

# ECOTOURISM

*a natural strength for VICTORIA - Australia*



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**DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES**  
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## FOREWORD

Ecotourism, is nature-based tourism that fosters environmental appreciation and awareness. It is widely considered to be one of the fastest growing segments in tourism today.

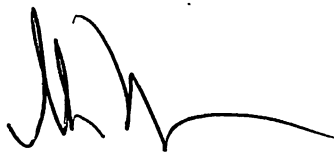
Victoria, with its ease of access to a great diversity of natural environments, and quality tour operators is an ideal destination for ecotourism. One of the major benefits for the state in encouraging ecotourism is that ecotourism integrates tourism development and preservation, providing an economic incentive for protecting the environment.

Victoria has now one of the best and most comprehensive national parks systems in the world. Some 12% of Victoria is now protected in National Parks. Most of Victoria's natural ecosystems are represented. In addition to enabling Victorians to appreciate and enjoy their natural heritage, Victoria's conservation programs and park system constitute a major attraction and basis for drawing people from around Australia and the world to experience and understand the special nature of our part of the global environment.

Providing tourists with an opportunity to visit, understand and appreciate Victoria's natural attributes not only calls attention to their conservation value, but also has the potential to provide new employment opportunities and economic growth.

The need for a strategic approach to ecotourism was identified by the Jobs Council for Fibre Processing and Sustainable Development. A draft strategy was released in July 1992 and was widely distributed to the tourism industry, conservation groups, local government and relevant regional bodies. The strategy and the direction were strongly supported and acclaimed.

This final strategy has been further enhanced and refined reflecting the comments and suggestions received in the consultation phase. Although subject to final budget appropriations' this strategy has the endorsement of the Jobs Council as a positive step in increasing employment opportunities in Victoria while ensuring the quality of our natural environment is not compromised.



Alan Thompson  
Director-General

Department of Conservation and Environment

## CHARACTERISTICS OF ECOTOURISM

The principal characteristic of ecotourism is its emphasis on content, that is, the subject matter of travel; the information, interpretation and experience which match the needs of the traveller. Ecotourism educates and inspires the traveller through participation to appreciate, enjoy and understand natural assets.

The tourism market is becoming better educated and therefore more discerning. Therefore long-term growth in ecotourism depends on high quality information and educative experiences to convince people to travel to a destination. Tourists must be convinced that they will learn something profound about themselves and their relation to the environment at large rather than merely satisfy idle curiosity about a place.

The quality content of ecotourism must be compatible with ecologically responsible principles. This is its crucial feature. It should not be based simply on a marketing slogan that can be applied to any tourist activity or development that is incidental to the surrounding landscape. Any use of the term 'Ecotourism' should stress the importance of responsible behaviour and high levels of interpretation and education in order to maintain integrity in the market place.

This content is offered in the following ways; either as educational travel (also called Study Tours) or as information-rich travel.

Educational Travel is based on groups of 2 to 40+ travelling on formal, accredited study tours with a major aim of education for a set purpose, for example, to gain credit for subjects from secondary school level to and through University and post-graduate courses. Victoria is well placed to deal with this type of travel requirement.

Information-Rich Travel aims to ensure that all or part of the holiday experience has an input of rich information. This can be offered successfully over the whole range of traveller types, from individuals to large groups, and across a wide range of age groups.

This strategy recognises that recreational travel may be the medium through which Ecotourism can be experienced. Recreational travel is the most popular means of enjoying the natural environment through passive and active recreation, including adventure activities, admiring the scenery, bushwalking, camping, rock climbing and the like.

While these are not ecotourism activities in themselves, they can form an important part of the itinerary for educational or information-rich travel.

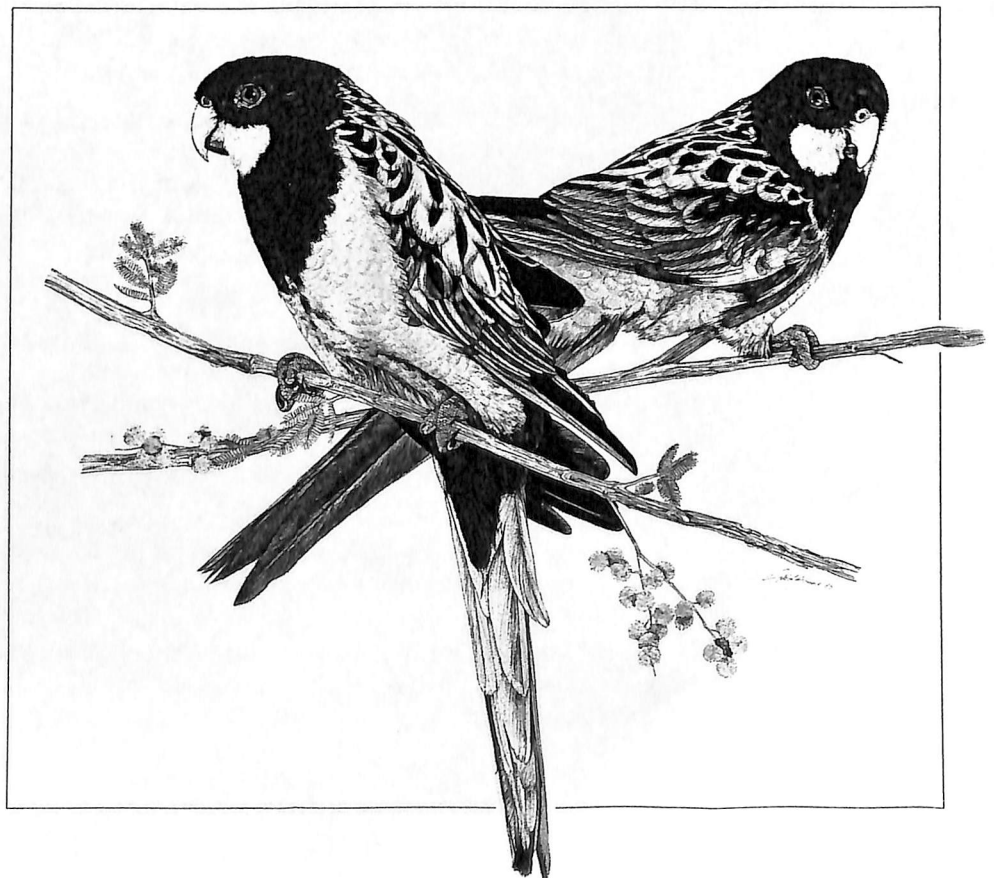
The growth in ecotourism will therefore increase the demands for the development of these recreational activities at ecotourism destinations in the State.



