



REVIEW OF NATURE-BASED TOURISM

A lot of Western Australia's nature-based tourism product is focused on experiences in protected areas (national parks, state forests, marine parks and other reserves) and often includes interaction with the State's unique wildlife. There has been a dramatic growth in this type of tourism in Western Australia over the past two decades, with the number of operators licensed to undertake commercial tours in protected areas increasing from approximately 50 in 1994 to 349 in 2010.

As a consequence of the growth in numbers of commercial operators and the increasing complexities associated with managing nature-based tourism activities, the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) and Tourism Western Australia (Tourism WA) jointly undertook a review of nature-based tourism in 2006.



Department of
Environment and Conservation





JOINT MINISTERS' FOREWORD

As part of the Western Australian Government's ongoing commitment to the development of a healthy and sustainable nature-based tourism industry, the State is implementing wide-ranging reforms to the way nature-based tourism is managed and presented in Western Australia.

The reforms were an outcome of the Review of Nature-based Tourism, and recognise that Western Australia's national parks and conservation areas require careful management to sustain their environmental and cultural values, while at the same time meeting visitor expectations. Significantly, these reforms will enable future generations to enjoy our natural environment and conserve the unique areas for the benefit of both commercial and community interests.

Outcomes of the review resulted in changes to commercial operating practices; licence and lease terms for tour operators accessing the State's conservation estate; communication; education; and marketing initiatives. These changes are designed to provide greater certainty and flexibility while increasing accountability and delivering conservation and tourism outcomes.

In implementing these changes, it is important to maintain a balance between the conservation of our parks and reserves with commercial and community access. This can only be achieved by the State Government and the tourism industry working together to improve the delivery of quality nature-based tourism experiences within Western Australia.

The reforms will assist the nature-based tourism industry to become more environmentally sustainable, socially responsible and commercially viable. They will also ensure that visitors to the State's magnificent parks enjoy a world-class natural and cultural experience.



Hon Dr Kim Hames MLA
Minister for Tourism



Hon Bill Marmion MLA
Minister for Environment





REVIEW OF NATURE-BASED TOURISM

WHAT WAS THE REVIEW ABOUT?

The Review of Nature-based Tourism ('the review') focused on the role of Government and its relationship with the tourism industry, local government and other relevant organisations and stakeholders. The review resulted in a number of recommendations relating to the statutory, regulatory and administrative framework of nature-based tourism in Western Australia, that would not only improve this relationship but would also advance the Government's environmental, social, cultural and economic goals.

To download a copy of the Review of Nature-based Tourism visit www.tourism.wa.gov.au.

In October 2009, the Ministers for Environment and Tourism announced that Government had endorsed 43 of the recommendations outlined in the final report. These 43 recommendations covered a number of key areas including business sustainability; the role of DEC as a tour operator; accreditation; government communication with key stakeholders; interaction with wildlife; and the development of new accommodation sites within or near protected areas.

DEC and Tourism WA support these recommendations and have made significant progress in implementing the outcomes of the review.

BENEFITS FOR TOURISM AND CONSERVATION

The State's national parks and other protected areas provide some of the world's most diverse flora, fauna and landscapes. Opportunities to visit these national parks and enjoy the experiences are becoming an increasingly important part of tourism development in Western Australia.

The review led to an integrated approach to ensure that tourism outcomes and conservation objectives can both be achieved in facilitating access to our national parks, opportunities for tourism infrastructure development and improvements to commercial operating practices.

Significantly, this includes increased availability of information regarding nature-based tourism, opportunities for investment in tourism through the Government's Naturebank program and increased scope for the marketing and promotion of the unique natural attributes of Western Australia.

EXPERIENCE EXTRAORDINARY

The implementation of the review recommendations supports the State's 'Experience Extraordinary' brand. The brand highlights that Western Australia should be celebrated as being extraordinary because of the many unique and wonderful things that it has to offer.

Changes to licence and lease terms, requirements for accreditation and increased levels of communication and education aim to sustainably manage and maintain these experiences. This will result in improved environmental outcomes and management practices, and will ensure that tourists visiting the State will be able to enjoy these extraordinary experiences.

GREATLY IMPROVED LICENCE TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Changes to the current licensing terms and conditions are designed to allow greater flexibility in applying for, and renewing licences and provide for longer licence terms. Requirements for accreditation to ensure environmental standards are met are also introduced.

'T'-class licences include safari tours, guided walks and general snorkel and dive charters. Most commercial tour businesses would fall into this category, which is normally required when the business activity is open to many operators.

'T'-class licences will:

- remain available on an unrestricted basis, for a 12-month period, subject to appropriate



accreditation being achieved by the operator within six months of licence issue.

- require achievement of a recognised accreditation program that meets Tourism Accreditation Australia Limited's standard within six months of gaining a new licence (accreditation will be required for all licence renewals).
- have a maximum licence period of 10 years (increased from five), with options of one, three, five and seven year periods available, subject to the level of accreditation attained by the operator.
- still allow the two-month short season licence where deemed appropriate by DEC.
- require completion of the On Line Training Program prior to a licence being issued.

