

NATIVE TITLE RIGHTS AND ECOTOURISM ON ABORIGINAL LANDS

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous ecotourism enterprises and joint ventures are a growing trend in Australia. These include nature-based tours, cultural attractions, river cruises and accommodation owned by Indigenous groups. The ventures are mainly based on recognition of Aboriginal or Native Title rights and interests; jointly managed National Parks; and negotiated Indigenous Land Use Agreements. Aboriginal and conservation groups and park agencies all support ecotourism as a sustainable development option for Indigenous lands. This paper evaluates Indigenous participation in ecotourism and the changing roles of Indigenous people in state and territory plans for nature tourism and economic development. These roles now include Indigenous people as Native Title holders, traditional owners, land managers, business investment, park rangers, tourism operators and guides. Indigenous ecotourism ventures thus present Aboriginal culture to visitors, re-assert Aboriginal control over traditional land areas and generate some economic benefits from customary lands and culture. Hence, this paper also applies a framework for Indigenous ecotourism that considers environmental, cultural, economic and political aspects of Indigenous involvement in tourism. This analysis indicates that nature tourism plans recognise the need for consultation about Indigenous cultural heritage and environmental relationships, but offer limited support for Indigenous groups to develop and manage ecotourism as Native Title holders.

Keywords: Indigenous ecotourism, nature tourism plans, Native Title rights, Australia

INTRODUCTION

Aboriginal-owned tourism ventures are a growing segment of the Australian tourism industry, mainly since the 1990s (Sykes 1995; Pitcher, van Oosterzee and Palmer 1999; DISR, 2000; Zeppel, 2001, 2007a; Singh et al., 2001; Robertson-Friend, 2004; Bailey, 2005; Crawshaw, 2005). Well-known Aboriginal tourist ventures include the Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park in Cairns (QLD), 50% owned by the local *Djabugay* people; and Tiwi Tours on Bathurst and Melville Islands (NT), fully owned by the Tiwi Tourism Authority since 1995. Aboriginal culture is mainly promoted in the Northern Territory, North Queensland and the Kimberley (WA), but other states (e.g. NSW, SA & Victoria) are also developing Indigenous tourism products and attractions. Indigenous ecotourism ventures are a growing part of this trend. This paper evaluates Indigenous participation in ecotourism and the changing roles of Indigenous people in state and territory plans for nature tourism and economic development. The roles of Indigenous people in Australian ecotourism now include Native Title holders, traditional owners (TOs), land managers, business investment, park rangers, tourism operators and guides. Indigenous ecotourism is important in terms of presenting Aboriginal culture to visitors, regaining Aboriginal control over land areas and the need for Aboriginal groups to generate economic benefits from their traditional land and culture. Both Aboriginal and conservation groups consider ecotourism as a sustainable development option for Indigenous lands. Hence, this paper critically reviews Indigenous issues in state eco/nature tourism strategies or plans. It first defines Indigenous ecotourism; profiles Indigenous ecotourism ventures on Aboriginal lands and Native Title rights, then reviews research on Indigenous ecotourism and tourism industry engagement with Aboriginal people. Next, a framework for Indigenous ecotourism is presented followed by a review of key Aboriginal issues covered in government ecotourism plans and nature based tourism strategies. This paper suggests that government ecotourism plans address Indigenous cultural heritage and environmental relationships, but offer limited support or means for Indigenous groups to control and manage ecotourism as Native Title holders.

DEFINING INDIGENOUS ECOTOURISM

Ecotourism Australia (2006) defines ecotourism as 'Ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation.' There is a primary focus on the natural environment with a secondary emphasis on cultural heritage, including Indigenous cultures. Indigenous ecotourism though involves nature-based attractions or tours owned by Indigenous people, and also Aboriginal interpretation of the natural and cultural environment. The Wilderness Society (1999) defines Indigenous cultural tourism as 'responsible, dignified and sensitive contact between indigenous people and tourists which educates the tourist about the distinct and evolving relationship between indigenous peoples and their country, whilst providing returns to the local indigenous community.' Indigenous cultural tours are located on traditional country and in urban areas. It includes Aboriginal people on their traditional land sharing culture (i.e. cultural tourism) and Aboriginal people, not on their own land, speaking about culture (i.e. interpretive experience) (Ellis, 2003). Aboriginal tours link Indigenous people with their traditional country, highlighting their role as cultural custodians. Key motives for Aboriginal involvement in ecotourism include cultural revival, economic benefits and employment, self-esteem and securing Native Title rights to land (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006).

