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Nature Based Tourism Strategy

FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA



September 1997



DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT



Why have a Nature Based Tourism Strategy

Tourism is one of the world's fastest growing industries and nature based tourism its fastest growing segment.

A 1992 Stanford Research Institute study of world-wide tourism trends, estimated an overall 10-15 per cent increase per annum in adventure or cultural tourism and a 25-30 per cent increase per annum in nature tourism up to and beyond 2000.

Research shows that today's travellers are more environmentally conscious, and are seeking new experiences and more information about the destinations they visit. This change in the tourism market, together with an increased awareness of the need to conserve the environment, has set the scene for the growth of nature based tourism.

The Nature Based Tourism Strategy is the result of a joint effort by the tourism industry, the Western Australian Tourism Commission (WATC), and the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM). It forms part of a broader statewide strategy to manage tourism in Western Australia, and complements the National Ecotourism Strategy released in 1994.

The Nature Based Tourism Strategy provides the framework to ensure that nature based tourism in Western Australia grows in a way that is sustainable as well as economically and socially beneficial.

FOREWORD

The diversity and quality of Western Australia's natural environment are an integral part of "Brand" Western Australia and provide the State with an exceptional opportunity to capitalise on the growing worldwide demand for nature based tourism experiences.

Crucial to the development of the nature based tourism industry is maintaining a healthy environment. By working together the industry and all levels of Government can ensure that nature based tourism is developed in a way that provides economic and social benefits to Western Australia whilst ensuring the sustainability of the natural environment on which the industry depends.

Developed responsibly and sensitively, a nature based tourism industry can enhance conservation objectives and make a major contribution to protecting the unique ecosystems of the State and conserving its animals, plants and landscapes.

The Nature Based Tourism Strategy provides the framework for the development of an industry which will deliver long-term and wide-ranging benefits to Western Australia and to the people who live in and visit the State.

Western Australia's Natural Advantage

Western Australia has a buoyant tourism industry: it is a safe destination, has a wide range of accommodation, transport and other related tourism services and its skilled and friendly tour operators are focused on meeting visitor needs.

But there are many other destinations around the world that have these assets. What sets Western Australia apart is the uniqueness of its natural environment - unusual plants and animals, ancient culture, surprising landscapes, and vastness, which can be packaged into experiences second to none in the world.

Western Australia covers more than 2.5 million square kilometres - a third of the continent - and has over 12,500 km of coastline. It has one of the oldest landscapes on the planet and is characterised by enormous diversity of landscapes, climate, plants and animals.

Of the 25,000 species of flowering plants found in Australia, 12,000 are found in Western Australia, with over two thirds endemic to the State. By comparison, the United Kingdom has a total of 1,400 plant species - about the same number that occurs in **one** of Western Australia's national parks.

The State has a diverse range of habitats which includes: remnant rainforest, karri and jarrah forest, mangroves, heathlands, coral reefs and deserts. Combined with massive stretches of unspoilt coastline, spectacular gorges, prolific wildflowers, and features such as the striped beehive domes of the Bungle Bungle in the Kimberley, the State offers an amazing wealth of natural attractions.



