a significant number of tourists who want each of their dollars to create a new experience the next time they are on holidays. A nature based tourist experience, whether it includes watching and interacting with dolphins visiting the shore at Monkey Mia, participating in a night-time possum spotting exercise, or swimming with whale sharks, is an experience which will also be 'new' no matter how many times it is repeated.

The potential for growth of nature based tourism

The World Tourism Organisation has predicted that the 450 million tourists in 1991 will have increased by 50% by the end of the decade and doubled by 2010. This represents an average of 3.7% annual 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% increase per annum in adventure or cultural tourism and a 25-30% per annum increase in nature tourism (*A Sense of Place*, 1992).

Surveys of the preference of visitors to Australia have confirmed that our customers like Australia's natural assets. The Australian Tourism Commission found that 71% of all American visitors put, as their number one reason for visiting Australia, 'unusual birds, animals and flora'. Similarly 71% of UK visitors and 77% of European visitors stated the same reason. The second choice by 63% of European visitors was that they were seeking some form of 'unique style holiday', 63% of American visitors and 54% of UK visitors were seeking the same type of holiday. The third choice of 'interesting landscapes' was made by 75% of American visitors, 63% of UK visitors and 81% of European visitors. The fourth

choice by 73% of UK visitors, 69% of European visitors and 62% of American visitors was that Australia was 'not overcrowded, fairly unknown and not overdeveloped'. (ATC, 1984).

The Industrial Assistance Commission in its draft report on Travel and Tourism (IAC, 1989) quotes the Australian Tourism Industry Association, ATIA, and the Australian Tourism Commission (ATC), who, along with Qantas, argue that "an attractive combination of unique natural phenomena is the core of the Australian tourism product." They went on to argue that given the distance from world markets the tourism industry should be around attractions which cannot be duplicated in destinations which are more accessible. The recent study of Japanese tourism focusing on the role of the natural environment in Japanese holiday experiences in Australia (Bureau of Tourism Research, 1992) indicated that Japanese visitors are attracted by the opportunity to experience what they see as natural and unexploited environment particularly open space and marine areas. The same study concluded however that while the natural environment dominates the Japanese perception of Australia, often this is not the experience of the visitor because tours concentrate on urban areas.

The centre for international economics and its report on the economic affects 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 tourist visiting Australia may be many and varied, the principal ones appear to be:

- unique landscapes and wildlife (there's 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), and
- relatively unspoilt and new destination."

We would argue that these features are found to a higher degree in Western Australia and, in particular, the north of the State, than in most other places in the world.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S COMPARATIVE NATURAL ADVANTAGE

Western Australia covers more than 2.5 million square kilometres - a third of the continent's land area and coastline. Western Australia has one of the oldest landscapes on this planet and it is characterised by great diversity in landform, climate and biota.

This is one of the places on earth which exhibits megadiversity. Of the 25,000 species of vascular plants found in Australia, 12,000 are found in Western Australia with over two

thirds being endemic to the State. (In the United Kingdom there are 1,400 plant species, about the same number that occurs in one of the State's national parks.) The State has 179 species of indigenous mammals (including 37 marine), 480 species of birds, 387 species of reptiles, 68 species of amphibians and 1,600 species of fish (CALM, 1992).

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

The biodiversity, high degree of endemism, unusual landscapes and space, create a comparative advantage for Western Australia in nature based tourism.

PROTECTING OUR HERITAGE

The opportunities to capitalise on our natural advantage will disappear if those assets themselves are degraded. CALM has responsibility in this State for protecting wildlife as well as managing some 195,800 square kilometres of State lands and waters. The managed land area represents 7.4% of the State, equivalent to 70% of the land area of New Zealand or 51% of the land area of Japan or 2.7 times the area of Tasmania (Figures 4 and 5). The main categories of reserve are national park (about 48,900 square kilometres), nature reserve (about 107,500 square kilometres), marine parks (about 11,300 square kilometres) and State forest (about 17,500 square kilometres) (Figure 6). That conservation estate is rapidly expanding. In the last 6 years the area of terrestrial conservation reserve managed by CALM has increased from 164,240 square kilometres to 187,570 square kilometres, and increase of 23,150 square kilometres. An average of 3,850 square kilometres each year. The challenge is to manage and protect these areas and maintain their values while at the same time ensuring that visitors have the opportunity to see, understand and appreciate those values.

There is ample evidence from other many unique areas in the world to demonstrate that if people pressure is not managed it will result in environmental degradation. It's also obvious that too many people, too often in the one place can destroy the very essence of the nature based experience being sought. However Western Australia is a vast land and it would be possible with appropriate management to more than quadruple current visitor levels without causing damage to the environment or lessening the nature based tourist experience. This is particularly true in the North of the State where areas are vast and visitor numbers relatively low.