Indigenous-owned and operated ecotourism ventures benefit Indigenous groups, families or individuals while conserving the natural and cultural environment. Key aspects of Indigenous ecotourism include a nature-based product, the presentation of Indigenous environmental and cultural knowledge and Indigenous ownership or control of ecotourism on tribal homelands. Ecotourism includes Aboriginal people and their traditions because of the strong bond between Indigenous cultures and the natural environment. This includes cultural, spiritual and physical links between Indigenous peoples and their traditional lands or natural resources. Indigenous ecotourism then is: 'Tourism which cares for the environment and which involves (Indigenous) people in decision making and management' (ANTA, 2001). It includes nature-based tourism products or accommodation owned by Indigenous groups, and Indigenous cultural tours or attractions in a natural setting. Much of this Indigenous tourism development focuses on community-based ecotourism that benefits local people. According to Drumm (1998, p.198), Indigenous community-based ecotourism involves 'ecotourism programs which take place under the control and active participation of the local people who inhabit a natural attraction.' These ecotourism enterprises involve Indigenous communities using their natural resources and traditional lands to gain income from tourism. Hence, Indigenous ecotourism ventures involve nature conservation, business enterprise (or partnerships) and tourism income for community development. Hunting, gathering and fishing tours are also part of Indigenous ecotourism although hunting animals often conflicts with conservation and ecotourism goals (Hinch, 1998).

INDIGENOUS ECOTOURISM VENTURES

Most Indigenous ecotourism ventures operate on Aboriginal lands or protected areas. Aboriginal land rights, joint management of national parks and the need for consultation with Native Title claimants are the main impetus driving Indigenous involvement in ecotourism. These Indigenous ecotourism ventures, then, include boat cruises, nature-based accommodation, cultural ecotours and wildlife attractions operating on Aboriginal lands, National Parks and in traditional tribal areas (see Table 1). These Indigenous-owned ecotourism enterprises present unique Indigenous perspectives of the natural and cultural environment, promote nature conservation and provide employment for local Indigenous people (ANTA 2001). Hence, these Indigenous products meet the key criteria of ecotourism as nature based tourism with environmental education and ecological sustainability or conservation supporting tourism (Blamey, 1995). Indigenous nature conservation or 'caring for country' involves traditional land owners/custodians 'looking after the environmental, cultural and spiritual well being of the land' (ATA, 2005). Looking after Aboriginal sites, landscapes or natural resources and educating visitors about "country" often motivate Indigenous conservation ethics in ecotourism or land

management. Nganyintja, a *Pitjantjatjara* Elder working with Desert Tracks stated that: 'carefully controlled ecotourism has been good for my family and my place Angatja' (cited in James, 1994, p.12). Most Aboriginal nature-based tours are marketed as cultural tours rather than ecotours, emphasising the links between Indigenous operators and their traditional lands.

Table 1
Selected Indigenous Ecotourism Ventures in Australia

Accommodation

Gagudju Lodge, Kakadu, NT+
Seisia Resort and Campground, Cape York, QLD+
Kooljaman at Cape Leveque, Kimberley, WA+

Boat Tours

Yellow Water Cruises, Kakadu, NT*
Guluyambi Aboriginal Cultural Cruise, Kakadu, NT*
Nitmiluk Cruises, Katherine, NT*
Darnngku Heritage Cruises, Geikie Gorge, Kimberley, WA*

Cultural Ecotours

Tiwi Tours, NT+
Umorrduk Safaris, Arnhem Land, NT+
Manyallaluk, NT+
Anangu Tours, Uluru, NT*
Wallace Rockhole, NT+
Desert Tracks, Pitjantjatjara Lands, SA+
Camp Coorong, SA
Iga Warta, SA+
Adjahdura Tours, SA
Karijini Walkabouts, WA*
Kepa Kurl Tours, WA
East Gippsland Wilderness Tours, VIC
Harry Nanya Tours, NSW
Mutawintji Heritage Tours, NSW*
Tobwabba Tours, NSW
Umbarra Cultural Tours, NSW
Native Guide Safari Tours, QLD
Munbah Aboriginal Culture Tours, QLD+
Kuku-Yalanji Dreamtime Walks, QLD+
Walker Family Tours, QLD+

Wildlife Attraction

Whale Watching, Yalata Aboriginal Land, SA+
Cape York Turtle Rescue, Mapoon, QLD+

Note: *Indigenous-owned cruises or tours operating in Aboriginal-owned and/or jointly managed National Parks

+Nature-based accommodation, cultural tour or wildlife attraction located on Indigenous land

