



NEW SOUTH WALES
ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL

information sheet

SUSTAINABLE LAND USES

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Ecotourism information sheet

Please note: While all care has been taken in the preparation of this information sheet, it is not a substitute for legal advice in individual cases. The content of this information sheet is current as of July 2011.

This information sheet is one of a series on sustainable land uses which have been developed for Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) by the NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC). Copies of the information sheet are available from www.alc.org.au or by calling the NSWALC Policy and Research Unit on (02) 9689 4444.

What is ecotourism?

Ecotourism is a form of tourism which is ecologically sustainable. It has a primary focus on experiencing natural areas in a manner that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation and improves the welfare of the local community.

Ecotourism aims to minimise the negative aspects that conventional tourism may have on the environment and provides an opportunity to protect the environment while allowing access to the land for tourism. Ecotourism also aims to promote recycling, energy efficiency and water conservation. For these reasons, ecotourism often appeals to environmental and socially responsible advocates.

Ecotourism primarily involves travel to destinations where the principal motivation is to observe and appreciate nature and cultural and heritage sites in natural areas. It is about uniting conservation, communities and sustainable travel.

Who are ecotourists?

Travellers who choose ecotourism are generally consumers interested in social, economic and environmental sustainability. Increasingly, ecotourists are also seeking to minimise the carbon footprint of their travel, travelling with climate in mind by planning wisely and choosing consciously. They are often prepared to pay a premium for sustainable tourism experiences.

Ecotourism for Aboriginal landowners

The value of natural, cultural and heritage assets are likely to increase as consumers actively seek sustainable

tourism experiences. The economic value of these assets is significant.

Local and international interest in Aboriginal cultures and culture and heritage sites has grown significantly in recent years. Aboriginal peoples have a unique connection to Country and understanding of natural, cultural and heritage assets. For many overseas visitors, Aboriginal cultures and the unique landscape to which they are linked define what is unique about Australia.

Benefits of ecotourism

- Potential for employment, tourism development and income for landholders.
- Tourist appreciation of natural habitats.
- Minimises impacts on the environment.
- Builds environmental awareness and respect.
- Provides direct financial benefits for conservation.
- Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people and communities.
- Raises awareness of, and empathy for the host communities' political, environmental and social climate.
- It promotes the preservation of wildlife and natural habitats.
- Preserves heritage sites and records, conserves and interprets Aboriginal cultures for present and future generations.

Risks associated with ecotourism

- Poorly planned, unregulated ecotourism can bring major social, cultural and environmental costs.
- Potential to damage wildlife.
- Cultural and social intrusion.
- Effects of induced environmental restructuring (e.g. unplanned development in adjacent villages due to migration for ecotourism related employment).

Most of these risks can be eliminated or reduced through careful planning and communication. For more information contact NSWALC.

Associated costs

The following economic factors must be taken into account when considering ecotourism:

- Cost of transport infrastructure and access to ecotourism sites.
- Development of accommodation and other amenities.
- Cost of energy infrastructure and waste treatment.
- Education and training of employees.
- Insurance costs, including public liability insurance.
- Costs associated with running a business.
- Costs associated with obtaining requisite development consents and permits to develop and run the site.

First steps in developing ecotourism on Aboriginal land

Tourism Australia provides information and assistance for people working in the Aboriginal tourism sector, such as:

- Setting up tourism businesses.
- Marketing and growing tourism businesses.
- Legal and regulatory considerations.
- Funding and support networks.
- Operator listings and case studies.
- News and events.

Further information can be found at Tourism Australia's Indigenous web portal at: www.indigenoustourism.australia.com.

Aboriginal Tourism Australia (ATA) is a central point of contact for Aboriginal tourism and can also provide information and assistance in starting a tourism business. www.aboriginaltouroperators.com.au/index.html

Under the National Long-Term Tourism Strategy, Australian Tourism Ministers have established the **Indigenous Tourism Working Group** to maximise the participation of Indigenous Australians in the tourism industry. More information can be found at: www.ret.gov.au/tourism/tmc/workinggrps/indigenous/Pages/default.aspx; and www.ret.gov.au/tourism/Documents/tmc/Indigenous_Programs_and_Resources.pdf.

Aboriginal Ecotourism and the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* (NSW)

Landowners should seek advice to determine how development of ecotourism sites can interact with the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* (ALRA) and prevailing land rights. In particular, it is important to determine:

- Whether the development of an ecotourism site is a land dealing requiring NSWALC approval under Part 2 Division 4 of the ALRA; and
- Whether changing land use (to use for a commercial or residential purpose) will result in a change in any rates, levies or charges payable in relation to the land as described in Part 2 Division 5 of the ALRA and clause 7 of the Aboriginal Land Rights Regulation 2002. NSWALC can assist with these considerations.

Ecotourism Accreditation

After the initial set up of a tourism operation, the next step would be to get in touch with Ecotourism Australia in order to gain ecotourism accreditation. Ecotourism accreditation assures travellers that certified products are backed by a strong, well managed commitment to sustainable practices and provides high quality nature-based tourism experiences. To gain accreditation, ecotourism operators must apply through Ecotourism Australia. An independent, qualified environmental assessor will then review the application and determine if it is successful. A site audit would be undertaken by Ecotourism Australia within the first 12 months of reviewing the application.

Respecting our Culture (ROC) Tourism Accreditation Program

The ROC program has been developed by Aboriginal Tourism Australia (ATA) to assist the Indigenous tourism sector in developing products that are sustainable, address relevant cultural protocols, employ good environmental practice, and follow appropriate business practices. www.ecotourism.org.au/roc.asp

Eco Certification Program

www.ecotourism.org.au

Climate Action Certification Program

www.sustainabletourismaustralia.com



Developing ecotourism

Key steps in developing ecotourism in accordance with the ROC accreditation program's principles include:

1. **Business management and operational planning** - Sound business management and operational procedures are integral to the delivery of economic sustainability, which, together with environmental and social sustainability, provide the basis for a "triple bottom line" approach.
2. **Business ethics** - The business and all its personnel adopt and follow ethical business practices.
3. **Responsible marketing** - Marketing is accurate and leads to realistic expectations.
4. **Customer satisfaction** - The business consistently meets customer expectations.
5. **Aboriginal cultural focus** - The businesses has an Aboriginal cultural focus.
6. **Environmental sustainability** - The business represents best practice for environmentally sustainable tourism.
7. **Working with local communities** - The business provides constructive ongoing contributions to local communities.
8. **Cultural respect and sensitivity** - The business is sensitive to the value of interpretation and involves different cultures, particularly Aboriginal cultures.

Available Grands

Grant	Purpose	Contact
TQUAL Grants – Tourism Quality Projects	To stimulate sustainable economic growth in the Australian tourism industry by enhancing the supply of quality tourism products and experiences to support marketing promises.	Web: www.ret.gov.au/tqual
Indigenous Heritage Program (IHP)	An Australian Government initiative that supports the identification, conservation, and promotion (where appropriate) of Indigenous heritage.	Web: www.environment.gov.au/heritage/programs/ihp/index.html
Caring for our Country	Australian Government Initiative that funds projects across the country to achieve national targets including Indigenous Tourism related deliverables.	Web: www.nrm.gov.au/Contacts/index.html#nsw
Community Heritage Grants	Provides grants to community organisations including Indigenous groups. Grants are provided to assist with the preservation of locally owned, but nationally significant collections of materials that are publicly accessible.	Web: www.nla.gov.au/chg