

# Ecotourism in Australia and New Zealand

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## **Introduction**

Ecotourism has become a new marketing brand for tourism, but one often inappropriately used to describe environmentally exploitative experiences that have simply been disguised to broaden their appeal to a specific tourism market segment. Debasing of the concept of ecotourism in this way has important ramifications for genuine ecotourism destinations as well as ecotourism operators. Australia and New Zealand are well endowed with a surprising variety of landscapes, flora, fauna, and terrestrial and marine ecosystems, many of which have potentially high ecotourism values. Unfortunately, many of the significant areas of ecotourism interest are subject to competition from other activities including forestry, mining, fishing, farming and urban sprawl, which are characterised by both low yield returns *and* a degree of degradation that adversely affects claims for ecotourism values.

Both countries have long recognised the value of tourism as a generator of regional development (Hall, 2000), employment and export income, however, recent economic and political events have forced policy makers to attend to a range of urgent matters that rarely include tourism issues. This paper argues that in spite of short-term expediencies necessitated by the swirl of economic, political and security matters that have recently affected tourism, there is an urgent need to reconsider the role of ecotourism in each country's tourism industry and wider economic life. To illustrate the potential impact of inappropriate development, the paper considers the case of Fraser Island in Australia, identifying deficiencies in the administration and operation of the World Heritage-listed park that are reducing its ecotourism potential.

## **Ecotourism – Fad, Fiction, or the Future?**

If it is required that the global environment should cater for a doubling of visitors by the year 2010 (WTTC, 1994), and if it is intended that irreversible environmental damage should be avoided, then it is necessary to achieve effective integration of environmental protection with economic development of tourism resources (Farrell and McLellan, 1987; Murray North, 1990). It is pointless to seek higher capacities if the quality of visitor experience will be eroded, and pointless to consider doubling or trebling tourist numbers without major management inputs if adverse experiences are to be avoided (Higham & Kearsley, 1994). Indeed, many studies have demonstrated that the industry may “self destruct” without adequate monitoring and control of its effects (Craig-Smith and French, 1993).

In line with this change in thinking, *ecotourism*, or tourism with an environmentally friendly face, has been praised for its potential for enhancing the

positive effects of economic development while minimising the negative. Indeed, it has been argued that ecotourism is the *only* form of tourism development that is sustainable in the long term. Sustainable tourism, or tourism that does not erode its resource base is a key goal in Australia and New Zealand. However, to be sustainable tourism development must fulfill four major criteria:

- It must be based upon conserved and well managed resources, be they environmental, cultural or social;
- It must be financially viable and provide a real rate of return for all stakeholders;
- It must provide continuing visitor satisfaction, because declining satisfaction erodes economic viability; and
- It must be based upon a supportive host community, because without host satisfaction and approval, no other objectives are achievable in the long term.

Each of these criteria is dependent upon the maintenance of others in a balanced system of inter-relationships (Higham & Kearsley, 1994).

Ceballos-Lascurain (1987) first identified ecotourism as a form of travel that primarily focussed on the natural environment; involving travel to (unspoilt) natural environments, and experiences relating to those natural environments. Since that seminal article, debate about the nature of and the impacts associated with ecotourism has raged across academia and into the public consciousness in most countries. The term has become a catchphrase that encompasses numerous tourism forms, including “nature tourism,” “wilderness tourism,” “low impact tourism,” “green tourism,” and “sustainable tourism” (Wearing & Neil, 1999, 4-5). In turn, the debate has ranged from the mechanics of what constitutes an ecotourism product or experience, to the concept of ecotourism as a way of living (organising interactions between humanity and the environment in which humanity lives). In fact, it is our view that until all the parties involved in a particular development accept and internalise the concept of sustainability as the guiding force behind all decision making concerning the use of nature for tourism purposes, it is unlikely that ecotourism can be structured for long term sustainability.

Underlying such a pattern of thought is the need for the realisation that nature does not exist in a time warp and is itself constantly undergoing change as a response to changed environmental conditions, including the impact of tourists. There is therefore a need to allow natural systems to evolve; a process that may entail considerable modification including changes to the size of the habitats of many species, new vegetation regimes and changes in the shape and size of the areas that need protection. In response to these natural changes there is a need for flexible administrative regimes that can accommodate natural change.