Source: Based on Zeppel, 2003

Indigenous ecotourism ventures focus on Indigenous relationships with the land and the cultural significance of the natural environment. This includes Indigenous use of bush foods and traditional medicine, rock art, landscape features with Dreamtime significance, creation stories, totemic animals, traditional artefacts and ceremonies, and contemporary land use. Such tours educate visitors on Indigenous environmental values, sustainable use of natural resources and "caring for country." As Tom Trevorror, an *Ngarrindjeri* operator of Camp Coorong noted: 'We have to look after the environment and we teach visitors the importance of this' (cited in ATSI 1996, p.29). In addition, Tom Trevorror also stated that Indigenous people were land custodians rather than just tourism stakeholders "because we have more at stake here, we have

our culture and our heritage which is in the land, the waters, the trees, the birds and the animals” (cited in Canadian Heritage, 2006). Indigenous cultural interpretations of nature are important for the maturing ecotourism market (Office of National Tourism, 2001). Aboriginal operators, however, resent “outsiders” setting up tours in their traditional area, permits to visit sites in their own country, and ecotourism certification when ‘Aboriginal “accreditation” involves approval from elders’ (Bissett, Perry and Zeppel, 1998, p.7). These key issues for Indigenous ecotourism ventures are little addressed in state or territory plans and strategies for eco and nature tourism.

Zeppel (2003) reviewed 17 Federal and state/territory plans prepared for Aboriginal tourism and the Indigenous issues included in ecotourism or nature tourism strategies from 1995 to 2002. The focus was on Indigenous involvement in ecotourism policy and planning in Australia. Key issues addressed in the Aboriginal tourism or ecotourism plans included cultural integrity and interpretation, access to Aboriginal land, and Indigenous joint management of national parks. Social values and community attitudes toward Indigenous people and their ties with the land influenced public policy-making and planning for Aboriginal tourism and ecotourism. These government tourism policies and plans addressed Indigenous cultural heritage and environmental issues, but had limited means for Indigenous participation in the control of tourism. Wearing and Huyskens (2001) also found that cross-cultural approaches in joint management of national parks and policies based on ecotourism and community ownership of tourism were mainly a political means to meet legal requirements under the Native Title Act.

NATIVE TITLE RIGHTS

The Commonwealth Native Title Act 1993 recognises Aboriginal rights and interests over their traditional land areas and customary use of natural resources (e.g. fauna, flora) in Crown lands, national parks and on pastoral leases. Native Title claimants are Indigenous peoples who have maintained an ongoing connection with their lands and waters based on traditional laws and customs. Native Title does not apply to freehold land and common law leasehold land titles. Since 23 December 1996 all future acts that may impact on Native Title rights, such as the issue of a tourism permit, licence or lease in a National Park must be negotiated by government agencies or commercial operators with the legally recognised native title holders (Seidel and Declé, nd). As at September 2006, legal determinations of Native Title covered 649, 951km², mainly in the desert regions of Western Australia (582,904km²), Cape York and Torres Strait Islands in Northern Queensland (30,388km²), northern South Australia (20,500km²) and top end of the Northern Territory (12,758km²). Another 441 Native Title claims were in consideration, mainly in NT (160), Queensland (138) and WA (82). There were also 253 negotiated Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUA), mainly in Queensland (118), NT (73) and Victoria (23) (NNTT, 2006). A registered ILUA provides legal certainty for developers and Native Title holders. Aboriginal Land Trusts and Reserves and co-managed national Parks also include large land areas of central and northern Australia of interest for nature tourism. The chairperson of Aboriginal Tourism Australia noted at the 2005 Tourism Futures conference that ‘Put simply Native Title is a fact of life the tourism industry has to come to grips with’ (Peeler, 2005). However, there is little published research about Native Title rights and ecotourism ventures.

ECOTOURISM ON ABORIGINAL LANDS

Aboriginal reserves, land trusts and national parks are the main focus for Indigenous ecotourism. In the Northern Territory, Aboriginal landowners derive income and annual lease fees from tourism concessions operating on Aboriginal lands (Sykes, 1995; Pitcher et al., 1999; Northern Territory Tourist Commission, 2004). Aboriginal people own 50% of the land and 80% of the coastline in the Northern Territory, under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976*. The Northern Territory *Economic Development Strategy* focused on economic outcomes from Indigenous tourism and arts, training and enterprise support, partnership agreements and joint ventures with Indigenous organisations and working with traditional owners to maintain access

and tourism opportunities in Territory parks (Office of Territory Development, 2002). In the remote Kimberley region of Western Australia, Aboriginal communities on the Dampier Peninsula, north of Broome, provide accommodation and charge access fees for tour groups and private vehicles (Western Australian Tourism Commission 1999). A strategy for *Aboriginal Economic Development in Western Australia* (Office of Aboriginal Economic Development 1997) outlined government support for developing Aboriginal tourism businesses, particularly in the Kimberley region and national parks. A key principle of this strategy was Aboriginal participation in national parks and tourism development and 'enabling visitors to experience Aboriginal heritage in the natural environment' (OAED 1997, p.8). The Aboriginal Tourism Unit in the Department of Conservation and Land Management has trained Aboriginal people as guides and developed Aboriginal heritage and tourism enterprises on WA national park lands.