FIGURE 4

**CALM manages a land area
70% the size of New Zealand**

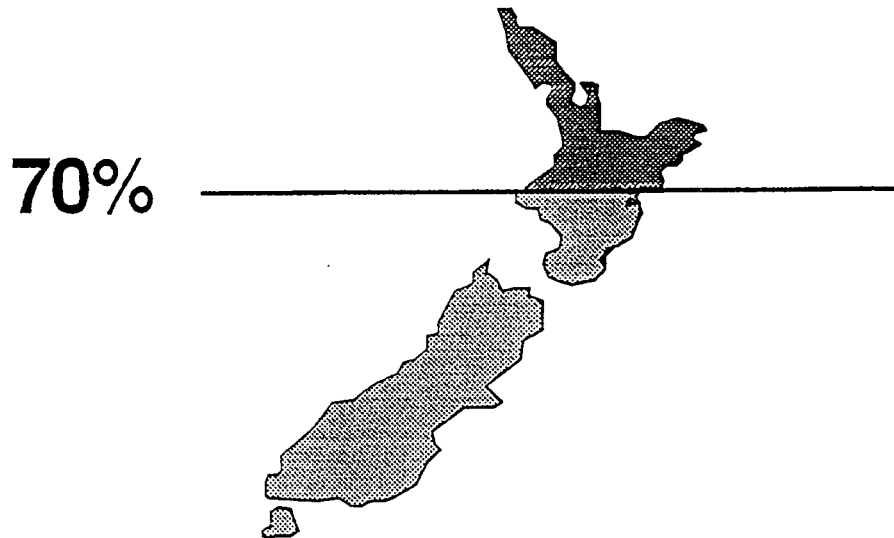


FIGURE 5

**CALM manages a land area
51% the size of Japan**

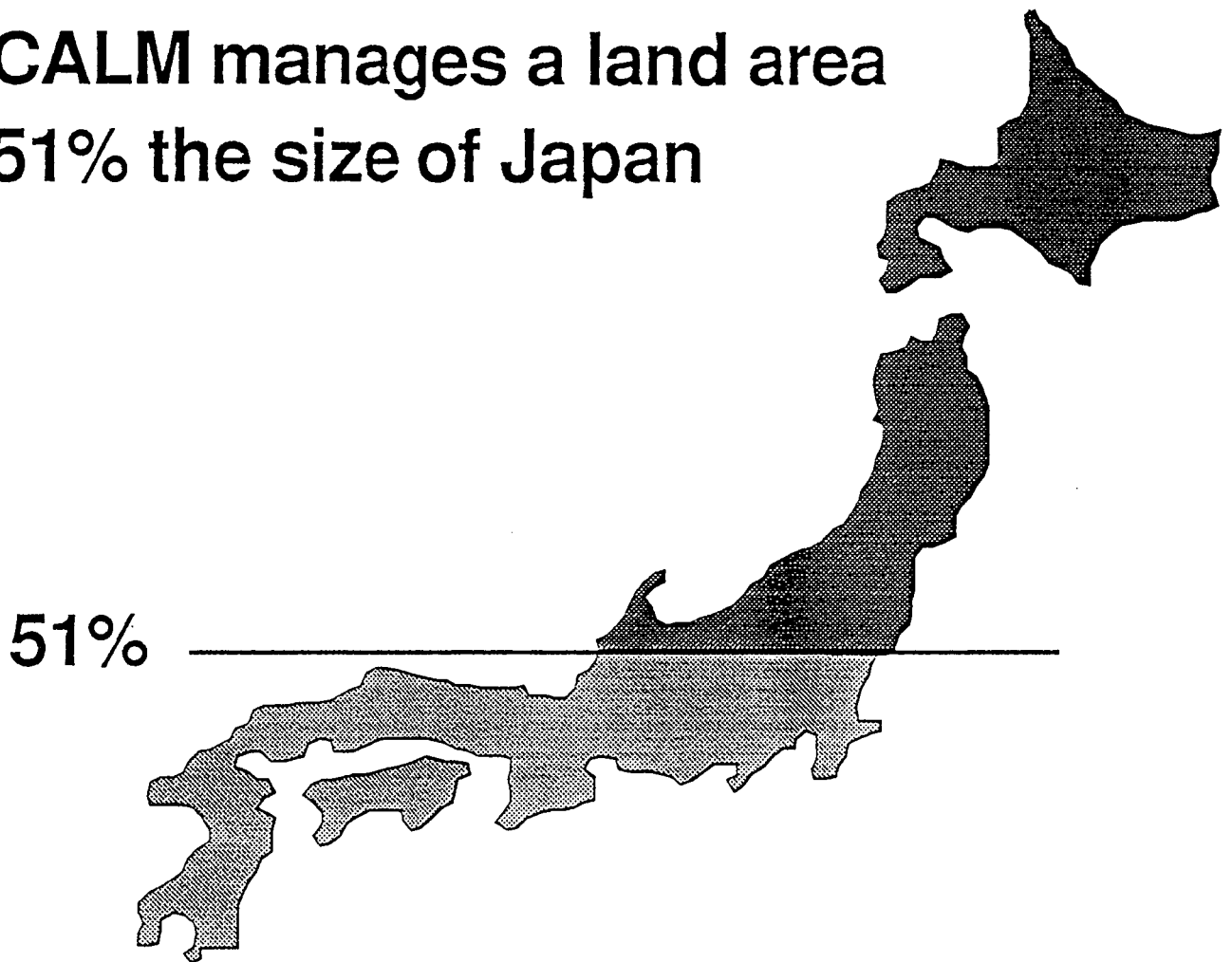
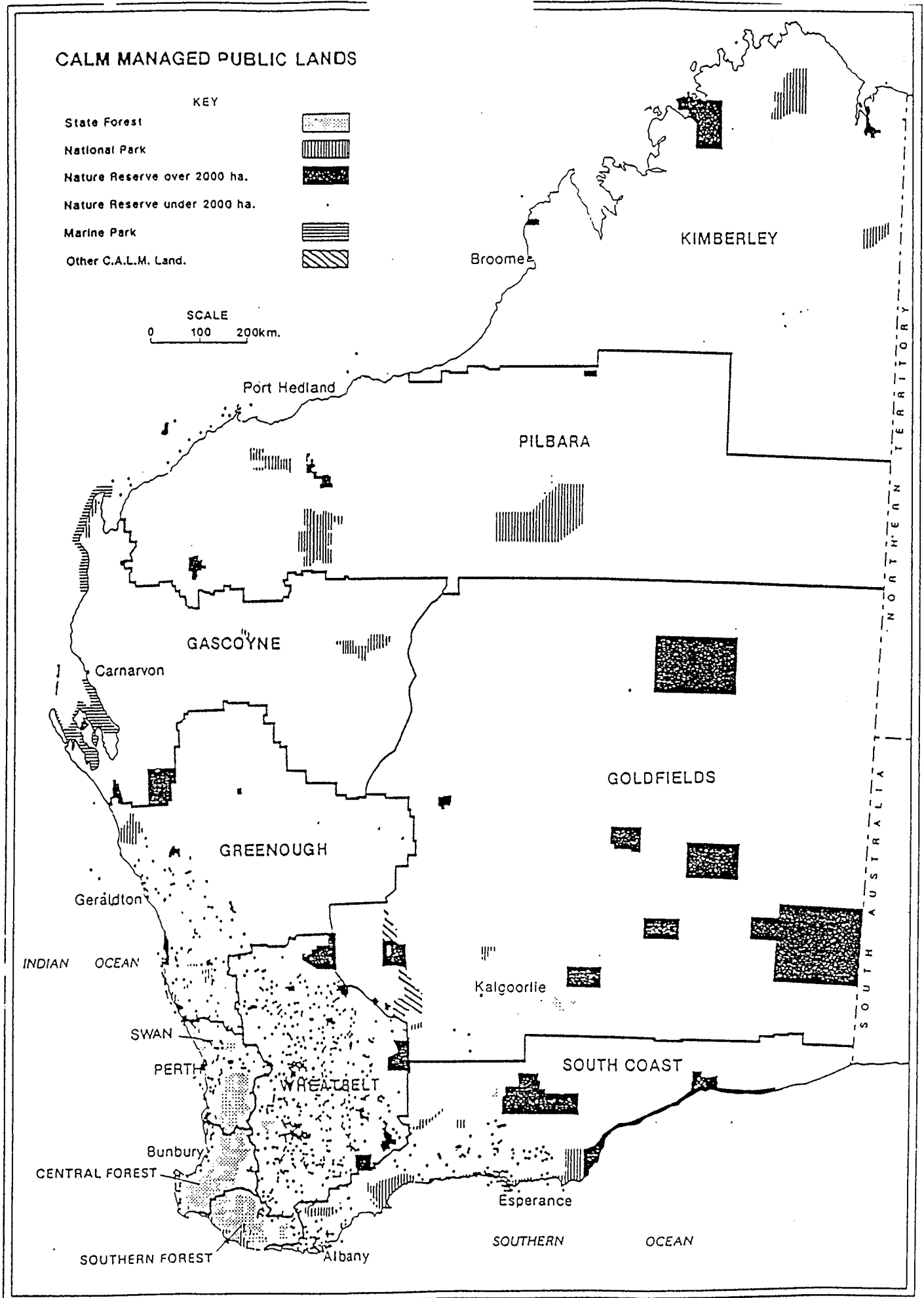


FIGURE 6



Rather than seeing nature based tourism as a threat to its mission, which is 'to conserve Western Australia's wildlife and manage lands and waters entrusted to the Department for the benefit of present and future generations', it sees that it is an essential partner in achieving that end. But there must be management.

