

## **INQUIRY INTO CROWN LAND IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** Tourism and transport forum

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The Hon Paul Green MLC  
Chair, General Purpose Standing Committee No. 6  
c/o Sam Griffith  
Via email: [gpsc6@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:gpsc6@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Mr Green

**Re: Inquiry into Crown Land**

I write to make a submission on behalf of the Tourism & Transport Forum Australia (TTF) to the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 6 inquiry into Crown Land in New South Wales (NSW). TTF commends the Committee on undertaking this Inquiry.

TTF is the peak national body for the tourism, transport and aviation sectors across Australia. We are a CEO forum representing some of the leading institutions and corporations in the Australian visitor economy. Our membership spans accommodation and transport providers, airlines and airports, restaurants and retailers, business and major events organisers, property developers, investors and land managers, amusement and cultural attractions, and professional services.

TTF utilises its expertise and networks to develop and advocate public policy for the sustainable long-term growth of the visitor economy. The nature-based tourism sector is a vital part of the visitor economy and a fundamental component of a region's identity as a visitor destination.

TTF continues to advocate for Governments to recognise the economic, social and environmental benefits that stem from sustainable nature-based tourism development. Reference to 'natural landscapes' in this submission includes reference to Crown Land, national parks, state forests, nature parks and reserves.

***The natural environment: more than Australia's greatest tourism asset***

Nature-based tourism forms a significant component of Australia's visitor economy, ranking among top travel motivators for international visitors to the country. Our natural heritage and culture provide us with a unique competitive advantage in the global market – but they must also be appropriately protected, managed and developed.

International visitor research reveals Australia's biggest strength as an international tourist destination is its natural environment. Interest in nature is even higher among actual visitors to Australia, with 62 per cent of international visitors engaging in nature-based activities. In 2011, \$25 billion was the total expenditure of international and domestic overnight visitors who participated in nature-based tourism during their visit.

Tourists who engage in nature-based activities tend to generate higher yield and stay longer – international nature-based visitors, for example, spend 17 per cent more and stay 22 per cent longer than the average international visitor. The strong interest of visitors to engage with our natural landscapes highlights the value of nature-based tourism to the Australian economy. With natural landscapes spread out widely across Australia, nature-based tourism is also an important driver of regional dispersal and a contributor to regional economies.

Natural landscapes have several purposes, the foremost of which is to protect native flora and fauna. But natural landscapes are also there to be enjoyed and to facilitate learning and education about our unique environment, heritage and culture. Not only are natural landscapes therefore critical to tourism in Australia, they help build appreciation and understanding of the environment, creating a coalition of nature advocates.

The reality of a tighter fiscal environment coupled with maintenance becoming more complex and more expensive, means that new and innovative ways to meet the economic challenge must be explored. TTF therefore strongly supports the sustainable development of natural landscapes across Australia, including NSW, through partnerships between industry, stakeholders and Government to meet the triple bottom line. Nature-based tourism delivers a range of demonstrable benefits to the community, including jobs and revenue through tourism, greater awareness of conservation<sup>1</sup> values through increased visitation and education, and stronger regional economies.

### *Importance of tourism to NSW*

The sum total of NSW's visitor economy is of critical importance to the State economy, with nearly 87 million visitors generating \$30.6 billion in activity in the year ended December 2015 across nearly 177 million visitor nights. This activity accounts for approximately 6 per cent of total gross state product (GSP) - including \$13.9 billion in direct activity and some \$15.7 billion worth of activity in supporting industries. The NSW visitor economy also supports 271,900 jobs, directly generating 158,800 jobs in tourism-related and tourism-connected industries, with a further 113,100 jobs created in supporting industries.

In the year ended December 2015, NSW received nearly 25.3 million international and domestic nature-based visitors, up 10.5 per cent on the previous year. This included 2.8 million international nature-based visitors, up 9 per cent. Domestic and international nature-based visitors spent nearly 116 million nights in NSW, up 8.6 per cent on the previous year, and spent approximately \$16.8 billion, up 13.1 per cent.

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<sup>1</sup> TTF believes it is important to distinguish between conservation and preservation in the context of this submission. As per the Burra Charter (2013), The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, 'conservation' means all the processes of looking after a place so as to retain its cultural significance, while 'preservation' means maintaining a place in its existing state and retarding deterioration. Conservation of natural landscapes should be the aim of Government.

