

Collected data proves vital

NEARLY 50 topics that are important to data collection on visitors to national parks and reserves were raised in the brainstorming session that launched a recent VISTAT Workshop.

The workshop was held at the Como Training Centre and was the first in nearly 10 years, and attracted 23 participants from six regions.

While VISTAT had a humble start, it has made enormous progress and, according to CALM Executive Director Dr Syd Shea, is considered throughout Australasia as one of the leading programs in its field.

The task of collecting visitor data might appear to be mundane, but it is vital to effective park and reserve management, from the perspective of giving visitors what they want, and at the same time protecting the very environment they have come to see.

The aims of the workshop were to:

- exchange information between regions
- determine the priority of VISTAT issues of concern to regions
- discuss these priority issues
- suggest future directions.

Addressing these aims, participants voted on the topics raised at the brainstorming session to determine their priority, and the following were presented for further in-depth discussion:

1. Social surveys
2. Standardisation of data collection methods
3. Impact of visits on the environment
4. Staff training, and equipment.

Park Policy and Tourism manager Jim Williamson was the facilitator who organised the brainstorming session, while the responsibility for the overall co-ordination of the workshop fell to research sci-

entist Luisa Liddicoat.

Luisa said the enthusiasm of those taking part was encouraging.

"It soon became obvious they were all well aware of the fact that they are at the cutting edge of the still-new era of eco-tourism, and they're not going to be caught napping," Luisa said.

"And if the thoroughness that they applied to thrashing out every conceivable facet of each topic is anything to go by, eco-tourism as practised by these dedicated CALM staff members is in safe hands.

"All in all, it was a highly productive day, with those taking part keen to take on board many of the issues raised and tackle them over the next 12 months; it's intended to hold another workshop around that time to review the progress made and decide what further steps need to be taken to maintain CALM's high standard of eco-tourism.



Jim Williamson, Annie Greig and Luisa Liddicoat look pleased with the topics listed for discussion at the VISTAT Workshop. Photo by Verna Costello



• NGT SUPPORT FOR VISIT DATA COLLECTION

INCREASE NO. OF SITES MONITORED

• IDENTIFY WHICH SITES TO MONITOR

• DISTRICT VISIT PROGRAMS

• ENGAGEMENT FOR VISIT TO

• OTHER WAYS OF MEASURING VISITS

① TRAINING IN INSTALLING EQUIPMENT REPAIR

• FREQUENCY OF DATA COLLECTION + TIMING

• SORTAGE AND SURVEY FORMS

② STANDARDISING DATA COLLECTION

③ OTHER SOURCES OF DATA