



Australian Government  
Director of National Parks



## Parks Australia Sustainable tourism overview 2011–2016





# Sustainable tourism overview 2011–2016

## Purpose

The Parks Australia Sustainable Tourism Overview 2011–2016 identifies the principles and objectives that will guide Parks Australia in managing tourism in Commonwealth terrestrial reserves over the next five years. This strategic overview is consistent with the management plans for each reserve and the Australian Government's National long-term tourism strategy (2009). Over time, additional internal policies and guidelines may be developed to support our tourism objectives.

## Background

“Sustainable tourism guides the management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes and biological diversity” (UN World Tourism Organisation 2004).

The Director of National Parks is the statutory authority responsible for the Australian Government's protected area estate. The Director is assisted in managing the estate by Parks Australia, which is a division of the Australian Government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. The Director's estate is made up of the following terrestrial parks and reserves:

- Australian National Botanic Gardens
- Booderee National Park and Botanic Gardens
- Christmas Island National Park
- Kakadu National Park

- Norfolk Island National Park and Botanic Garden

- Pulu-Keeling National Park

- Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park

Our parks are spectacular and diverse: from the rugged escarpments and lush wetlands of Kakadu with its rich Aboriginal culture, to the stunning white beaches, magnificent cultural heritage, diverse marine life and thick natural forest of Booderee. Norfolk Island National Park features tall tree ferns and giant Norfolk Island pines, while Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park offers a rare insight into how Anangu traditional landholders have lived — and continue to live — in the arid environment of this World Heritage listed area.

Christmas Island is home to a rich abundance of flora and fauna found nowhere else in the world. Even the smallest, most isolated park — the island atoll, Pulu-Keeling National Park — has an internationally significant seabird rookery. In the heart of Canberra the Australian National Botanic Gardens connects people with Australian flora.

Parks Australia has a responsibility to conserve these special places while also enabling memorable visitor experiences.

The World Heritage listed parks, Kakadu and Uluru-Kata Tjuta, carry responsibilities and obligations for their management, protection and presentation. Three of our national parks are managed jointly with their Aboriginal owners — Kakadu, Uluru-Kata Tjuta and Booderee. These are significant tourism destinations for both domestic and international visitors, stimulating national and regional economies and creating significant benefits for businesses and communities.



Parks Australia also plays a leadership role in the management of Australia's National Landscapes — a partnership between Tourism Australia and Parks Australia — to build on the natural link between tourism and conservation and to market Australia's world-class visitor experiences.

Parks Australia operates in a dynamic environment constantly faced with new conservation and management challenges competing for available funding and resources. Many reserves are under increasing environmental and cultural pressures. A sustainable approach to tourism development and management is essential in the face of these challenges. It is also important to meet stakeholder expectations and deliver high-quality visitor experiences.

The natural and cultural values of Commonwealth terrestrial reserves are the foundation for many commercial tourism operations. The Director of National Parks issues around 250 permits each year to tour operators to enable them to deliver tourism products in Commonwealth reserves. The tourism industry plays a vital role in providing access to reserves and educating visitors about their values and appropriate use. Commercial tour operators have a role to play in fostering community support for conservation and can also assist the parks by effectively managing the visitors they bring.

Tourism is a significant part of our business, contributing some \$9 million in revenue during 2009–2010 and requiring ongoing investment in the delivery of visitor services and infrastructure. We provide visitor and cultural centres, camping areas, bushwalking tracks, roads and 4WD tracks, viewing areas, visitor

information and interpretive programs, as well as support to school groups and special interest groups. These facilities and services contribute to delivering accessible, safe, educational and satisfying visitor experiences.

## The benefits

Tourism can be an effective tool for the conservation and management of protected areas (IUCN 2002). Well-managed tourism can generate the financial and political support needed to sustain the values of protected areas. It can also increase understanding of our reserves and their environmental and cultural values, and contribute to enriching visitor experiences.