Among international visitors, going to the beach (85 per cent) and visiting national parks or State parks (64.3 per cent) were the most popular nature-based tourism activities. Visitors from China make up the largest group of international nature-based visitors to NSW, followed by the UK, the USA, New Zealand and South Korea. Chinese visitors were the biggest individual contributors of nature-based tourism visitor nights in NSW.

Existing natural landscapes and their supporting infrastructure are often unable to cope with increasing visitor numbers. Issues of peak capacity constraints at popular natural landscapes are anticipated to grow over the next 10 years with the growth of visitors. This presents a dilemma for the tourism industry: if Australia's marketing efforts, which largely focus on the nation's natural beauty, result in a significant increase in visitation to natural landscapes, do we have the infrastructure needed to cope with this increased visitation? If aspirations to double overnight visitor expenditure by 2020 in NSW are achieved, will our natural landscapes be able to cope with the associated influx of visitors?

To mitigate the pressures and demands on our natural landscapes now and into the future, the Government needs to ensure that the right policy settings are in place to make certain that our nature-based assets are sustainable – environmentally, socially and financially. A new approach to the management and development of natural landscapes has the potential to unlock tourism benefits and allow visitor-generated revenue to be reinvested in infrastructure, management, conservation and promotion.

### *TTF's nature-based tourism policy principles*

TTF believes the growth of nature-based tourism will be driven by the following policy principles:

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*Deliver world class nature-based tourism experiences by facilitating best practice and innovation as well as increasing sustainability initiatives.*

*Attract a greater funding allocation/investment in critical infrastructure, operations and new product development in and around natural landscapes, and support thriving nature-based tourism operators.*

*Remove regulatory barriers to investment and streamline approval processes for sustainable development in and around natural landscapes.*

*Focus more on destination management and promotion to raise the profile of Australia's natural and cultural heritage experiences.*

*Support dispersal of visitors to key regional natural landscapes through better transport and accessibility across all modes.*

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Within an increasingly competitive global tourism marketplace, visitors are becoming more discerning. Our natural tourism experiences and infrastructure are now not only competing domestically but evermore internationally, and therefore our natural landscapes need to be maintained and improved to meet visitor needs and expectations.

However, Government agencies responsible for managing and maintaining natural landscapes often lack sufficient funding for maintenance, development and improvements, increased conservation, climate change adaptation and visitor management costs. Natural landscape management is also often underfunded relative to the level of visitation. Due to these financial restraints, tourism branding, planning, infrastructure development and marketing are often discretionary initiatives and are left by the wayside.

While visitor entrance and usage fees provide a valid source of revenue, they are often not sufficient in their own right to subsidise for the decreasing funding trend of Government agencies. Some Government agencies prohibit private sector involvement and have restrictions on leases and licences of natural landscapes that create a barrier to effective private sector investment in these natural landscapes. Such efforts that effectively restrict or limit visitor access and enjoyment of natural landscapes further reduce sources of revenue, exacerbating the fiscal constraints of Government agencies.

A reality for many Government agencies within a tightening fiscal environment is to develop strategies that provide alternate revenue streams. Current lease and licensing regimes in natural landscapes are one revenue strategy. However, the current regimes encourage landlord-tenant relationships, rather than risk and revenue sharing partnerships between Government agencies and the private sector.

An alternative revenue stream that better leverages natural landscapes and is strongly supported by TTF, is the development of 'Natural Tourism Partnerships' (NTPs) between Government and the private sector, similar to Public Private Partnerships. Due to the strong tourism value of Australia's natural landscapes, private sector investors are interested in investing in and operating infrastructure, visitor experiences and conservation services in natural landscapes through NTPs.

Tourism and recreational use of natural landscapes through NTPs can also make a direct contribution to their conservation, preservation, enhancement and climate change adaptation by encouraging visitation and so providing for full hypothecation of revenue. By funding better quality sustainable visitor access, Governments can in turn receive greater revenues from visitor entrance, usage fees, permits, and commercially-generated revenue – revenue that can be reinvested into conservation and sustainability.

Many private operators have put forward proposals for private sector funding of infrastructure in natural landscapes where existing facilities are failing to meet visitor needs and expectations, or where opportunities exist to develop new infrastructure and experiences. However, many traditional natural landscape management structures, which have focused almost exclusively on conservation over sustainable visitation, have been unable to accept such proposals to facilitate private investment.

