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15 March 2006

Ref: OC06-0030

Committee Secretary
Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Secretary

RE: Senate Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas – TTF Australia Submission.

Please find attached TTF Australia's submission for the Senate Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas.

TTF Australia has been a strong advocate for building partnerships between parks agencies and the tourism sector. We have a firm view that the tourism industry is a valuable ally for the conservation movement and the parks sector. However, the opportunity to fully leverage this alliance is yet to be fully realised.

Our submission deals with broader issues of tourism, tourism investment and protected area sustainability rather than the specific issues of the terms of reference.

If you wish to contact TTF Australia regarding this submission please call our National Tourism Policy Manager, Ms Joyce DiMascio on (02) 9240 2000. We look forward to hearing the committee's feedback on this issue when a final report is issued in September this year.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris Brown', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

CHRISTOPHER BROWN
Managing Director & CEO

SENATE INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL PARKS, CONSERVATION RESERVES AND MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

TTF AUSTRALIA BACKGROUND

TTF Australia (Tourism & Transport Forum) is a national, Member-funded forum, representing the top 200 CEOs in the Australian tourism, transport and infrastructure sectors.

Among our Members and partners are investors, operators and marketers with a major stake in the sustainability of Australia's parklands and natural environment. These include GPT, Voyages, Parks Victoria, Forests NSW and Indigenous Business Australia.

TTF Australia also has important partnerships with the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), Parks Australia, Tourism New South Wales, Tourism Victoria, Tourism Queensland and Tourism Australia.

TTF Australia is the only industry group that brings together investment and conservation interests to achieve sustainable tourism outcomes.

TTF Australia has strong credentials in the areas of tourism and investment policy both in Australia and overseas. TTF Australia's Managing Director & CEO, Christopher Brown is the President of the Business Council of the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO); he has a seat at the table of the Industry Implementation Advisory Group for the Tourism White Paper and has been invited to Parks Australia's National Landscapes Reference Committee. TTF Australia is also a founding member of the National Tourism Alliance.

TTF AUSTRALIA AND PROTECTED AREAS

In 2004, TTF Australia formed an important partnership with the ACF, which resulted in the signing of a joint Sustainable Tourism Protocol.

This Protocol marks a commitment on behalf of the TTF Australia and the ACF to;

- Share knowledge and information;
- Liaise on issues of common interest;
- Develop common policy priorities;
- Communicate with government, the community and our Members;
- Initiate and sponsor research; and
- Advocate on the specific issues identified in the Protocol.

TTF Australia is currently rolling out its *Natural Tourism Partnerships Initiative* which will involve a suite of activities to reinforce the principles underpinning this protocol. Don Henry of the ACF, Penny Figgis of the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) and Bruce Leaver of Parks Australia have provided counsel to TTF Australia on an appropriate direction for this initiative.

TTF Australia will be looking to build on the delivery of the 2004 research report '*A Natural Partnership: Making National Parks a Tourism Priority*' which served to highlight the need for an alliance between tourism and Australia's National Parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas (hereafter "protected areas"). Further research will be commissioned by TTF Australia during the next phase of the initiative including an investigation into the economic contribution of tourism to protected areas.

LINK BETWEEN TOURISM AND AUSTRALIA'S PROTECTED AREAS

Australian tourism is a \$73 billion industry¹ and a major economic driver for Australia. According to the Tourism White Paper, tourism's input to the economy was greater than agriculture, forestry or fishing, communications services or electricity, gas and water supply in 2002.

Tourism makes a significant indirect contribution to economic activity in Australia by creating demand for upstream industries, such as infrastructure development, cleaning services, and food suppliers. Tourism represents 7.1% of Australia's GDP².

In 2004, tourism directly employed 536,600 people and according to Tourism Research Australia there are an estimated 351,000 further people indirectly employed by the industry. Direct and indirect tourism employment represents over 9% of total employment nationally³. Tourism jobs are unevenly distributed throughout Australia. Tourism's direct share of employment in regional Australia is 6.5% which is significantly higher than the national average of 5.7%⁴.

Tourism to protected areas is often identified as nature-based, indigenous or eco-tourism. There is an inherent link for inbound tourists between these tourism experiences and Australia's natural and cultural attractions. This makes Australia's protected areas an invaluable asset for the nation.

