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Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
References Committee
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**SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE FUNDING AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE
TO MEET THE OBJECTIVES OF AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL PARKS, OTHER
CONSERVATION RESERVES AND MARINE PROTECTED AREAS.**

**Submission from Dr Robyn Bushell
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I am writing to you as an academic who has many years of experience in tourism planning and the relationship between tourism and natural and cultural heritage through my research, teaching and a number of key roles with protected areas and their management. This includes:

- the Vice Chair International Tourism Task Force, World Commission for Protected Areas (WCPA) – World Conservation Union (IUCN); and convenor of the Tourism program at the Vth World Parks Congress in Durban 2003;
- Tourism Member of the Expert Liason Committee for Protected Areas with responsibility for the development of input to the SBSTTA 9 for the Convention on Biological Diversity;
- Federal Ministers Appointment, as Tourism Expert on the Booderee National Park Board of Management;
- State Ministers Appointment as Tourism Expert to the NSW NPWS Regional Advisory Council for Blue Mountains National Park;
- NSW Vice Chancellors Committee representative Member of the NSW Environmental Education Council;

- Member of International Expert Advisory Group on Indicators of Sustainable Tourism, for the World Tourism Organisation;
- Australian Academic Co-ordinator for the DEST-EU funded project *Sharing Our Heritages: Master Classes in Cultural & Natural Heritage Management* with four Australian and four European University partners plus UNESCO-World Heritage Centre and Parks Australia; and
- Formerly, Member of the NSW Tourism Industry Council.

I understand your Terms of Reference are to examine funding and resources available to meet the objectives of Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas, with particular reference to:

1. the values and objectives of Australia's national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas;
2. whether governments are providing sufficient resources to meet those objectives and their management requirements;
3. any threats to the objectives and management of our national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas;
4. the responsibilities of governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas, with particular reference to long-term plans; and
5. the record of governments with regard to the creation and management of national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas.

Australia's Protected Areas (PAs) constitute a vital and irreplaceable national and international asset. We are custodians of one of the few megabiodiverse nations, and the only developed country in the world with this status. This places huge responsibility on the government and people of Australia to make **every possible effort** to protect this invaluable heritage of our land and seas. We are also the custodians of the oldest living cultures in the world, a culture that white Australians had almost destroyed in just 200 years. We are now much less ignorant and understand the horrific nature of the attitudes and behaviour that saw Indigenous Australians treated with contempt and racist

arrogance. We now respect their strong relationship to country and great stewardship of their resources for many thousands of years. European methods of agriculture, forestry and development have seen great damage and loss occur to the integrity and health of the environment. It is my considered opinion, that we have much to learn from Traditional Owners of the land, and through our PAS and Co-management of a number of these special places we can learn a lot more about sustainable development. That these laboratories will serve to help us become better natural resource managers and to help Aboriginal people regain their proper place in the civil society of Australia.

Protected areas remain the most cost effective way of conserving biodiversity. PAs contribute to a very broad range of important values central to quality of life in this country and provide a wide range benefits to all Australians, both economic and non-economic. With so much significance attributed to PAs it is most appropriate and important that much higher levels of funding and investment of resources than those currently provided are directed to the research and management of PAs. In summary, my points are :

- Australia's global biodiversity significance demands consequent high levels of responsibility
- Australia has one of best global possibilities for modelling the integration of sustainable development and conservation, and of managing our cultural landscapes in a way that protects our unique natural and cultural heritage
- PAs are the most cost effective tool for protecting and enhancing biodiversity values and ecosystem benefits
- Research suggests it is at least 7 times more cost effective to maintain and protect natural resources than restoring damaged ecosystems ; in fragile environments as in many parts of Australia this figure is much higher
- PAs contribute significantly to a very broad range of values and benefits to all Australians. As well as providing invaluable ecosystem services relating to water supply, air and water quality, protection from storm, protection against erosion, genetic pools, PAs also have many other values including recreational, educational, scientific, creative, historical, emotional, romantic, spiritual and economic.
- Therefore vital and irreplaceable national and international asset and essential to Australia's future sustainable development

