



# pursuing common goals

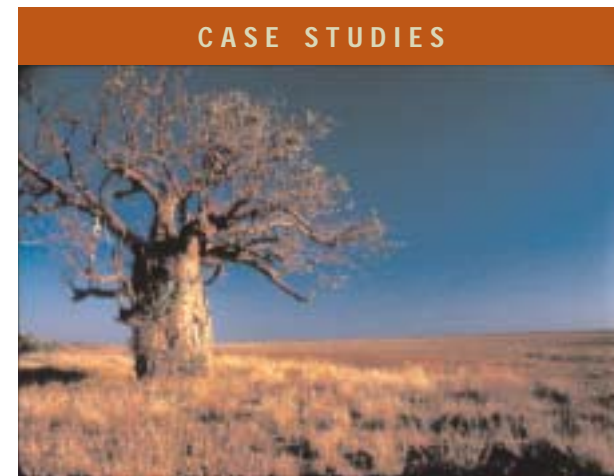
The path to partnerships  
may be a maze  
but it need not be  
a minefield

## CASE STUDIES

Opportunities for Tourism and Conservation



# pursuing common goals



Opportunities for Tourism and Conservation

# contents



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Comments and discussion on this report can be posted on the Sustainable Tourism Bulletin Board at [tourism.industry.gov.au/sustainable/forum](http://tourism.industry.gov.au/sustainable/forum).

These studies were prepared by Carrie Steffen with assistance from others on the Sustainable Tourism Team of the Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources. Preparation of this report drew on research expertise and advice from many in the park management and tourism communities. We are particularly grateful to the businesses and agencies who contributed to the case studies for providing a very valuable window into their experiences.

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# introduction

Australia has great potential to expand nature-based tourism to meet strong international and domestic demand. Expanded tourism will, however, put pressure on national parks and areas of natural and cultural significance that are protected for conservation. More than half the submissions to the Commonwealth Government's review into a medium to long term strategy for tourism expressed concern about access to national parks.

The Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources conducted a study of parks and tourism collaboration and published *Parks and Tourism: Pursuing Common Goals* in June 2003. Written from a tourism industry perspective, the report introduces important issues and provides analysis and comment.

The report highlights case studies of nature-based tourism businesses and partnerships between the private, public and community sectors. The case studies are interesting and varied, and most are profiled for the first time. They cover access arrangements, infrastructure development, community-based conservation and Indigenous development. They profile a mix of voluntary and regulated systems: some are complex and involve multiple partners; others are straightforward but target specific outcomes. A common theme throughout all case studies is delivery of good outcomes for visitors, operators and protected area managers.

The case studies are reprinted in this volume to make them more accessible to the tourism industry and park management. They are good models for operators and managers who are working towards new partnerships. Contact details are provided for each case study to allow readers to make follow-up enquiries.

## The basis for partnerships

Nature-based tourism is an important component of Australia's \$70 billion tourism industry, and indications are that it is growing in importance both internationally and domestically.

For many nature-based tourism operators access to national parks, world heritage and other protected areas is essential. How can a 'Crocodile Dundee experience' be delivered without Kakadu National Park? The Great Barrier Reef and Ningaloo Reserve are synonymous with dive experiences. How can tourism deliver these experiences and improve on investment? Operators need access, tenure and operational flexibility in order to develop and deliver quality, sustainable tourism products.

At the same time, park managers have a responsibility to conserve the natural resources in parks. Even though park managers want visitors to enjoy and learn about the features of their parks, inadequate resources frequently mean providing services for visitors must be given lower priority than conservation. How can protected area managers resolve these conflicting priorities? How can increased visitation be managed and conservation outcomes enhanced?

The answer is to pursue common goals even though tourism operators and park managers have seemingly different agendas.

- ◆ Nature-based tourism operators have a business, if not a moral, interest in protecting the areas upon which their livelihoods depend.
- ◆ Park managers have a business interest in pursuing partnerships where they can gain revenue or in-kind contributions or shift some management burden to the private sector to alleviate budget pressures.

The case studies illustrate partnerships which achieve good outcomes for tourism and for parks. They provide a practical interpretation of the many complex issues in parks and tourism interaction.



Kata Tjuta, C. Steffen

## What partnerships can achieve

Successful partnerships achieve outcomes that are appropriate for the circumstances and for the partners. Park managers want to know what advantage they will gain by using a private operator to deliver services. Private operators want arrangements that increase the value of their product.

Sustainability is an overriding concern. Environmental sustainability – preservation of the park’s natural and cultural values – is one aspect, but so also is business sustainability. If operators are not commercially viable, they cannot invest in ecologically sustainable development or contribute to park objectives.

Table 1 provides a synopsis of the types of benefits that can be gained from partnerships. Specific benefits will vary with each partnership and are identified in each case study.

Table 1: What is gained from partnerships?

Benefit	To parks	To tourism
Environmental and social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• visitor management</li> <li>• education and inspiration of visitors, increasing environmental awareness and support for parks</li> <li>• in-kind contributions to park management agencies</li> <li>• incentive to expand protected areas, both public and private</li> <li>• voluntary labour for projects</li> <li>• marketing and publicity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• education and interpretation</li> <li>• sustainable management of nationally and internationally-known attractions</li> </ul>
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• income through increased visitation (entry fees, camping fees, tours, etc.)</li> <li>• income through permits and licence fees</li> <li>• financial contributions to park management, research, conservation projects</li> <li>• market-responsive visitor services and infrastructure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• publicly-funded infrastructure</li> <li>• publicly-funded marketing of parks</li> <li>• provision of access rights through permits, licences, leases (if these are restricted or exclusive they can add value)</li> </ul>



Crystal Creek Rainforest Resort, Ralph Kraemer

## Successful partnerships

The diversity of partnership arrangements in the case studies points to a willingness, if not a need, to experiment with different approaches. They highlight the positive response of many park agencies and managers to commercial opportunities. However, there appears to be few such successful arrangements.

It is also clear that no single type of partnership arrangement fits all scenarios. A mix of approaches will be needed, depending on the desired outcomes, the ability of partners to contribute, and a range of other, often local, factors. In some cases, legally-binding arrangements may be essential; in other cases, flexibility may be the best way to achieve desired outcomes. The case studies show a mixture of approaches and provide insight into the many factors that can influence the success, or otherwise, of partnerships.

Success factors in partnerships are:

- 1 If legal frameworks are used, they should include specific commercial terms that are **binding on all parties**.

The Mansion Hotel agreement sets legally-binding revenue targets, with the result of creating a common commercial interest in increasing visitation to Werribee Park.

- 2 Partnerships do not need to be revenue-centred but need to **generate benefits that are visible** to local park management and operators.

Aries Tours employs specialist environmental staff whose expertise complements local park knowledge. It also contributes funding to employ additional park rangers, provides financial assistance for research projects and maintains public facilities at the trail head. Odyssey Tours and Safaris provides assistance with weed and fire management in an area that park rangers do not closely manage.

- 3 Partnerships should allow all parties to gain **significant additional benefits**.

The Guluyambi Aboriginal Cultural Cruise arrangements provide benefits to the traditional owners, the local Indigenous community and the owner-operator. It also helps park management meet specific objectives relating to the Indigenous community.

- 4 **Flexibility** is needed to find the right conditions to attract significant private infrastructure investment. It may be necessary to negotiate conditions that are not contained in current policy guidelines.

The land for the Kings Canyon Resort was excised from Watarrka National Park to allow greater public access and services than may have been possible within park management resources. The lease for the Mansion Hotel in Werribee Park was provided under the Land Act, which

facilitated a long lease that was attractive to large capital investment.

- 5 A negotiation process that is **transparent and open** leads to better net overall outcomes.

Consulting the community about redeveloping visitor facilities at the Twelve Apostles Visitors Centre in Victoria influenced the direction of the project and led to community acceptance of the final product.

- 6 To encourage opportunities for innovation, park planning systems need to be **open to new ideas** and products.

The amortised lease arrangement for the Bent Wing Café enabled local investors to offset refurbishment costs for the kiosk in the park. The Bibbulmun Track combines government land management resources, community-based volunteer support resources, and private service provision businesses along the track to create a recreation and tourism product.

- 7 Partnerships can be established to deliver broad **public good outcomes** (such as conservation) or specific aims (such as Indigenous employment).

Kakadu Tourism cooperates with the Commonwealth to run employment training for Indigenous people to learn about the tourism industry and provides employment opportunities through the Gagudju Lodge and Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre. The performance-based licensing arrangements for World Heritage Cruises’ boats on the Gordon River in Tasmania deliver better environmental outcomes than did previous licensing arrangements.

- 8 Consultative mechanisms and **feedback systems** help resolve potential conflict and build positive relationships.

Feedback systems are a feature in virtually all the case studies. For some (Mansion Hotel and Bibbulmun Track) they are integrated into all aspects of the partnership. Consultative mechanisms, where contact with government agencies is critical to accessing resources or expertise that contribute to the success of the enterprise, are crucial for the Yalata Indigenous Protected Area, the Warrawong Earth Sanctuary, the Crystal Creek Rainforest Resort, and the Mareeba Tropical Savanna and Wetlands Reserve.

- 9 Park involvement in partnerships can be encouraged through **incentives** offered by the private sector.

Revenue retention arrangements at the Mansion Hotel provide an incentive for park management to support private commercial developments within Werribee Park. Springbrook National Park gains valued resources through the partnership with Aries Tours. The Tourism Optimisation Management Model (TOMM) helps business enterprises on Kangaroo Island identify the positive and negative

impacts of tourism, reinforcing the connectedness of the tourism industry with other island businesses.

- 10 The government can influence private sector investment in conservation through funding and through **recognition, rewards, and incentives**.

Recognition, rewards and incentives directly influence pursuit of conservation by private individuals, businesses and non-government community groups. The Yalata Community is encouraged to pursue conservation activities and tourism development opportunities because funds and resource support are available from State and Commonwealth governments. Conservation agreements and special tax arrangements encourage private land owners to manage land in ways that contribute to national conservation and biodiversity goals and allow for tourism opportunities. Recognition of the Warrawong Earth Sanctuary encourages other such ventures.



Mareeba Wetlands Foundation

**Communication** is also very important. During the negotiation phase, open communication is necessary to establish trust and to ensure arrangements match expectations. Once arrangements are in place another critical success factor is feedback to ensure smooth operations and positive outcomes. The case studies all highlight the arrangements by which partners maintain contact to resolve issues.

## How to facilitate successful partnerships

Negotiation of a partnership can be complicated by tension over the use of public lands. One example is the debate over conservation objectives versus recreation and tourism use. Tourism operators, park managers, private landowners and conservation groups each have different, but legitimate priorities.

There may be different perspectives but these do not need to be barriers to pursuing and achieving successful partnerships. The case studies contain many lessons that will be valuable to those seeking collaborative ventures. Such lessons include:

- opportunities may not be identified because of a lack of mutual understanding arising from differing perspectives;
- ventures may fail, not because of any difference in objectives, but through incompatible systems or processes; and
- park and environment laws, plans, regulations and processes that are appropriately and necessarily aimed at conservation and resource management objectives, can inadvertently prevent development of viable business operations and new products that are compatible with park aims.

There are many ways to overcome these barriers and to create the right environment for partnerships. They include:

- encouraging operators to adopt best practice through structural incentives supported by industry accreditation systems that are able to define quality operators;
- improving data and analysis on park tourism and its economic impact;
- facilitating tourism operator input to local park planning;
- encouraging tourism operators to use their commercial capacity to offer incentives to park management to enter partnerships; and
- using marketing and presentation of parks to influence visitation trends that are beneficial for both tourism and conservation outcomes.

These issues, which span many types of partnerships, are featured in the case studies which show that a diversity of arrangements and approaches can lead to satisfactory outcomes. This is important to acknowledge because many park management systems span several government jurisdictions — each with different processes and regulations. These jurisdictional issues mean the partnership solutions will not always be applicable to or useful for all enterprises. However, the underlying principles, which are summarised above and discussed in detail in *Pursuing Common Goals: Opportunities for Tourism and Conservation*, are useful for most situations.