Consequently, CALM has a number of management procedures in operation that are there to fulfil the Department's first obligation - the maintenance of the natural environment for use of future generations:

Statutory controls on CALM-managed lands

CALM operates under two primary Acts, the Wildlife Conservation Act 1950 and the Conservation and Land Management Act 1984. The Wildlife Conservation Act protects all wildlife regardless of land tenure. Its regulations provide powers to conserve and protect flora and fauna.

The CALM Act directs management activities to given tenures and purpose of reservation. Most protected areas are vested in the National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority (NPNCA), which prepares management plans and policies applying to protected areas. The NPNCA represents the wider community interest, including the voluntary conservation movement, academic institutions, local government, Aboriginal interests and recreational groups. Management plans are the mechanisms by which protected areas are managed and tourism development and activity is controlled.

Management Plans

Before any tourist development can take place, the CALM Act requires that a management plan for the national park or protected area must be in place and that the activity is approved. The only alternative is if the activity is deemed to be a 'compatible operation'. Such a determination can only be made by the Minister for the Environment after seeking public comment and allowing a two-month period for public submission.

Management plans are produced at several levels. Regional plans cover CALM's nine management regions throughout the State. These plans examine broadscale planning of reserves in all categories and recommend additions to the conservation estate. Such broadscale planning helps address the common criticism that tourism planning is on a project basis rather than looking at the accrued impacts of several projects or activities over a wider area. Regional planning also allows parks and reserves with varying opportunities and settings to be developed and managed for visitors in such a way as to complement each other.

Management plans are also prepared at area specific levels for one or several national parks, nature reserves or marine parks in close proximity. These plans prescribe management actions for up to 10 years. They also indicate the level and type of tourist activity that is appropriate to maintain conservation values. The CALM Act states that as far as national parks and conservation parks are concerned management plans should be designed 'to fulfil so much of the demand for recreation by members of the public as is consistent with the proper maintenance and restoration of the natural environment, the protection of indigenous flora and fauna and the preservation of any feature of archaeological, historic or scientific interest.'

Management plans are required by Statute to be made available as a draft for public comment for at least two months. In fact, much wider public involvement occurs than is required under Statute and this ensures that all aspects of community interest and concern are expressed before the National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority (NPNCA) forwards the final plan to the Minister for the Environment for approval.

Site development plans

Where tourism and recreation facilities are permitted by way of management plans, specific site plans are developed. These plans ensure that visitor facilities and services are located in zones where the impact on the environment is minimised and the benefit for the visitor maximised.

These site plans are developed where degradation occurs or the potential for degradation exists or it is perceived that management intervention is necessary to prevent environmental impact from increased numbers of visitors.

These plans take into account visitor needs, scenic values, management capability as well as environmental concerns using concepts such as the 'recreation opportunity spectrum' and the 'limits of acceptable change'. Important components in these site plans are signs, as well as interpretation and education plans and programs. Site plans are developed in close association with local communities and interest groups and are of particular interest to tour operators.

Over 300 CALM staff have had intensive training in recreation site planning by specialist landscape and community education and interpretation officers.

Policies

CALM has published policies endorsed by the NPNCA and the Minister for the Environment for recreation, tourism and visitor services. These comprehensive policies are predicated on four major principles:

- the need to preserve values of land and water;
- consistency of any activity with the purpose for which that land or water is vested, that is nature reserve, national park, marine park or conservation park etc;
- equity of use; and
- CALM's ability to manage the impacts of any proposed activity or development.

Flowing from these principles are numerous statements that deal with issues such as public safety, fees, leases and concessions, as well as those that deal with specific activities such as four wheel driving, horse riding or shell collecting. These policies, combined with intensive training have enabled a culture in management which understands the balance between use (and appreciation) and protection.

Tour operators' permit system

Tour operators require approval to operate on CALM-managed land and are required to apply for a permit to operate. Approval is given subject to conditions designed to protect conservation values. It allows managers to be aware of the numbers and types of tour operations taking place. A database has been developed that provides a means of keeping tour operators informed of current conditions and relevant information about tenures. Licences and leases are issued where exclusive use or limited access is given to lands and waters.

THE SYNERGY BETWEEN NATURE BASED TOURISM AND CONSERVATION

Community awareness and support

In the State the size of Western Australia, with its diversity of plants and animals and its often fragile landscapes, it is impossible to ensure protection of the environment by regulation and policing. Community understanding of our environment and sympathy for it, which is the inevitable consequence of a nature based tourist experience, are the most powerful forces that can be unleashed to protect the environment.

Provision of resources

Western Australia does have significant environmental problems and there is no question that the arrival of European man resulted in a massive disruption to many of the State's

ecosystems and wildlife. But the problems that we confront, although serious and are compounded by the bizarre nature of our ecosystems, are not unmanageable and are not necessarily a function of the numbers of people who live in or visit this State.

If a neutron bomb was set off in Western Australia tomorrow and resulted in the selective instant extinction of every human in the State, most, if not all, of our significant environmental problems would remain and some would be magnified.

For example, probably the most significant threat to our native fauna is not bulldozers, chainsaws or tourists in Western Australia - it is the European fox. CALM research has shown that when this introduced predator is controlled, native animals return in abundance to areas where they previously were extinct (Figures 7a, b and c). What is required to ensure this major conservation initiative is sustained is more human intervention in the form of dollars.

We can no longer expect that the funds required for management of lands and wildlife will be available at the levels required from taxpayers. But the redirection of a small proportion of the extra tourist dollars, generated by a quality nature based tourist experience, would be sufficient to fund major conservation initiatives. For example, CALM research indicates that it would be possible to achieve native animal population levels in the Peron Peninsula at Shark Bay similar to those achieved in the Dampier Archipelago, by eradicating feral animals. The majority of the Peninsula is reserved land managed by CALM. The eradication could be achieved at a cost of approximately 20 cents per hectare per year. This means that at a cost of approximately \$40,000 per year, the Peron Peninsula could have its native animal population restored. This would be a spectacular conservation coup. But it would also add a new tourist experience (because it would be possible to create situations where these animals could be readily viewed by tourists) for those who visit the Monkey Mia dolphins, thus increasing the propensity for tourists who visit Monkey Mia to stay longer. If each of the 100,000 visitors currently visiting Monkey Mia was encouraged to stay one additional day, it would add \$5 million per annum to revenue in the Shark Bay area.