## CHARACTERISTICS OF ECOTOURISM

In addition, ecotourism :

- comprises companies which are generally small and have usually been created by enthusiasts and experts in conservation and education.
- is a labour and knowledge intensive industry.
- is young and so its community is not yet well organised like mass tourism.
- often uses focused or targeted marketing methods and education, networking, indexing, and thematic guidebooks to sell products.
- parallels nature documentaries in its aims, attitudes, markets and style. It uses documentaries to sell tours and experiences.
- originates from an interest in the environment. It sells a product which celebrates nature and seeks understanding and experience of natural systems.



Ecotourism is a niche market experiencing extraordinary growth throughout the world. The current rate of growth suggests that the problem will be controlling the standards of tourism calling itself "Ecotourism" rather than interesting travellers in the idea. It is widely considered to be one of the fastest growing segments in international tourism and will contribute an ever-increasing proportion of the tourist dollar to the economy.

Governments throughout the world are developing ecotourism strategies and policies in response to a huge growth in ecotourism markets.

Research on the growth in demand for ecotourism products has been most comprehensive in the USA. A Stanford Research Institute study has forecast a 10% to 15% a year growth in adventure and cultural tourism, or nearly twice the rate of an estimated 8% for general tourism worldwide. The study's figures for Nature Tourism (or ecotourism) are even more startling; growth is estimated at 25% to 30% each year.\*

While in percentage terms, the growth rate of ecotourism is considerable, it must be emphasised that ecotourism is a niche market and the overall size of the market segment is relatively small when compared to mass tourism. However, market size in itself is not a major limitation to economic growth as the yield per ecotourist is high, the length of stay longer and the nature of the visit compatible with nature conservation objectives.

## **Ecotourism: A competitive strength for Australia**

Australia is relatively undeveloped as an ecotourism destination even though its international tourism images, such as Uluru, the Great Barrier Reef, and Kakadu are strongly related to the natural environment. However, these images often only hint at the uniqueness and diversity of Australia's ecology which can give the traveller enormous enjoyment and satisfaction.

This is particularly relevant to the education travel market which seeks destinations that have a range of ecosystems that are able to offer serious study opportunities. This market also wants relaxation, adventure, and shopping in a safe, hospitable and relatively inexpensive country. Australia is in a position to offer all these benefits but has not yet fully capitalised on the potential, particularly to the USA, Germany and northern Europe.

Along with other sectors of Australia's tourism industry, the ecotourism sector would receive a significant boost from reduced international and domestic airfares. Perhaps of equal importance, however, is the ability to further market the competent, enthusiastic tour operators that provide the quality tour products expected in an international market.

This potential is only now beginning to be tapped around Australia. Universities in Queensland and Western Australia are offering extension courses that cater for the domestic and, tentatively, international education travellers. Park authorities in Queensland and the Northern Territory have also developed programs which are proving highly successful. Tasmanian and South Australian tourism agencies and academic institutions are assisting the development of travel products centred around the natural and cultural environment.

\* quoted in "A Sense of Place" - Ecotourism Issue, Summer 1992

# THE GROWTH POTENTIAL OF ECOTOURISM

## Potential for Victoria

The diversity of ecosystems and land types that are under public protection in the State make Victoria a highly desirable destination for ecotourism, appealing to both domestic and international markets. With the implementation of an effective and responsible strategy, the State will be able to capture a significant proportion of the ecotourism market and, in turn, stimulate employment in the tourism sector.

The Government of Victoria through the Land Conservation Council has conducted a systematic review of public land use in Victoria. This process has led to the establishment of a system of national parks and other conservation reserves, representative of most of the significant ecosystems and land types in this diverse state. Twelve percent of the State is classified as National Park.

Victoria's approach to conservation and the public land system constitute a major strength and basis for drawing people from around Australia and the world to experience and understand the special nature of Australia's part in the global environment.

For example, Phillip Island's Little Penguins already attract in excess of five hundred thousand visitors per year. An ecotourism approach to the island would result in a framework that focuses on the inter-relationship of all the island's fauna (Australian fur seals, mutton birds, wetland birds, and koalas). This might not only increase visitation to the island but also length of stay and yield per visitor. Such frameworks could also be developed around the other regional strengths in Victoria where over one or two days people can experience environments of great contrast.

The accessibility of such a diverse range of experiences of nature is Victoria's greatest advantage in ecotourism, particularly for educational tours. The capacity to visit a wide range of ecosystems - from deserts to alpine areas to rain forest - within half to one day's journey of Melbourne and have access to appropriate accommodation, information and research back-up plus a host of recreational activities to choose from is a major potential strength of this State. This potential should be realized.