Each year about 1.4 million people visit Commonwealth terrestrial reserves to experience natural landscapes and culture unique to Australia. These visitors provide critical support for the conservation of Commonwealth reserves through recognition, public support, revenue, and advocacy.

Nationally, the nature-based tourism sector contributes \$23 billion to the Australian economy each year. In 2009, there were 3.3 million international nature visitors to Australia — 64 per cent of all international visitors to Australia (Tourism Research Australia 2009). It is estimated that Kakadu and Uluru-Kata Tjuta national parks alone contribute more than \$320 million a year to regional economies in the Northern Territory, with about 740 jobs either directly or indirectly associated with park visitation (Gillespie Economics and BDA Group 2008)

Indigenous tourism is a key element of our





protected area estate's existing and potential tourism offer. Indigenous tourism is recognised in the National long-term tourism strategy as important to the Australian tourism industry's competitiveness and to economic development for Indigenous Australians (Tourism Research Australia 2010). In the jointly managed parks (Kakadu, Uluru-Kata Tjuta and Booderee) it is a priority and a lease obligation to enhance Indigenous employment and business opportunities.

## Guiding principles

To effectively manage Commonwealth reserves a sustainable approach to tourism is essential, the tourism industry, traditional owners, local communities, government agencies and visitors all have a part to play.

Parks Australia's overall approach to sustainable tourism will be guided by the following principles:

- In jointly managed parks, Booderee, Kakadu and Uluru-Kata Tjuta, relevant Aboriginal persons guide the nature and pace of tourism development.
- In jointly managed parks, tourism is planned, as far as possible, to provide business and employment opportunities to relevant Aboriginal persons.
- Tourism is managed to deliver attractive, high-quality visitor experiences that provide environmental, social and economic benefits.
- Visitor information and interpretation is delivered to promote understanding and appreciation of the natural and cultural values of reserves, and the need for their protection.
- Visitor facilities and services are managed to a standard of excellence that reflects the status of the parks and takes into account national and international benchmarks.
- Commercial tourism operations are subject to

clear guidelines and conditions that facilitate an exceptional visitor experience.

## Objectives

Parks Australia will develop and implement management strategies to address the following objectives for sustainable tourism:

1. To provide high-quality visitor experiences that are welcoming, engaging and raise awareness of the natural and cultural values of Commonwealth reserves.
2. To minimise visitor impacts on the natural and cultural values of Commonwealth reserves.
3. To achieve environmental, social and economic benefits through partnerships and commercial arrangements.
4. To achieve social and economic benefits through tourism for relevant Aboriginal persons in jointly managed parks.

### Objective 1: To provide high-quality visitor experiences that are welcoming, engaging and raise awareness of the natural and cultural values of Commonwealth reserves

Visitors should have access to a diverse range of quality experiences which promote insight into the reserves' natural and cultural values. To meet the demand for high-quality experiences, Parks Australia will work to provide responsive, relevant and innovative services and infrastructure and to encourage best practice and continual improvement in the tourism industry.

With the rapid change in technology, it is also important to keep pace with new and innovative ways to communicate with visitors before, during and after their visits. This is of particular relevance given the preferences of the 'Experience Seeker' target market (the market segment identified by Tourism Australia and adopted as relevant to several of Parks Australia's terrestrial reserves).



The Kakadu tourism master plan 2009–2014 is an example of a strategic framework under the park's management plan that guides future tourism to ensure it is culturally appropriate, environmentally sustainable and supports the development of experiences which match the identified target market — Experience Seekers.

In October 2010 the Uluru Board released an action plan Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park tourism directions: Stage 1. The Board, the traditional owners and the tourism industry have developed this action plan to map out the steps to deliver outstanding new experiences to the next generation of visitors. New business ideas include guided overnight walks, an Aboriginal arts and crafts market, bicycle tours and animal tracking lessons for kids. Ideas such as these will take time to develop, through partnerships between the tourism industry and traditional owners.