CAPITALISING ON THE NORTH'S NATURE BASED TOURIST POTENTIAL

What is the potential?

In 1991/92 over 4.3 million visits were made to CALM-managed areas (Figure 8). While most of these visits were to sites near major urban areas, there has been rapid growth in visitation to the more remote northern areas of the State. There were over 650,000 visits made to natural areas managed by CALM in the north of the State in the 1991/92 year.

FIGURE 7a

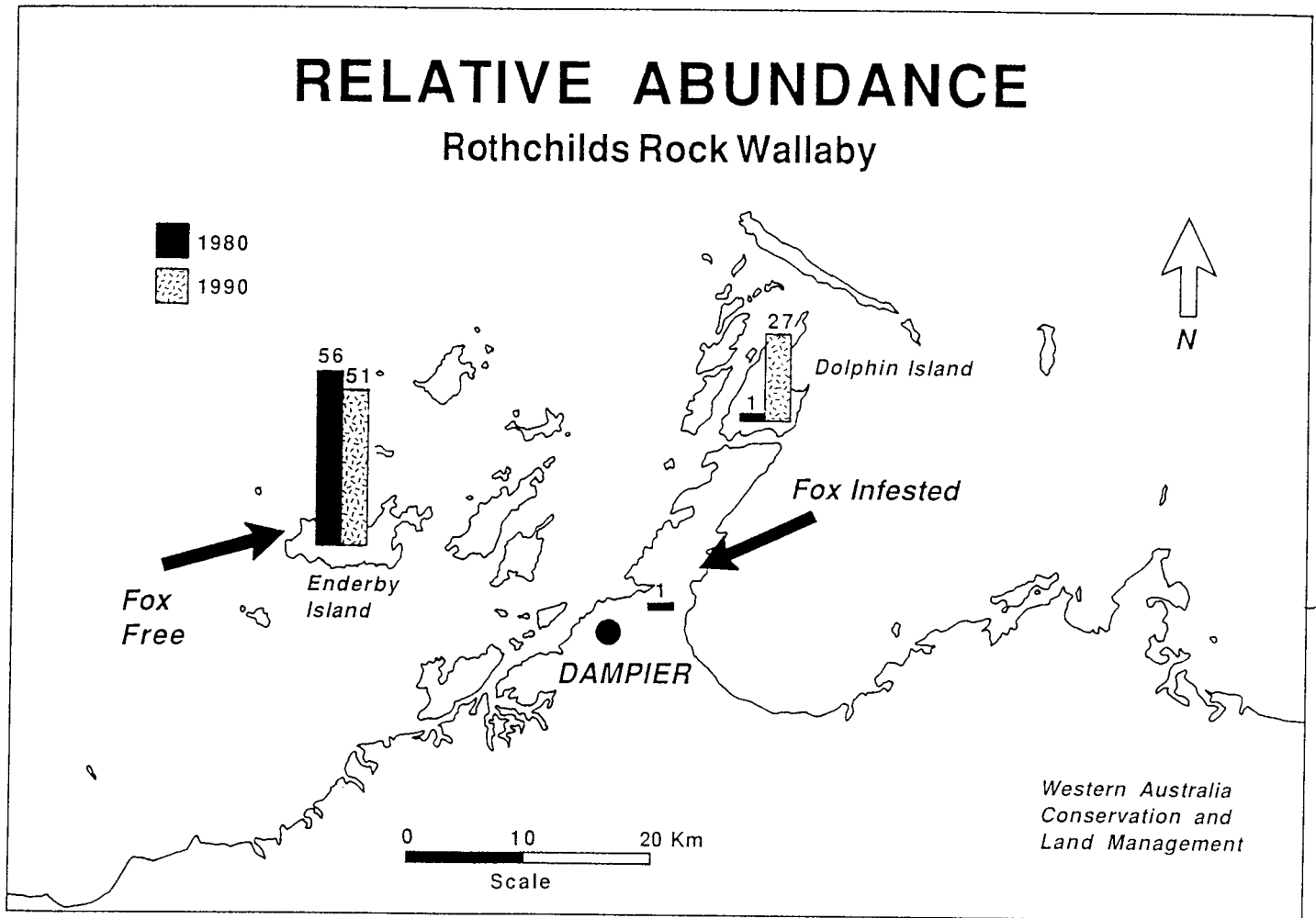


FIGURE 7b

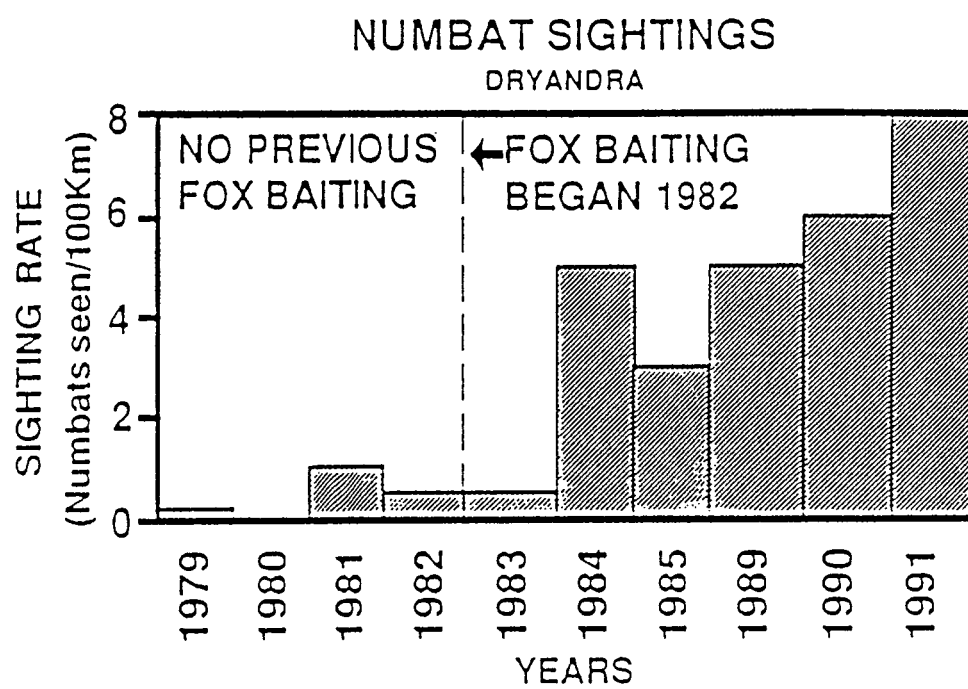


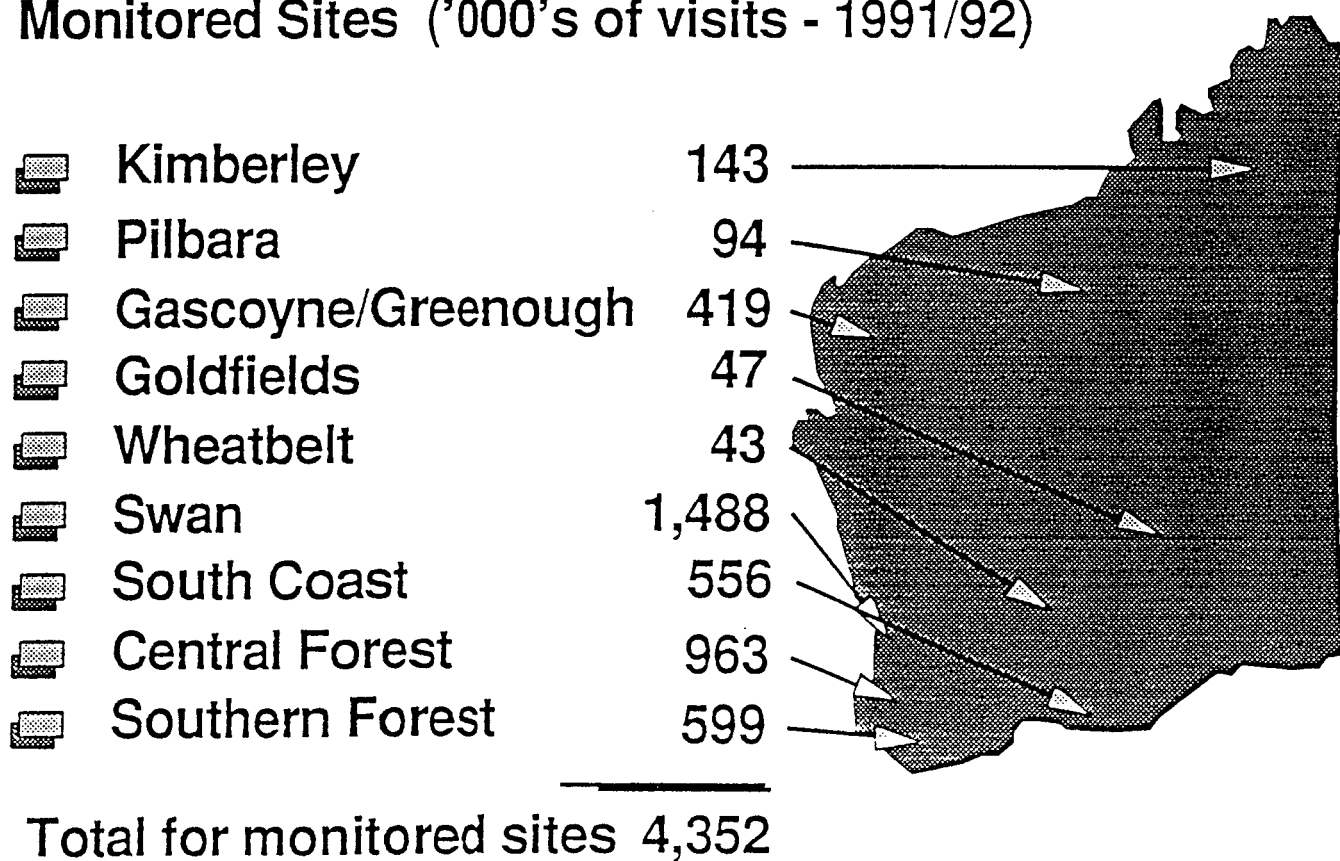
FIGURE 7c



FIGURE 8

VISITATION TO CALM ESTATE

Monitored Sites ('000's of visits - 1991/92)



The north of this State has all of the elements of the nature tourism package in abundance. In addition to having the high degree of diversity in plant and animal life exhibited in the remainder of the State, it also has bizarre landscapes and a 'last frontier atmosphere' which is being increasingly sought after by tourists around the world.

The north's 'last frontier' atmosphere is particularly sought after by the backpacker market segment who, contrary to what has been assumed, is something of a super tourist. A recent newspaper report quoted surveys which indicate that the backpacker is spending approximately \$8,000 while in Australia, nearly six times more than the average see-Australia-in-8-days Japanese tourist.

Increasingly, "the discoverers, the type who carved out the Sydney-Cairns route 10 years ago are now heading for the West Australian coast to find the last frontier; they are coming down from Indonesia and Thailand avoiding the Cairns-Sydney track. Places like Ningaloo Reef near Exmouth ('as good as the outer Barrier Reef but you can walk to it') provide all the beauty without the commercialism." (*The Australian*, 3 April 1993).