Late Black Wattle

Golden Wattle

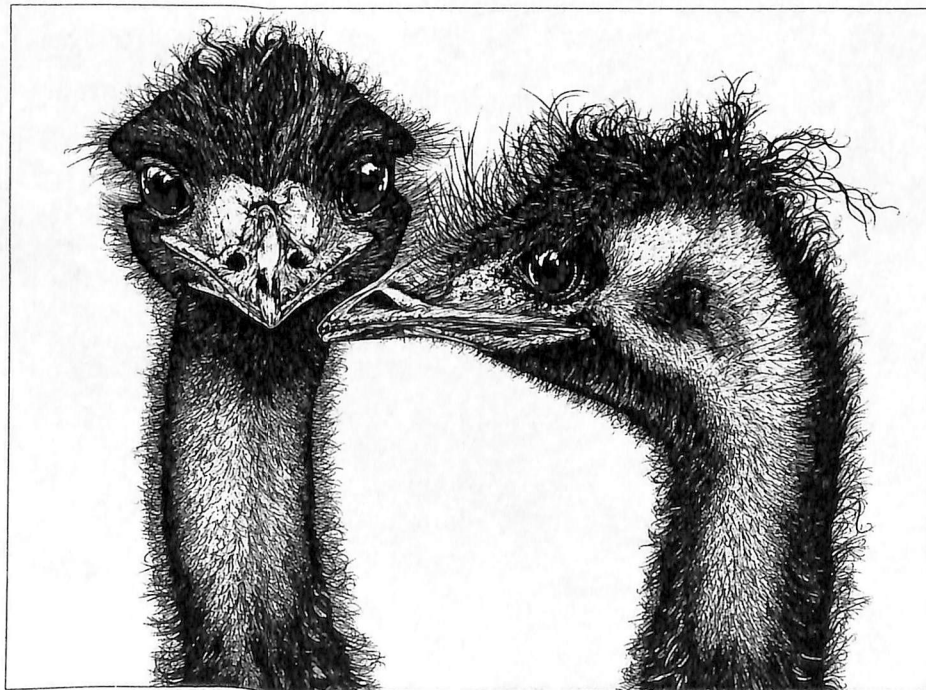
## THE GROWTH POTENTIAL OF ECOTOURISM

Each region of this State has environmental strengths of great appeal to the discerning traveller seeking understanding and inspiration.

**These regions include:**

- The Grampians/Gariwerd - noted for wildlife, wild flowers and evidence of a rich Koori Culture.
- The Gippsland Lakes - a unique lakes system of over 400 square kilometres separated from the sea by a slender strip of coastline along the Ninety Mile Beach.
- The Murray River - Red Gum forests, bird life and wetlands of international significance.
- The High Country - unique alpine flora, geology and history.
- The Great Ocean Road and South West Coast - the dramatic landscape of Port Campbell National Park, the rainforests of the Otways, whales, bird rookeries and ancient volcanoes.
- The Mallee - Outback Victoria - the dry country flora and fauna.
- The Wilderness Coast - the world bio-sphere reserve of Croajingalong National Park, and the rainforests of the Errinundra Plateau.
- The Wildlife Coast - the fauna of Wilsons Promontory National Park through to Phillip Island.(including significant Marine Parks).

Closer to Melbourne, there are international wetland reserves, temperate rain forests, the Dandenong Ranges National Park, Healesville Sanctuary, the Melbourne Zoo and growing interest in the dolphins and marine reserves of southern Port Phillip Bay





# THE DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF ECOTOURISM

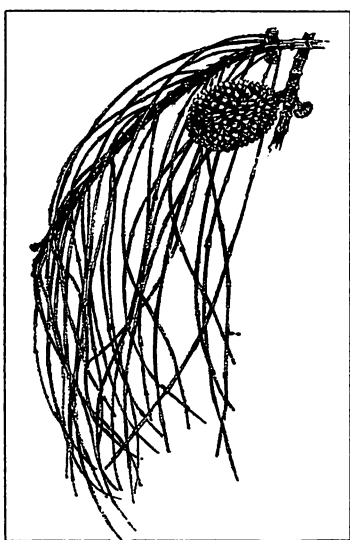
## Infrastructure Needs

The infrastructure needs of the ecotourist differ from the mass market tourist primarily in requirements for the locality and style of accommodation, transport services, and access to sites. Ecotourists seek local vernacular accommodation that allows them to be close to the natural environment rather than removed from it. They seek designs and styles which expose them to the local culture not cosmopolitan internationalised architecture.

Victoria is generally well served by conventional and alternative accommodation which can be used for servicing ecotourism. However, the accommodation within parks across the State cannot meet tour operators' needs in terms of range, quality and booking access.

The approach that should be taken to meet the accommodation and other infrastructure needs of ecotourism is:

- Booking systems for accommodation in parks to cater for tour operators' needs should be reviewed with relevant industry bodies.
- Private infrastructure development outside National Parks will be encouraged.
- Funds spent on accommodation infrastructure now may be best spent upgrading current assets.
- Where private developments serving parks could occur on public or private land outside the park area, the Government can assist in facilitating these through:
  - identifying suitable sites,
  - assisting developers with concept development,
  - possible joint ventures, for example, information centres.
  - assist with funding where the public land is controlled by a local committee of management.



Drooping She-oak

Guidelines for tourism developments on public land, particularly outside parks, have been drafted by DCE to establish the basis for assessing proposals. Such proposals could include major new information centres and/or facilities based on the principles of energy efficiency and best environmental practice and designed to integrate with the natural environment. Improved farmstay accommodation networks would also benefit Victorians and meet an important market need.