- PAs will be of increasing future importance, especially in rapid urbanisation, coastal pressures and climate change
- Climate change alone will present many challenges to retain values and build in some capacity for resilience and adaptation
- Protected areas require effective management to sustain and enhance their values
- Much has been achieved in Australia- with considerable achievement at both the State and Territory jurisdictions as well as Federally
- Policy directions generally in Australia are essentially good and consistent with the outcomes of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the recommendations of the World Parks Congress in 2003
- Diversification of governance models – Indigenous PAs, Private land trusts, community conservation and incentives for private landholders are all needed and should be positively encouraged and supported
- Seeking integration of parks with other sustainable land and sea uses.
- However systems are not complete despite many bipartisan calls for completion
- Many threats exist and need intensive management (on PAs and whole of land/sea scape especially against invasive weed species, feral animals and fire)
- Ecological monitoring is critical to effective management but seldom adequate, and poor baseline data
- All positive strategic directions need major funding to achieve their outcomes
- Many national targets for CAR have not been met and international goals such as CBD will require major effort
- The current dollars at both State and Commonwealth level simply do not match the importance and centrality of the task
- Increasing importance of these areas has been matched with decreasing dollars
- The commitment to progress is impeded by an apparent lack of political priority, loss of focus, low agency morale, loss of critical related funding and lack of integration into natural resource management
- To retain rich benefits and achieve these other essential goals requires a very substantially increased investment of national commitment, resources and funding
Such support needs to come from all levels of government and other sectors like the tourist industry, NGOs and private land owners. Currently the tourism industry seeks merely to exploit the resource not to contribute financially; taxes such as GST and

airport and bed taxes that collect revenue from international tourism should provide a source of revenue for conservation and the provision of expensive visitor services, given the natural environment, in particular our many national parks and botanic gardens are the main attraction of Australia's 70 billion dollar tourism industry.

- A failure to invest will be a very expensive, possibly irreversible, loss to Australian society and a serious abrogation of ethical and moral responsibility to future generations of Australians
- Future also requires good governance principles and a diversity of governance models

Given tourism and PAs is my main area of expertise I will provide some tourism specific and expanded thoughts about this relationship. As one of the world's fastest growing and largest industries, tourism is the epitome of the globalised world. As such the world's tourism and recreation industries can be highly influential on investors, on the travelling public and on government looking to tourism for economic growth. It can also provide significant benefits to conservation and society. These can include: economic benefits; opportunities for communities, for land acquisition for community conserved areas; greater appreciation of cultural and natural heritage; greater knowledge of the interplay between humans and their environment; and importantly, through visitation, generate increased interest, understanding and commitment from the general public to the conservation of places of significant natural and cultural value. Well planned and executed tourism can contribute to increased respect for diversity of all sorts - biological, cultural, religious and political, and provide incentives to support Indigenous people's traditional customs and values; protect and respect sacred sites; and, enhance the legitimacy of traditional knowledge. The tourism industry is therefore a critical component in fostering support for heritage conservation, poverty alleviation and community wellbeing. But to achieve this requires very deliberate strategies, policies and leadership.

On the other hand, if poorly planned and managed, as is frequently the case, with money making is the only incentive, the ecological, social and cultural consequences of tourism can be disastrous. Tourism development that does not aspire to the goals of sustainable development can contribute to the deterioration of cultural landscapes, threaten biodiversity, contribute to pollution and degradation of ecosystems, displace agricultural

land and open spaces, diminish water and energy resources, and drive poverty deeper into local communities due to job losses and leakage of economic benefits from regional economies. During the past decade nature-based and adventure travel has emerged as one of the fastest growing segments of this vast industry. In Australia the Camping and Caravan sector which is almost entirely nature-based is growing at a staggering 15 %pa. This is not all ecotourism nor sustainable tourism, though these labels are frequently used just as marketing tools.