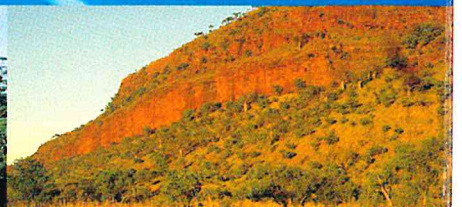
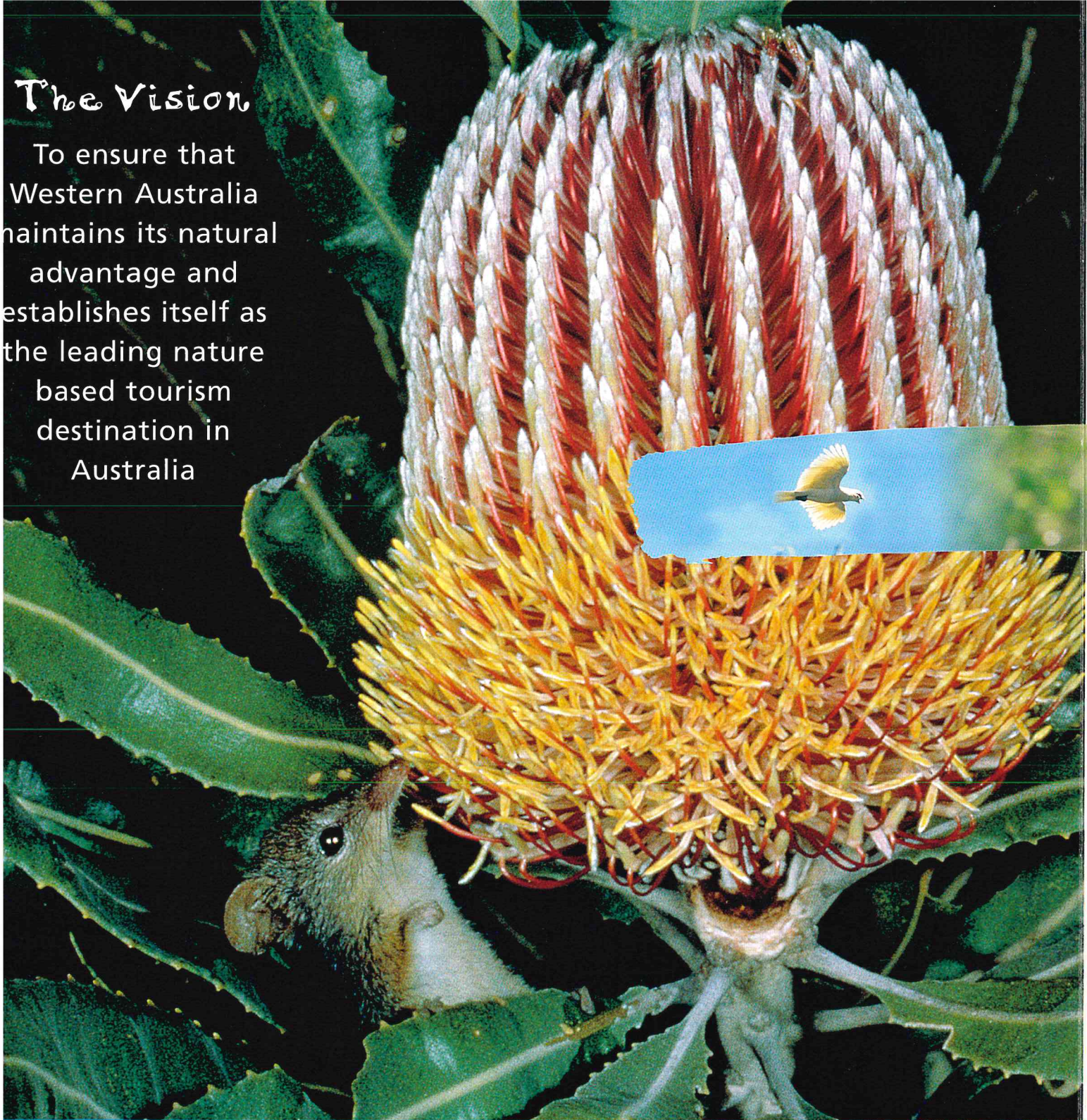
Hon Norman Moore MLC
Minister for Tourism



Hon Cheryl Edwardes (Mrs) MLA
Minister for the Environment

The Vision

To ensure that Western Australia maintains its natural advantage and establishes itself as the leading nature based tourism destination in Australia



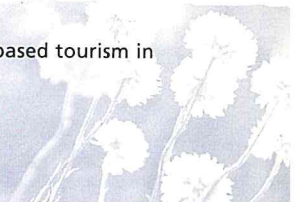


The Challenge

The growing demand for nature based tourism will increase pressure on the environment. The industry will self-destruct, however, if the environment on which it is based, is destroyed. Like all land uses, nature based tourism can be damaging if not properly managed. Effective management requires sound principles relating to planning, design, product development and marketing which aim to deliver quality experiences. The challenge is to ensure that these experiences enhance the enjoyment, appreciation, awareness and knowledge of the natural environment in a manner which does not negatively impact on attractions or the local community.