Adequate signage, quality information centres, and a well developed and maintained network of access and walking tracks are major elements in a quality ecotourism experience. These elements would benefit from significant injections of funding and should be developed in a strategic manner in order to meet market growth on a region and locality basis.

Priority should be given to developing information centres to service the alpine region, the desert country and Phillip Island and upgrading existing centres serving Wilsons Promontory and the Great Ocean Road region. Consideration will be given in each case to jointly develop or redevelop these centres with the relevant private sector and/or Regional tourism body.

## THE DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF ECOTOURISM

A related issue to infrastructure needs is the current system for providing funds for maintaining and enhancing tourism-related work within the public land network. Revenues obtained by park staff by way of licences, entrance fees, fines and sales of literature, are not retained for the benefit of the park. Providing suitable financial arrangements for the retention of these funds for park protection and development could engender higher levels of incentive and commitment from the park's custodians.

### Service Needs

The type of services needed to support ecotourism specifically relate to the information/content requirements of this sector. There are significant gaps in the range, quantity and quality of literature, publications and souvenirs available for the key environmental destinations throughout Victoria. DCE is a major source and initiator of this type of material and has the capacity to produce, in conjunction with the tourism industry and community groups, a wide range of quality literature.

As a starting point, the adequacy, in terms of range, quantity, quality and content of information available at Information Centres should be reviewed to determine how well the needs of the ecotourism industry are being met.

Content will also be enhanced through the development of formal affiliation links between DCE research centres and academic institutions. This will assist local and overseas educational institutions to obtain accreditation to the numerous activities which give substance to Educational Travel tours.

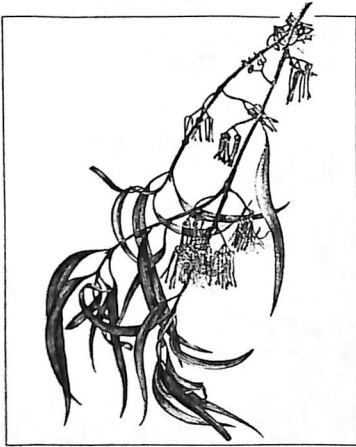
### Training Needs

The principal means of developing the content necessary to stimulate ecotourism in Victoria is by training those in the industry for content-centred ecotourism. Conversely, it is also vital that all personnel are trained to understand and cater for tourism as a valid and integral part of land management and therefore a natural and important part of their custodial duties.

The types of people the training scheme must identify for training or retraining in terms of the tasks they are to perform are:

#### a) Operators

Operators already exist but need to be introduced to the idea of selling content to drive demand for their services. They are the small, regional coach companies, tour operators and accommodation providers identified in Australian Southern Tourism Promotion's Product Manual. Operators convey tourists to their hosts, and provide information and interpretation en-route. A scheme based on isolating the strengths of regions should be followed by workshops to develop themes for tours in these regions. These themes may be called frameworks. Operators should also produce the content to drive ecotourism and generate the thematic frameworks. They must be trained to look beyond their specialisations to frame knowledge in a way which is comprehensible to visitors who are not experts in their field or region.



Drooping Mistletoe



River Red Gum

## THE DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF ECOTOURISM

### b) Hosts

Hosts are the people who receive guests in a particular region. They may provide a distinctive form of accommodation, run a museum, or take visitors on a short walking tour. These people need to be introduced to the content of ecotourism and to the thematic frameworks. Often they are extremely enthusiastic about their region which they see as the only place in the world one could ever want to visit. They should join Regional Tourism Associations which will help co-ordinate their strengths into themes which are attractive and meaningful to visitors.

### c) Custodians

These are the people responsible for the management of our natural and material assets. They may be staff of the Department of Conservation and Environment who undertake planning for specific units of public land or the development of regional or statewide strategies. Custodians are also the park rangers and other field staff who deal directly with tourists and the tourism industry on a day to day basis. Custodians must be introduced to and have a understanding of thematic frameworks so that their work reinforces the experience of each visitor and caters for the needs of the tourism industry within the objectives of public land management.

### d) Guides

The key to successful ecotourism is content that is relevant and focused at the right level. Guides and park rangers are most often the people who convey the content of ecotourism. Victoria has an established association of guides which provides a sound structure for guide training. These guides compliment the role of the Department's rangers and field staff by interpreting the natural environment for visitors. The major problem is, however, that many tour guides currently fail to frame knowledge in a contextual way but rather give the visitor a set of isolated facts and status (biggest, oldest, highest etc.) which does not satisfy the educational needs of the traveller. Guides must be trained to become educators who give contextual knowledge and therefore must be introduced to and involved in developing and refining thematic frameworks.

There is also an urgent need for additional Koori teachers/guides who can lead groups.



# THE DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF ECOTOURISM

## e) Marketers

Marketers must not just use ecotourism as a slogan but establish Victoria's credentials as a leader in the field. They must therefore be trained in understanding the principles and philosophy of ecotourism.

### Marketing Needs

Finally, strategic marketing will be an essential element in putting Victoria on the world ecotourism map. While it is recognised that the greatest economic yield per visitor will come from International visitors the majority of demand for Ecotourism experiences will come from Victorians and Interstate visitors. Marketing initiatives will reflect this demand.

The natural environments of Victoria are subtle. Apart from the Great Ocean Road, we do not have landmarks of the singularity of Uluru, the Swiss Alps, the Grand Canyon, or Victoria Falls. Melbourne is an ambience, not a city of monuments or icons.

