

PARLIAMENTARY ENQUIRY:

**HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT,
WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND WORKFORCE
PARTICIPATION**

**CHALLENGES IN THE
AUSTRALIAN TOURISM SECTOR**

**SUBMISSION BY
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Term of Reference 1: Current and future employment trends in the industry

Current trends indicate that the tourism market is becoming more sophisticated and increasingly demanding quality products and services. This is particularly true for mature age tourists (over 45) and the increasing number of "Baby Boomers" - many of whom want a "once in lifetime" experience and are prepared to pay for it.

Tour Guides Western Australia (TGWA) fully supports the increasing employment of professional Tour Guides in all aspects of tourism operations to enrich the experience and provide a high quality product.

The questions then remains:

- what is a quality product and service,
- how are the quality standards set
- by whom, and
- how are they monitored and maintained.

This is a question which has been concerning Professional Tour Guides throughout Australia for many years.

The basis of their concern is the increasing number of tour operators who promote their tours as being accompanied by a driver/guide, and the employment of site tour guides (many of them volunteers). Many driver/guides and site guides have minimum, if any, Tour Guide training. They are usually well informed on specific factual information but anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a lack of knowledge on wider issues. This is especially true concerning equity, cross-cultural, and environmental matters which frequently leads to inappropriate behaviour. For example, stopping tour coaches to allow passengers to pick wildflowers (in WA), personal comments relating to equity issues, and providing incorrect information - information which is often based on personal opinion rather than well researched facts.

TGWA also have deep concerns on the safety issues surrounding employment of driver/guides. In Australia tours cover many kilometres, often in remote areas, travelling at high speeds. It is not possible for a driver/guide to provide well informed, appropriate commentary when their main focus is on driving.

This applies equally to city tours where traffic congestion requires similar driver concentration.

There is also the issue of passenger safety, and related risk management for the business, if the driver is distracted by attempting to provide the comprehensive commentary which should accompany any journey, or to answer questions from passengers.

The employment of a professional Tour Guide would remove the risk as well as providing a high quality service and experience to passengers.

To address this issue of professional recognition and quality control the national body, Guiding Organisations Australia (GOA) was formed in 2002. In 2005 GOA were successful in obtaining a Federal Government Grant to develop a Tour Guide Accreditation system for Australia. TGWA manages this accreditation process in Western Australia.

The accreditation programme provides both tour operators and tourists with an assurance that guides:

- meet industry specific requirements
- have a commitment to best practice standards
- undertake ongoing professional development, and
- abide by the Australian Tour Guides Code of Practice

Industry specific requirements can be met through the acquisition of either the Certificate III or IV in Tourism (Guiding). These are Nationally Recognised Qualifications from the Hospitality and Tourism Training Package.

More detailed information can be obtained on the GOA website: www.goa.org.au

Term of reference 2: Current and emerging skill shortages and appropriate recruitment, co-ordinated training and retention strategies

There is no clearly articulated career path for professional Tour Guides. Many of the currently trained and qualified professional Tour Guides are mature age and have chosen tour guiding as a second career later in life rather than entering the profession straight from school or university. While a certain level of maturity and experience is an advantage, tour guiding should be recognised by the tourism industry as a worthwhile and valued career for any age.

The majority of employment for young people who wish to become Tour Guides is usually in "adventure" tourism, often in remote locations, and also usually only seasonal. Judging by the number of advertisements which appear just prior to the traditional tourism seasons, it would appear that these employers do not retain their employees in any kind of employment or activity out of season.

It would be to the advantage of employers to:

- work with other businesses in their location to provide alternative employment out of season

- encourage/sponsor their employees to attend appropriate training courses at local TAFE Colleges, Universities or other RTO's, in the low season. This would involve liaising with the appropriate RTO to offer short intensive courses in relevant areas. These could cover, for example, various aspects of business management (finance, human resources, project management, customer service, research skills) and relevant supporting IT software.

In this way, the Tour Guides would be retained (no more advertising required) and the business, the individual and the community would benefit through the acquisition of a wider range of skills and knowledge, and a more stable workforce.

Term of Reference 3: Labour shortages and strategies to meet seasonal fluctuations in workforce demands

See Term of Reference 2 above

Term of Reference 4: Strategies to ensure employment in regional and remote areas

This is partly addressed by the comments in Term of Reference 2. However, TGWA strongly support the employment of local Tour Guides in regional and remote areas, both as local site guides and for local tours. They add considerably to the quality of the experience through their own personal and local knowledge.

It is extremely important that these Tour Guides be provided with opportunities to obtain appropriate qualifications and accreditation (see Term of Reference 2). In this way they demonstrate not only their commitment to the tourism industry, but also have the necessary skills and knowledge to offer prospective employers.

During seasonal activity there is little time for formal study, but invaluable practical experience is gained. This experience should be supplemented by short, intensive courses using a variety of modes of delivery. However, as tour guiding is a very interactive and interpersonal profession, the delivery of training should include face to face sessions with visiting trainers/lecturers who are themselves experienced Tour Guides, as well as the (now) more traditional methods of flexible delivery ie on-line.

Term of Reference 5: Innovative workplace measure to support further employment opportunities and business growth in the tourism sector

This Term of Reference is addressed by the responses to Term of Reference 2 and 4