The Nature Based Tourism Strategy provides the framework for a sustainable approach to the development of nature based tourism in Western Australia.

Tourism, like the natural environment, needs to be managed to be sustainable.



The Issues

A number of key issues that impact on the future growth of nature based tourism have been considered:

PLANNING

Sustainability

The long-term viability of the nature based tourism industry is dependent on maintaining the integrity of the natural environment which will require the development of models of 'sustainable tourism development'.

Accommodation

To develop the potential of nature based tourism, a range of accommodation is required which utilises new technologies to minimise the impact on the environment.

Investment in Infrastructure

A joint approach by the Government and the private sector is required to address infrastructure gaps in, for example, accommodation, roads and air access which impede the development of nature based tourism.

ZONES OF OPPORTUNITY

Tourism assets often transcend traditional local government and regional boundaries. There is a need to identify 'zones of opportunity' based on features and the potential to market these areas.

COMMERCIAL VIABILITY AND SECURITY

The benefits of nature based tourism will only be realised if inhibiting factors that characterise the industry are overcome. These include infrastructure needs, high transport costs, the seasonal nature of the industry, and costs associated with adopting responsible environmental practices.

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Opportunities exist to develop new tourism products which meet the expectations of the market. New products need to be authentic, provide rewarding experiences, and generate repeat visits. They also need to be based on market needs and an understanding of customer motivations.

ABORIGINAL TOURISM

The desire by visitors to experience Aboriginal culture is well known, but opportunities are limited. Aboriginal tourism is seen as a means of strengthening the traditional links Aboriginal people have with the land and of breaking down barriers between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. It will also provide economic, cultural, social and employment benefits to Aboriginal people.

MARKETING AND PROMOTION

Correctly positioning "Brand" Western Australia as a premier nature based destination is pivotal to the success of nature based tourism. Efforts need to focus on the **quality** of experiences, presented accurately, to avoid customer dissatisfaction.

INFORMATION AND TRAINING

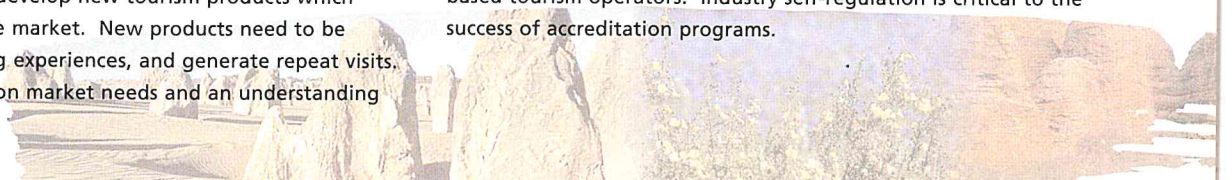
The quality of a nature based tourism experience is generally closely linked to the level of interpretation and quality of information. Quality training is critical to the delivery of quality nature based tourism experiences. Signs, pamphlets and displays are an important means of improving the understanding and appreciation of the natural environment.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

In general, the people of Western Australia and community decision-makers do not fully appreciate the economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits of nature-based tourism, or the issues affecting the growth of the industry. Nature based tourism can provide significant benefits to local communities as well as economic and employment opportunities, and the attachments of local people to natural areas can assist in their long-term protection. This is particularly relevant in areas where Aboriginal people have strong traditional and cultural links with the local environment.

QUALITY

Today's competitive environment demands quality products and services. This is particularly relevant in nature based tourism where quality experiences are offered to a niche market. Programs are required to ensure a consistent delivery of high standards by nature based tourism operators. Industry self-regulation is critical to the success of accreditation programs.





The Guiding Principles

The Nature Based Tourism Strategy for Western Australia is based on five guiding principles:

Conserving the Natural Environment

Nature based tourism must protect the State's natural assets, return benefits back to the natural environment and use codes of practice that ensure environmental, cultural, social and economic sustainability.

Involving and Benefiting Local Communities

Nature based tourism must involve local communities in determining the type and level of tourism, and provide local benefits. Opportunities need to be identified which encourage Aboriginal participation in nature based tourism and support the affinity between Aboriginal people and the environment.