The mere adoption of codes of conduct or enforcement of environmental regulations does not necessarily engender the state of mind that host communities and individuals working in the tourism sector require in order to provide an experience that offers both an ecotourism experience to the tourist and one which is sustainable in the longer term (Cooper, 2000). Many so-called ecotourism experiences are exploitative and may not be sustainable over a period of time (Clarke, 1997; Cooper, 1997). Unfortunately, the expectation of short-term profits and the need to achieve attractive

returns on capital investment leads managers, regulators and investors to operate ecotourism businesses in a manner that is often not sustainable. The concept of the lowest common denominator, where the operator with the lowest price and sometimes the most exploitative and unsustainable operational and business practices is often allowed to set the industry standard, generally prevails (Butler, 1993; Carter & Davie, 1995). However, a review of the literature indicates strong evidence that the tourist is not so completely cost-sensitive that price need be the overriding means of competition. Recent research in a number of countries indicates that the tourist is concerned about the environment to the extent that many are willing to pay a premium for an ecotourism experience that is sustainable. For example, Masau and Prideaux (2002) found that in Kenya tourists were prepared to pay a premium for both experiences that exhibited a high sensitivity to the sustainability of the environment as well as pay a premium for hotel accommodation that was managed according to sustainable principles (see also Bumgarner, 1994; Gustin and Weaver, 1996; and Hornemann, Beeton and Huie, 1997).

### **Developing Sustainable Tourism**

Given this debate and previous experience with the true nature of the term “development,” it is fairly obvious that in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century it would be shortsighted in the extreme for Australasian communities to advocate ecotourism unless they have a sustainable development policy in place to begin with. Such a policy has to be environmentally sensitive, incorporate operational guidelines and ecological assessment procedures, invoke effective local change management techniques when faced with barriers to implementation, make explicit codes for development, and restrict or forbid project reappraisals based on a need for more “profit” (or at least set environmental limits to this type of trade-off). Anything less, and “ecotourism” becomes nothing more than a means of obscuring the true environmental impact of tourists.

What does “sustainable development” really mean? At the risk of oversimplifying the current debate on this question, it involves finding the most appropriate development pathway to follow in a given situation under often widely different social, economic and ecological settings (Beaumont, 1998). On the one-hand, there is a need to preserve the functional integrity of natural processes for succeeding generations, and on the other, maintaining current economic growth by decoupling new and existing development projects from major unwanted environmental side effects. In short, different interpretations of sustainable development will have applicability according to circumstance, and will involve different sets of trade-off decisions between the various components of sustainability, depending on need. In the end, sustainability can only be defined as a process of development that enables natural systems to retain their integrity in the long term, which should be measured with a horizon of centuries not decades. If change reduces the integrity of the natural environment it is simply not sustainable. According to this premise, the robustness of the ecosystem and its ability to undergo modification without loss of integrity must become the benchmark for adoption of sustainable practices and the policies that guide them.

To achieve sustainability, which balances the needs of the environment and of the

people wishing to use it, flexibility of approach is required. To achieve this form of flexibility the following tasks should be carried out:

- Ensure that all government departments and management involved in tourism are properly briefed and trained in the concept of sustainable development;
- Ensure that national and local tourism development agreements stress a policy of sustainable tourism development;
- Include tourism in land-use planning policies;
- Develop design and construction standards to ensure that tourism development projects do not disrupt local culture and natural environments;
- Develop standards and regulations for environmental and cultural impact assessments and monitoring of existing tourism developments, and ensure that carrying capacities defined for tourism destinations reflect sustainable levels of development and are monitored and adjusted appropriately;
- Assist and support lower levels of governments in developing tourism strategies and conservation strategies and in integrating the two;
- Enforce regulations relating to illegal trade in historic objects and crafts, unofficial archaeological research and desecration of sacred sites;
- Create local tourism advisory boards that involve all stakeholders (e.g. the public, indigenous populations, industry, NGOs), and design and implement public consultation techniques and processes to involve all stakeholders in tourism-related decisions;
- Undertake area/sector specific research into the environmental, cultural and economic effects of tourism for each subject area;
- Implement an accreditation system, such as that of NEAP or Green Globe for tourism operators; and
- Design and implement educational and awareness programmes to sensitise local people to sustainable tourism development issues.