Visitation figures for specific natural attractions in the north illustrate its potential. For example, in the case of the Purnululu National Park, ground visitation has risen from a few hundred people in 1986 to nearly 8,000 people visiting by road in 1991/92 (Figure 9). Those road visitors are restricted by access to four wheel drive vehicles given that the wilderness characteristic of the Park is being maintained by the use of existing roads. Even more striking is the fact that this very remote place has approximately 40,000 people each year flying overhead in fixed wing aircraft and helicopters to view the splendour of the Park. Visitors can now arrive by air and land in the Park. In its first few months of operation, hundreds of people have taken advantage of the opportunity to overfly and then experience the atmosphere of the Park and magnificent 'Bungle Bungles' massive from on the ground.

The whale shark tourist phenomenon is a classic example of the power of unique natural phenomenon to attract tourists. This season, 1,000 charter boat passengers have viewed and interacted with whale sharks off Exmouth. They paid between \$350 to \$1,000 each for the privilege. There are up to 14 charter boats and five spotter planes employed to cater for these tourists.

The Monkey Mia dolphins attract 100,000 thousand visitors per year to Shark Bay (Figure 10).

Is it worth pursuing?

It is possible to hypothesize about the economic impact of increasing tourist visits to the north. Currently, it is estimated that the north is receiving 30,000 overseas tourists each year.