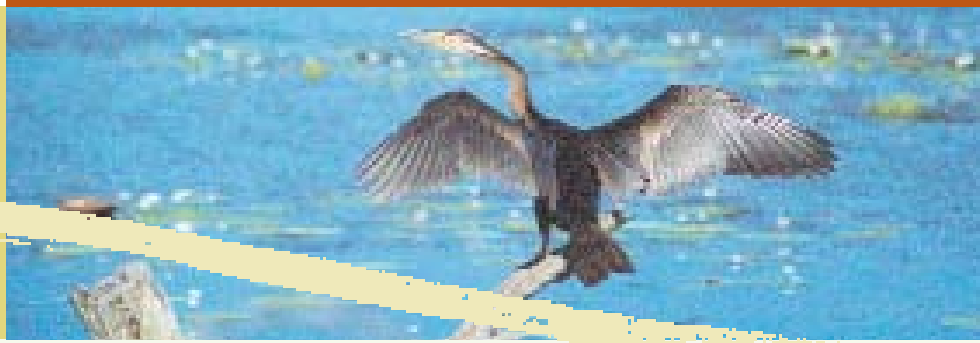


Mareeba Wetlands Foundation

## The future

Creating successful partnerships among tourism operators and park managers is complicated, but achievable. Entrenched interests or differing philosophical perspectives may create initial resistance, but this is not insurmountable.

These case studies provide insights on the issues and suggest ways to achieve mutually-beneficial outcomes.



~ **Aurora Kakadu Resort,  
South Alligator River,  
Kakadu National Park,  
Northern Territory**

## Private infrastructure in a national park

The Kakadu National Park attracts approximately 200 000 visitors per year. Aurora Kakadu Resort is the first tourism facility encountered within the national park on the Arnhem Highway from Darwin to Jabiru.

### business model

The resort developed out of a family-run roadhouse which serviced visitors, coach tours, and fishermen before Jabiru was established. The resort, which offers accommodation, food, beverage, retail and fuel, has existed in its present form since 1983. Aurora Hotels and Resorts Pty bought the resort in 1999 as part of a business strategy to develop a consistent high quality product across the Top End to complement other properties in Darwin and Alice Springs.

### background

The Aurora Kakadu Resort is a wholly privately owned business. It has 138 rooms and camping facilities with a turnover of about \$4 million per annum. Visitors comprise about 50 per cent domestic and 50 per cent international tourists, reflecting the mix of visitors to the park itself. Over the past seven years group tours have declined by about 20 per cent, possibly reflecting a trend towards self-drive tourism. The resort is open all year round but visitation is down in the wet season, reflecting visitation patterns to the park. The hotel once operated a boat cruise on the South Alligator River and is in the process of seeking to develop a new business venture in consultation with Parks Australia North and the traditional owners.

### partnership arrangements

Aurora Kakadu Resort has:

- a 36-year lease with an annual payment to Parks Australia based on a percentage of net profit, with a minimum payment;
- a separate wayside inn licence covering the sale of alcohol;
- land management consistent with national park standards – all new developments are carried out in consultation with traditional owners and Parks Australia North; and
- almost daily informal contact with park staff who use the resort shop and are regularly invited to events and functions at the resort.



### SUCCESS

The resort has had a healthy business turnover since its establishment.

Factors that have contributed to the success of this enterprise are:

- good relations with park management;
- continuity of operation; and
- being the first tourism business along the Arnhem Highway gave it a monopoly position in the early days.

### benefits

The identified benefits to park management are:

- annual revenue based on percentage of net profit with minimum guarantee;
- provision of visitor service and camping facilities in a part of the park with limited park management presence or facilities; and
- recreational and service facility for park staff.

The resort operator benefits from:

- having a World Heritage profile; and
- receiving revenue and profit for company.

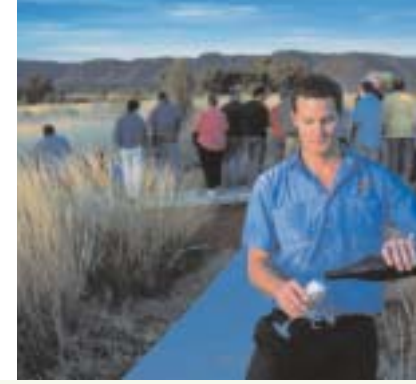
### comment

Aurora Kakadu Resort has been wholly developed by the private sector, with much of its development preceding the declaration of Kakadu National Park. National Park status means the resort owners must work in partnership with traditional owners and Parks Australia North to further develop the property, including new services or products. This arrangement is complicated by delays in resolving land claims in the area under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* and consequent uncertainty, for Aurora, about who to establish partnerships with. The resort's challenge will be to develop new products, in association with the traditional owners, which will reposition the resort as a tourism destination in its own right. Visitation is also linked to through traffic on the Arnhem Land Highway. Issues such as access, entry fees and marketing, which impact on the numbers visiting Kakadu, can directly affect its revenue stream.

General Manager, Aurora Kakadu (08) 8979 0166, [www.aurora-resorts.com.au](http://www.aurora-resorts.com.au)  
Parks Australia North, Kakadu National Park (08) 88938 1100



Photographs supplied by Aurora Resorts



~ Kings Canyon Resort,  
Watarrka National Park,  
Northern Territory



## Private development on excised land

Located in the Central Australian desert, about 200 kilometres to the north of Uluru, Kings Canyon Resort provides modern comfortable accommodation and camping in Watarrka National Park. Kings Canyon is the park's premier attraction which received an estimated 280 000 visitors in 2001-02.

### business model

Owned by a consortium of Indigenous and other business groups, the resort has clear commercial objectives. Although the land on which the resort is sited has been excised from the national park, the property is wholly encompassed within the national park and its development and operations are bound by planning instruments established by the Northern Territory Government.

### background

Built only 7 kilometres from Kings Canyon in 1991, the resort sits on 300 hectares of land excised from Watarrka National Park at the time of its declaration in 1989. Previously the area was natural bush with basic bush camping facilities at the base of the canyon managed by the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory. Excision of land to provide for tourist accommodation and services, including camping, was planned at the same time as all other visitor facilities, park access and infrastructure before the land was declared a national park. The development consortium is a mix of Indigenous and non-Indigenous business groups, currently consisting of Voyages Hotel and Resorts Pty, Centre Corporation, Indigenous Business Australia, and the Ngurrutjuta Association. The resort currently has 128 hotel rooms, 36 lodge rooms and caravan and camping facilities that host up to 1000 people in the peak season. Sixty per cent of guests are international and numbers directly correspond to visits to Uluru (about 75 per cent of Uluru visitors also visit Kings Canyon). While the hotel has a proactive Indigenous employment policy, the take-up has been inconsistent. The resort contracts out a scenic flight helicopter tour business. The hotel operates a mobile kiosk at the Kings Canyon trailhead, in exchange for which it maintains visitor facilities, such as toilets, at the site.

### partnership arrangements

Partnership arrangements are affected by such issues as:

- no revenue is generated for the Parks and Wildlife Commission because there is no lease arrangement for the resort;
- most business is handled on a day-to-day basis as the need arises;
- the maintenance agreement to operate a transportable kiosk at the Kings Canyon trailhead;
- all activities and new developments occur in consultation with traditional owners, the Parks and Wildlife Commission and other government agencies; and
- the Watarrka Consultative Committee, which includes the Kings Canyon Resort, Kings Creek Station and Parks and Wildlife rangers, has scheduled quarterly meetings.

### success

The resort's commercial success is indicated by:

- its financial success since establishment, with approximately 120 000 hotel visitor nights per annum; and
- receiving two Northern Territory Brolga Awards for Tourism Excellence for Best Restaurant and Best Resort Accommodation.

Factors that have contributed to the success of this enterprise are:

- monopoly on accommodation and services within the park; and
- growth in Uluru tourism provides an increasing source of visitor levels to Kings Canyon.

### benefits

The identified benefits to park management are:

- resources are freed up, from campground supervision and visitor facilities maintenance, to concentrate on park management;
- the resort is a point of distribution for park visitor information;
- the kiosk at the Kings Canyon trailhead provides support for visitor safety and emergency contact; and
- the resort and park staff are able to combine resources for safety and rescue operations.

The resort operator benefits from:

- commercial return from operations; and
- assistance from park managers in weed control and fire management.

### comment

The Kings Canyon Resort provides visitor information services that in other parks is provided by park-managed visitor centres. This has enabled park management to focus on its core business of land management. The resort has become a de facto face of

the park. Park staff provide education services about the park to new employees at the resort through the resort's induction program.

Because visitation to Kings Canyon is directly linked to that of Uluru which is forecast to grow by 20 per cent over the next 10 years, tourism to Kings Canyon is also expected to rise. Visitation may even be higher if access is improved by sealing the Mereenie Loop road from Hermansburg. Such growth will inevitably put pressure on facilities, products and services in the park.

The challenge for both tourism operators and the park agency is to build new partnerships that provide mutual benefits. The Parks and Wildlife Commission receives no income from the current arrangement. While this could be seen as a disincentive to work with the tourism industry it could also be an incentive to develop new products and services that do provide a greater financial contribution to park management. Uncertainty over Aboriginal land claims, however, could be a factor in future tenure and lease arrangements.

General Manager, Kings Canyon Resort (08) 8956 7442  
Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory (08) 8999 5511



Photographs supplied by Voyages Hotels and Resorts



## Private investment in an urban park

### ~ Mansion Hotel at Werribee Park, Melbourne, Victoria



The Mansion at Werribee Park is one of Australia's grandest homes. Built in the 1870s the 60-room mansion and spectacular 10-hectare grounds are the legacy of Scottish brothers Andrew and Thomas Chirnside. Once a pastoral property of over 93 000 acres, Werribee Park was largely self sufficient and supported an extensive dependent rural workforce. The park forms part of an important wildlife corridor. Many species of birds, aquatic animals and reptiles are frequently seen in the park. The Mansion Hotel is only 30 minutes drive from Melbourne.

#### business model

Tourist attractions at Werribee Park, south west of Melbourne, are the result of a successful partnership between Mansion Group Holdings Ltd and Parks Victoria. They consist of the historic Chirnside Mansion, managed by Parks Victoria since 1984, and the Mansion Hotel and Shadowfax Vineyard, managed and operated by the Mansion Group since June 2000. The catalyst for Parks Victoria inviting private development was the cost of refurbishing the more recent St Joseph's Wing within the Mansion grounds. The St Joseph's Wing was not only in a substantial state of disrepair, with some parts derelict and unsafe, but was also an add-on to the 1860s mansion, which

had been substantially restored and opened to the public. Under the lease the Mansion Group has restored the Church era buildings, constructed a new hotel wing and a new pavilion adjacent to the polo field, established a commercial vineyard and winery, started a day spa facility and sub-let space for retail use. The terms of the lease provide Parks Victoria with rental based on the private operator's turnover, with a guaranteed minimum payment.

#### background

The Chirnside Mansion and Werribee Park itself exemplify Australia's pastoral history. Parks Victoria restored the Mansion and opened it as a museum dedicated to this heritage. Half of the park's operating budget is generated through gate fees, special events, transport and lease arrangements. Concerts and opera are held occasionally in the park grounds. At the back of the Mansion are extensions that were added in the 1920s when the property was owned and used by the Church as a Victorian Seminary for the training of priests. In the 1990s this portion of the property was not open to the public.

The involvement of the Mansion Group was the result of an initiative of the Parks Victoria Board to develop accommodation and hospitality services

in the park. Following an extensive advertising and marketing campaign in 1996 which resulted in no suitable tenders, the Mansion Group Holdings syndicate was invited to submit an offer for consideration by the board. This resulted in a 50-year lease being approved under the *Land Act 1958* in September 1997. The lease required the developer to undertake all building and site upgrades within the leased area, at a cost of around \$32 million. Parks Victoria negotiated an income retention arrangement with Treasury which enabled it to retain the rental stream for park operations rather than remitting it to general revenue. Rental from the Mansion Group is based on business turnover with a minimum guarantee and currently provides approximately 30 per cent of the park's operational budget.

#### commercial success

The Mansion Hotel at Werribee Park has turned what was a day trip experience into a boutique short break destination for the leisure and business markets. It provides luxury accommodation with a high quality food and wine experience to the greater Melbourne area, which makes up 90 per cent of the hotel's leisure guests. Within six months of its opening in June 2000, sales exceeded operating costs. Annual turnover is approximately \$10 million. With a maximum of 92 rooms, the Mansion Group anticipates a plateau in income from the hotel and is looking to the vineyard and Shadowfax Winery to provide long-term growth.