A wide range of regulations could be applied to tourism developments (Minidis 1994; Prideaux and Cooper 2000), but it should be stressed that it is important to design regulatory systems to fit both the demands of the environment as well as the requirements of central and local Government and industry. On achieving this, a sustainable future for tourism is possible.

The specific form of policy adopted will depend on:

- The nature of the resource and the sensitivity of the ecosystem of which it is a part;
- The development ethos of those involved in the private sector;
- The ability of the government to achieve desired sustainable policy goals; and
- Openness in government decision-making and freedom from corruption of public officials.

Where sensitive environments are involved the risk from accepting compliance as the preferred code is great, particularly if participants see development as only another

profit centre and lack commitment to the philosophy of sustainability. In new developments a government should implement certification as the benchmark for development. Alternatively, developments expressing resistance to certification may be viewed with a degree of apprehension if not concern, because of their apparent hesitation to embrace sustainable principles. This argument is conditional on the degree to which the government is willing to enforce codes of development.

### **Ecotourism in Australia and New Zealand**

Australia and New Zealand have so far been substantially isolated from many of the problems of global environmental deterioration. Some of the worst problems of desertification, water pollution, acid rain, deforestation and the like have not been substantially experienced there. Nevertheless, both countries have major concerns with increasing soil degradation, deteriorating water quality, the loss of natural animal and plant species, and some waste disposal practices. Moreover, they cannot avoid the impacts of global environmental problems such as ozone layer depletion, and global climate change. These pressures are likely to increase in the future.

It was partly in response to international concerns, and partly in response to a growing awareness of these problems in local communities, that led Australasian Governments – National, State and Local – to establish *ecologically sustainable development* (ESD) policies. The aim of those policies is to develop an agreed strategy for moving towards sustainable development practices by the year 2000 (Harris, 1992). There are however, almost as many schools of thought as to what constitutes ESD, and indeed even the environmental crisis itself, as there are nation states (Elder, 1991). As a result, most sustainable development policy is largely political expediency (Harris, 1992), based on value judgements rather than precise performance standards. In many situations, opposing fundamental positions on the value of environmental concerns are likely to remain central and will impose a continuing need for political adjudication. Cases in point are the siting of dams for hydro-electricity generation, or tourist development in or near wilderness areas.

Economic development activities at all levels of government in Australia and New Zealand have traditionally been opportunistic. As a result, only when a company or industry wishes to undertake a *major* commercial or industrial activity do governments review such proposals for consistency with environmental regulations or policies, and this is usually achieved through the use of development control regulations under planning legislation.

#### *Traditional Landuse Control*

In line with this, there are two broad approaches to the control of ecotourism development in Australasia. The first is through traditional landuse controls on specific development and the second is through codes of operation for tourism operators. For those development proposals that are classified as minor or “normal” each local government authority will have guidelines and the determining power under legislation. When a proposed development is classified as major, the “traditional” method of incorporating at least some explicit environmental considerations in development control has been through subjecting an individual proposal to the procedure known as

*Environmental Impact Assessment* (EIA). The purpose of EIA is to identify the possible risks to the environment inherent in any proposed development (Bates, 1992). However, the flaws of EIA are well documented; with the lack of background data on ecosystems, inadequate treatment of the concept of intergenerational equity, lack of opportunities for public involvement, and inadequate post-project monitoring, all being of considerable concern.

This has meant that policies on tourism development, where they have taken notice of environmental issues at all, usually have gone no further than requiring new projects to conform to *basic* environmental rules. Governments have not yet been very active in formulating economic development policies based on a goal of sustainability, and very limited effort has been made towards ensuring that new development proposals help move toward that goal.