On Cape York Peninsula, northern Queensland, Indigenous groups operate campsites, resorts, fishing tours, turtle rescue, and a ferry service across the Jardine River. The Injinoo community also operated Pajinka Lodge from 1992 to 2002 (Simonsen, 2006). Cape York has large areas of land owned by Indigenous groups under the Queensland *Aboriginal Land Act 1991*. A *Cape York Partnerships Economic Development Policy Framework* outlines cooperative steps between government agencies and Aboriginal communities to facilitate new tourism enterprises, business mentoring and jobs in tourism (Department of State Development 2004). The focus is on developing community-based Indigenous arts, cultural and ecotourism projects in regional hubs such as Lockhart River, Weipa, Laura, Lizard Island and Mossman Gorge. Ecotourism was encouraged with 25 Indigenous groups or individuals applying for tourism support (Hodges, 2002; Simonsen, 2006). South Australia also has 20% Aboriginal freehold land, mainly in the north of the state. National Parks such as Uluru, Kakadu and Nitmiluk (NT), Booderee (ACT) and Mutawintji (NSW), jointly managed with Aboriginal landowners, also provide a variety of Aboriginal tours (Mercer, 1994; Sutton, 1999; Department of Environment and Heritage, 2005). Aboriginal-owned boat tours operate in Kakadu, Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) and Geikie Gorge (WA). More Indigenous groups are also looking to set up ecotourism ventures on Aboriginal lands in rural and remote areas of northern Australia (Fuller, Howard and Buultjens, 2005). The Indigenous Land Corporation funds tourism ventures on Indigenous-held land (Jeffries, 2006).

RESEARCH ON INDIGENOUS ECOTOURISM

Research on Indigenous ecotourism includes Aboriginal heritage sites and cultural interpretation (Bissett, Perry and Zeppel, 1998; Howard, Thwaites and Smith, 2001) and Aboriginal tourism in national parks (Mercer, 1994; Pitcher et al., 1999; Sutton 1999; Wearing and Huyskens, 2001). Research on industry issues includes ecotourism education and training for Aboriginal people (Australian National Training Authority, 2001; Weiler, 1997), Aboriginal tourism and ecotourism strategies (Zeppel, 2001, 2003), Indigenous involvement in Australian ecotourism (Miller, 1996; Dowling, 1998; Zeppel, 2002, 2003, 2007b) and constraints to developing Indigenous ecotourism enterprises in rural areas (Fuller, Buultjens and Cummings, 2005). Other research has reviewed Indigenous wildlife tourism in Australia (Muloin, Zeppel and Higginbottom, 2001). International research has addressed the benefits of ecotourism for Indigenous communities (Scheyvens, 1999; Zeppel, 1998, 2000, 2006) and potential conflicts between ecotourism and Indigenous hunting of wildlife (Hinch 1998; Buckley, 2005). Case studies of specific Indigenous ecotourism ventures include Manyallaluk, NT (Hodgson and Firth, 2006), Camp Coorong, SA (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2003, 2006), Gagadju Lodge, NT and Pajinka Lodge, QLD (Simonsen, 2006) and Kuku Yalanji Dreamtime Walks, QLD (Sofield, 2002). Fuller, Howard and Buultjens (2005) reviewed two proposed new Indigenous ecotourism ventures in the Top End of the Northern Territory, including boat tours and riverside campsites at Ngukurr and cabin accommodation on Warai Aboriginal clan land near Adelaide River.

TOURISM INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT WITH INDIGENOUS ECOTOURISM

Ecotourism Australia (EA), established in 1991, supports partnerships with Indigenous groups and includes Indigenous cultural criteria in the Eco Certification Program. This Program (formerly Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program or NEAP) certifies genuine ecotourism operators and includes a cultural component addressing Indigenous consultation, interpretation and employment in ecotourism (EA, 2005). However, Aboriginal-owned business enterprises are a small part of Australia's ecotourism industry (*Ecotourism News*, 2000; Zeppel, 2003). Of 297 ecotourism products accredited by December 2000, Tobwabba Tours (NSW) was the sole Aboriginal business certified by NEAP. Tobwabba Tours and also Desert Tracks (SA) were listed in the *Australian Ecotourism Guide 2001*. The *EA Directory of EcoCertified Products in Australia 2004/2005* had no Indigenous tourism businesses listed. The *Cairns Charter on Partnerships in Ecotourism* though recognised the need for ecotourism operators to consult with traditional owners about access to their land and culture (EA, 2002).