#### lease arrangements

Lease arrangements consist of:

- a 50-year lease which includes most buildings at the back of the mansion, some land adjacent to the buildings, land for new construction, and land for the winery and vineyard;

- development and maintenance of the leasehold must meet Parks Victoria standards; and
- rental to Parks Victoria is based on a turnover, with a guaranteed minimum payment.

#### features of partnership

The partnership arrangement features:

- business objectives with mutual interest;
- an investment fund for projects of mutual benefit is being established;
- a Precinct Partners Group meets monthly and facilitates coordination of promotional activities and marketing initiatives between all tourism attractions in the district; and
- close proximity of park and hotel management offices aids the discussion and resolution of problems.

#### SUCCESS

Factors that have contributed to the success of this enterprise are:

- recognition of mutual business interest and a positive relationship from the start;
- lease terms that allow for return on investment, further development and complementary activities;
- long-term vision for the precinct and a consultative approach;
- effective feedback systems – regular Partners Precinct meetings and day-to-day exchanges; and
- emphasis on high quality products and services.

#### benefits

The identified benefits to park management are:

- buildings that were previously a safety hazard and an eyesore, with associated costly repairs have been restored;

- new facilities add to the park's overall attraction, increasing visitation and entry fees to the park;
- revenue offsets operating costs; and
- accommodation for visitors who attend special events at the park.

The operator benefits from:

- heritage adding value to the hotel's attraction;
- a location that has an immediate and high public recognition factor;
- a lease that provides land for construction of additional structures and a vineyard; and
- a lease that provides for hotel to sub-lease food, beverage and retail outlets within the park.

#### comment

At the time of development, the Victorian Government decided to develop Werribee under the Crown Lands Reserve Act rather than the National Parks Act. The ethos of urban park management is different to national park management and commercial development is easier to facilitate. Budgetary pressures also encouraged a more commercial and entrepreneurial approach. Conservation of the park and mansion is imperative and appropriate revenue streams are seen as important to achieving this. Pressures shared by park management and hotel management, such as attracting more visitors and maximising revenue, have led to a common business focus.

Overall, both parties view the partnership as successful. They acknowledge that better systems could be developed to facilitate joint operational and maintenance issues. A larger pool of revenue, that does not impact on operational budgets, is needed for infrastructure development and upgrades.

The Mansion Hotel, Werribee Park (03) 9731 4000, [www.mansionhotel.com.au](http://www.mansionhotel.com.au)  
Commercial Services, Parks Victoria 13 19 63



Photographs supplied by Mansion Hotel Group and Werribee Park, Parks Victoria



## Park development on private land

### ~ Twelve Apostles Visitors Centre and Car Park, Victoria

The Twelve Apostles, a group of spectacular tall weathered limestone formations jutting out of the ocean, is one of Australia's tourism icons. It attracts over 1 million visitors a year, with visitation growing at more than 9 per cent each year. It is situated off the southern coast of Victoria's Great Ocean Highway in the Port Campbell National Park.

#### business model

Parks Victoria leased pastoral land adjacent to the Twelve Apostles overlook site and formed partnerships with design consultants, approval agencies and contractors to build a new visitors centre and car park. The leaseholder receives a rental payment from Parks Victoria. Half of the \$5.5 million investment was expended on suppliers and contractors within the region.

#### background

By 1996 the increase in the number of visitors to the Port Campbell National Park lookout made the parking and toilet facilities acutely inadequate. By leasing three hectares of pastoral land adjacent to the lookout site Parks Victoria found a solution. On the leased land, Parks Victoria established parking for 189 cars and 12 buses, and provided basic visitor facilities. A self-servicing visitor amenity centre has toilets and a permanent orientation display. State-of-the-art water and waste management technology ensures energy efficiency and minimal management oversight. In 2001 the facility was a finalist in the Sustainable Design and Practice category of the Banksia Environmental Awards.

The planning process included consultation with community groups concerned that commercial development of the site could impact adversely on Port Campbell businesses. The initial proposal was scaled down to respond to these concerns.

Parks Victoria has rehabilitated the degraded original visitor site in the park. It has been extensively revegetated with native plants to restore the natural landscape and a large pedestrian underpass provides access from the car park to the lookout using disabled access gradients.



#### lease arrangements

The lease arrangements ensure:

- a 50-year lease at minimal cost to Parks Victoria paid in two instalments;
- provision for the landowner to develop concessions, subject to a planning process; and
- Parks Victoria assumes all responsibility for developing and maintaining the leased site.

#### features of partnership

The features of the partnerships include:

- a cash payment to the landowner; and
- informal interaction between the Park Ranger and the landowner to resolve issues as they arise.

#### SUCCESS

Factors that have contributed to the success of this enterprise are:

- extensive consultative process with community groups; and
- mutually beneficial outcomes for park management, the landowner and visitors to the park.

#### benefits

The identified benefits to park management are:

- restoration of degraded parkland; and
- improved visitor management and safety.

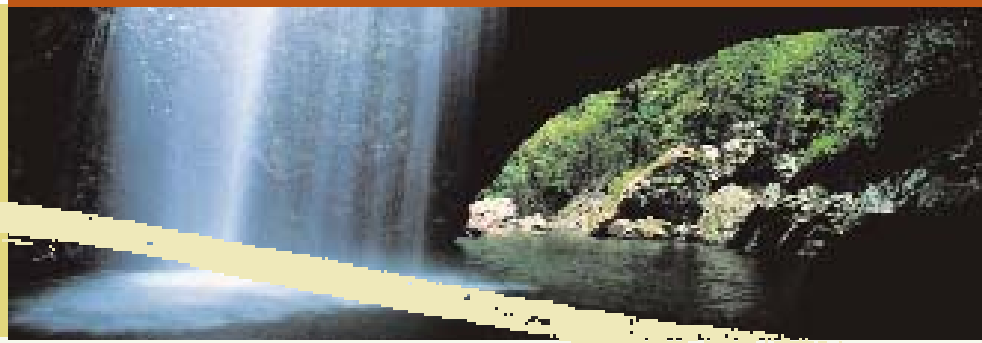
The land owner benefits from:

- additional income with cash payments; and
- increased leverage in negotiations with other prospective commercial operators.

#### comment

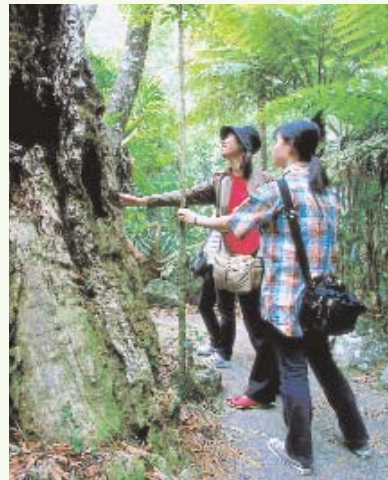
The outcome has achieved some of Parks Victoria's original objectives, in that visitor capacity and safety has been enhanced. Parks Victoria proposes to further negotiate with businesses in the nearby township of Port Campbell to develop major interpretation services, theatre, retail sales and food and beverage services for visitors.





## Arrangement based on mutual goals

### Aries Tours Natural Bridge Glow Worm Tour, Springbrook National Park, Queensland



In the sub-tropical rainforest west of Surfers Paradise, a naturally-formed cave with a waterfall illuminated by glow worms is attracting increasing nocturnal visitors. The Aries Tours Natural Bridge Glow Worm Tour offers guided interpretive tours in safety and comfort.

#### business model

Aries Tours Pty Ltd (Aries Tours) is an Australian proprietary company, limited by shares registered in mid 1989 as a tour and coach charter business. The Glow Worm Tour is Aries' principal profit generator, although coach services, consulting work and other services also feature in the business.

The Glow Worm Tour is strongly focused on the inbound tourist market and sold to wholesalers and inbound tour operators who predominantly service the Japanese market with a collection of Gold Coast tourist experiences over 3-4 days. Between 10 and 18 per cent of all Japanese visiting the Gold Coast take the tour. Reliability and quality assurance are the tour's main attractions, offering services 365 days a year irrespective of weather conditions.

#### background

Although well known to locals, commercial tours to Natural Bridge only began in 1993. Due to its popularity, by 1995 it was necessary to introduce management systems to protect the resource. One such system was imposition of a cap on tourist numbers which limited the number of operator-carried visitors at the site. As Aries Tours was the pioneer-operator, it holds around two-thirds of the permit capacity and brings the largest number of visitors to the site each night.

A ground-breaking commercial agreement between Aries Tours and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service established a shared commitment to conserving the natural attractions. The agreement permits Aries Tours nocturnal access to the Natural Bridge cave and glow worms in return for funding assistance to Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. Aries Tours funds two ranger positions that provide a level of resource protection to the glow worms, the cave and visitor access paths. Aries Tours also funds the cost of cleaning and maintaining the toilets and other on-site visitor facilities. It holds operator training workshops twice a year for glow worm tour operators and funds baseline fauna research.

Aries Tours has been very successful in the Asian market. It has fine-tuned its tour package to provide a complete package of experiences – transport, refreshments and language translations – to enable visitors to have a safe and satisfying experience. Part of the secret of Aries' success in the Asian market is its extensive development of effective communication tools and methods. These include:

- fully training all tour guides to Natural Bridge;
- directly employing around 24 specialist interpretive guides who are fluent in the language group they lead;
- providing specialised marketing material in four languages – Japanese, Mandarin, Cantonese and English;
- developing a web site in both Japanese and English;
- developing school workbooks for educational tours in both Japanese and English; and
- developing a guidebook for deaf visitors.

Aries Tours undertakes product awareness seminars in Japan twice a year and has widened its marketing to Hong Kong, mainland China, Malaysia and Taiwan. Aries Tours was one of the first tour operations in Australia to achieve advanced and core level accreditation under Ecotourism Australia's Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP). Aries Tours employs around 100 staff and has a turnover of around \$5 million in 2001-02.

#### SUCCESS

Factors that have contributed to the success of this enterprise are:

- an authentic nature-tourism experience within a World Heritage area – participants receive a World Heritage Visitation Certificate featuring the official World Heritage logo;
- value adding to the tour itinerary through special food and services, interpretation and reliability;
- small tours – 1 guide per 10 tourists (industry best practice ratio is 1:15) led by guides trained in the biology and ecology of the region;
- an interpretive guide training program and being registered as a Certificate III level in Tour Guiding adds to the business profile; and
- direct marketing in Japan, Hong Kong, mainland China, Malaysia and Taiwan.

#### benefits

The identified benefits to park management are:

- funding of two additional rangers;
- maintenance of on-site visitor facilities;
- industry involvement in training of glow worm tour operators;
- private sector financial assistance for research projects; and
- a new model for commercial operations in protected areas.

The tour operator benefits from:

- access to a World Heritage Listed area creating a higher valued tour package;
- improved processes for attaining park access permits;

- the opportunity to adjust, or introduce new products in response to research outcomes;
- improved quality of interpretation based on scientific research;
- greater resource protection through ranger presence;
- clean amenities for visitors; and
- improved company profile/brand as a leader in the ecotourism field.

#### comment

Aries Tours has built a quality product based on access to a World Heritage area. It actively seeks out new markets of inbound tourists with an interest in authentic nature-based activities. As visitation to the caves grows, both park managers and operators need clear arrangements on appropriate guiding and visitor management to ensure visitors receive a quality experience and the natural resources are protected and managed sustainably. Aries Tours contributes to these objectives by participating in research projects, developing codes of conduct, and providing in-kind support to the park, in addition to the normal licensing fee arrangements. For tourism operators to be able to contribute substantially to shared goals they need to generate profits, which means they need a competitive advantage or some other incentive. At the same time, park agencies need to see that the tourism operation benefits park management overall, without compromising the general public's enjoyment.

Aries Tours Pty Ltd (07) 5594 9933, [www.ariestours.com](http://www.ariestours.com)  
Environmental Protection Agency, incorporating Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (07) 3227 1111



Photographs supplied by Aries Tours



## ~ Hastings Thermal Springs and Caves, Tasmania



# Commercial partnership

One of the world's great dolomite caves, formed 40 million years ago, and a crystal clear thermal spring pool at a constant 28 degrees Celsius, attract around 35 000 visitors a year mostly concentrated in the peak December-April period. The Hastings Caves State Reserve is near Dover about one-and-a-half hours drive south of Hobart.