Mass tourism uses icons which are easily identified world-wide. Ecotourism, like its human heritage equivalent - cultural tourism - is concerned with the meaning of ambience. Ambience, being subtle, is sometimes harder to sell than Uluru or the Sydney Opera House.

Our "icon" should be that Victoria as a State combines an international city (Melbourne) as the central hub and a regionally diverse series of ecotourism experiences that encapsulate a great deal of what Australia can offer.

The importance of images is that they are universal, appealing to people world-wide. A place which 'owns' an image automatically becomes almost like a centre of pilgrimage.

Victoria must create this image of itself as a major destination for ecotourism, using its competitive edge in education to reinforce and deliver the image. If Victoria does so, it will automatically gain world media attention. It may become the host to conferences. This is not an expensive exercise; it merely takes careful and thoughtful planning, education and training, and cheek.

The Victorian Tourism Commission (VTC) is the lead agency responsible for the promotion of tourism in Victoria. Its major objective is to market Victoria as a tourist destination for international and interstate visitors, and for Victorians. Promoting Victoria as an ecotourism destination will primarily be the responsibility of the VTC. The distribution and sales of ecotourism product will be the responsibility of travel industry bodies such as the RACV and tour wholesalers.



Yellow Hakea

# THE BENEFITS OF ECOTOURISM

## Economic Factors

Tourism is increasing in importance as a key element in the State and national economy. It is estimated to have contributed 5.4% to Australia's Gross Domestic Product in 1990/91. Total expenditure derived from tourism in Australia that year was \$25.1 billion of which \$17.9 billion (or 71%) was attributed to domestic tourism. Tourism generates \$4.7 billion annually in Victoria.

The development of ecotourism can make a significant economic contribution with acceptable environmental cost. The nature of ecotourism as defined offers particular economic advantages at a regional/community level.

- Ecotourism is labour and knowledge intensive. To achieve the quality of experience demanded by the market, ecotourism depends upon close interaction between tourism product providers and small groups of consumers.
- Ecotourism encourages the dispersion of income directly to regional areas rather than large foreign, or capital city, investors. The preference of the ecotourism market is for small scale, unobtrusive development which reflects environmental values. The relatively low level of capital investment needed to satisfy this demand provides opportunity for growth in the numbers of community-based service providers.
- Ecotourism is a non-exploitative means of recovering a percentage of the costs of national parks and other public land.
- Ecotourism can allow local communities to value and identify with national parks and public land by earning a livelihood from them - especially where reservation has terminated other activities such as forestry, mining and grazing.





## THE BENEFITS OF ECOTOURISM



Victorian Christmas Bush

### Jobs potential in Victorian Ecotourism

Fostering this niche market of ecotourism could add 2000 new jobs to the State's tourism industry over the next decade. The specific initiatives provided by this strategy will stimulate job growth and economic activity, primarily throughout regional Victoria, by substantially increasing the projected annual growth of visits to national parks and other ecotourism destinations in Victoria.

Visits to national parks in Victoria exceeded 10 million in 1990/91 and are increasing by 1 million visits annually. Twenty percent of these visits were from interstate (16%) or overseas (4%) visitors.

The jobs potential from this growth is major. For example, it is estimated that 55 jobs are created for every 1000 additional overseas tourists (Industry Commission).

The National Tourism Strategy (released 5 June 1992) has forecast at least 200 000 extra jobs in the tourism industry over the rest of this decade if industry growth targets are met. This represents a 5% average annual growth rate in tourism employment and does not take into account the many additional jobs indirectly generated from tourism expenditure.

Victoria's share of this forecast growth will add 50 000 jobs to the 150 000 already employed in the State's tourism industry. At least 10 000 of these extra jobs will result from the increasing popularity of national parks as a tourist destination.

This strategy for the development of ecotourism will give Victoria a greater slice of the employment growth in the tourism industry and provide additional jobs over and above the current estimates.

As the ecotourism market grows the jobs created will mainly be in two areas; infrastructure development and services. Take-up of under-utilised capacity in accommodation, transport and other areas in common with the general tourism market will mean that growth in jobs in the short term in these areas could be slow. However, by taking initiatives to provide for the necessary development needs of the ecotourism market, the Government can accelerate the jobs development potential.

Also, because tourists are generally interested in a variety of experiences when they travel, ecotourism will complement related tourism activities such as adventure tours, sport, relaxation, enjoying local craft and food, conferencing. Thus, ecotourism can "piggy-back" on other local and regional attractions (and vice versa) to generate additional tourism activity in an area for the mutual benefit of a number of enterprises, leading to further job opportunities.

While the Government can assist in facilitating infrastructure development through site selection, possible joint ventures and so on, the tourism industry must provide the necessary venture capital and development initiatives to meet the growing market demand for accommodation and services.

## THE BENEFITS OF ECOTOURISM



Goldfields Grevillea

The specific areas of investment and funding that will result in employment creation are:

- Early development of additional Information Centres to service three key ecotourism destinations - should be provided over the next 5 years at a cost of some \$3 million to service the high country region, Mallee country and the Koala Centre on Phillip Island. Sites will need to be identified and may involve joint venture developments.
- Redevelopments or new developments of ecotourism/recreational facilities which are related key ecotourism destinations should also be encouraged to proceed. Some of these are, or could be, located on appropriate public land and can therefore be facilitated by the Government. It is expected that 4 to 5 such developments with a value of \$5 million could be undertaken over the next 3 years, mainly in coastal regions.
- These developments could provide up to 270 jobs during the construction phase and 20-30 ongoing jobs depending on the forms of development undertaken.
- A program of training and accreditation for private guides to meet the demand for skilled guides and field interpreters is likely to yield up to 50 job opportunities throughout the State within the next 2 years, primarily on a seasonal or part time basis.
- Running a program to familiarise overseas decision makers with Victoria, and enabling them to review the educational travel and ecotourism opportunities. This may also require sending overseas the best local operators to "sell" Victoria to those market areas which may respond most promptly.

