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An industry that can speak with a united voice is more powerful than the individual

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Dear Senators

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NATIONAL PARK SUBMISSION

Introduction to ORIC

The Outdoor Recreation Industry Council of NSW (ORIC) is the peak body for public and commercial providers of outdoor recreation/education services in NSW. ORIC comprises over 100 organisational members. ORIC has functioned in its peak body role since 1990. The organisation has a full-time secretariat and is funded by member subscription and the NSW Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation.

National Parks and ORIC

A significant number of ORIC members regularly use national parks. This use is concentrated in the Blue Mountains National Park (and adjoining protected areas) west of Sydney, the Kosciusko National Park in the alpine area of southern NSW, Moreton National Park, south west of Wollongong, the Barrington Tops National Park north west of Newcastle and the various parks of the northern coast and tablelands of NSW. Members in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) use both the NSW national park system and those of the ACT. In a recent member survey (64 organisations responded) of annual national park use: 15 indicated that they did not use national parks; 22 spent between 20 and 40 days in national parks; and 10 had user rates of 140 days plus.

Given these data, ORIC recognises its significant dependence on national parks and other protected areas to provide opportunities for organised outdoor recreation for both its commercial and not-for-profit members. This dependence is recognised by ORIC in its efforts to have a fully accredited membership who are aware of both the values of national parks and the necessary best practice to minimize the impact of their activities.

Issues

Licensing

In NSW, commercial operators are required to obtain a national park licence when conducting operations within park boundaries. ORIC supports such a licensing system. The licence system is ostensibly used to regulate and monitor use within national parks - licence fees apply.

Our concern is with the lack of uniformity in licensing. Different parts of the state have different licensing regimes. Further, should members cross interstate borders in the course of their activities, new licensing regimes apply. There is also some concern as to what a licence, in effect, means. Is it payment for entry, a quality indicator (as a licensed operator) or a contribution to specific management practices that facilitate the type of activities conducted by our members within national parks? There is also some concern that only commercial organisations are typically required to purchase a license yet our data would suggest that these groups are not the major users of the park system.

It is the view of ORIC that some form of licensing arrangement needs to be invoked for all groups within national parks where those groups engage in organised and sustained outdoor recreation activity. This licence should provide for some standards of quality assurance, for example, the group has codes of practice for minimal impact camping.

ORIC has an existing organisational accreditation process to support members in their endeavours to operate as responsible users of protected areas - including national parks.

Carrying Capacity

In the context of the above, ORIC recognises the issue of carrying capacity in some fragile areas and would support regulation that helps sustain the environmental integrity of specific protected areas and habitat.

Access

It is in ORIC's interest to have ongoing access to national parks. However, ORIC also recognises that access is not necessarily a right and that some activities will at times be restricted in specific areas – for example, the current ban on rock climbing on the Three Sisters in Blue Mountains National Park. However, the principle of access to national parks for organised outdoor recreation must be maintained.

Park Management

ORIC has a positive and valued working relationship with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). The attempts of the NPWS to balance the preservation of the natural resource with specific forms of nature-based outdoor recreation are consistent with the views of ORIC. However, it is our strong view that the level of resourcing for the management of the protected areas within their control is clearly and grossly inadequate.

Indeed, we suspect that governments of all persuasion have not sufficiently grasped the need for the resources needed for the long term stewardship of the various national park systems within Australia. Given that they are clearly a national resource, some additional forms of Commonwealth funding should be made available to assist state government bodies with what is ultimately a national issue.

ORIC would be pleased to discuss further any of the issues raised in this submission.

Yours sincerely



Bruce Hayllar PhD
Vice-President