FIGURE 9

PURNULULU NATIONAL PARK

Total Visitor Numbers

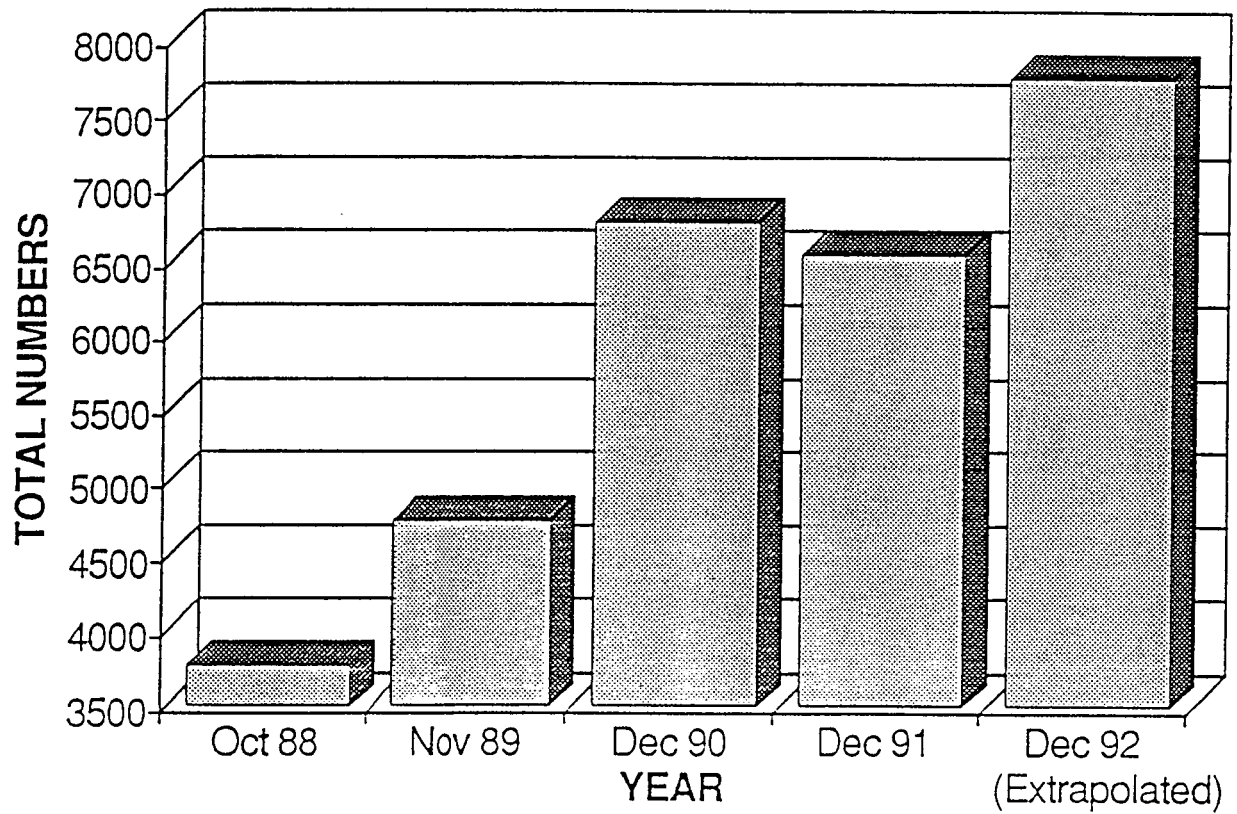
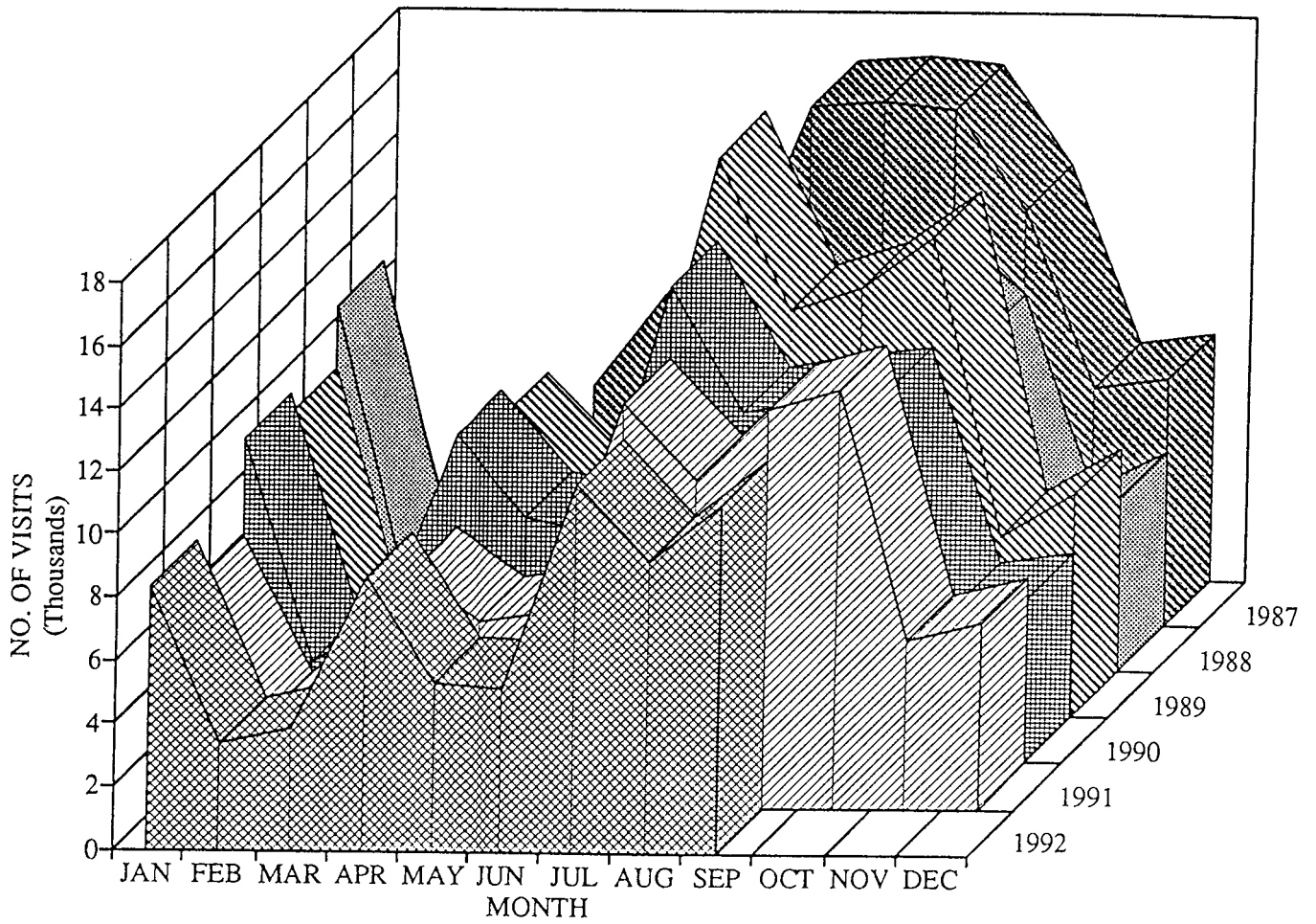


FIGURE 10

PEOPLE VISITATION - MONKEY MIA



If it was possible to attract an additional 100,000 overseas visitors to the north, staying five days, spending \$200 per day, an additional \$100 million per year would be generated in the north.

But the benefits cannot be measured in dollar value alone. Nature based tourism has a relatively high employment investment ratio. The industry thus can complement the mining industry by contributing disproportionately to the infrastructure costs of towns in the north.

As noted above, the conservation of our unique assets may well depend on the funds generated by nature based tourism.

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF A STRATEGY

Nature based tourism is growing in the north of the State. How do we enhance it, maximise its value and manage the environment so we don't lose the asset?

The critical mass factor

The nature based tourism industry in the north is particularly prone to being constrained by its requirement to achieve sufficient scale to become self generating because of the problems associated with seasons, large distances and high infrastructure costs. For example, regular international flights won't be scheduled to the north until there is sufficient quality accommodation and tourist packages, but neither will occur until there are sufficient numbers of tourists to justify the investment.