#### **Our strategies are to:**

- Use visitor data, tourism research and target market preferences to guide planning, decision making, communication, service delivery and resource allocation.
- Support higher tourism industry standards through accreditation and tour guide training.
- Encourage the development of relevant visitor experiences through innovative partnerships and commercial arrangements.
- Provide excellence in customer service through staff training and development.
- Develop interpretation guidelines to raise awareness of the natural and cultural values of Commonwealth reserves.

#### **Objective 2: To manage visitor impacts on the natural and cultural values of Commonwealth reserves**

Growth in the demand for nature-based and Indigenous tourism experiences can put significant pressure on Commonwealth reserves. Care is required in planning for

tourism and recreation to minimise negative environmental and cultural impacts, while providing desired experiences for visitors and securing economic benefits for protected areas and local communities.

Tour operators play an important role in controlling and encouraging positive visitor behaviour. Education through high-quality interpretation is also important to inform and encourage positive behaviour by independent and group travellers.

#### **Our strategies are to:**

- Monitor visitor impacts and develop appropriate mitigation approaches.
- Design and manage visitor access, commercial arrangements and infrastructure to ensure they are environmentally sustainable, culturally appropriate, and mindful of business implications.
- Encourage tour operators to complete best practice accreditation programs that address environmental, cultural and social issues.

#### **Objective 3: To achieve environmental, social and economic benefits through partnerships and commercial arrangements**

Like many park agencies, Parks Australia faces a challenge in sourcing adequate funds to manage both natural resources and visitor infrastructure. Over recent years the costs of managing and maintaining Commonwealth reserves while providing visitor opportunities have significantly increased. By working more closely with the tourism industry, Parks Australia seeks to augment existing strategies and resources to provide additional high-quality visitor experiences and increased public appreciation and support.

Innovations in tourism offer opportunities to provide visitor experiences that meet the needs of the identified market while contributing to park values. For example,



emerging conservation or volunteer tourism may offer benefits for protected areas, by providing additional support and revenue for conservation activities and by fostering visitor appreciation of biodiversity and conservation values.

Partnerships with other government agencies are also important given the regional context of our reserves and the complex nature of the tourism industry.

#### **Our strategies are to:**

- Continue the partnership between Parks Australia and Tourism Australia to unite the best of Australia's natural and cultural assets and promote their uniquely Australian experiences through Australia's National Landscapes.
- Investigate potential for private–public partnerships to achieve real benefits to conservation and to enhance visitor experiences.
- Engage with industry, local agencies and regional tourism organisations in policy development and local planning to develop high-quality facilities and services.
- Regularly review commercial tourism management arrangements in Commonwealth reserves to support social, economic and environmental outcomes.
- Ensure that marketing of reserves is culturally appropriate and consistent with conservation of the natural and cultural values.
- Measure the economic benefits that tourism brings to assist in attracting future government funding and private investment in tourism infrastructure and conservation programs.

#### **Objective 4: To achieve social and**

#### **economic benefits through tourism for relevant Aboriginal persons in jointly managed parks**

In a highly competitive international market, Indigenous culture is a key point of differentiation for Australia and a major drawcard for a proportion of international visitors. While Indigenous tourism offers potential economic and social outcomes, Australia's Indigenous tourism offering needs further development (Australian Government 2009).

Engaging parks' Indigenous owners in tourism will vary depending on the level of interest and capacity. It is important to find the balance between sharing parks with visitors and safeguarding culture, lifestyle and privacy. The current level of Indigenous involvement in tourism is limited, reflecting these challenges. However, several new businesses have been established in Kakadu since the Shared tourism vision was released in 2004 and at Uluru-Kata Tjuta and Booderee national parks, traditional owners are very interested in tourism opportunities and generating new business ideas.