### Environmental Benefits

In Australia, Government and the tourism industry are both moving towards acceptance of the concept of tourism based on sustainable development. The Government interest reflects increased community awareness of environmental issues and of the potential negative environmental effects of uncontrolled tourism developments. Industry commitment to the concept stems from the increasing realisation that long term viability and profitability depend on the protection of the resource upon which the tourism industry is based. Tourism can have positive environmental effects. By enabling people to enjoy the environment, tourism can promote greater public awareness of it and support for its conservation. While uncontrolled tourism can have adverse environmental effects, as often occurs through incremental development, strategically managed tourism may also lead to general improvements in the aesthetics of an environment and more effective management. As well, the income generated will allow rehabilitation of degraded environments.

## DEVELOPING AN INDUSTRY ACCORD

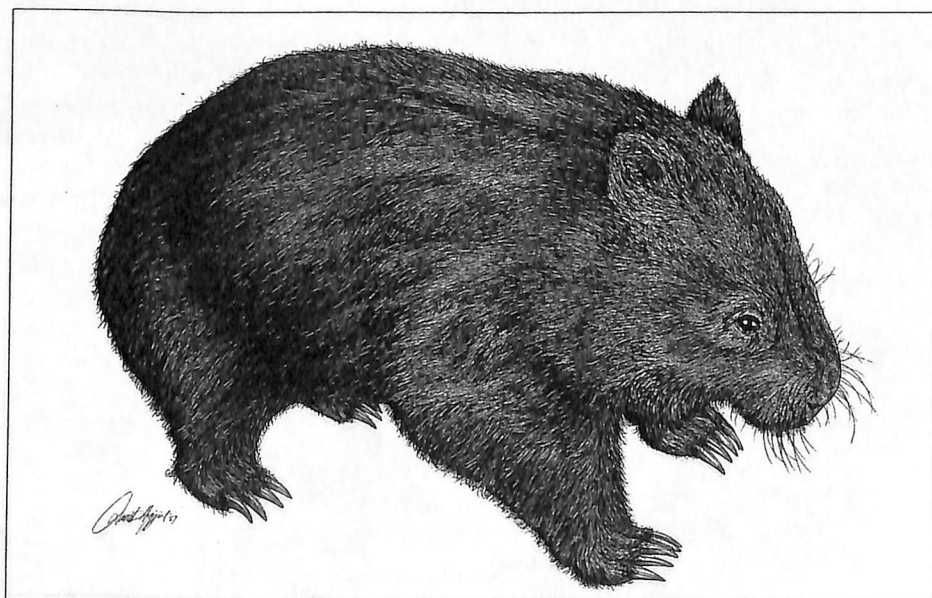
Ecotourism in Victoria must have a high degree of integrity in the market place. To achieve this it is essential that there is a clearly identifiable and consistent standard of quality that is accessible to the consumer. The tourism industry has a prime responsibility for maintaining high levels of quality in service and content, particularly through the provision of training, accreditation and literature. While not all ecotourism relies on access to public land, DCE, as the provider of access to parks and other public land, has joint responsibilities with industry in the setting of standards and literature development. DCE also needs to provide visitor-friendly staff and quality facilities in its parks and public land.

### **The responsibilities of industry**

The tourism industry has been becoming increasingly aware of the need for environmental guidelines to protect its long term interests. This has led to the adoption of the ASTA guidelines on environmental issues. This recognition of environmental responsibilities needs to continue to be emphasised and implemented on a practical level.

Industry should therefore:

- provide the development initiatives and the venture capital to meet the primary infrastructure needs of ecotourism development.
- develop and adopt an Ecotourism Code of Ethics to provide self-regulation of the industry and meet recognised standards of the tourism industry and DCE environmental management requirements.
- take the lead in the development of training and accreditation of tour guides. Accreditation would provide the consumer with a clearly identifiable indication of product quality and environmental integrity.
- assist in the co-ordination of literature development with DCE and marketing with VTC and regional tourism bodies.



## DEVELOPING AN INDUSTRY ACCORD

### **The role of the Department of Conservation and Environment (DCE)**

DCE should assist the growth of the ecotourism industry in Victoria by developing a co-operative relationship with private operators who are currently, or wish to become, involved in ecotourism. This can be achieved by close consultation with the tourism industry to:

- provide controlled access to soundly managed natural environments that protect and preserve indigenous flora and fauna in accordance with statutory responsibilities.
- assist with the development of an Ecotourism Code of Ethics that would form the basis of an industry accreditation scheme for private operators including appropriate standards of training and conduct.
- develop quality information and resource materials on Victoria's ecosystems and key environmental destinations.
- assist industry in the establishment of a training and education program for existing and new tour operators.
- assist the Victorian Tourism Commission in its promotional strategies to take Victoria's ecotourism profile to other states and the world.
- develop and maintain quality facilities that reflect ecotourism philosophy, for example, visitor centres. At the moment, many key environment destinations suffer from lack of adequate visitor facilities such as information boards, walkways, and viewing areas. Accommodation on the other hand should be developed by the private sector.
- identify sites on public and private land for joint venture for facilitation of appropriate infrastructure developments.
- further develop a high standard client service culture in all DCE operations which provide a service to visitors and tour operators.
- develop its research capabilities to provide formal affiliation links between its research centres and academic institutions. This will enhance the academic credibility of DCE's programs necessary for providing the substance for quality Education Tours.
- assist Regional tourism bodies by participating in the development of Regional tourism strategies.
- recognise the commercial realities of the industry by providing long term lease arrangements.