It is possible to create 'circuit breakers' by integrating activities and using existing services to develop additional clients. For example, Ansett Airlines have introduced innovative one day package tours from Broome to Kununurra which takes advantage of unused seats and links to a tourist operation on the ground in Kununurra and existing Purnululu overflight tours.

CALM can assist nature based tourism overcome the 'critical mass problem' by making available basic infrastructure and services to private tour operators. The Department already has staff and infrastructure throughout the north of the State. Tour operators can, by accessing the Department's resources (staff, accommodation, airstrips, existing tours), trial various tourist packages without having to incur a massive infrastructure cost.

Marketing - Securing investment in tourism

We cannot expect investment to occur in the nature based tourism industry, particularly when it is being made on publicly owned land, if there is no security for that investment.

CALM has developed a suite of legal agreements, which are permitted under the Act, and which provide security for the investor while at the same time protecting the land and preserving the equity of the country. For example, there are already many leases operating on CALM managed lands which have been judged to be sufficiently secure by the private sector to enable them to make multi-million dollar investments in infrastructure.

There are currently no legal procedures in place, however, which secure the investment of a tourist operator in a tourist product, such as a nature based interpretive tour, which may have cost the tour operator thousands of dollars to develop.

Resources for management

Increased use of our natural assets must be accompanied by the provision of matching resources to manage the places, animals, plants and the people. Given the wide dispersal of sites and attractions in the North of the State, the increased cost of management brought about by factors such as distance, it is even more critical that we find sufficient resources to both protect and enhance the quality of experience at these places. Increasingly across the world those who benefit are being asked to make some contribution towards the ongoing management and protection of these areas. We need to jointly explore ways with the tourist industry and participants to ensure that in a cost-effective way these valuable assets are protected.

Interpretation

Much of the value of nature based tourism derives from the visitor being provided with information about the place, the animal or plant. One of CALM's functions is to provide information on the natural environment to the community.

Publications such as 'Landscape', the Department's quarterly magazine, play a major role in providing the information required to appreciate and understand WA's unique ecosystems. The magazine's credibility is enhanced by the fact that the majority of the articles are written by the scientists and managers who conduct research or who are responsible for managing Western Australia's ecosystems. The Department has produced *North West Bound*, a book which is a guide to the natural wonders of the north, but it also explains the basic science of the ecosystem, plants and animals, that tourists want to see.

CALM has recently published *Flora of the Kimberley Region* which describes and permits easy identification of the 2085 plant species in the Kimberley.

The world is currently in love with rainforests. Most Australians, and even West Australians, associate rainforests with Queensland. Biological Surveys of the Kimberley Region (McKenzie et al, 1991) have shown that there are about 6,000 hectares of rainforests scattered in about 1,500 patches throughout the Kimberley.

The resources of CALM are available to the tourist industry to produce the information either at the sites or through publication of videos for promotion and explanation of the natural phenomena of the north.

Training

Training of tour operators so the quality of the nature based components of their product can be enhanced by an explanation of the natural phenomenon is essential. CALM has developed a number of training programs involving interested Aboriginal groups and local naturalists giving them the opportunity to interact with tour operators to market nature based tourism in remote areas.

The knowledge and experience of staff combined with the opportunity to interact with wildlife is a valuable product for tour operators. In April this year, a tour operators' training course was held in the Purnululu National Park which provided tour operators, CALM staff and the local Aboriginal community, an opportunity to develop ways by which the tourists' experience can be enhanced by interpretation of what they are seeing.

Specialised tours

CALM has developed a number of specialised nature based tours. These tours have demonstrated in the market place the potential drawing power of tours which provide unique opportunities to interact and learn about nature. For example, Landscape Expeditions recently organised a tour, in cooperation with the University of WA's Extension Service, involving 20 tourists acting as paying volunteers to help trap, identify and monitor animals using radiotelemetry. This tour was to the Gibson Desert where two endangered species, the Burrowing Betong and Golden Bandicoot have been reintroduced from Barrow Island. Four further expeditions of this nature are planned for this current year.

Dorre Island is about 60 kilometres off the coast in Shark Bay and is the habitat of four rare mammals extinct on the mainland. Protected from introduced predators, these animals, Rufous Hare Wallaby, Banded Hare Wallaby, Boodie and Western Barred Bandicoot are the last remnants of what were once thriving mainland populations. CALM scientists have been studying the animals for some years and are poised to reintroduce them to the mainland areas (such as the Peron Peninsula) from which exotic predators, including foxes and cats have been removed. Desert Discovery, an ecotour company which had previously undertaken tours

with CALM's scientists, undertook a tour to Dorre Island in August 1992. The funds from Desert Discovery have underwritten the cost of the scientific expedition and have made the project possible.

There are many other examples and opportunities for partnership between CALM and the private sector tour operators to develop nature based tourism opportunities. CALM's role in managing and presenting the natural assets, providing access, information and interpretation, can complement the role of private tour operators.

The development of outstanding and unique nature based tours is also one way of bypassing 'the critical mass' problem. For example, the Monkey Mia dolphins, because they were unique, did not require an infrastructure to attract tourists. Unique natural attractions, such as the Monkey Mia dolphins and the whale sharks, are also self-marketing because they attract free international publicity.

ABORIGINAL CULTURE

Aboriginal culture has the potential to be a feature of nature based tourism in the north of Western Australia. The potential for including Aboriginal culture in the nature based tourism package coincides with the aspirations of many Aboriginal communities in the north of Western Australia to develop new employment opportunities for their people.

There are several examples in the North of Western Australia where Aboriginal people are responding to the demand from tourists seeking cultural as well as nature based information and experiences. Access into the Purnululu National Park is restricted to four wheel drive vehicles to protect the wilderness experience. Last year operators were given approval to land a limited number of visitors each day. A traditional owner of the Purnululu National Park is one of three ground tour operators permitted to take fly-in campers. Already the demand for the genuine Aboriginal experience is being sought by tourists who wish to understand the natural environment and Aboriginal culture and its relationship to that environment.

CALM has been working with one of the legends and pioneers of nature based tourism in the Kimberleys, Mr Sam Lovell, to develop models for nature based tourism which feature Aboriginal culture and involve local Aboriginal communities in developing tourism. One program currently being developed is an Aboriginal cultural tour of Geikie Gorge. Currently a launch cruise takes up to 30,000 tourists per year on a cruise through the Geikie Gorge. This tour is led by CALM Rangers who explain the biology and geology of the Gorge to tourists. Sam Lovell is developing, in association with local Aboriginal people, a complementary tour which will give the local Aboriginal people an opportunity to conduct a

specialised boat tour incorporating the natural attractions of Geikie Gorge but emphasising the Aboriginal heritage.

This month CALM will be conducting two 5-day residential nature based tourism training courses at Broome and Dwellup for members of the Aboriginal community who wish to explore the potential for their people in the nature based tourism industry.