Improving Knowledge

Nature based tourism must help people to understand the link between natural and cultural heritage and promote understanding and appreciation of the environment by the provision of quality information and interpretation.

Providing Quality Products and Services

Nature based tourism must provide visitor satisfaction by the development of appropriate products which are effectively marketed, and provide training to ensure the quality delivery of tourism products.

Fostering an Effective and Efficient Industry

Nature based tourism must have a clear understanding of the appropriate roles of Government and the industry, ensure that an environment exists which inhibits barriers to the growth of the industry, and facilitate open communication between all parties.

A Cooperative Approach

The success of the Nature Based Tourism Strategy will depend on a commitment by all stakeholders, and a clear understanding of the role of Government agencies, the private sector, education institutions and tourism industry bodies in the planning, marketing and coordination of nature based tourism. A united approach by all agencies and the industry will ensure the longer term prosperity of nature based tourism in Western Australia.



Implementation

Implementing the Nature Based Tourism Strategy will require a joint effort by a number of government and private sector organisations. The effective implementation of these strategies will involve:

- ◆ The formation of a Steering Committee, comprising representatives of the industry and relevant Government agencies, to guide the implementation of the strategy.
- ◆ The appointment of an Executive Officer to action the recommendations of the Steering Committee.
- ◆ A commitment by all relevant parties and a clarification of their specific roles and responsibilities in the implementation of the strategy.

As part of its commitment to tourism in Western Australia, the State Government has allocated \$500,000 to the Western Australian Tourism Commission over a three year period, commencing in 1997/98, to implement the Nature Based Tourism Strategy. Additional funding from other agencies and the private sector will be sought to supplement this contribution.

The Strategies

To achieve the five guiding principles, the following **fundamental** and **secondary** strategies have been developed:

FUNDAMENTAL STRATEGIES

Awareness

Develop community and industry awareness and appreciation of the economic, social, cultural and environmental value and benefits of nature based tourism.

Develop an awareness and understanding that a healthy environment is fundamental to the development of a nature based tourism industry.

Encourage a whole of community sensitivity towards maintaining an attractive and healthy environment.

Planning

Identify specific zones of opportunity for nature based tourism development.

Prepare, for each zone of opportunity, nature based tourism action plans which are developed in consultation with the local tourism industry and communities.

Sustainability

Develop nature based tourism experiences which contribute positively to the conservation and management of Western Australia's natural environment and which are environmentally, economically, socially and culturally sustainable.

Develop models of sustainability and guidelines to determine the carrying capacities of areas with potential for nature based tourism.

Develop guidelines and controls to protect areas of tourism activity.

Involve local communities in the development of models of sustainable nature based tourism.

Develop standards, policies and practices that will sustain a nature based tourism industry.

Establish a system for ongoing funding and support for nature based tourism resources, including managing and protecting national parks, reserves and other conservation areas.

Develop a monitoring program to assess the sustainability of nature based tourism activities.

Infrastructure

Establish sufficient and appropriate tourism infrastructure on public and other lands.

Develop models of tourism development in natural areas which are environmentally, socially, economically, and culturally sustainable.

Training and Accreditation

Develop and implement training programs for tour operators and guides that will assist in the delivery of quality products and service, and encourage the adoption of accreditation programs that identify minimum standards of services and products.

SECONDARY STRATEGIES

Product Development, Promotion and Marketing

Produce quality promotional materials that highlight Western Australia's natural advantage, and ensure that tourism advertising and marketing strategies recognise the State's outstanding natural features.

Initiate and develop a cooperative approach to developing and marketing nature based products.

Develop new products and marketing programs.

Create an environment which encourages the development of Aboriginal tourism products and the involvement of Aboriginal people in tourism ventures.

Continue market research with an emphasis on nature based tourism.

Quality Information and Services

Develop and produce quality information, interpretation material and services that encourage an appreciation and understanding of the State's natural values.

Integration and Cooperation

Develop mechanisms to communicate, facilitate and coordinate nature based tourism enterprises that explain, enhance and sustain the benefits to local communities.

Investment

Create an environment that is conducive to attracting investment in nature based tourism opportunities.

Assistance

Identify and minimise the impediments to developing and establishing nature based tourism businesses.



For further information, please contact



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