Strategies stressing the urgent need for policies and practices that ensure tourism be developed in line with principles of sustainable development have been recommended by a wide range of international agencies and instrumentalities including the World Tourism Organisation (WTO), The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), regional UN commissions.

Despite the recognition of issues relating to the impacts of tourism the WTO sees the road to achieving the goals of sustainable tourism much longer than it was a decade ago, due to the unstoppable growth of tourism around the world (Yunis, 2003). According to WTO statistics the number of international tourist arrivals reached nearly 700 million in 2000, well over 10% of the world population. This represents a growth of 7.4% since 1999. This a much higher rate than expected and twice the 3.8% rate of 1998/99. As demand for tourism, both international and domestic, continues to grow, particularly from the rapidly rising middle class of the Asian region, so too is commercial interest in the development of the most ecologically fragile, biodiverse, aesthetically, culturally and spiritually rich locations. In Australia our national parks and in particular our World Heritage Areas are 'jewels in the crown', that visitors want to visit. These natural and cultural heritage conservation hotspots are the drawcards for much tourism development both within and outside protected areas. The challenges and the opportunities this represents have never been so great. It will require the concerted and collaborative efforts of government and conservation agencies to combine expertise, knowledge, resources and influence to ensure that this continued growth trajectory is managed within the guidelines of sound policy frameworks. Protecting the environment from the impacts of tourism will also require proactive participation of tourism bodies and operations.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002 identified biodiversity conservation as one of the five priority areas. As one of the fastest growing sectors of the global economy, it is imperative that tourism and conservation are strategically aligned. A number of highly ethical tourism operations lead the way and demonstrate that it is possible that tourism in partnership with conservation can work to benefit the health and wellbeing of local people at the same time as achieving conservation objectives and economic growth. The benefits should not be confined to economic values. It is therefore important for government agencies to proactively ensure tourism policy and practice is linked to environmental and conservation conventions and guidelines, and results in:

- a) sustainable use of natural and cultural heritage;
- b) the protection of nature conservation areas from being loved to death by visitors or exploited by industry, as feared by many conservationists;
- c) the potential of tourism being harnessed to help finance conservation and provide direct financial support for protected areas;
- d) support for local communities and Indigenous people through nature based tourism; and support for greater co-management of PAs;
- e) a contribution to civil society, engendering respect for others and for our natural and cultural heritage; and that
- f) visitor services, tours and interpretation strategies that foster a greater level of understanding of the many values of protected areas and wider support for conservation.

These objectives are best achieved through high level negotiation between peak conservation and tourism bodies, together with on-the-ground partnerships between natural resource managers, local communities and tourism operators. This requires highly trained and skilled personnel, and it takes park managers away from the core business of conservation management, so supplementary funding is needed to enable the partnership with tourism to result in the desirable outcomes for PAs, not just contributing to GDP at the expense of the environment.

The contribution of PAs to recreation, leisure, tourism and environmental education has economic, educational, research, health, spiritual components, collectively contributing significantly to quality of life. PAs are places of social and personal reflection. Places

where physical fitness and social interaction take place everyday. In NSW alone national parks have some 22 million visitors per year. In a society increasingly troubled by fear and conflict between different cultural groups, nature based recreation offers a space to educate people about the significance of biodiversity to life on Earth and the importance of cultural diversity in making that life worthwhile, in a vibrant, safe and healthy civil society.

It is public funded and managed heritage places that are able to advance national priorities in research, education and health as well as the vital role of PAs in ecosystem protection and conservation. They are not a utility to be sold or a responsibility to be handed over to the private sector. The private sector, along with NGOs and community can be partners with PA managers, but not policy makers. Our planet is our future (as Illona Kickbush former Head of Health Promotion for the World Health Organisation once quipped “ Good planets are hard to find!”). It will be a negotiated future but it is incumbent on present world governments, with nations like Australia as leaders, to adequately protect the shrinking natural resources so future generations have health and options.

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