## STIMULATING ECOTOURISM IN VICTORIA THE 13 POINT PLAN

The foregoing material by the Department of Conservation and Environment (DCE) and the Victorian Tourism Commission (VTC) has argued that Victoria's major strength in tourism is our diverse natural environment protected by our world class public land network of National Parks and Reserves. This unique environment has the potential to provide enjoyment, inspiration and understanding to a wide range of local and overseas travellers and students.

To meet this potential a range of inter-related initiatives will be needed to stimulate the development of ecotourism and provide the framework for long term sustainability and growth. There are a number of specific actions that can be taken, subject to final budget allocations, these actions are as follows.

### 1. Declare Victoria as a major ecotourism destination

This provides an additional marketing focus for Victorian tourism and sets an agenda for the type and style of future tourism developments associated with the State's public land network.

DCE & VTC will adopt this strategy as the basis for developing Victoria as a major ecotourism destination.

### 2. Develop tour frameworks for Regional Victoria

Thematic frameworks are like curricula in schools or television documentaries. These frameworks place regional tourism strengths, (flora, geology, fauna, landscape, history) into a broader educational context. In creating frameworks for key areas such as Victoria's High Country, the dry country of the Mallee and the Wilderness Coast of East Gippsland we not only create the content of tourism to Victoria but also create the training material for Victoria's ecotourism industry.

DCE & VTC will support the development of specific tour frameworks and packages that will be based around our public land network and match the education content and experience requirements as specified by the relevant parent education bodies.

### 3. Target markets for educational travel to Victoria

Victoria is well placed to become a focus for educational travel, through the provision of quality tours that have content, integrity and the support that matches the needs and requirements of educational institutions and the expectations of those seeking greater understanding of the natural environment.

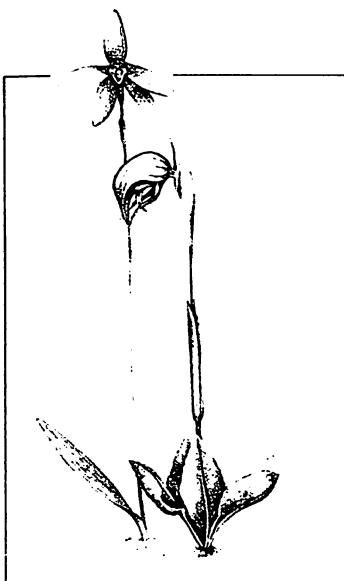
The immediate target market for educational travel to Victoria will be the United States of America, Europe and niche markets in Asia. It is important that key decision makers who influence education travel destinations are familiar with the opportunities available in Victoria.

VTC will identify key international educational travel people and host familiarisation tours that highlight our competitive advantages.



Snow Daisy-bush

## STIMULATING ECOTOURISM IN VICTORIA THE 13 POINT PLAN



Nodding Greenhood

#### **4. Advance the production of educational and other support material for ecotourism's regional destinations**

The development of quality thematic guides, information maps, systems of on-site information, education kits, videos, and so on will be undertaken by DCE in co-operation with the tourism industry and community groups. The "High Country Guide" is an excellent example of the high class material that can be provided which can meet the needs of a wide market at relatively low cost.

DCE will co-operate with the tourism industry and community groups in developing support material for ecotourism.

#### **5. Develop and implement a training and accreditation program for private tour guides**

There is a shortage of skilled tour guides to meet increasing ecotourism demands on national parks and other environmental destinations.

In regional Victoria tour operators cater for predominantly general tours and adventure tours. Following the development of regionally based frameworks, training programs will be offered to operators who seek accreditation to operate tours based on ecotourism. Both the training and accreditation will be jointly managed with appropriate educational bodies and relevant tour operators, associations and regional tourism organisations.

This program will also extend to independent tour guides who generally have a specific interest in attractions in a particular locality and usually work on a seasonal or part-time basis. Specific consideration will be given to the training of Koori guides, and the development of Koori tour operators.

DCE will assist the tourism industry to develop a training and accreditation program for private tour guides.

#### **6. Undertake to produce quality promotional material that highlights ecotourism opportunities and experiences in Victoria**

The ecotourism market responds to quality images of high integrity that conveys a strong educational message. These images need to be supported with content-driven brochures, guides and documentaries. In addition this niche market responds well to feature articles and editorial comment in targeted publications.

DCE & VTC will in conjunction with regional tourism associations, relevant industry bodies and community groups develop promotional material about Victoria's ecotourism opportunities.

#### **7. Facilitate private tourism developments on public land**

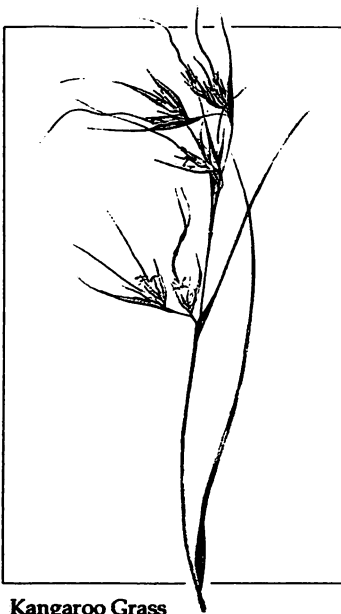
Adequate and appropriate tourism infrastructure must be available to serve the State's key ecotourism areas which, in many cases, include areas of public land.