### *Codes of Conduct*

The main aim of codes of operation is to influence attitudes and modify the behaviour of operators and to some extent that of their clients, the visitor. Codes are usually designed to improve environmental quality and minimise negative impacts of tourism. Codes of conduct are usually part of a process involving attempts to regulate activity and are often used in conjunction with guidelines for development under the traditional planning system. Codes of conduct generally have the following objectives (Cooper & Erfurt, 2003):

- To serve as a catalyst for dialogue between government and other bodies involved in tourism;
- To create an awareness in government and industry of the need for sound environmental management;
- To heighten awareness amongst tourists of the need for appropriate behaviour;
- To make host populations aware of the need for environmental protection;
- To encourage co-operation between government agencies, host communities, industry and NGO's.

It would appear from this that tourism codes are primarily concerned with environmental impacts and improving environment management, however the message of such codes is not just confined to environmental issues. A number of visitor codes, for example, make reference to socio-cultural matters, such as respect for local religious beliefs. Codes with industry as the audience frequently refer to the need for appropriate training and honest marketing of tourism products. Also, although many codes are impressive in terms of the range of issues that they cover and in their depth of discussion and information, for example the impressively titled *National Ecotourism Accreditation Program* (NEAP), there are a number of significant problems with them. First, codes must be practised as intended, but most codes tend to be poorly implemented. Awareness concerning whether codes are well implemented can be derived from monitoring, however, the great majority of codes are not monitored, so it is very difficult to evaluate their effects (UNEP, 2002). Clearly, there is little point in having a code unless it achieves its desired impact (Cooper & Erfurt, 2003).

Second, several codes may be found operating in the same location but they may be written by different authors and aimed at targets existing at different scales, from local to national or even international. This suggests a much greater need to co-ordinate codes and there is perhaps a related need to reduce variability between codes. Third, and of particular importance, codes may be little more than clever marketing devices, rather than genuine attempts to promote more sustainable forms of tourism. Under such conditions, a code is used in an attempt to persuade potential customers that a tour operator adheres to a set of environmental and/or socio-cultural principles. The reality may be that the principles are not adhered to, but this is, in fact, a cynical attempt to get a customer to part with their cash, believing they are buying an ethical/green tourism product. Fourth, codes are voluntary; they are a form of self-regulation. As such, they can do little more than exhort the target audience to respond to the requests/instructions contained within the code. Virtually no codes are backed up by actual legally binding documents, which of course limits their effectiveness.

#### *New Zealand's Resource Management Act and the Australian Equivalents*

One of the few national legal frameworks for managing the environmental impact of economic development in the Region, and one which incorporates many of the above criteria, is the New Zealand *Resource Management Act 1991* (as amended). Under that Act the environment is defined as the country's natural and physical resources – its air, soils, rivers, minerals, coast, and mountains, and all plant and animal life (*including people*). The environment also includes built form resources (buildings and other structures), as well as those intangible matters of concern to people, such as visual, privacy, cultural and other values placed upon it.

The Act provides a system of responsibilities and powers for central and local government in order to ensure that principles of good environmental management are adhered to. These principles are based on the concept of the sustainable management of natural and physical resources. New Zealand's tourism industry depends on the maintenance of environmental quality as a major draw card for international visitors. It's "clean green" image is however fragile, and can only be safeguarded by managing the environment on a long-term sustainable basis. As a user and developer of environmental resources, the implications of the Act for tourism are wide ranging.

Under the Act the term *sustainable management* is defined as involving three main goals:

- To balance development needs with those of the environment by ensuring that the use of resources does not endanger or irreparably damage (such as by pollution) any ecological system(s);
- To ensure acceptably high standards of environmental quality are achieved and maintained; and,
- To ensure the environment and its resources is used in such a way as to protect the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Other than for proposals with minor effects, the Act requires that an assessment of the environmental impact of a proposed activity be lodged with a local authority at

the time of applying for resource consent (planning approval). More attention by tourism developers to identifying the potential environmental impacts of a proposed development or business, and deciding how such impacts could be avoided or reduced is therefore required before an application for consent is lodged with a local authority.

It has therefore been recognised in New Zealand that without proper planning and management tourism can lead to the degradation of the environment, especially in coastal zones and unspoiled areas, and to the disruption of indigenous culture and other economic sectors such as agriculture. The *Resource Management Act* insists that environmentally compatible development, especially within existing cultural and environmental constraints and opportunities, is the only form of tourist development that is allowable.