### business model

The Hastings State Reserve is managed as a partnership between local private developers Sue and Ian Hall and the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service (TPWS) Southern District.

Under the arrangement, TPWS is responsible for the visitor interface, caves, cave tours, thermal pool, kiosk/café and overall management of the site. Sue and Ian Hall are responsible for constructing, maintaining and servicing on-site accommodation. An Enterprise Management Board oversees management of the reserve and consults with the local community through an advisory group which meets twice a year. The board currently employs 12 (full- and part-time) staff who are entitled to TPWS conditions of service. Through government investment in new visitor facility infrastructure and through careful cost management and implementation of better pricing structures, the reserve has attracted more visitors, enhanced the quality of their experience and increased its revenue.

### background

The Hastings Reserve was one of Tasmania's top 10 attractions in the 1960s but declined in popularity in the 1970s and 1980s. The site was managed as an extension of TPWS operations from the Dover Ranger Base and lacked the on-site coordination needed to keep up with changing visitor trends. In 1994 the Tasmanian Government, recognising that Hastings Reserve needed to be significantly revitalised, called for expressions of interest to operate all or part of the reserve. Under a competitive tender process, the successful tender was a joint submission between the Halls, who operate Driftwood Cottages in Dover, and the TPWS Southern District.

The Reserve facilities comprise a recently built visitors centre, owned and operated by the TPWS, a thermal pool, caves, self-guided and guided cave and walking tours and picnic/barbecue facilities. Entry charges apply to the pool and caves. The Board of Management is seeking about 43 000 visitors per annum as a sustainable level of visitation that will maintain the integrity of the experience. Sue and Ian Hall plan to eventually build and maintain 12 chalets for on-site accommodation. They plan to present a seamless visitor experience with accommodation that is integrated into the landscape using of the area's geo-thermal resources as a source of heating while meeting or exceeding environmental guidelines.

### partnership arrangement

The partnership arrangement features:

- a contractual lease agreement with a detailed, mutually binding, site service agreement which approximates a legal partnership while maintaining separate legal accountabilities;
- revenue to TPWS based on rent;
- Enterprise Management Board comprises equal representation of Sue and Ian Hall and two TPWS representatives;
- Hastings Advisory Group meets twice a year for local community consultation; and
- disputes are resolved through independent arbitration.

### SUCCESS

Factors that have contributed to the success of this enterprise are:

- a shared vision for the future of the reserve and tourism experience; and
- reserve's natural attributes attract high-yield eco-conscious visitors.

### benefits

The identified benefits to park management are:

- a revitalised reserve that attracts more visitors and generates a strong revenue stream; and
- a new visitor's centre, cave re-lighting and car parking.

Benefits to the operator include:

- exclusive access to a protected area;
- improved visitor facilities and visitor service to complement the accommodation development; and
- opportunity to develop a vision based on a seamless ecotourism experience.

### comment

This arrangement demonstrates the difficulties involved when a private operator seeks to enter into a full commercial partnership with a government park management authority.

While negotiating in good faith, a contractual agreement could not be found that provided a true equal partnership, in the legal sense. Because the Crown owns the Hastings Reserve, there are legal constraints on the

Tasmanian Government which do not allow it to delegate those responsibilities to a private citizen. For example, under the *National Parks and Reserves Management Act 2002*, the sole responsibility for environmental decisions must lie with the Minister. This made it difficult for Sue and Ian Hall to obtain long-term finance to build accommodation.

Other problems encountered included:

- A requirement to offer Tasmanian public sector employment arrangements that did not provide enough flexibility to allow for daily and seasonal variability in visitor numbers.
- The need to operate under departmental accounting systems that did not provide cash management and profit and loss reporting suitable for a small business application. After strong pressure from Sue and Ian Hall and the TPWS Board members, the enterprise was allowed to adopt an integrated, stand-alone accounting software package.

The Board of Management is exploring options to establish a legal vehicle to enable a more equal private operator/TPWS partnership, including the possibility of legislative amendments, to ensure private investment is not reduced to the status of concession holder.

Driftwood Cottages, Dover, Tasmania (03) 6298 1441  
[www.tassie.net.au/driftwood/localattractions.htm](http://www.tassie.net.au/driftwood/localattractions.htm)  
 Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service (03) 6233 6121



Photographs supplied by Peter Whyte & the Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment, Information & Land Services Division, Hobart



~ World Heritage Cruises,  
Gordon River,  
Strahan, Tasmania



## Performance-based licensing

The Gordon River in the Franklin–Gordon Wild Rivers National Park is a spectacular stretch of tannin-leached river water which reflects the ancient river banks of Huon Pine and temperate rainforest in an almost perfect mirror image.

### business model

World Heritage Cruises, a family owned business, operates two cruise boats from Strahan 6 nautical miles up the Gordon River into the world heritage area.

Adherence to strict environmental regulations is a requirement of World Heritage Cruise's licence contract, in particular no erosion to the river banks. In the 1980s and early 1990s operators ran cruise ships at speeds of up to 25 knots up the Gordon River, resulting in high backwash and significant erosion of the river banks. Both the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service (TPWS) and the operators recognised that because long-term damage was being caused to the river banks, to the detriment of tourism, it was necessary to introduce strict environmental requirements. TPWS now monitors the river banks every six months for signs of degradation.

World Heritage Cruises contracts guides from the Round Earth company which runs the Tasmanian Visitors' Centre in Strahan and conducts tours of the world heritage area.

### background

World Heritage Cruises is owned by the Grining family, which has conducted charter and cruise operations in the area since the 1890s. The company owns two boats, each with a capacity of 160 passengers, and employs four skippers and about 12 crew, including cooks and hosts. The hulls on both boats are designed to minimise backwash and cause as little damage as possible to the fragile sand banks of the Gordon River. The current generation of the Grining family began cruises 1991 with a small single-hulled Tamar River ferry called the *Wanderer*. This was replaced in 1996 by the *Wanderer II*, a high-tech, environmentally friendly catamaran that is still in operation and in 1999 the addition of the *Wanderer III*, which was replaced in 2002 by the *Adventurer*.

The cruises allow visitors to travel up the Gordon River and into the world heritage area while causing minimal impact to the largely pristine environment. The full day cruise stops at Sarah Island, the site of a former penal colony, and at Heritage Landing, which allows visitors to walk through rainforest on an elevated walkway and view 2000-year-old Huon Pines.

### partnership arrangements

The partnership arrangement features:

- a licence agreement with TPWS includes a payment arrangement based on the time boats spend in the world heritage area; and
- TPWS and the operators work together on matters such as maintaining walkways, constructing jetties and providing visitor interpretation services.

### success

World Heritage Cruises' commercial success can be attributed to:

- use of low impact boats – World Heritage Cruises has operated with commercial success since it introduced low impact vessels in the early 1990s; and
- environmental responsibility – the strict environmental requirements allow the operators to market their operation as environmentally responsible.

Factors that have contributed to the success of this enterprise are:

- all operators have consistent conditions in managing operations; and
- growth in tourism infrastructure in Strahan provides for year-round visitors.

### benefits

The most significant benefit to park management is that the impact on the fragile environment is minimised while tourism is facilitated.

World Heritage Cruises benefits most from the long-term licensing agreement which allows them a return on investment.

### comment

World Heritage Cruises uses its sensitivity to the environmental values of the area as a selling point for its operation. Along with its main competitor, Gordon River Cruises, World Heritage Cruises works closely with the local council and the Tasmanian Tourism Commission to market the product to environmentally conscious tourists, although the cruise does have more widespread appeal.

Because of improvements in boat technology, the number of people taking cruises up the Gordon River has increased and has potential to continue to grow. Carrying capacity is linked to environmental outcomes which are affected by boat design and operation.

The licence system does allow operators a period of time to recoup investment. This has contributed to the ability of operators to re-invest in continual improvements to their fleets.

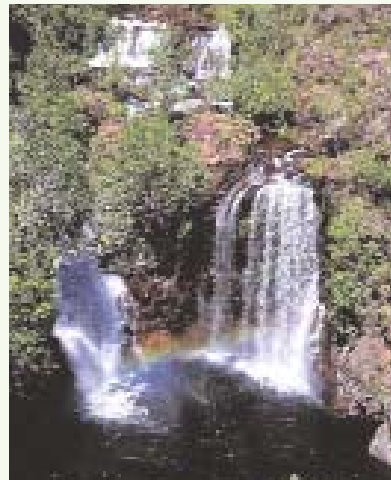
World Heritage Cruises, (03) 6471 7174 [www.worldheritagecruises.com.au](http://www.worldheritagecruises.com.au)  
Tourism and Recreation, Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service, (03) 6233 6121



Photographs supplied by World Heritage Cruises



~ **Odyssey Tours and Safaris, Minjungari Camp, Litchfield National Park, Northern Territory**



## Tour operation in a restricted area

Litchfield National Park, 100 kilometres south of Darwin, offers a year-round outback experience in a Top End escarpment environment with waterfalls and rainforest tracts.

### business model

Pitched at the high end of the nature-based tourism market, Odyssey Tours and Safaris aims to develop, market and operate high quality, ecologically responsible and sustainable tourism products in the Northern Territory. The company has a concession from the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory for exclusive use of a campsite in the Litchfield National Park. The Litchfield experience is part of multi-day Top End tours that include Kakadu and Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge). Because of the emphasis on education and interpretation, Odyssey Tours and Safaris is accredited at the highest level by the Nature and Ecotourism Association Program (NEAP) and by Savannah Guides. Odyssey Tours and Safaris has won numerous tourism awards for its product and services.

### background

Odyssey Tours and Safaris has operated in the area of Litchfield National Park since the mid-1980s. With the declaration of the national park in 1989, the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission began building infrastructure that facilitated growth in public visitation but changed the nature of popular tourism sites. Parks and Wildlife developed camping and barbecue facilities in areas where infrastructure was minimal. With 70 per cent of Odyssey's clientele being international tourists, mainly from the United States, who are seeking a remote outback experience, the changes impacted on the wilderness quality of its product. Negotiations over 12 months with the Parks and Wildlife Commission led to development of a semi-permanent camping facility that is used solely by Odyssey Tours and Safaris and guests. This unique camp enhanced Odyssey's other products as the Litchfield tour is a bridging link in their multi-day tours through the Top End.

### concession arrangements

The concession arrangements that were negotiated include:

- permission to operate for three years with a one year probationary period and establish semi-permanent facilities on the site;
- annual fee to the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission;
- tour operator is broadly responsible for developing and maintaining the final leg of the access track into the camp; and
- the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission prescribes land management policies, including waste management and weed and fire control.

### features of partnership

Features of the partnership are:

- meetings with Litchfield park managers to discuss opening and closing dates and other park management issues such as fire and weed management, crocodile and wildlife issues;
- quarterly reports to the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Commission on guest numbers; and
- interaction with park rangers as needs dictate and the opportunity arises.

### success factors

Factors that have contributed to the success of this enterprise are:

- operator built a relationship with the government and traditional owners over a period of time and is committed to developing a sustainable product over the long term;
- enough stability in ranger staff and park management to facilitate outcomes; and
- concession length and renewal over a period sufficient for a return on investment.

### benefits

Park management benefits from:

- being seen to be working cooperatively with the tourism industry;
- assistance with weed and fire management in the area;
- using the camp as a way station for injured and orphaned wildlife being reintroduced into the wild; and
- revenue from permit (annual permit fees are \$500).

The benefits to the operator include:

- camp enhances other operator products – is a link in a chain;
- sole operator at the site; and
- access to native wildlife that park staff are reintroducing into the wild.

### comment

As international tourism in the Top End has grown, visitation pressures in areas such as Litchfield National Park have increased. Now that initial problems associated with the transition of Litchfield to a national park have been resolved, the challenge will be to build partnerships that will facilitate development of new products that provide mutual benefits to both park management and tourism operators. The key lesson from this operation is the need for flexibility in park management, in order to respond to development proposals that may not be foreshadowed in management plans.

Having a probationary period for concessions is beneficial for both parks and businesses to work through issues. However, operators need certainty for business planning and it is suggested that longer terms, for example, five years plus five year renewals, would provide that assurance.