A further issue is that the approval processes can be a major barrier for NTPs through time delays and changing approval requirements, rather than common sense approvals that recognise the value of sustainable commercial developments in and around natural landscapes. Assessment and approval processes for NTPs can also involve multiple levels of Government and multiple agencies within each level of Government, further complicating the process and frustrating potential investors to withdraw from the project.

In some cases, commercial development in specific remote national landscapes may prove to be unsustainable and unviable. However, there may be potential to develop tourism facilities, attractions and supporting infrastructure around the natural landscapes or in communities located within convenient travel time. This can provide an effective hub community with good accommodation, food and other facilities to service tourists visiting natural landscapes. This type of community could also be a more suitable location for potential attractions which may be deemed inappropriate for natural landscapes. Further, private investors may be more attracted to investing in regional communities that are underpinned by existing civic infrastructure which can potentially be leveraged to develop good quality tourism products and experiences.

Community engagement and consultation in all circumstances involving use, development or management of natural landscapes is paramount, as Australians have a very strong affinity to their natural surrounds. An element of community engagement should also be strong communication from very early on in the process that helps educate and enlighten stakeholders as to the triple bottom line benefits from sustainable tourism development in and around natural landscapes.

### *Preserving and protecting natural landscapes for the future*

TTF believes that natural landscapes must become a tourism priority, as not only are they at the heart of Australia's visitor offering but as a means of preserving and protecting them for future generations.

In the past and across a number of jurisdictions in Australia, there have been barriers to collaboration between the conservation and tourism sectors. The approach from Government agencies responsible for the management of natural landscapes, strongly reinforced by environmental interest and lobby groups, has been one of conservation and preservation, with the issuing of tourism leases and licenses seen as an administrative (and subordinate) task. Unlocking the potential value of developing sustainable tourism experiences in natural landscapes was not been seen as a priority or, indeed, as desirable.

It is clear however, that many Governments are generally moving away from the "lock out" mentality of the past, to a position where they are exploring options for sustainable commercial development to improve access and provide adequate facilities, as well as more innovative thinking about how to invest in projects that enhance these valuable national assets. The case of the Tasmanian Government's EOI process for tourism investment opportunities in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, national parks and reserves, is a best practice example of this new approach and one that should be aspired to by all State and Territory Governments.

Destinations around the world have embraced the need to preserve the facets of their countries that attract tourists, such as their natural landscapes, and have developed their nature-based tourism offering as an effective commercial solution to address conservation challenges. For this reason, tourism can effectively provide the incentive for promoting strategic partnerships, implementing progressive conservation policies, and encouraging community involvement in sustainable tourism and community development.

TTF supports sustainability being at the heart of any and all proposals for tourism and transport development in and around natural landscapes. With innovative developments in technology, construction and transport, light touch sustainable development can be achieved with impacts that can be managed, to facilitate tourism in natural landscapes that raises awareness of the importance of nature-based assets to the community.

### *Cultural heritage opportunities*

There are clear opportunities to support the development of Indigenous tourism businesses associated with natural landscapes. Research shows that international visitors to Australia want to take part in activities that truly immerse them in Australia's history, culture and nature. There is strong visitor demand to access authentic Indigenous experiences and opportunities for genuine interaction with Indigenous Australians to understand traditional teachings and modern insights that make up Aboriginal life.

Natural landscapes have a central role to play in providing authentic Indigenous experiences because of the strong traditional bond between land and Indigenous culture. Tourism also creates synergies for Indigenous employment and interaction with the community, through encouraging interpretation of culture and story-telling. Opportunities to increase Aboriginal involvement in nature-based tourism experiences and as part of any sustainable tourism development in and around natural landscapes should be encouraged.

By providing economic incentive for protecting natural and cultural diversity, nature-based tourism can make conservation efforts possible. TTF therefore supports active use of natural landscapes by encouraging and facilitating sustainable tourism and transport development as one of the most appropriate and effective measures for protecting these landscapes so that they are preserved and enhanced for future generations.

Should you have any questions or wish to discuss this submission in further detail, we remain available at your convenience.

Kind regards

**Margy Osmond**  
Chief Executive Officer