Aboriginal people have also participated in EA's national ecotourism conference since the mid-1990s. The 1997 ecotourism conference included a workshop discussing cultural issues for Aboriginal tour operators (Bissett, Perry and Zeppel, 1998). At the 2000 EA conference, an Aboriginal keynote speaker, Gatjil Djerrkura, wanted 'Aboriginal enterprises to be given the opportunity to play contemporary roles in Australia's burgeoning ecotourism industry' (*Ecotourism News*, 2000, p.6). Workshops for local Aboriginal tourism operators were part of the 2002 international ecotourism conference held in Cairns. The 2006 Ecotourism Australia conference in Townsville included Aboriginal keynote speakers talking about ecotourism and Native Title (Warren Mundine) and the business potential for ecotourism on Indigenous land (Joseph Elu). The focus has shifted from cultural issues to business partnerships in ecotourism.

Savannah Guides, based in northern Australia, has an Indigenous policy that recognises Indigenous culture and rights to traditional country. The policy, endorsed by Aboriginal Tourism Australia, encourages members of Savannah Guides to form partnerships and consult with Indigenous people, organisations and businesses about tour operations and employment. Aboriginal Tourism Australia has produced fact sheets on Native Title, a 'Welcome to our Land' brochure for tourists and manages the 'Respecting our Culture' certification program. The Association of Marine Park Tourism Operators (nd) also provides an advisory service to inform their members of native title issues for tourism permits in sea, islands and coastal areas.

A FRAMEWORK FOR INDIGENOUS ECOTOURISM

Indigenous ecotourism occurs within a wider nature-based tourism industry dominated by non-Indigenous tour operators and travel agents. Ecotourism itself is one part of a global tourism industry. As such, Indigenous ecotourism is part of a broader environment that is influenced by non-Indigenous tourism, conservation and development activities. Therefore, issues associated with Indigenous control of ecotourism and factors that affect these enterprises need to be considered. Indigenous ecotourism ventures face the same issues of product development, marketing, competition, quality control, training and profitability faced by other small ecotourism businesses (Weaver, 2001). However, Indigenous ecotourism businesses also have other objectives such as asserting territorial rights, maintaining cultural knowledge and practices and providing employment. For many Indigenous people, ecotourism is an alternative to other extractive land uses such as logging, mining, farming or fishing and hunting (Hinch, 2001; Weaver, 2001). However, the development of Indigenous ecotourism is limited by poverty, the lack of infrastructure on reserves, community conflicts over tourism, gaining business knowledge and forming commercial links with the tourism industry. A framework for Indigenous ecotourism thus needs to consider environmental, cultural, economic and political factors that may limit or control tourism development (Zeppel, 2006) (see Table 2). Indigenous ecotourism takes place within a global tourism industry, which dominates marketing, transport, accommodation and visitor services (Hinch and Butler, 1996). Socio-political factors that affect

Indigenous groups developing ecotourism include land, resources and property rights, and overcoming social and economic disadvantage. Therefore, guiding principles for ecotourism in Indigenous territories usually include community involvement and benefit; small-scale ventures; land ownership; and cultural sensitivity (Hinch, 2001, 2004). The 'successes' of individual Indigenous ecotourism ventures may also be measured in environmental, social or political outcomes (e.g. land rights) rather than in purely economic terms.

Table 2
A Framework for Indigenous Ecotourism

<p>Environmental</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> +Indigenous environmental stewardship +Cultural & spiritual values of biodiversity *Preserving environment from harmful use *Subsistence uses of the environment 	<p>Economic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Limited capital & equity in tribal areas *Lack of reserve infrastructure & services *Tax status & public funding schemes *NGO funding for ecotourism ventures
<p>Cultural/Social</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> +Diversity of Indigenous cultures + 'Traditional' culture & authenticity *Intellectual & cultural property rights *Poverty & social issues on tribal reserves 	<p>Political</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Indigenous land rights & resource rights +*Indigenous councils & organisations +Indigenous elders, kinship, local leaders *Access to Indigenous territories ('title')

*Externally determined factors or legal rights of Indigenous groups controlled by nation-states

+ Internal cultural, environmental and political factors controlled within Indigenous groups

Source: Zeppel, 2006

In the suggested framework for Indigenous ecotourism, the environmental and cultural impacts or benefits of ecotourism are treated equally with financial or territorial (i.e. political) outcomes for Indigenous groups. Economic and political criteria are key motivators for Indigenous ecotourism, while environmental and cultural criteria are outcomes for Indigenous groups involved in ecotourism. The four key dimensions of this framework for Indigenous ecotourism are next examined in state and territory strategies for ecotourism and nature-based tourism.