#### **Our strategies are to:**

- Develop tourism strategies with boards of management that identify the goals of traditional owners in tourism for jointly managed parks.
- Connect traditional owners with business development and other services to mentor and support the development of new Indigenous businesses.
- Create a business environment that supports partnerships between traditional owners and non-Indigenous operators.
- Improve Indigenous employment and participation in parks' visitor and tourism services sections.





## Implementation and review

The Parks Australia Sustainable tourism overview 2011–2016 is to be implemented over five years consistent with the directions of the management plans for Parks Australia's terrestrial reserves. Implementation of this overview is subject to budgetary and resource constraints. The overview will be reviewed on a rolling basis and amended as required to take account of new information or changes in policy directions.



## References:

- Australian Government 2009. *National long-term tourism strategy*  
[www.ret.gov.au/tourism/Documents/tmc/DRET%20Tourism%20Strategy.pdf](http://www.ret.gov.au/tourism/Documents/tmc/DRET%20Tourism%20Strategy.pdf)
- Gillespie Economics and BDA Group 2008. *Economic activity of Australia's World Heritage areas*, report to the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, Canberra, Australia  
[www.environment.gov.au/heritage/publications/report/pubs/economic-activity-report.pdf](http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/publications/report/pubs/economic-activity-report.pdf)
- IUCN 2002. *Sustainable tourism in protected areas: Guidelines for planning and management*, International Union for the Conservation of Nature  
[www.iucn.org/about/union/commissions/wcpa/wcpa\\_puball/wcp\\_bpg/?2167/Sustainable-tourism-in-protected-areas-guidelines-for-planning-and-management](http://www.iucn.org/about/union/commissions/wcpa/wcpa_puball/wcp_bpg/?2167/Sustainable-tourism-in-protected-areas-guidelines-for-planning-and-management)
- Kakadu National Park 2005. *A shared vision for tourism*  
[www.environment.gov.au/parks/publications/kakadu/pubs/tourism-brochure-summary.pdf](http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/publications/kakadu/pubs/tourism-brochure-summary.pdf)
- Kakadu National Park 2009. *Kakadu National Park Tourism master plan 2009–2014*  
[www.environment.gov.au/parks/publications/kakadu/pubs/tourismmasterplan.pdf](http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/publications/kakadu/pubs/tourismmasterplan.pdf)
- Tourism Research Australia 2010. *Indigenous tourism in Australia: Profiling the domestic market*  
[http://www.ret.gov.au/tourism/tra/Documents/Domestic%20Analysis/Indigenous\\_Tourism\\_in\\_Australia\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.ret.gov.au/tourism/tra/Documents/Domestic%20Analysis/Indigenous_Tourism_in_Australia_FINAL.pdf)
- Tourism Research Australia 2009. *Nature tourism fact sheet*, June 2009  
[http://www.ret.gov.au/tourism/Documents/tra/Snapshots%20and%20Factsheets/Nature\\_factsheet\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.ret.gov.au/tourism/Documents/tra/Snapshots%20and%20Factsheets/Nature_factsheet_FINAL.pdf)
- Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park 2010. *Tourism directions: Stage one*, September 2010.  
[www.environment.gov.au/parks/publications/uluru/pubs/tourismdirections.pdf](http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/publications/uluru/pubs/tourismdirections.pdf)
- United Nations World Tourism Organisation 2004. *Sustainable development of tourism mission statement*  
[www.world-tourism.org/frameset/frame\\_sustainable.html](http://www.world-tourism.org/frameset/frame_sustainable.html)

Prepared by: Director of National Parks

© Commonwealth of Australia 2011

This publication is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced by any process without prior written permission from the Commonwealth. Inquiries regarding reproduction should be addressed to:

Director of National Parks  
Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities  
GPO Box 787  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

This plan should be cited as: Director of National Parks 2011. *Parks Australia Sustainable tourism overview 2011–2016*. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, Australia.