The Australian situation is somewhat different. While the *intent* of most State legislation is to control the potential environmental impact of a development proposal and to enable a Planning Authority to make an informed decision on whether a decision should proceed, unlike the New Zealand situation there is no one over-arching legislative and administrative framework to ensure that all these competing interests and requirements are integrated, with the proponent knowing exactly what has to be satisfied before approval is sought. In Australia too, the provision of information on the potential environmental impacts of a proposed development is generally the responsibility of the *developer*. However, for the system to work as intended, approving authorities need to have objective and uniform data on the ecosystems affected by the proposal, and in many cases that information does not exist. Only in New South Wales has there been any systematic attempt to require each local authority to fully analyse the local biophysical environment in advance of any development pressure, before zoning or other planning controls are established. All other States rely on the developer to analyse that environment specifically for the one-off project (which is then checked by either a Local or State approving authority).

A related problem is that, in most cases local government is not adequately resourced to address the environmental and other complexities of major development proposals. The boom in tourism can and has caused major resourcing and logistical problems and, as a consequence, there have been delays in processing development applications and failure to meet time limits for provision of information to proponents. So much so that tourism development has been the subject of fast tracking legislation in several States, passing normal approval systems and turning development control over to a government committee. While this process avoids delays, and the financial costs imposed by such delays, special case treatment of tourism development has not been viewed favourably by many people in Australia (e.g. the controversial Hinchinbrook Channel development near Cairns). Communities often perceive it as an attempt by proponents and a Government dedicated to development at all costs to circumvent public consultation and indeed, environmental responsibility.

In order to enhance their effectiveness in Australia as a tool for the control of the environmental impact of tourism then, a number of changes to planning policy frameworks are required. These are:

- The urgent provision of a comprehensive ecological information base, *at a local level*, for policy analysis, planning, business decisions, and public information, to ensure that social and environmental concerns are



- increasingly integrated with economic decision-making;
- The designation of tourism development (except for very minor proposals) as *requiring* the undertaking of an environmental impact assessment;
- The expansion of public consultation processes, both sectoral and regional, coupled with adequate third party enforcement rights in the Courts;
- The adoption of the precautionary approach when assessing applications for tourism development approval; and
- Requiring all projects to be subject to environmental auditing after construction.

However, very few of these new initiatives are visible on the National or State political horizon in Australia, unlike in New Zealand. Indeed, such administrative and economic changes seem increasingly unlikely as each Government's concern with the "economy" severely restricts consideration of environmental matters.

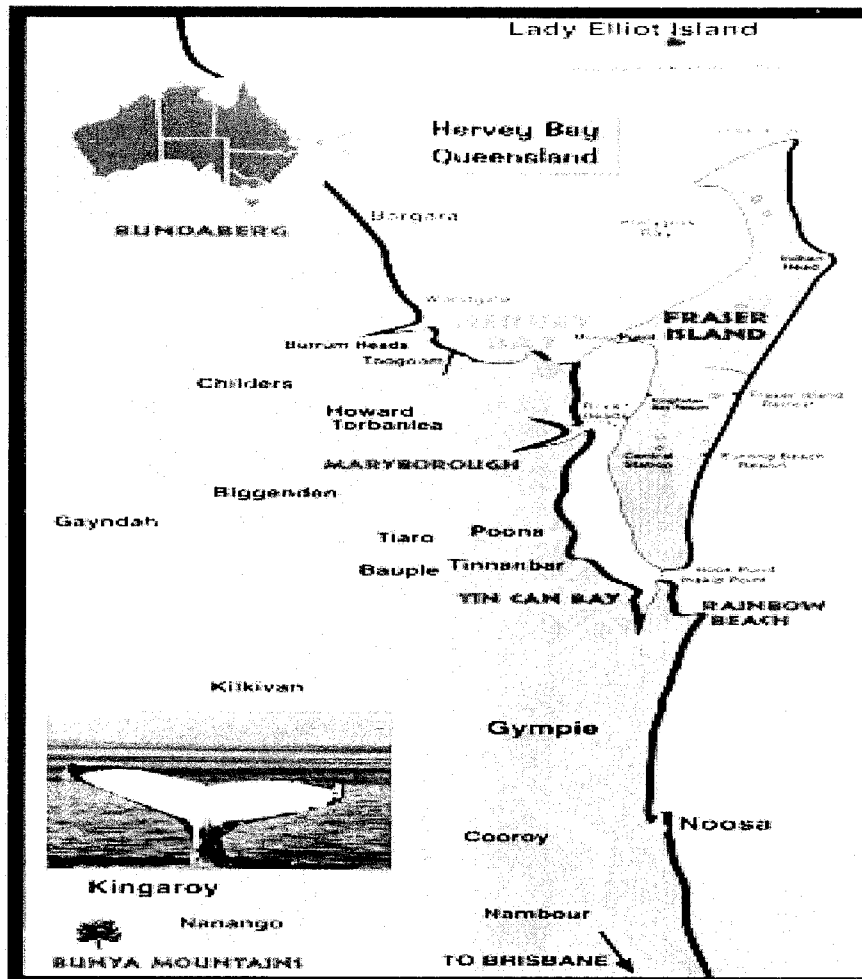
#### *Fraser Island – An Example of Inappropriate Regulation?*