INDIGENOUS ISSUES IN AUSTRALIAN ECOTOURISM AND NATURE TOURISM STRATEGIES

From 1994 to 2004, various ecotourism and nature based tourism strategies were devised in Australia. Indigenous tourism issues and roles were mainly addressed in ecotourism plans for Australia and Queensland and in nature-based tourism strategies for WA and the Wet Tropics of North Queensland (see Table 3). These key ecotourism issues included Indigenous nature interpretation; intellectual copyright; consultation with Indigenous people; developing Indigenous ecotourism; and ecotourism assets on Aboriginal lands.

Table 3
Indigenous Issues in Australian Ecotourism and Nature Tourism Strategies[#]

NATURE/ECOTOURISM STRATEGY, Area, Year	INDIGENOUS ISSUES IN ECOTOURISM
<i>National Ecotourism Strategy</i> , Australia, 1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Consultation & negotiation with ATSI communities *Recognise ATSI intellectual property rights *Minimise social & cultural impacts on ATSI sites
<i>Ecotourism: Adding Value to Tourism in Natural Areas</i> , Tasmania, 1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Aboriginal products, heritage sites, consultation
<i>Ecotourism: A Natural Strategy for South Australia</i> , SA, 1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Increase in Aboriginal operators, Aboriginal lands

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<i>Nature Based Tourism Strategy for WA, WA, 1997</i>	*Aboriginal involvement in tourism, Aboriginal Lands: natural & cultural assets, interpretation
<i>Keeping it Real: A Nature Based Tourism Strategy for Western Australia, WA, 2004</i>	*Support Aboriginal tourism development & marketing *Cultural affinity, business skills, accreditation
<i>Nature in Tourism: A Plan for NSW, 2004-2007</i>	*Cultural heritage sites, Aboriginal interpretation
<i>Queensland Ecotourism Plan, QLD, 1997</i> <i>Queensland Ecotourism Plan, QLD, 2003-2008</i>	*ATSI cultural perspectives of natural environment, *Foster ATSI involvement in Qld ecotourism
<i>Wet Tropics Nature Based Tourism Strategy, 2000; Wet Tropics Walking Strategy, QLD, 2001</i>	*Partnerships, management of nature based tourism *Cultural values, tourism employment & training

Note: #There was no Indigenous input in ecotourism mentioned in *Nature-Based Tourism in Tasmania 1998-99 Update* (May 2000); *Nature Based Tourism Strategy* (SA 2000); *Nature-based Tourism: Directions & Opportunities* (VIC 2000); and *Ecotourism: A Natural Strength for Victoria – Australia* (1992)

Source: Based on Zeppel, 2003

The *National Ecotourism Strategy* (Commonwealth Department of Tourism, 1994) included a section on the 'Involvement of Indigenous Australians' (Sect. 5.10, pp.42-45) in ecotourism. It recognised opportunities for the involvement of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders (ATSI) in ecotourism as 'land owners, resource managers and tourism operators' (1994, p.3) and as 'site and intellectual property custodians' (1994, p.8). Two (of 7) key actions to enhance opportunities and encourage Indigenous involvement in Australian ecotourism were as follows (1994, p.44):

Action 1 Include ATSI communities and organisations in development and implementation of ecotourism programs, and

Action 4 Encourage ATSI to participate across the full range of ecotourism development, planning, management, decision-making, regulation and implementation.

Specific measures to include ATSI people in ecotourism programs were not addressed, though the Strategy recognised that 'many potential indigenous tourism products will be ecotourism based' (Commonwealth Department of Tourism 1994, p.44). However, the entire Indigenous input into the *National Ecotourism Strategy* consisted of just 10 comments or submissions (out of 252) from four Aboriginal agencies and one Aboriginal tour operator, Desert Tracks. The Strategy also received input from an ATSI Tourism Resource Steering Committee. This 1994 ecotourism strategy, however, is no longer Federal government policy.

The ecotourism strategy for South Australia sought to increase the number of Aboriginal tourism operators, noting that 20% of the state was held as Aboriginal freehold land. It featured Aboriginal culture and heritage as a key tourist attraction and included comments by ecotourism operators. For example, Tom and George Trevorrow, the Aboriginal managers of Camp Coorong, stated: 'true ecotourism needs the meaningful involvement of Australia's indigenous people' (SATC, 1994). However, specific programs to involve Aboriginal people in ecotourism were not outlined. In Tasmania, a discussion paper on ecotourism addressed the need for more Aboriginal heritage products and consultation with Aboriginal communities about tourism. It included a section on the 'Involvement of Tasmanian Aboriginals', focused on the needs of Aboriginal people in tourism and other issues in presenting Aboriginal heritage sites to visitors (Foley, 1994).