Odyssey Tours and Safaris, General Manager – Operations (08) 8948 0091 [www.odysaf.com.au](http://www.odysaf.com.au)  
Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory (08) 8999 5511



Photographs supplied by Odyssey Tours and Safaris



## Marine park tourism

### ~ Fantasea Cruises, Whitsunday Islands, Queensland



Fantasea Cruises operates trips on high speed catamarans from Shute Harbor and some of the Whitsunday Islands to two floating pontoons at Hardy Reef in the southern section of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in Queensland. Coral and prolific fish life are the key attractions which are accessible by snorkelling, scuba diving, semi-submersibles and underwater observatories. The pontoons can hold up to 600 people and there is limited overnight accommodation.

#### business model

The park is managed by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, which is a Commonwealth Government agency. Fantasea is the major transport provider in the Whitsundays and only one of a few operators with a moored pontoon to provide access to the outer reef. Fantasea has a tourism operation permit from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, which is valid to 2009. There was an initial application assessment fee of \$1560, but no annual permit fee. Quarterly payments of an environmental management charge are made to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. Fantasea collects \$4.50 per person, over four years of age, per day to offset the environmental management charge.

#### background

Fantasea Cruises was established in 1983 to provide ferry services and reef trips in the Whitsunday Island area. Its mission is to provide the best quality products, delivered by the best quality service, and to represent the best value for money for customers. Over 20 years of operation Fantasea has built up a fleet of five high-speed catamarans doing a variety of trips to the reef and providing ferry services to the islands. Over the past two years the company reinvested \$6 million in a fleet refurbishment that has reduced travel time and energy costs. The business turnover is approximately \$15 million per annum.

Two high-speed catamarans service the two pontoons on Hardy Reef, taking up to 55 000 people each year. Reef visits can include snorkelling, guided snorkel tours, scuba diving, diving instruction for first-timers and dry underwater viewing either in semi-submersibles or, in Reefworld, underwater viewing chambers on each pontoon. The largest, Reefworld, can hold up to 50 people and won the 2002 Queensland

Tourism Award for Significant Attraction. An arrangement with Hamilton Island Aviation provides customers with the additional option of helicopter joy flights or transport. Fantasea recently introduced the Reefsleeper package, a luxury overnight accommodation on the reef, which was a finalist in the 2002 Queensland Tourism Awards for Unique Accommodation. Tours to the reef are accredited by the Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program.

#### permit arrangements

The permit arrangements Fantasea has are:

- a 6-year permit with no annual fees; and
- collection of environmental management charge paid to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority quarterly.

#### success

Fantasea's commercial success is exemplified by:

- a steady growth in company operations and assets;
- a \$15 million annual turnover;
- state recognition shown by the 2002 Queensland Tourism Award for Significant Tourism Attraction and finalist in other categories; and

- numerous Whitsunday Tourism Awards for attraction, accommodation and catering.

Factors that have contributed to the success of this enterprise are:

- trust between operator and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority – sharing a 'moral' interest in protecting the coral;
- partnerships with other tourism operators in the area; and
- direct marketing overseas.

#### benefits

Park management benefits from:

- visitor management – impact on the fragile environment of the area is minimised while tourism is facilitated;
- presentation of marine park values to visitors; and
- management that is consistent with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's values and management plans.

The operator benefits from:

- a long-term permit which allows the operator a return on investment; and
- the reef being zoned as a no-fishing area – the prolific fish life adds value to the package.

#### comment

In the Cairns Section of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, where the majority of tourism pontoons are located, there is no anchoring area within 200 metres of each pontoon. This is to minimise anchor damage at important tourism presentation sites. There is no equivalent provision in the Whitsundays, however the operator reports that anchor damage to coral is not a problem. Pontoon numbers are limited in the Whitsundays, although more sites are available. Each proposal is looked at in relation to its environmental impact on the area. Fantasea is currently the only operator, although traditionally there have been two. Fantasea bought out one interest two years ago and a new operator, who operated for 14 months, is no longer active. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority has proposed extending the maximum permit tenure for high standard operators to 15 years.

Fantasea Cruises Operations Manager, (07) 4946 5811 [www.fantasea.com.au](http://www.fantasea.com.au)  
 Tourism and Recreation Group, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (07) 4750 0700  
[tourec@gbrmpa.gov.au](mailto:tourec@gbrmpa.gov.au)



Photographs supplied by Fantasea Cruises



## Amortised lease for capital investment

### ~ Bent Wing Café, Naracoorte Caves, South Australia



An award-winning attraction in the Limestone Coast tourism region in south east South Australia, the World Heritage Listed Naracoorte Caves attract up to 80 000 visitors each year. The caves, a treasure trove of fossils of extinct fauna from the Pleistocene era, provide cave-based ecotourism experiences.

#### business model

The Bent Wing Café is an integral part of the experience, providing quality food and beverages. The café is privately managed in an amortised lease arrangement with the Department for Environment and Heritage – the only such arrangement in South Australia. The lease enables the operator to service a loan used to renovate the café over the 10 years of the lease. Monthly rent paid to the department is reduced by the amount of the loan repayments. At the end of ten years the cost of renovation will have been paid off. The National Parks and Wildlife South Australia (NPWSA) staff at Naracoorte previously ran a kiosk, which was not profitable and took rangers away from core duties. NPWSA regard the Bent Wing Café as a real asset to the park experience and promote it in brochures and marketing campaigns.

#### background

In a region that attracts 691 000 tourists a year and is worth more than \$97 million to the regional economy, the Naracoorte Caves attracted 71 000 visitors in 2002 and is on target to increase that figure to 100 000 by 2004. Ten per cent of these visitors are international, 41 per cent interstate, and 49 per cent South Australian.

Visitors to Naracoorte Caves – 70 per cent of whom spend more than 5 hours – need food and beverages because the park is isolated from nearby townships. A renovated Bent Wing Café opened in 1998 under a 10-year amortised lease arrangement, which allowed investors to finance renovations that upgraded and modernised the facilities. The result is a modern café that:

- is less visually obtrusive than the original 1960s design;
- offers modern cuisine featuring local produce and wine and catering to special dietary requirements;
- incorporates a small retail and souvenir shop; and
- contributes to local employment – one full-time, three part-time and five casual staff.

Naracoorte Caves have been open to the public since 1885 and from 1917 were managed as a national pleasure resort by the South Australia Tourism Bureau. In 1972 the Caves became a conservation park, inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1994 because of fossil values, and in 2001 was designated a national park.

The NPWSA actively markets the caves which have twice won the South Australian Tourism Commission Award as a Significant Tourism Attraction. A federally and state funded visitor centre, which features an animatronics 3D walk through southern Australia before the last Ice Age, has been an outstanding feature attracting increasing numbers of school groups and visitors. Trained NPWSA staff lead mostly NEAP accredited guided interpretive tours of the caves. NPWSA also manages a camping ground and bunkhouse within the park. Revenue generated by activities at Naracoorte Caves is returned to the South Australian Department of Environment and Heritage.

#### lease arrangements

The lease arrangements that were negotiated include:

- a 10 year lease;
- amortised rental arrangement; and
- performance measures relating to price, customer service, occupational health and safety, etc.

#### partnership features

Features of the partnership include:

- NPWSA gives the café first option to cater for events and packages;
- the café and NPWSA coordinate marketing and promotion; and
- informal exchanges occur as opportunities arise, primarily to

communicate information about visitor numbers and forthcoming opportunities.

#### SUCCESS

Bent Wing Café's commercial success is reflected by:

- the café's turnover is indicative of visitor numbers to the park, although local trade does top-up turnover; and
- the park generated over \$411 000 in revenue in 2000.

Factors that have contributed to the success of this enterprise are:

- mutual dependence – café turnover is related to visitor numbers; park experience is related to quality of ancillary services; and
- amortised lease facilitates private capital investment.

#### benefits

Benefits to park management include:

- NPWSA staff can focus on core duties;
- improved visitor services add to the park's attraction, thereby increasing visitation;
- park functions are catered for with quality food and reasonable prices; and
- revenue to the Department of Environment and Heritage.

The operator benefits from:

- a financial arrangement that allows capital investment to be offset as part of ongoing expenses;
- upgraded facilities; and
- a facility that can provide a base for other entrepreneurial activities relating to cave visitors or other tourism features in the region (such as catering to wineries).

#### comment

An active marketing campaign and quality visitor centre is generating greater visitation to the park, and creating opportunities for generating revenue from special events, merchandise, retail sales and improved accommodation. There is little incentive for park managers to develop this potential because income generated is not returned to the park. Revenue goes into a General Reserves Trust from which a Board of Trustees allocates funds to South Australian parks.

The amortised arrangement enabled small investors to secure capital for the café renovations and to have loan repayments subsidised by the reduction in rent paid to the Department. Because the rent reduction is set at the beginning of the lease arrangement, on the basis of existing interest rates, the arrangement can have negative outcomes if interest rates are unstable and rise, causing the mortgage repayments to be higher than the level subsidised by the rental arrangements. The Bent Wing Café has potential to increase additional business activities, for example adding to the souvenir line sold in the shop and catering for events in the district. Lease arrangements do not restrict such entrepreneurial directions.





~ **Guluyambi Aboriginal Cultural Cruise, East Alligator River, Kakadu National Park, Northern Territory**



## Indigenous partnership

Kakadu National Park attracts visitors from around the world to view its spectacular array of wildlife, landscapes, rich Aboriginal rock art sites and living Indigenous culture.

### business model

Guluyambi boat cruises are built around aboriginality, offering a unique Aboriginal cultural experience in contrast to the already established wetlands wildlife tours. The boat tours cruise the East Alligator River and are operated exclusively by Aboriginal guides who share with visitors the mythology of the area and knowledge of traditional hunting methods. Clientele is largely international (60 per cent). In the wet season, Guluyambi Aboriginal Cultural Cruise relocates to Magela Creek with an add-on drive tour to Ubirr Aboriginal rock art shelters.

An operator who was already long established in Kakadu developed the company in association with the local Indigenous business organisation and traditional owners and has a financial arrangement that creates an economic benefit to local Indigenous people.

### background

Bob McDonald, owner and director of Kakadu Air, developed Guluyambi in association with the Djabulukgu Association. A primary motivation for establishing the company was to provide a means for Aboriginal involvement in tourism and to establish a quality operation involving local Indigenous people. Under the current Kakadu Management Plan, boat cruises are primarily the reserve of Indigenous people. An arrangement was reached with the Djabulukgu Association who successfully applied to Parks Australia North for dispensation to operate a cruise tour on the East Alligator River. A profit-share arrangement gives the Djabulukgu Association an interest in sustaining the business. Tours began in 1996 and within three years of operation all guides were Aboriginal. Kakadu Air has managed the operation from the beginning, but has a long-term aim to put management fully under the control of Indigenous operators. The company is still working to develop a core of local Indigenous people with the business skills to run a sustainable, high quality international tour company.

Approximately 50 per cent of the Kakadu National Park is Aboriginal land held in trust, with most of the remaining land under claim by Aboriginal people. Aboriginal

land trusts have, in turn, leased their land to the Director of National Parks and Wildlife. The park is managed through a joint arrangement between the Aboriginal traditional owners and the Commonwealth Government through Parks Australia North. The land is managed to respect the interests of the traditional owners, to conserve the natural and cultural heritage of the park, and to encourage visitors to appreciate, enjoy and understand the park. A long-term aim is for traditional owners to derive employment and other opportunities from local management arrangements and to be fully equal partners in making management decisions at all levels in the park.

### partnership arrangements

Partnership arrangements include:

- Djabulukgu Association holds a commercial boat cruise permit from Parks Australia and permit fees are waived because it is a joint operation with traditional owners;
- Kakadu Air manages the operation through a profit-sharing partnership arrangement with the Djabulukgu Association; and
- fees are paid to the traditional owners based on the number of cruise participants.

### features of partnership

Features of the partnership include:

- Parks Australia runs tourism industry seminars twice a year for permit holders; and

- interaction between operators and park rangers on issues as they arise.

### success

The success of the operation is indicated by:

- approximately 20 000 people a year take the tour, about 10 per cent of all visitors to Kakadu; and
- while the principal motivation for establishing the tour was not financial, it has established itself in the market and is operating profitably.