From the iconic and remote Uluru, Kakadu, the Kimberley, South West Tasmania and Daintree to the Sydney Harbour National Park and the Great Ocean Road, Australia's protected areas are defining tourism images.

Inbound visitation to Australia in 2004 reached 5.2 million⁵. During that calendar year, over 597,000 international visitors experienced some form of Indigenous culture during their stay in Australia⁶. There were more than 12 million distinct visits to protected areas

¹ Australian National Accounts: Tourism Satellite Account.

² *Indirect Economic Contribution of Tourism to Australia*; Tourism Research Australia 2006.

³ DITR *Impact*, February 2006.

⁴ TTF Australia National Tourism Employment Atlas, 2004.

⁵ Overseas Arrivals and Departures (OADs), Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004/05.

⁶ DITR website, February 2006.

during the same period⁷. However, the greatest source of tourism to protected areas comes from domestic markets which represent nearly 90% of the 80 million total visits to protected areas annually⁸.

The UNWTO's vision of sustainable tourism development is to meet *"the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems."*⁹

TTF Australia shares the view that tourism should support conservation, and that both residents and visitors alike should be able to appropriately access, appreciate, respect and help fund the conservation of our natural areas, now and into the future.

PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Australia's protected areas have two notable functions. According to the World Conservation Union (IUCN)¹⁰ protected areas are important because of the critical role they play in biodiversity conservation and the protection of natural ecosystems. However, an equally important function is recreational visitation to national parks and the activities carried out in these areas.

For Australia's tourism industry to reach its full potential it is vital that protected areas are adequately funded, managed and promoted. TTF Australia advocates that future policy decisions for protected areas take into consideration how the tourism industry may be impacted.

TTF Australia proposes three fundamental issues for protected areas within Australia in relation to tourism.

1. Marketing – Tourism and parks to form partnerships to market protected areas and promote regional economic development.
2. Visitor services – A review of the management structures of protected areas to reflect the dual role of conservation and tourism.
3. Public and private sector partnerships – Opportunities for investment in protected areas to add value and to reduce liabilities.

1. Marketing

Parks agencies and tourism organisations at a State and Federal level have the opportunity to form a strategic marketing alliance to promote regional economic development through tourism. Together they can monitor sustainable visitation to protected areas whilst ensuring the carrying capacity of the environment is not exploited.

⁷ International Visitors Survey, Tourism Research Australia, 2004.

⁸ *A Natural Partnership: Making National Parks a Tourism Priority* – TTF Australia, June 2004.

⁹ ACF & TTF Australia Sustainable Tourism Protocol, 2004.

¹⁰ *Guidelines for Protected Area Management Categories*, IUCN (The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources), Switzerland, 1994.

Protected areas are among the greatest attractions tourism can offer international and domestic travellers and a successful partnership with parks is paramount to the on-going success of both industries. Tourism can also help to elevate the level of awareness of the value of Australia's protected areas.

These natural areas must be managed in ways that are compatible with their long-term protection and their financial, environmental and social sustainability. Promotion, distribution channels and the visitor experience can be managed to support desirable environmental and tourism outcomes.

As many protected areas lie within regional and rural Australia, a successful partnership can enhance regional economic development. Tourism provides employment to remote areas of Australia which is a key indicator of economic health and tourism expenditure has a direct impact on the community.

2. Visitor Services

Adequately funded protected areas enable parks agencies to provide a level of resource protection and tourism experience that sustains the environment and can respond to visitor needs. This includes completion of critical park infrastructure such as walking tracks, roadways, signage and amenities as well as establishing effective programs to protect or enhance conservation efforts.

In March 2006, the Australian Government released the *National Tourism Investment Strategy: Investing for our future* (NTIS) which covers a broad range of investment issues across a number of Government portfolios.

The report is the first of its kind in Australia and brings tourism into mainstream economic and strategic planning. It provides a simple, well planned, integrated strategy to break down impediments to tourism investment in Australia.

Federal Tourism Minister, the Hon Fran Bailey MP will convene an interdepartmental committee, chaired by the Department of Industry Tourism and Resources, involving all relevant agencies to provide advice on the recommendations. A comprehensive Government response to the report will be released in a few months.

