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Ecotourism Australia

TWWHA Tourism Master Plan submission

Please contact us to discuss any clarification or further points.

Our Association

Ecotourism Australia was formed in 1991 as the Ecotourism Association of the Indo Pacific Region and launched the world's first National Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP) in 1996. Renamed in 2002 as Ecotourism Australia Limited (EA), the organisation has grown substantively and is Australia's peak body for eco-and sustainable tourism. Ecotourism Australia inspires environmentally sustainable and culturally responsible tourism through the provision of certification programs for tourism businesses and destinations and collaboration with government agencies and other organisations.

The organisation's work has rapidly broadened over the last few years, with strong international linkages, including the introduction of new internationally recognised eco-destination certification and broader local work such as bushfire recovery (through a substantial WWF grant).

With over 1500 products nationally, EA promotes ecotourism throughout Australia and its immediate region by creating partnerships, developing and encouraging quality ecotourism experiences and providing the industry with a clear voice. The commitment to quality shows with 36 of our ECO Certified businesses having been certified with us for 20 years or more, and 213 businesses certified for more than 10 years.

General comments

Ecotourism Australia applauds PWS for the work to date that has gone into the draft Tourism Master Plan and the intent of the Plan.

Our comments below are general and focus on an important missing area we believe should be incorporated into the Plan to improve future management and assist Tasmania to be seen as a leading location for global WHA visitor management.

We see this Plan as replacing and taking precedent over the current EOI process which should be stopped. This Plan provides a better understanding of the planning and management system required for the WHA, considers the re-establishment of social licence with the Tasmanian community and the wider public, and supports a strong and sustainable visitor economy.

We consider the quality of the visitor experience as crucial and highlight the need for establishing and maintaining an ongoing system to ensure high quality tourism operators. Globally WHA are recognised as special places and visitor expectations are that tourism operators working within them meet and exceed globally accepted standards of operation. Both new and existing operators should meet specified standards and be regularly audited. The system should also encourage continuous improvements against economic, social and environmental goals. Other parts of Australia use incentive programs to encourage and reward high standard operation – such the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council is the governing body globally and Ecotourism Australia is one of two current Australian systems recognised as meeting such standards and is widely used in other parts of Australia.

Section 6.6 on Quality Assurance refers to operator quality but focuses mostly on interpretation. While the existing statements are valid this section does not address core issues that are required to achieve the desired goal. The draft Plan currently states:

‘The lease and licence mechanism is a tool to provide quality assurance of the visitor experience and mitigate impacts on the TWWHA’s values through adherence to a code of conduct and minimum standards of training and professional development. The importance of this is recognised through the commitment to accreditation and performance standards’ (p58).

The section continues to discuss quality only in terms of interpretation. Details are not provided on the ‘minimum standards of training and professional development’ or how this is ‘recognised through the commitment to accreditation and performance standards’.

The visitor expectations and experience require a much broader suite of quality assurance and we recommend a new section is added that includes a requirement for all operators to meet globally recognised standards.

We believe our future visitors expect high standards of operation. We also believe for Australia to continue to be competitive in nature based tourism we need to follow global best practice. Tasmania has the opportunity to be seen as leaders in quality WHA visitor management.

This draft plan is a good start but ensuring the quality of tourism operations will be vital to long term sustainability.

At a broader level we also believe Tasmania PWS needs to be appropriately resourced to rapidly activate this Plan. There is considerable work required in a number of the actions. The quality of the outcomes to be realised in terms of economic social and environmental gain is dependent on Tasmania PWS capacity to undertake high quality planning and management.