ACCESS

Isolation and 'space' are two of the features of the north which contribute to its appeal to the nature seeking tourist. But these factors are also significant barriers to the industry developing.

There are now airport facilities in the north of the State which can receive direct international flights. The provision of regular international flights into the north, however, will only occur when there is a sufficient number of tourists to justify the investment. This year six international charter flights are scheduled into Broome from Singapore. Ansett Airlines are currently investigating the potential for establishing a regular international service from Denpasar into Broome.

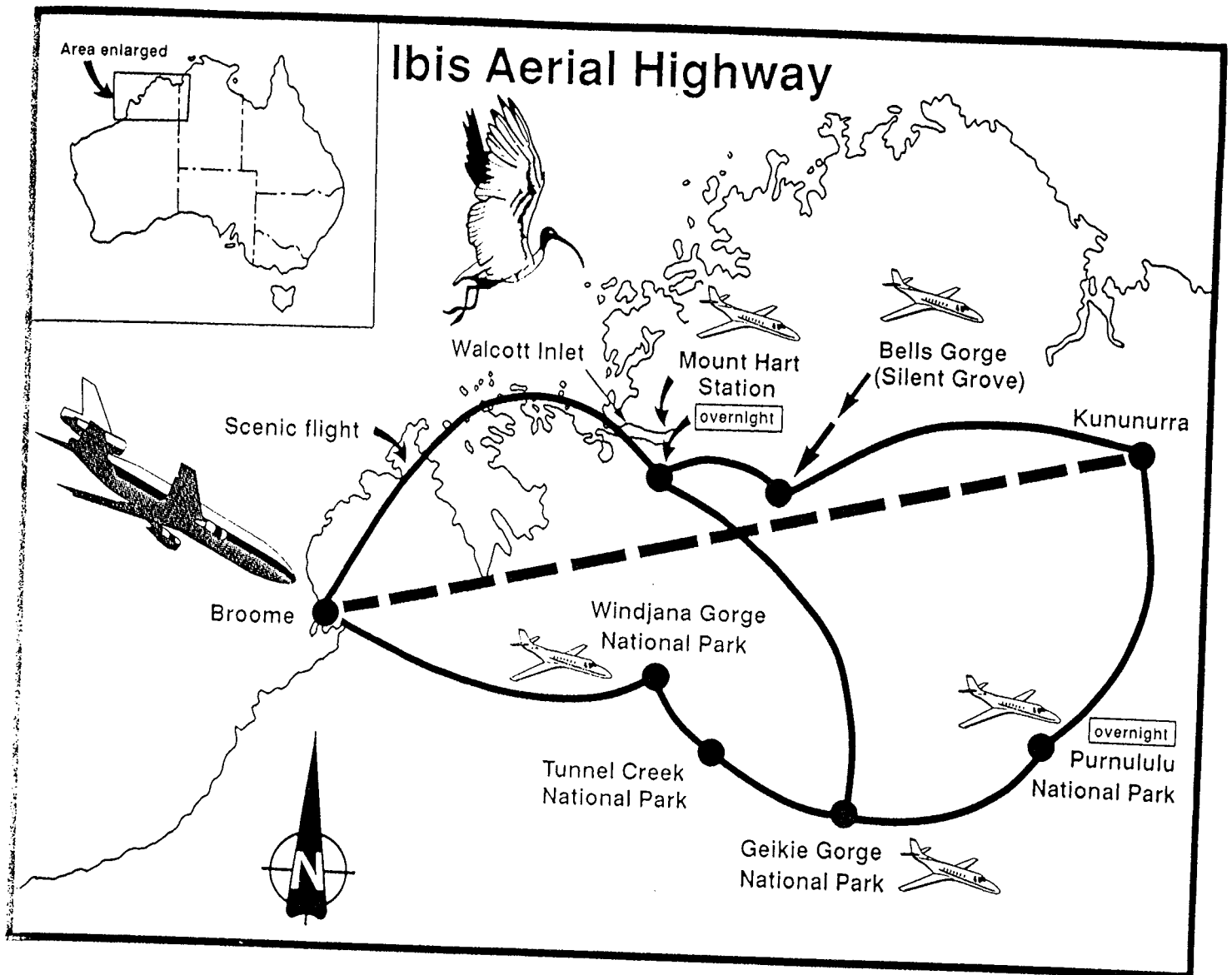
While the north of the State has areas of outstanding beauty, there is 'a long distance between the waterholes'. Further development of the existing internal aerial access system is essential if the full potential of the north is to be realised, because a significant proportion of those seeking nature based tourist experiences are on tight time schedules.

Transport by air has the advantage of retaining that part of the experience which comes from the north's size and isolation, while at the same time provides the means for rapid transport. Air transport also has minimal impact on the environment.

CALM will this year commence, in cooperation with the Derby Shire Council and private airline and tourist companies, a small trial of what we have called *'The Ibis Aerial Tourist Highway'*. The concept is to develop an aerial highway which would link the major attractions of the Kimberley and thus make available a vast array of visitor experiences at a reasonable cost in a relatively short timeframe. (Figure 11).

The options would range from a scenic flight through to flights with ground tours and overnight stays, homestead accommodation to camping, hiking and links with extended ground tours. The only limitation as to the places visited, length of stay, accommodation type, tours available and the services and facilities desired, would be time constraints and budget.

FIGURE 11



The '*Ibis*' concept is not intended to be a trojan horse containing a government (or for that matter private) monopoly. Quite the contrary - the essence of the tourist industry and, in particular, the nature based tourism industry is the innovation and service that comes from individual operations. It will involve, however, cooperation between tour operators, other land managers, motel and hotel owners, major airlines, local government and CALM to coordinate and market the concept.

This year, CALM, in cooperation with the Derby Shire Council will provide facilities including transport, accommodation and onground tours which permit aerial tourist operators to market 1-3 day tours out of Derby or Broome incorporating a combination of a specialised Geicki Gorge boat tour, tours of Tunnel Creek and Windjanna Gorge, overnight accommodation at Mt Hart Station and tours of the spectacular Bell Creek in the Mt Leopold Ranges.

If this year's trial is successful, we believe that the *Ibis aerial tourist highway* concept could, as it develops, make a significant contribution to developing an integrated approach to nature based tourism in the Kimberleys, decrease the time it will take to reach the 'critical mass' required before there is a surge of self-generating investment in nature based tourism in the north of Western Australia.

CONCLUSION

Western Australia is one of the oldest and most isolated places on earth and this is one of the principal reasons why we have a treasure trove of natural places, plants and animals. The north of the State exemplifies our natural assets and combines them with a vibrant culture and last frontier atmosphere.

Throughout the history of this State, and in particular the north, we have been bedevilled by our isolation and the harshness of the environment in which we live. It is ironic that it is these very factors which have provided us with the opportunity to capitalise on the high demand for nature based tourism and use it to create the wealth we need to maintain our living standards and protect what nature has given us.

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