TTF Australia endorses recommendation 30b of the NTIS which calls for "*the Australian Government to develop park management structures which reflect the dual role of parks as conservation areas and tourist attractions. A management structure with dedicated resourcing to tourism industry development and liaison will provide a system to evaluate and facilitate private sector investment in facilities, such as parking and amenities.*"¹¹

The Federal Government must form stronger relationships with the State and Territory Governments to deliver policies, funding and structures which allow conservation to continue, while at the same time, improve visitor services and infrastructure.

¹¹ National Tourism Investment Strategy: Investing for our future – The Hon. Warwick Smith, Rick Allert AM, David Baffsky AO, Sarina Bratton, Leanne de Bortoli and Hugh King, March 2006, pg 56.

The States cannot manage the funding burden alone. Many of Australia's vast protected areas transcend State and Territory borders. Therefore it should be acknowledged that funding issues must transcend State borders. However, to supplement essential Government appropriations, parks agencies must look to partnership opportunities with the private sector to prevent protected areas from becoming a bottom-line liability. This would be a great threat to conservation and the sustainability of parks.

3. Public and Private Sector Partnerships

Currently, the private sector is deterred from investing in protected areas because of prohibitive regulatory procedures and poor return on investment. A review of the current model for parks investment strategies should be explored.

Government policies on public private sector partnerships could be streamlined to ensure the highest quality visitor experience can be delivered in a profitable environment. Approval processes are currently protracted and costly, posing barriers to entry for genuine investors and operators. To attract high-calibre investors, agencies must look at inefficiencies in current approval processes for commercial operators at each level of Government.

The existing land tenure arrangements also require review. Development of infrastructure requires expenditure which is commensurate to the projected outcomes of any venture. Without a change in the current land tenure arrangement, commercial operators will be deterred from investing substantial capital. Moreover, the financial burden will again rest with the under-resourced parks agencies leaving tourism insufficiently serviced – and the conservation agenda under resourced.

A recommendation of the NTIS is that “a *minimum tenure length of 50 years and an optimal length of 99 years...*¹²” should be adopted which would provide investors with degree of security that can only come from a long-term lease.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TTF advocates that parks agencies develop an integrated strategy with the tourism industry. Such a strategy should include:

- A greater emphasis on the importance of visitation, employment and promotion to the development of the regional economy and the sustainability of protected areas.
- The development of a national strategic marketing partnership between the tourism industry and protected area managers.
- Acknowledgement by the parks sector of the role that tourism can play in regional economic development which can lead to increased environmental awareness of protected areas.

¹² National Tourism Investment Strategy: Investing for our future – The Hon. Warwick Smith, Rick Allert AM, David Baffsky AO, Sarina Bratton, Leanne de Bortoli and Hugh King, March 2006 pg 55.

- Adoption of “tourism partnerships” as a policy priority for State and Federal parks agencies.
- Recognition that the private sector has a role to play to supplement public investment in protected areas, park infrastructure and services through partnerships. Non-core services should be outsourced, releasing Government funding allocations for park management services and conservation.
- Adoption of recommendations in NTIS specifically as they relate to longer land tenures (minimum of 50 years, which an optimal 99 year option) and a review of park management structures to reflect the dual role of protected areas in tourism and conservation.
- Coordination of adequate public and private sector funding and research into tourism and conservation management.

CONCLUSION

The establishment of sustainable and predominately self-sufficient protected areas is crucial to the future of tourism in this country. It is also vital for the on-going conservation efforts of parks agencies nationwide.

Australia's natural icons represent one of Australia's most recognisable points of differentiation in tourism. This must be leveraged further to ensure Australia's future economic development through tourism is maximised.

Investment in protected area infrastructure and visitor services will bring significant financial returns through increased visitor expenditure in regional and rural Australia. It will also lead to significant destination development and employment as well as promote environmental and conservation benefits.

Streamlining approval procedures and increasing land tenure arrangements will also encourage high-calibre commercial operators to invest in the future of some of Australia's greatest natural assets.

TTF Australia urges the Senate Inquiry to fully explore the opportunities to strengthen the performance of Australia's parks agencies through an integrated approach to tourism partnerships and public private sector initiatives.

Tourism and conservation are natural allies, yet this alliance still remains in its infancy.

For further information please contact:

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