Factors that have contributed to the success of this enterprise are:

- involvement of traditional owners and the Djabulukgu Association in developing the product;
- business and marketing skills provided by an established operator;
- fulfilling a cultural niche market; and
- good faith between Kakadu Air and the Djabulukgu Association.

### benefits

Park management benefits from:

- a culturally-centred product that enhances the natural attractions of the park; and
- the contribution to Parks Australia North's objective of encouraging business and employment opportunities for local Indigenous people.

The operators benefit from:

- financial rewards for Kakadu Air, the Djabulukgu Association and the traditional owners; and

- personal development and employment opportunities for Indigenous people.

### comment

Guluyambi aims to capture a cultural niche market. It has clearly differentiated itself from other boat cruises by providing an interpretation of the river and wetlands ecosystems from the Indigenous perspective. This is especially attractive to international tourists seeking an Indigenous experience in Australia. The tour is advertised through direct marketing in Darwin and Kakadu.

The strength of the operation is the involvement of the Djabulukgu Association and traditional owners. This stems from a common objective of developing the company as an avenue for employing, and providing opportunities for, Indigenous people. The partnership facilitated negotiations with Parks Australia North that took six months to complete and is a key factor in continuing interactions with both the park managers and Indigenous groups. A possible weakness in the operation is that it relies on personal relationships and good will, thus its life cycle is dependent on finding a successor who shares the company's goals. Guluyambi is an excellent example of a mutually beneficial business relationship that is likely to be the future of sustainable tourism growth in Kakadu and other areas of Indigenous ownership.

Guluyambi Tours (08) 8979 2411  
Parks Australia North, Kakadu National Park (08) 8938 1100



Photographs supplied by Guluyambi Aboriginal Cultural Cruise



~ Gagudju Lodge Cooinda and Yellow Water and Wetland Cruise, Cooinda, Jim Jim Kakadu, Northern Territory



## Indigenous ownership and private management

The Yellow Water and Wetland Cruise at Cooinda is one of the premier attractions of Kakadu National Park. Delivering a unique wetlands experience, interpreting wildlife and bird life on the Yellow Water Billabong, the cruise attracts approximately 60 per cent of all Kakadu visitors.

### business model

The Gagudju Lodge is the base for the cruise and offers accommodation, camping and caravan sites, as well as food, beverages and retail services. Both operations are currently owned by Kakadu Tourism, a joint arrangement between the Gagudju Association and the Indigenous Business Association. Six Continents Hotels manage the property under contract. Clientele is approximately 51 per cent international and 49 per cent domestic, reflecting the same mix of visitors to the national park. The lodge and cruise operate on a commercial basis, but also have a goal to improve employment opportunities for local Indigenous people. The Gagudju Association has leased the land from the Commonwealth Government in return for a nominal rent.

### background

The Gagudju Association purchased the lodge and cruise business at Cooinda in 1980 from its previous owners who had a garden lease on the property. When the Kakadu National Park was declared, the 50 hectare Cooinda property was not included as part of the park, but remained commonwealth land. The Gagudju Association currently leases the land from the Commonwealth Government. The Gagudju Lodge has the capacity for up to 700 people in 48 units, 34 budget rooms, 80 caravan sites and 300 camping sites. The Yellow Water Cruise is the backbone of the business, the key attraction for visitors. It operates on a permit from Parks Australia North. In addition to the cruise, the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre is another attraction. This was built by Parks Australia North on land within the National Park. The centre is leased to Kakadu Tourism and managed by the hotel operators in an arrangement that pays a percentage of gross turnover back to Parks Australia North.

### partnership arrangements

Partnership arrangements include:

- a lease signed with the Commonwealth Government in 1996 runs to 2024 – the Gagudju Association pays a nominal annual rent to the Commonwealth;
- the boat cruise operates on an annual permit from Parks Australia North – permit fees are waived because it is a joint operation with Aboriginal traditional owners; and
- the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre is leased from Parks Australia North in return for a small percentage of the gross turnover.

### features of partnership

The partnership features include:

- interaction with park rangers on issues occurs as the opportunity arises. Rangers conduct slide shows at the resort twice a week during peak season. A parks-built walking track extends from the Cultural Centre into the Cooinda lease area;
- the Kakadu Park Manager attends hotel board of management meetings by invitation only; and
- Kakadu Tourism cooperates with the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations to run an employment training program for Indigenous people to learn about the tourism industry.

### success

The commercial success of the operation can be attributed to:

- the lodge and services operate profitably; and
- the cruises are an established feature of Kakadu and attract an estimated 115 000 people per annum, 60 per cent of Kakadu visitors.

Factors that have contributed to the success of this enterprise are:

- involvement and ownership by Indigenous group;
- good relationship between park management and the hotel's board of management and hotel operators; and
- the cruise has become an established 'must do' for Kakadu visitors.

### benefits

Park management benefits from:

- facilities and services that add to the park's attraction;
- revenue from Warradjan Cultural Centre lease arrangements;
- a distribution point for park information to visitors; and
- provision of visitor services in a part of the park with limited park management presence.

The operator benefits from:

- commercial return from hotel and cruise operations; and

- opportunities for Indigenous employment, average 5 per cent of workforce.

### comment

The number of visitors to Cooinda Lodge and the Yellow Water Cruise is directly in line with overall visitation to the park. Park issues, such as access, entry fees, and marketing, all of which affect visitation, also directly affect lodge and cruise revenue. The Yellow Water Cruise has developed largely as a dry season attraction because of the access to a spectacular concentration of wildlife and bird life around the billabongs, but there is capacity to develop wet season tours in the event that tourism in the wet season increases.

General Manager Gagudju Cooinda Lodge (08) 8979 0145, [www.gagudju-dreaming.com](http://www.gagudju-dreaming.com)  
Parks Australia North, Kakadu National Park (08) 8938 1100



Photographs supplied by Intercontinental Hotels Group



~ Yalata,  
Great Australian Bight,  
South Australia



## Indigenous protected area

The Yalata Indigenous Protected Area is located adjacent to the Nullarbor National Park and Yellabinna Conservation Reserve and the Great Australian Bight Marine Park. The area has outstanding marine life and endangered fauna, as well as a rich Indigenous culture and history. Approximately 20 000 visitors per annum stop at the Head of the Bight to view the migrating and mating Southern Right whales between May and October each year. The visitors are a mix of domestic (80–85 per cent) and international (15–20 per cent), and are primarily self-drive travellers. The nearby Nullarbor Roadhouse is one of the few places where travellers can stay overnight on the way to Western Australia. Other attractions are the Indigenous culture, history and craft, the limestone caves and the unique wildlife.

### business model

The 456 300 hectare property is managed by Yalata Community Inc. The Yalata Community entered into an Indigenous Protected Area agreement with the Commonwealth Government to manage the land for the protection of its natural and cultural features. Tourism income supplements commonwealth funds provided for land management under the Indigenous Protected Area agreement and provides an avenue for

developing business opportunities and income for the Yalata community.

### background

The Yalata Indigenous Protected Area was declared in October 1999. An Indigenous Protected Area is a voluntary agreement between traditional owners and the Commonwealth to promote biodiversity and cultural resource conservation. Under the agreement the Commonwealth provides funding for management planning and conservation activities.

Many native birds, mammals and reptiles inhabit this important mallee ecological zone on the edge of the Nullarbor Plain. The region is of great cultural importance, with dreaming tracks which cross continental Australia converging in this region. The Yalata Indigenous Protected Area, in combination with adjacent reserves, national parks and marine parks, has created one of the world's largest contiguous areas of land and sea managed for biodiversity conservation.

The Yalata Community raises revenue from visitors by issuing permits for access to their land, including entrance to the Head of the Bight viewing areas, camping and fishing. The permit fee is charged per individual with a reduced fee for concessions. Commercial

operators are charged an annual permit of \$250 per annum or \$25 a visit, but also pay a concession rate for each visitor they bring into the park.

The Yalata Community has contract and service arrangements with other Commonwealth and state agencies. In terms of tourism the most important of these is the South Australia Tourism Commission which has approved \$800 000 for the Head of the Bight project to improve visitor and tourism infrastructure at the whale watching site. Once completed, the new facilities will include a visitors/ticketing centre, extended walkways, viewing platforms, new toilet facilities and interpretive information. This will inevitably provide a solid base for developing new tourism-based business opportunities for both commercial operators and the local Indigenous community.

### partnership arrangements

Both the Commonwealth Government and the South Australian Government are involved in partnership arrangements with the Yalata Community:

#### Commonwealth Government

- Environment Australia – funding for administration and management;
- National Heritage Trust – grant funds for specific coast care and bush care activities;
- Indigenous Land Corporation – funding for an Anangu Supervisor;
- Great Australian Bight Marine Park – contract for services relating to surveillance, coastal land care and distributing interpretive material; and
- Department of Employment and Workplace Relations – funding through the Indigenous Small Business Fund for development of a Business Plan for the Head of the Bight.

#### South Australian Government

- South Australia Tourism Commission – funding for the Head of Bight project to improve visitor and tourism infrastructure, assistance with developing an Indigenous Small Business Plan; and
- Aboriginal Lands Trust – assistance with ranger patrols and monitoring programs.

### features of partnership

The partnership features include:

- commonwealth funding for activities consistent with conservation objectives;
- access to programs for funding to improve infrastructure; and
- access to funding to provide direction for the Head of the Bight as a tourism business.

### SUCCESS

Factors that have contributed to the success of this enterprise include:

- unique natural and cultural features; and
- potential for diversity of tourism products, including nature-based, adventure and cultural heritage.

### benefits

Park management benefits from:

- extension of protected ecosystems that add significantly to the National Reserve System; and
- contribution to coastal surveillance and land and coast care management.

The Yalata community benefits from:

- recognition of natural and cultural values of land;
- access to commonwealth funding from National Heritage Trust;
- capital works funding from the state government for tourism projects;

- generation of jobs and training opportunities;
- revenue; and
- community development – increased pride.

### comment

This is an area with natural and cultural features that have great potential for tourism. Development of a business plan by the Yalata Indigenous Community will be a big step towards recognising and tapping into this potential. It will also be essential to help the community direct and control tourism growth for their own benefit. They may choose to encourage individually-owned tourism businesses, in which case improving local skills will be a priority, or they may choose to contract out to non-Indigenous commercial operators.

Developing tourism will also contribute to broader conservation objectives. Commonwealth funding is currently directed towards conservation objectives, with little opportunity for pursuing tourism related initiatives or skill development that could, in the longer term, provide an income to achieve community and conservation goals.

There is potential to immediately expand tourism at the Yalata Indigenous Protected Area through improved marketing. Business is currently generated through referrals from local roadhouses, the Ceduna Tourist Information Centre and as a result of signage along the Nullarbor Highway. Once the new visitor infrastructure is in place and there is a venue from which tourism operations can be managed, the increasing interest in specialist nature or adventure based products can be exploited.

Project Manager, Yalata Indigenous Protected Area (08) 8625 6342 [www.yalata.org](http://www.yalata.org)  
 Environment Australia, Reserve Systems Indigenous Policy (02) 6274 1111  
 Eyre Regional Development Board (08) 8626 9044, South Australia Tourism Commission (08) 8463 4635



Photographs supplied by Project Manager for Yalata Indigenous Protected Area and South Australian Tourism Commission



## Private wildlife sanctuary

### ~ Warrawong Earth Sanctuary, Adelaide Hills, South Australia



Warrawong Earth Sanctuary in the Adelaide Hills showcases one of the world's most inspirational ecosystem regeneration projects. Thirty-four hectares of former dairy grazing land has been fenced off, regenerated with native vegetation, cleared of feral animals and restocked with Australian wildlife, much of which is rare, threatened or endangered.

#### business model

Warrawong Earth Sanctuary is a wholly owned subsidiary of Earth Sanctuaries Ltd (ESL), an Australian public company listed on the Australian Stock Exchange in 2000. Conservation of wildlife and regeneration of ecosystems is its core business. Most investors are small shareholders and many are primarily interested in preserving Australian wildlife. The company generates revenue through tourism at sanctuaries such as the ones at Warrawong in the Adelaide Hills, Little River near Melbourne, and Hanson Bay on Kangaroo Island, and through consulting work. ESL has amortised its sanctuary habitat development and initially set a monetary value on animals to give a measurable outcome for its activities.