In Queensland, Aboriginal interests and links with natural areas were recognised in the *Queensland Ecotourism Plan* (Department of Tourism, Small Business and Industry, 1997; Tourism Queensland, 2002). This included the Indigenous cultural significance of natural areas and Aboriginal guided tours interpreting Indigenous heritage in the natural environment. The Plan included sections on Indigenous involvement in ecotourism and land management, and ATSI as stakeholders in ecotourism. It recognised that Indigenous people could be involved in ecotourism as 'operators...guides and trainers, or as participants in ecotourism planning, management and operation' (DTSBI, 1997, p.33). ATSI people were listed ninth of 10 key stakeholders in Queensland ecotourism. The Plan emphasised the development of Indigenous ecotourism ventures and producing materials to support Indigenous involvement in ecotourism. It highlighted the opportunities for ecotours with an Indigenous cultural focus on Indigenous lands and national park areas. In this Plan, Indigenous people were considered 'integral to all stakeholder groups' for ecotourism (DSTBI, 1997, p.52). Indigenous contributions to the ecotourism industry, government agencies and as natural resource managers were not specified.

Aboriginal cultural links with the natural environment and the benefits of Aboriginal involvement in ecotourism were also recognised in *The Nature Based Tourism Strategy for Western Australia* (WATC, 1997). The Strategy included sections on Aboriginal tourism and Aboriginal community involvement in nature based tourism. It particularly noted that Aboriginal knowledge of the environment would 'provide an enormous resource for the development of nature based tourism products' (WATC, 1997, p.14). The Strategy acknowledged the unique relationship between Aboriginal people and the land. It further recognised that Aboriginal lands contained cultural and nature based assets of great interest to ecotour operators. However, practical methods for involving Aboriginal communities in nature based tourism planning and activities or in WA national parks were not outlined. '*Keeping it Real*' the revised and updated *Nature Based Tourism Strategy for WA* (WATC, 2004) supported Aboriginal tourism development and marketing, the need for Indigenous business skills, accreditation of Aboriginal operators and their cultural affinity with nature. The *Nature Tourism Plan NSW* (Tourism NSW, 2004) focused on Aboriginal cultural heritage and providing Aboriginal interpretation and/or Indigenous tour guides on traditional country. This included adding Indigenous place names to tourist signage and consulting with local Indigenous communities about nature tourism or regional tourism issues in NSW.

Aboriginal involvement in rainforest-based tourism is central to the *Wet Tropics Nature Based Tourism Strategy* (Wet Tropics Management Authority, 2000). This tourism strategy for the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area (WHA) of North Queensland aimed to 'facilitate Aboriginal involvement in (nature) tourism and tourism management' (WTMA, 2000, p.3). It also acknowledged the Native Title rights of Rainforest Aboriginal people and their role as participants and partners in managing nature tourism in the Wet Tropics WHA. The Strategy included policy statements on 'Rainforest Aboriginal people's rights and interests,' including the cultural responsibilities of Native Title holders; visitor site management involving traditional Aboriginal owners; and Aboriginal involvement in nature-based tourism. The strategy outlined Aboriginal participation, employment and training in tourism; interpretation of natural and cultural values; and partnerships in tourism such as Aboriginal cultural tours at Mossman Gorge. The Bama Wabu Rainforest Aboriginal Association (now Aboriginal Rainforest Council) was listed as a key partner in Wet Tropics marketing guidelines; monitoring visitor sites; and setting accreditation levels for tour operators but not with tourism permits. Some 80% of the Wet Tropics WHA is claimable under the *Native Title Act 1993*.

NATIVE TITLE RIGHTS AND INDIGENOUS ECOTOURISM

Since 1993, there has been growing recognition by protected area agencies and, to a lesser extent, the tourism industry in Australia of the need to consult with traditional owners about their Native Title rights and interests. Indigenous ecotourism enterprises and joint ventures have

increased with joint management of national parks and Indigenous communities, families or individual entrepreneurs developing new ecotourism ventures on Aboriginal lands. The framework for Indigenous ecotourism addresses the environmental, cultural, economic, and political criteria that affect the development of Indigenous ecotourism. Hence, the key Aboriginal issues covered in government plans for nature tourism and economic development can be analysed within this framework (see Table 4). Government eco/nature tourism plans address Indigenous cultural heritage and environmental relationships, but offer limited support or means for Indigenous groups to control and manage ecotourism as Native Title holders. They focus on access to Aboriginal freehold lands and partnerships to manage nature based tourism. The economic development strategies also focus on maintaining tourism access/opportunities in NT parks and Aboriginal participation in WA national parks and tourism. In addition, the economic plans also endorse training and enterprise support for Aboriginal tourism operators, business mentoring and forming partnerships and tourism joint ventures with Aboriginal groups.