There are also other examples of the potential and actual impacts of tourism development receiving little attention from the authorities charged with their control. As noted above, changing tourist attitudes have recently given rise to an increasing demand for environmental education, ecotourism and other nature-based opportunities (Oppermann, 1994). However, while it is clear that a high percentage of international visitors come to countries like Australia and New Zealand to experience the natural environment, they are not made aware of its fragility, or that unique wildlife and other environmental icons are not highly visible at every point. While it is true that ecotourism product must match visitor expectations, it is equally true that visitors must correctly value ecotourism destinations for the benefits of ecotourism to be realised. If the latter does not occur, management authorities may be persuaded to close off access, to the detriment of tourism.

This section of the paper looks at how these somewhat conflicting requirements actually impact in practice. Fraser Island is an example of a World Heritage listed park that is facing significant problems regarding the environmental values placed on it by visitors and the resources allocated to the authority charged with its management (Figure 1). The *Final Report of the Review of Tourism Activities in the Great Sandy Region* (Department of Environment and Heritage, 1998) noted that this region ranked higher than other comparable areas in Queensland terms of naturalness. However, while that review clearly identified the value of nature-based ecotourism activities, it also flagged potential problems – both for the environment and visitors – of uncontrolled access to the major draw card of the Region, Fraser Island. The crowding effect of a large number of visitors and their impact on the natural environment – through significant degradation, site hardening or on-site management – therefore needs to be considered. This in turn leads to the question: how to find ways of meeting visitor expectations while allowing as many people as possible to experience Fraser Island and other areas? Part of the solution is to provide informative, practical advice and enforceable standards relating to the ecotourism experience.

The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), in its Tourism Policy (ACF, 1994), specified six characteristics that it considered essential to ecotourism:

## Hervey Bay



**Figure 1 The Great Sandy Region**

Note: The Great Sandy Region is a coastal zone that extends from Noosa in the south to Hervey Bay in the north and includes Fraser Island. Source: Prideaux and Cooper (2002).

- Visitation to enjoy nature, wildlife, culture, and archaeology;
- A high degree of interpretation;
- High quality, low-impact design in all infrastructure;
- Promotion of conservation knowledge and ethics;
- The provision of net benefits to environmental protection; and
- The provision of net benefits to indigenous communities and other affected communities.

These defining characteristics broadly follow the minimalist impact definition of ecotourism (Figgis, 1993; Weiler, 1993; Whelan, 1991), with the addition of

environmental education and cultural appreciation (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987; Hall, 1994), and have generally been adopted by responsible Government agencies in specifying appropriate ecotourism *strategies*. According to Buckley (1994), however, *in practice* the tourism industry and government agencies in many countries have been inclined to focus on the product side and to treat ecotourism as identical to nature-based tourism.

By doing this it is possible to promote the intensive use of parks for example by giving the experience a veneer of respectability derived from a permit to enter and use, while placing very little actual restriction on that (Wheeller, 1993). As a result, the “reality” of the ecotourism experience is often that of the presentation of natural attractions as a means of selling a product, rather than of ensuring sustainable tourism impact on the environment. The problem is that this is what has happened with ecotourism on Fraser Island, Queensland, and is one outcome that should be avoided at all costs. The result of this form of ecotourism is that the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage (DOEH), while making considerable amounts from the permit system, is faced with considerable environmental pressure from the very tourists who might have been expected to be predisposed towards being environmentally protective of the Island.