ESL is focused on producing a positive cash flow from its managed wildlife sanctuaries. ESL initially raised \$12 million capital through a share float in May 2000. Prior to 1998 the company raised \$8.9 million from investors. Since then, the share price has dropped. Recognising that the company had significant assets but a diminishing cash flow, the Directors of the company initiated a restructure in 2001–02, selling properties to improve cash flow and to focus on its sanctuaries.

#### background

ESL purchased Warrawong Earth Sanctuary in 1969 and it has been operating guided interpretive tours for the public since 1985. The sanctuary grew from the vision of Dr John Wamsley to conserve and re-establish endangered Australian wildlife. Its key attraction is providing access to rare animals in a natural way. School groups and evening tours that include dinner and a guided night walk are the most popular activities. Some visitors are also attracted by the history of the sanctuary and the fact that it is a unique example of a public company involved in conservation.

While entry is free, all visitors must purchase a guided walk to access the main features of the sanctuary. Commercial activities include wildlife and wetland interpretive tours, a native retail nursery, a restaurant and retail shop, accommodation, group and corporate functions, and an education program for schools, youth groups and others. In partnership with Waltjapiti Arts, the sanctuary launched an Indigenous experience with workshops in dance, music and bush tucker in February 2002. Warrawong has a partnership with the Earth Sanctuaries Foundation which enables it to apply for funding for wildlife and habitat conservation projects. The Foundation also organises a volunteer program, including participants from International Student Travel Courses.

Warrawong attracts around 40 000 visitors per year, made up of 60 per cent local (25 per cent of which is school groups), 30 per cent interstate, and 10 per cent international. The sanctuary aims to increase yield from visitors through new products and improved services, rather than increased visitor numbers. The sanctuary employs 35 staff, 19 of which are permanent.

#### partnership arrangements

Partnership arrangements include:

- Waltjapiti Arts bring Indigenous Tourism and Education Experience to Sanctuary;
- Serco Buses run the Warrawong Bilby Bus night tour;
- Earth Sanctuary Foundation of Australia funds conservation projects and is a source of volunteers; and
- ESL shareholders participate in special member events and fund ongoing work.

#### SUCCESS

The sanctuary's commercial success can be measured by:

- a turnover around \$1.3 million per annum, comprising 95 per cent of operating costs; and
- Contributions to conservation of biodiversity include:
  - increasing the amount of land being managed for conservation;
  - breeding native wildlife and bringing some species, such as the woylie, numbat and bridled nailtailed wallaby, back from near extinction;
  - maintaining the best platypus breeding program in the world;
  - using surplus stock to stock other ESL properties;
  - rehabilitating local native wildlife by creating a wildlife corridor and reintroducing native species; and
  - providing inspiration for other programs, such as the Eden Project in Western Australia.

Factors that contribute to the success of this enterprise are:

- close proximity to a metropolitan centre with local market potential and significant visitation from interstate and international visitors; and
- ability to generate investment from the public company model and gain funding for special projects through a private foundation.

#### comment

Earth Sanctuaries Ltd is the only publicly listed company in Australia whose main objective is preserving wildlife and biodiversity. It illustrates that conservation of biodiversity does not have to be seen solely as a government responsibility. The need for profitability, in terms of meeting operational costs, is an ongoing challenge that requires compromises in terms of property selection and selection of animals to be preserved and bred within the sanctuaries.

Warrawong Earth Sanctuary does not receive government funding for conservation. It is the only public sanctuary in Australia in which the competitive neutrality principle – that government businesses should not enjoy net competitive advantages over their private sector competitors simply by virtue of public ownership – has been tested and applied. Consequently, the nearby Cleland Wildlife Park (run by the South Australian Department for Environment and Heritage) was restructured along the lines of a commercial operation. Despite the competition, the two attractions work cooperatively and staff liaise regularly.

Warrawong Earth Sanctuary has shown that it is feasible to run a privately funded and managed wildlife sanctuary. With new marketing strategies and products, it is likely that Warrawong will also soon realise a profit in addition to making a significant contribution to biodiversity.

Warrawong Earth Sanctuary (08) 8370 9197  
www.warrawong.com



Photographs supplied by Warrawong Earth Sanctuary



**~ Crystal Creek Rainforest Retreat, Northern Rivers, New South Wales**



## Conservation covenant

The Crystal Creek Rainforest Retreat is an award winning ecotourism lodge adjoining the Numinbah Nature Reserve and Springbrook National Park, part of the World Heritage Listed central eastern rainforest reserves in the Northern Rivers Region of New South Wales.

### business model

Sixty per cent of the property is protected by a perpetual Voluntary Conservation Agreement negotiated with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). The property owner and NPWS work in partnership to manage the land in accordance with the Voluntary Conservation Agreement.

### background

Voluntary Conservation Agreements provide permanent protection for special features of an area with high conservation value. In the case of Crystal Creek, it contains 25 species of rare and threatened plants and is habitat to 15 species of vulnerable birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians as well as over 400 plant species and more than 150 bird species. The Voluntary Conservation Agreement on Crystal Creek was initiated by the current landowners. Taking about one year to process, the Agreement was signed in May 1997 and set aside 60 per cent of the 102 hectare property and provided a buffer to the adjacent nature reserve. Nature-based activities are undertaken within the Voluntary Conservation Agreement area and guests do not enter the nature reserve, which acts as a gene pool for regeneration of flora and fauna. The retreat development, itself, is not on the area declared as Voluntary Conservation Agreement.

The Tweed and Coolangatta area receive around 660 000 visitors spending an estimated \$166 million. Crystal Creek is one of the first destinations in the area offering accommodation and a total rainforest experience. It is the only one that is adjacent to a national park and has running water. The resort's appeal to people with a special interest in rainforest ecology is reinforced by a program of specialist workshops focusing on local flora and fauna, and heavy involvement with local community festivals and events.

Formerly a banana plantation, the property was purchased by the current owners in 1988. They spent 4 years restoring, planning and constructing the retreat which opened in 1992. Quality accommodation is available for up to 20 guests in seven architect-designed fully self-contained bungalows. The retreat caters only for adults and is open all year round. There are approximately 3500 visitors per year. Five per cent are international.

Under Voluntary Conservation Agreements low key tourism activities, for example interpretation, bird watching and bushwalking can occur. There are no restrictions on economic activity undertaken on other parts of the property.

The NPWS not only helped prepare a plan of management but, through Conservation Volunteers Australia, has also helped Crystal Creek attract voluntary labour for projects, provided project building material, and helped design and produce interpretive boards on the property.

Crystal Creek Rainforest Retreat is accredited under the Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program. They are also closely involved with the Northern Rivers Ecotourism Association. The retreat has its own rainforest plant nursery where trees are propagated from local seed for use in regenerating degraded areas of the property.

### SUCCESS

The enterprise's commercial success can be measured by:

- 70 per cent plus occupancy rate; and
- multiple international, national and regional environmental tourism awards.

Factors that have contributed to the success of this enterprise are:

- being seen as a part of a World Heritage Listed rainforest is a major marketing drawcard for potential customers; and
- common philosophical objectives on conservation have strengthened the working relationship between NPWS and the property owners.

### benefits

The benefits the enterprise extends to park management are that it:

- provides informal guardianship over the adjoining nature reserve;
- contributes to major rainforest regeneration; and
- extends land area being managed consistent with national park objectives.

The tour operator benefits from:

- 8 kilometres of minimal-impact walking tracks on the property which were funded or assisted by NPWS;
- assistance with developing interpretive signage along paths and walking tracks;

- reduced land rates and taxation benefits;
- opens doors to partnerships with other government departments, local council and volunteer groups, such as Greening Australia; and
- adds to the market value of property.

### comment

The positive relationship between the Crystal Creek Rainforest Retreat and NPWS has worked because of a shared vision of conserving rainforest habitat and biodiversity and the good intent of the property owner.

Crystal Creek Rainforest Retreat (02) 6679 1591  
 www.crystalcreekrainforestretreat.com.au  
 New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service (02) 6672 6360



Photographs supplied by Ralph Kraemer and Crystal Creek Rainforest Retreat



## Non-government conservation

### ~ Mareeba Tropical Savanna and Wetland Reserve, Queensland



An easy one-hour drive from Cairns, the Mareeba Tropical Savanna and Wetland Reserve is a habitat for migratory birds and a wide variety of terrestrial and aquatic wildlife typical of seasonally dry savanna woodland country and wetlands. The savanna and wetland habitats of the reserve offer a contrasting large-scale, conservation-based tourism resource to complement the more popular rainforest and reef attractions of the Cairns area and Atherton Tablelands.

#### business model

The reserve is managed by the Mareeba Wetland Foundation Ltd, a locally-based, not-for-profit conservation organisation which is co-Trustee of the reserve with the Mareeba Shire Council. The foundation is a limited company where the directors have full fiduciary duty and are sharply focused on creating sustainable income streams. The chairman of the foundation's Council of Governors is Professor David Bellamy OBE. From the outset the foundation developed the reserve to fund high quality conservation work from sustainable tourism. The foundation is successfully moving towards making the reserve self-funding – in 2002 revenue covered costs with ongoing successful reliance on volunteers.

Community interest was one of the driving factors behind developing the reserve. The property was previously part of a much larger pasturage reserve administered by the Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines. With the cooperation of all levels of government, the foundation has raised over \$3 million in cash and kind towards developing the reserve, and continues to proactively seek grants and contributions to improve ecological conditions and visitor services.

The Founder of the Mareeba Wetland Foundation, Tim Nevard, was recently awarded the Order of Australia medal for his voluntary work in setting up and ongoing management of the reserve.

#### background

The reserve is approximately 2000 hectares of savanna woodlands incorporating 150 hectares of man-made wetlands using waste agricultural irrigation water. Funding from the Commonwealth in 1996 helped to develop the concept and the present wetlands were built between 1996 and 1999. It has created a habitat for migration of birds on the East Asian-Australasian flyway and for wildlife species displaced by agricultural practices. Funding from the then Commonwealth Office for National Tourism, matched with funding from the

Queensland Government, enabled a visitor's centre to be built and opened in 2001.

The foundation manages the day-to-day running of the reserve and employs one full-time warden and two casual staff for tours. All other work is undertaken by volunteers and locally-based contractors to ensure the foundation continues to foster community involvement. The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service provides in-kind support for research and conservation projects. To facilitate this approach, the property is currently designated as a reserve for natural resource management purposes under the Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines-administered *Land Act 1994*.

Open for only nine months each year because roads in the reserve are impassable in the wet season, visitation is around 8000, on course to rise to 13 000 in 2003. The peak visitation time is July–August. The majority of visitors are self-drive, and are interested in biodiversity and bird watching. A number of day tours also operate from the coast. Revenue is generated through a 'conservation levy' of \$8 per person, canoe hire, guided safaris, and retail sales. A kiosk at the visitor centre provides food, beverage and souvenirs, and there are advanced plans to establish a tented safari camp to maximise the revenue potential of early morning and evening tours.

#### partnership arrangements

Partnership arrangements include:

- local community and the Mareeba Shire Council – extensive voluntary contributions and assistance with land and access management;
- Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines – management planning;

- Queensland Parks and Wildlife – expertise and equipment;
- Conservation Volunteers of Australia – volunteer labour for projects;
- Mareeba Wetland Tours – conduct daily tours from Cairns; and
- James Cook University and Australian Geographic – Gouldian Finch research and release project.

#### SUCCESS

The enterprise's commercial success can be measured by:

- revenue covers operating costs and is moving into surplus, with the ongoing and expanding support of volunteers;
  - international recognition – 2000 British Airways 'Tourism for Tomorrow' award; and
  - national recognition – Far North Queensland Tourism Industry 2001 Tourism Development Award and finalist in the Queensland State Awards.
- Factors that have contributed to the success of this enterprise are:
- leadership and passion driven by key individuals;
  - community support and involvement; and
  - visitors to the wetlands know they are helping conserve Australia's native wildlife.

#### benefits

Biodiversity conservation benefits from:

- creation and management of breeding and foraging habitats – 187 species of birds, including Brolgas, Saurus Cranes, critically endangered Buff-breasted Button Quail and Cotton Pygmy Geese;
- reintroduction of endangered species – captive-bred Gouldian Finch and Freshwater Crocodiles (proposed); and
- creation of internationally-recognised conservation values from land

previously heavily disturbed by agriculture.