This paper has provided an overview of Indigenous ecotourism, the importance of Native Title rights and key factors that affect the development of Indigenous ecotourism ventures. While there have been studies on Indigenous involvement in co-managed National Parks, there has been little research on Native Title rights and ecotourism on Aboriginal lands. Hence, tourism researchers need to examine the outcomes of Native Title claims and negotiated Indigenous Land Use Agreements for ecotourism development in different land tenures and regions of Australia. This includes the role of key agencies such as the Indigenous Land Corporation and Aboriginal Land Councils in negotiating Indigenous ecotourism partnerships and joint ventures and the level of engagement of tourism industry groups such as Aboriginal Tourism Australia, Ecotourism Australia and Savannah Guides with Native Title issues. The social, political and economic issues that support or impede Indigenous ecotourism development (and joint ventures) also need to be examined for different tourism ventures in varied land tenures. Comparison can also be made with nature tourism plans, treaty claims and development strategies for Indigenous ecotourism ventures in New Zealand, Canada and the USA.

Table 4
Indigenous Issues in Nature/Ecotourism and Economic Development Strategies

<p>Environmental Natural & cultural assets on Aboriginal lands Aboriginal cultural affinity with nature/the land ATSI cultural perspectives of natural environment Cultural heritage sites, Aboriginal interpretation Aboriginal cultural values of Wet Tropics WHA Experience Aboriginal heritage in natural areas</p>	<p>Economic Increase in Aboriginal tourism operators Aboriginal involvement in tourism Support Aboriginal tourism development/marketing Improve Aboriginal business skills, accreditation Foster ATSI involvement in Qld ecotourism Aboriginal tourism employment & training</p> <hr/> <p>Economic outcomes from Indigenous tourism & arts Training & enterprise support, partnership agreements & joint ventures with Aboriginal groups Developing Aboriginal tourism businesses Facilitate new tourism enterprises, business mentoring & Aboriginal jobs in tourism Develop Aboriginal arts, cultural & ecotourism projects in regional hubs of Cape York Tourism funding support for Indigenous groups</p>
<p>Cultural/Social Recognise ATSI intellectual property rights Minimise social & cultural impacts on ATSI sites Aboriginal products, heritage sites, consultation Aboriginal heritage & cultural interpretation</p>	<p>Political Consultation & negotiation with ATSI communities Access to Aboriginal freehold lands Partnerships, management of nature based tourism</p> <hr/> <p>Maintain tourism access/opportunities in NT parks Aboriginal participation in WA national parks & tourism development Cooperation between government agencies & Aboriginal communities to develop tourism</p>

CONCLUSIONS

Most Indigenous ecotourism ventures are located on Aboriginal lands or jointly managed national parks, mainly in Northern and Central Australia. These enterprises include cultural ecotours, river cruises, fishing, accommodation, and wildlife attractions. Indigenous ecotourism includes unique Aboriginal perspectives of the natural and cultural environment, and provides economic benefits for local Indigenous people. Ecotourism Australia has included Indigenous cultural criteria in their Eco Certification Program but Indigenous ecotourism ventures remain peripheral to the mainstream tourism industry. In the NT, WA, SA and Queensland, Aboriginal land rights and the *Native Title Act 1993* have influenced ecotourism strategies, recognising Indigenous groups as traditional landowners and tourism partners. Most of these plans or strategies for ecotourism and nature tourism focused on the economic and social benefits of Indigenous ecotourism, along with access to Indigenous heritage sites and national parks. Since the mid-1990s, Indigenous tourism opportunities have also been included in some economic development strategies (e.g. NT, WA, and Cape York QLD). Recent government strategies for ecotourism and economic development increasingly recognise Indigenous people as landowners and Native Title holders with special rights and interests in their traditional land. Such plans promote Indigenous partnerships in national park management and Indigenous people developing or controlling ecotourism on their lands. They recognise Indigenous people as key managers of land areas rather than just cultural heritage sites. The nature tourism strategy for the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area has specific policies and legislation regarding the input of traditional landowners in site management and tourism. Other state government strategies for ecotourism, nature tourism and economic development also now recognise the need for beneficial tourism joint ventures with Indigenous landowners. Business enterprise support, mentoring and training are now required for Indigenous people to have management roles in

Australian ecotourism. While state government plans for nature tourism recognise the need for consultation with traditional owners they don't adequately address the economic, social and industry barriers that limit Indigenous engagement in ecotourism. Further applications of the framework for Indigenous ecotourism will assess the importance of environmental aspects, cultural recognition, economic needs and political drivers such as Native Title rights in tourism.

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