# STIMULATING ECOTOURISM IN VICTORIA THE 13 POINT PLAN

DCE will:

- i) publish guidelines for tourism development on public land which will encourage location of any private accommodation development outside parks.
- ii) facilitate opportunities for infrastructure investment by forming a working party to identify and assess high potential development sites on public or private land (new or redevelopment) that could help meet the strategic infrastructure needs of ecotourism destinations, in accordance with the following criteria:
  - long term employment opportunities as well as provision of local employment during construction or development.
  - consistency with relevant Government policies and strategies.
  - consistency with reserve management plans and provision of any necessary permits and approvals.
- iii) prepare, after site identification, concept proposals for appropriate sites for liaison with developers.

These would include, within the first 5 years, new or redeveloped information centres serving the high country, the Mallee, the Great Ocean Road and the Koala Centre on Phillip Island.



Kangaroo Grass

## **8. Initiate a process for tour operator allocation of existing accommodation within National Parks and Reserves**

Accommodation within our major parks is limited and the current booking systems do not always suit the needs of tour operators for access to such accommodation. In recognition of industry needs alternative arrangements will be investigated.

DCE will establish alternative booking arrangements for tour accommodation in parks, in consultation with industry.

## **9. Create a Foundation as an avenue for community and corporate resourcing and involvement in the public land network**

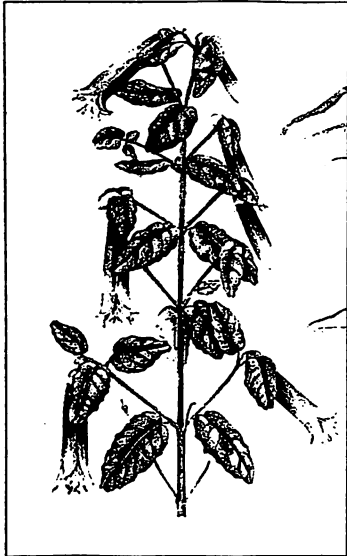
Increased tourism to national parks and reserves increases pressure on the park environment. As the very nature of ecotourism depends on high quality natural environments every effort must be made to undertake management works to protect and enhance our public land system. To help resource these works a Foundation will be established to facilitate corporate, visitor and community support for a network of Parks and Reserves. Such a Foundation will actively seek corporate and visitor support and involvement in programs that protect and enhance the enjoyment of public land.

DCE will create a Foundation for the support of Parks and Reserves.

## **10. Prepare an Industry Guide on the Access Rights of Tour Operators into National Parks and Public Land**

Prescriptions of access rights, use of tracks, camping regulations, licensing and other aspects of tour control in national parks and other public lands are currently set down in numerous management plans and other

## STIMULATING ECOTOURISM IN VICTORIA THE 13 POINT PLAN



Common Correa

documents developed by DCE over many years. In order to keep this information up to date, provide consistency of approach over the State and a ready reference for existing and new tour operators it would be of benefit to consolidate this information into a single compendium.

DCE will prepare a consolidated guide for tour operators on their access rights to national parks and other public land.

### **11. Set up a Tourism Operators' Liaison Committee.**

It is important that ecotourism operators have the opportunity to provide advice to the Minister for Conservation and Environment and his Department. The National Parks Advisory Council is already a source of high quality conservation management advice and has a particular emphasis in that area. Other suitable arrangements are required to meet this need of the tourism industry.

DCE will set up a tourism operators' liaison committee to consult with the Minister for Conservation and Environment and his Department on tourism issues.

### **12. Develop formal affiliation links between DCE research centres and academic institutions**

DCE researchers and research programs are highly regarded in the academic world. Providing formal acknowledgement of this through accreditation agreements with academic institutions will enhance DCE's programs in the Education Tour market, and provide further resources and support to DCE's research efforts.

DCE will develop affiliation arrangements between its research centres and academic institutions.

### **13. Establish a specific funding pool to resource DCE Regions and Committees of Management to undertake ecotourism related works and services**

The Department of Conservation and Environment and Committees of Management are responsible for public land with a wide range of tourism and recreation opportunities. The total Public Land network contains important natural, scenic and cultural features. Many are also gateways to major ecotourism experiences and provide accommodation and facilities in natural settings in and close to parks, reserves and forests. Financial assistance to DCE Regions and Committees will allow the establishment of new or significantly upgraded existing ecotourism opportunities on public land.

DCE will make funds available for tourism works and services on public land. Regional tour frameworks will establish priority areas and identify specific projects for funding consideration. Grant applications will be sought from Committees through DCE Regions. The aim is to assist Committees in improving infrastructure and upgrading existing tourism facilities.

## STIMULATING ECOTOURISM IN VICTORIA THE 13 POINT PLAN



Lemon Bottlebrush

The proposed scheme for Committees of Management will generally make funds available on a dollar for dollar basis. There may need to be some flexibility in cases where a Committee has limited financial resources but in other cases Committees would require assistance of less than 50% funding for projects.

### Guidelines for funding ecotourism works

- Approval and funding would be considered where proposals:
- upgrade and re-use existing facilities and develop materials which complement DCE's Ecotourism Strategy;
- result in increased long term employment opportunities as well as providing local employment during construction or development;
- are consistent with the Conservation, Coastal and other relevant Government policies and strategies;
- are based on reserve management plans and can obtain any necessary permits and approvals;
- can demonstrate the support of the local community and generally an ability to fund at least 50% of the total cost of the proposal;
- are not more appropriately funded by specific purpose grants from other sources;
- can demonstrate an ability to meet recurrent costs and maintenance costs.

Allocation of grants would also take into account the range in size, scope and location of project bids received.

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