Tourism benefits from:

- diversification of tourism product for the Cairns region;
- creation of a credible link between mainstream tourism and recognised non-government nature conservation; and
- contributing to development of a drive-market tour from Cairns.

#### comment

While the reserve is now considered a positive development for the local area, it was not always so – initially, entrenched perceptions needed to be overcome and partners found who shared and were able to contribute to the vision. As one person said: 'at first the greenies said they were vandals; farmers said they were greenies and parks didn't want to know because it wasn't a park responsibility'. In its favour was a legislative framework that facilitated alternative community uses of the land, individuals with vision, and support from the local authorities.

The long-term success of the Mareeba Wetlands will depend on its capacity to generate operating revenue from tourism and visitation. This is limited because current infrastructure is inadequate for offering a product year-round or generating greater yield from visitors. Visitation is already significantly improving through a targeted expansion of the drive market from Cairns and Port Douglas. The provision of appropriate high yield accommodation within the reserve will also address a significant unsatisfied demand from up to 33 per cent of existing visitors. Demand could be stimulated further with promotional campaigns and development of complementary products and activities in the area.

Honorary Curator, Mareeba Tropical Savanna and Wetland Reserve (07) 4092 3360  
www.mareebawetlands.com  
Department of Natural Resources and Mines (07) 4095 7000



Photographs supplied by Mareeba Wetlands Foundation and Environment Protection Agency



## Community-based partnership

### ~ Bibbulmun Track, Western Australia



The Bibbulmun Track, a 1000 kilometre walking trail from Perth to Albany, in existence since the 1970s, was a great asset for bushwalkers, but was little used. The Track is rapidly developing into an international tourist attraction. It is Western Australia's only true long-distance walking trail and one of the longest continuously marked trails in Australia.

#### business model

The enormous potential for recreation and nature-based tourism is being realised through partnerships developed and fostered by the Bibbulmun Track Foundation. The foundation is a not-for-profit community-based organisation which encourages community participation and ownership of the track, promotes the track, advocates its protection, and develops opportunities for tourism and employment. Its involvement has created a tourist destination worth an estimated \$8.8 million to the Western Australia economy.

The foundation contributes around \$150 000 worth of volunteer labour per year for maintaining and marketing the track. The foundation is staffed largely by volunteers and is overseen by a Board of Management with members from the Department of Conservation

and Land Management (DCLM), key businesses and government departments, the tourism industry and education providers who bring a wide range of skills and qualifications.

#### background

A partnership involving the foundation, DCLM, and other stakeholders, including the Commonwealth Government which contributed \$1.38 million over two years from the Regional Development Program, re-routed and re-vitalised the track between 1994 and 1998.

The foundation markets and promotes the track and coordinates delivery of products and services, such as transport and accommodation, along the track. This is achieved through partnerships with local businesses and has created profitable and popular tourism products, such as Bibbulmun Walking Breaks, the Bibbulmun Team Challenge and Bibbulmun for Schools. The foundation has focused on marketing the track within Western Australia, but has also successfully partnered with the Japan Travel Bureau and Golden West Holidays to develop tour packages currently sold in Japan and the United Kingdom. The foundation's turnover is around \$400 000 per annum from guided

events, tourism packages and merchandise sales, and from sponsorships, membership fees and fund-raising activities.

The foundation has a strong partnership with DCLM, which is providing \$150 000 over three years to help fund the volunteer maintenance program and track information service and marketing activities. DCLM licenses all tour operations on the track including those of the foundation.

#### partnership arrangements

A Memorandum of Understanding with DCLM recognises DCLM as the track manager and the foundation as the focus for community-based support and involvement. The foundation and DCLM regularly liaise and pool resources to address all aspects of track maintenance, marketing and management. DCLM provides indemnity insurance, training, uniforms and a rewards scheme for foundation maintenance volunteers. DCLM has two positions on the Foundation Board.

The foundation has partnerships with local businesses, including corporate sponsors and service providers along the track. A central database links over 300 businesses. The foundation works with businesses to create services and links for walkers, and acts as a central booking agency to deliver packages to tourists.

Partnerships with other government departments and community groups, such as the Ministry of Justice, Department of Sport and Recreation, the Western Australian Tourism Commission, Healthway, Lotteries Commission, the Heart Foundation, Tourism South West, to name just a few, exist to promote mutual objectives.

#### SUCCESS

The success of the foundation's approach is indicated by:

- Membership of the foundation has increased from 550 to 1850 over the past four years; there are 300 volunteers.
- Visitor use has increased from 10 000 walkers in 1998, to 35 000 in 2000. In the same period, walkers from overseas and interstate increased almost eight-fold.
- The direct impact on the Western Australia economy is about \$8.8 million, creating an estimated 190 new jobs. In a 2002 survey, 33 per cent of respondents reported that tourism is increasing in their area as a result of the Bibbulmun Track and 19 per cent of the businesses indicated that their business has grown as a result.
- The foundation is successful in gaining further grants from other agencies.

Factors that have contributed to the success of this enterprise are:

- combining government resources for land management with volunteer support;
- sharing a vision, flexibility, good will and an understanding of all partners' needs;
- harnessing the passion of volunteers within a professional environment;
- accessibility of track and routing it through major tourist attractions in the region;
- provision of linkages and off-track accommodation;
- recognition by other groups, such as tourism and health agencies, of benefits of the track;
- independence of a community-based organisation as against a government or commercial operator; and

- inclusive approach of the foundation and its emphasis on practical outcomes.

#### benefits

The benefits to track management include:

- community support and involvement;
- \$150 000 value in volunteer labour for maintenance of the track; and
- greater use of the track, yet the main impact is kept off the track.

The benefits to tourism as well as the community include:

- provision and enhancement of a community asset;
- growth in local businesses and tourism related opportunities; and
- better product for more tourism segments.

#### comment

Maintaining and marketing Bibbulmun Track is achieved through a unique model marrying the interests of different industry and community sectors. While the foundation is a volunteer community organisation, it professionally delivers products and services at a high standard. A high level of cooperation among the partners, means that problems can be resolved by being inclusive rather than competitive.

Managing the success of the track will be the foundation's and DCLM's greatest challenge. The foundation will partner with more businesses, develop new products and expand marketing where they can generate funds or increase its level of financial support, for example, through sponsorship and merchandise sales. The foundation encourages industry accreditation for tourism products on the track and will lobby to have the track listed by the National Heritage Trust.

The Bibbulmun Track Foundation (08) 9481 0551 or (08) 9321 0649, friends@bibbulmuntrack.org.au  
 Website: www.bibbulmuntrack.org.au  
 Department of Conservation and Land Management (08) 9334 0265, www.bibtrack@calm.wa.gov.au



Photographs supplied by Jon Davison and the Bibbulmun Track Foundation for images along the Bibbulmun Track



## Integrated planning systems

### ~ Tourism Optimisation Management Model, Kangaroo Island, South Australia



Kangaroo Island is the most internationally recognised region in South Australia outside of Adelaide. Its key attraction is a diversity of wildlife in its natural habitat. Tourism is Kangaroo Island's top income earner. Growing this industry on a sustainable basis is the objective of the Tourism Optimisation Management Model (TOMM).

#### business model

The TOMM is a community-based monitoring initiative aimed at integrating a wide range of data to gain an understanding of the whole-of-tourism environment on Kangaroo Island. Whereas most recreation planning and management frameworks are aimed at minimising negative ecological impacts, TOMM is about setting optimal uses to grow tourism while managing impacts. Through resident and visitor surveys, it monitors a range of indicators, including customer expectations and experiences, which help to understand who makes up the tourism market and what motivates them. The data can identify trends, for example recently recording a shift of 10 per cent towards independent travellers, and inform planning and product development. Businesses use it to improve service delivery and plan marketing strategies.

#### background

Nature-based tourism is estimated to be 7.3 per cent of all tourism expenditure in South Australia and Kangaroo Island accounts for 25 per cent of this expenditure. On Kangaroo Island, tourism contributes \$57 million to the economy, compared with agriculture at around \$35 million. There are approximately 140 000 visitors per year to the island. Twenty-eight per cent are international visitors, 22 per cent are interstate, and 50 per cent are from South Australia.

Activities in national parks generate 55 per cent of Kangaroo Island's tourism income and one-third of all park generated revenue in South Australia. The Department for Environment and Heritage is the island's third largest employer.

TOMM was developed in 1997 and began operating in 1999. It has created cross-connections which enable the island's agencies to integrate their strategic planning processes and projects. Survey results help inform business and natural resource planning.

TOMM costs approximately \$110 000 per year, to support a project officer and a minimum of two core surveys. Its establishment was jointly funded by the then Commonwealth's Office of National

Tourism and the South Australian Tourism Commission and it is supported by the Department for Environment and Heritage, which provides in-kind support. Now, the partners contribute to maintain the office and monitoring activities.

#### partnerships

Partnerships include:

- Department for Environment and Heritage (South Australia);
- South Australia Tourism Commission;
- Tourism Kangaroo Island;
- Kangaroo Island Development Board;
- Kangaroo Island Council; and
- Tourism operators.

Other agencies whose budgets are impacted by tourism, for example the Kangaroo Island Health Department and Agriculture Kangaroo Island, are becoming more informed about tourism through the TOMM data.

#### features of partnership

Partnership features include:

- sharing funding and in-kind support responsibilities;
- sharing responsibility for decisions that are impacted by, and have an impact on, the tourism industry and the wider community; and
- sharing data between agencies and within the community.

#### SUCCESS

Factors that have contributed to the success of this enterprise are:

- community involvement in developing and refining TOMM;
- data is of immediate relevance to community development planners and the business sector;

- ability to adapt, improve and refine indicators in response to community needs; and
- agencies are encouraged to work together on issues, thereby developing a culture of integration and collaboration.

#### benefits

The park management benefits through:

- value adding to natural resource planning;
- providing input to park strategic planning process and projects; and
- providing a regular link with commercial tour operators.

Tourism and the wider community benefit because TOMM:

- inputs trend data into product development and promotional marketing;
- provides quantifiable data to support funding applications and business plans;
- integrates tourism data into strategic community planning systems to facilitate appropriate responses and attitudinal change in the community;
- links into other community issues such as health, transport, environmental performance of operators, road kill;
- empowers the community – they have intelligence to support their views on issues such as planning; and
- provides baseline data and reliable ongoing data analysis which ensures the community's core values are not lost in the drive for growth.

#### comment

On an island of 4500 square kilometres, 33 per cent of which is managed by National Parks and Wildlife South Australia, and with a population of 4370, the future economic prosperity of Kangaroo Island is dependent on nature-based tourism and sustainable natural resource enterprises.

TOMM is a world first. The model has enabled the community to quantify the effects of tourism on the island and to adjust product and promotion in response to changes in the market that are identified from TOMM surveys. It is now being held as a possible model to be applied in other areas of South Australia and there is interest in the model from overseas. Lessons learned from developing TOMM were that:

- the model needs to be driven by an individual who is committed to selling the benefits as well as gathering data, particularly in the early stages until agencies understand and accept the value inherent in the model;
- there is a long lead time for community consultation and acceptance; and
- despite recognition of the value of TOMM to the partners and the community, problems with secure ongoing funding continue.

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Photographs supplied by Department for Environment and Heritage (Kangaroo Island Region)



Western MacDonald Ranges, Northern Territory, C. Steffen

A bulletinboard discussion on issues raised in this report is at [tourism.industry.gov.au/sustainable/forum](http://tourism.industry.gov.au/sustainable/forum)

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URL: <http://www.ea.gov.au/parks>

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority  
PO Box 1379  
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Australian Tourist Commission  
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URL: <http://www.atc.australia.com>

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## Industry Associations and Institutions

Ecotourism Australia  
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Victorian Tourism Operators Association  
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URL: <http://www.qtic.com.au>

## New South Wales

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National Parks and Wildlife Service  
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URL: <http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au>

## Victoria

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Parks Victoria  
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URL: <http://www.tq.com.au>

Environmental Protection Agency - Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service  
PO Box 155  
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URL: <http://www.epa.qld.gov.au>

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URL: <http://www.nttc.com.au>

Parks and Wildlife Commission  
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