### **Is There Any Solution?**

There seems no doubt that the managers of the World Heritage Fraser Island environment face increasing pressure from visitors, and that many of these visitors will be those who wish to indulge in “bush and sand dune bashing” in 4-wheel drive vehicles in the foreseeable future. There also seems little doubt, from the information presented by the DOEH and the evidence of private providers of “ecotourism” that such visitors *are* interested in the protection of the environment they have come to see. But, just at the point where they might become a useful resource for the authorities on Fraser Island with respect to environmental conservation, they are allowed to make their own way using off-road vehicles without adequate driver or environment protection education.

Small wonder then that the majority of visitors to the Island seem content with only sketchy outlines of both routes and the environment in this situation (although language barriers may be a contributing factor), and take full advantage of the “freedom and flexibility” to indulge their other passions in the absence of more structured experiences. These passions range from sand “bashing”, to an almost complete disregard of environmental protection instructions (litter, signage). In fact, it has been noted that various groups have even disregarded signs because they are in English!

Top Tours, a major Fraser Island private tour operator, has long advocated controlled access to the environment through structured tours, and find that there is increasing demand for this solution to the above paradox. However, a more radical solution may be found in making environmental protection the core of a tour, restricting “sand bashing” and other recreational pursuits to very tightly controlled areas as a reward for success in a programme of rehabilitation.

The practice of enrolling visitors as volunteers in environmental rehabilitation and education programmes is now quite common in Europe and the USA, and should

therefore be somewhat familiar to the majority of backpackers who visit Australia and other countries in the Asia-Pacific Region. Also, such programmes could be easily accommodated within the time frames of most visitors. While space does not allow a full exposition of advantages to be gained from such an approach, the most obvious would be the provision of practical assistance to the conservation activities of the environmental managers of the Island. Such an approach could include assistance by providing labour for conservation tasks, and by reducing the impact on creeks and camping grounds through a feeling of “ownership” that is currently missing. Another advantage would be the opportunity for educational institutions to form partnerships with backpackers, hostels and 4WD hire companies in the provision and support of such programmes. Local economies would then benefit from the resultant longer stay of backpackers and the dissemination of knowledge held.

To be able to deliver on the promise of ecotourism on Fraser Island or in any other area of Australia will take more than an assumption of interest and fair play on the part of visitor groups, especially when they are given a choice on how to behave and when a strong and enforced message on the requirements to protect the environment is missing. A solution may be to incorporate an environmental rehabilitation component in tours. By introducing such components both the visitors, who want to enjoy and protect the environment as well as play, and the environmental managers, whose resources are stretched, can benefit.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

As noted above, if tourism continues to grow as rapidly as it has done and the global environment is required to cater for a doubling of visitors by the year 2010, and if it is intended that irreversible environmental damage should be avoided, then it is necessary to achieve effective integration of environmental protection with the development of tourism resources. It is pointless to seek higher capacities if the quality of visitor experience will be eroded, and pointless to consider doubling or trebling tourist numbers without major environmental management controls if adverse experiences are to be avoided.

In line with this change in thinking, *ecotourism*, or tourism with an environmentally friendly face, has been praised for its potential to enhance the positive effects of economic development while minimising the negative. Indeed, it has been argued that ecotourism is the *only* form of tourism development that is sustainable in the long term. This paper suggests however, using the contrasting experiences of Australia and New Zealand that *all* development should adhere to such practices. If this were to be achieved there would then be no need for a concentration on ecotourism development as distinct from tourism development (however defined) to protect the environment from the impact of tourists.

It seems inevitable however that in many countries like Australia only the *language* of sustainable development will be employed. The practical steps needed to usher in the deep seated changes in planning systems which would ensure ecologically sustainable development, including that of tourism, do not appear to be forthcoming in the short-term. It is only when a radical change is made, such as that embodied in the New Zealand *Resource Management Act*, that the potential for ecotourism to enhance the bio-physical environment can be achieved.

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