'E'-class licences are required when there are environmental, management, safety or access reasons why licence numbers must be limited. Examples of 'E'-class licences include whale shark tours (where the demand for licences exceeds the number that can be sustainably managed) and boat tours in confined areas (where congestion and environmental damage may result from too many operators).

'E'-class licences will:

- increase in term, from up to a period of five years to 10 years, with a further renewal term based on performance, of up to five years.
- still be allocated via a publicly advertised call for expressions of interest (EOI).
- require accreditation for all licences.
- require ongoing conformity with licence conditions and the achievement of key performance indicators (KPIs).
- reward high levels of performance with fewer audit reviews of licence conditions and use KPIs to measure performance to assist in assessing licence renewals.

LEASES: ENSURING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR PARKS AND PEOPLE

The existing legislation allows for lease terms of up to 21 years with an option of up to a further 21 years, a total of 42 years. Where significant bona fide private sector investment is required, substantially longer lease terms may be necessary.

Government will introduce amendments to the *Conservation and Land Management Act 1984* to allow for lease periods to be granted up to a maximum of 99 years. The length of a lease will be determined by factors such as:

- environmental impacts.
- level of investment and the anticipated level of return on that investment.
- KPI compliance and conformity with protected area management plans.

DEC will maintain the EOI process for allocating leases and will apply an 'each case on its own merits' approach in assessing the period of the lease. The lease will be performance-based.

Lease terms will be set at the discretion of the Director General of DEC.

MEASURABLE ENVIRONMENTAL OUTCOMES

Changes to lease and licence terms and conditions will not be at the expense of environmental and social considerations. Key performance indicators will be built into all agreements to ensure the highest level of social and environmental sustainability is achieved. DEC will continue to monitor all business operations to ensure they are compliant with best practice principles.

Commercial operators will be required to achieve recognised tourism accreditation in order to conduct their business in the State's protected areas. This is in line with Tourism WA's decision to introduce mandatory accreditation for operators wishing to participate in the agency's marketing and promotional program.

This has significant advantages for tourism as accreditation promotes a national minimum standard



of operation to be met by tourism operators and businesses. This enables consumers to make an informed and confident choice about the legitimacy and quality of a tourism product. Acknowledging and supporting accredited tourism businesses is expected to help raise service standards, delivery and the development of quality products for nature-based tourism.

OTHER IMPORTANT CHANGES TO THE WAY GOVERNMENT DOES BUSINESS

There were other areas where it was deemed that Government might improve its service delivery to stakeholders without affecting its social and environmental responsibilities. These include:

Communication with stakeholders

This was seen as a core objective. Although communication to a variety of stakeholders currently exists through forums such as DEC's Tourism Industry Reference Group (TIRG), the Forum Advocating Cultural and Eco Tourism (FACET) and electronic media such as Touring WA and Tour Operator Alerts, there was room for further improvement, particularly in the engagement of local government and industry. Improvements include:

- The role of the TIRG is to be expanded to include wider interests and will include a representative from the Western Australian Local Government Association.
- The regional offices of DEC will establish, and report on, communication channels with their respective stakeholders including local government, tourism industry and the wider community.
- Each month Tourism WA publishes a Tourism Industry Scorecard. This outlines information on key performance indicators and research developments, and is designed to inform the tourism industry of the current state of play, latest trends and new initiatives.
- Distribution of information through Talking Tourism, which is Tourism WA's weekly

e-newsletter detailing all the latest news, events and other information of interest to the WA tourism industry. This is widely distributed throughout the tourism industry and provides an important mechanism for the dissemination of information regarding nature-based tourism.

Development of online tools

Raising awareness and education is a significant component of the implementation of the review. Online licence application facilities, training and booking systems are being developed to improve processing times and increase understanding of regulatory requirements, tourism activities and accommodation available in our natural areas.

Existing online tools including the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse also provide opportunities for nature-based tourism operators to outline product and destination information as part of a comprehensive centralised distribution system. This also provides access to marketing opportunities and tools including the tourism e-kit, which is designed to assist with business development and planning.

NATUREBANK

Naturebank is a new initiative launched by the State Government in October 2009 as an outcome of the review. Naturebank involves the assessment and release of 'investor-ready' land for low-impact visitor accommodation predominantly within Western Australia's protected areas. It is a partnership project involving Tourism WA and DEC, aimed at promoting eco and nature-based tourism opportunities in regional Western Australia.

This partnership aims to identify and prepare unique visitor opportunities that can operate as part of the ongoing sustainable management of the State's protected areas. Such facilities might include a low key safari camp or wilderness lodge, which would adhere to strict environmental sustainability and nature-based tourism guidelines.



Projects enabled by Naturebank will provide outstanding experiences for domestic and international visitors. It will enable Western Australia to be more competitive nationally and internationally for specialised niche tourism markets and is an important change to the approach of government to nature-based tourism development in land managed by DEC.

For more information on Naturebank visit www.tourism.wa.gov.au.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How has the licensing system changed?

- Longer term licences will be available.
- Suitable tourism accreditation will be a requirement for all operators.
- The online education program will need to be completed prior to a licence being issued.
- Vehicle registration documents for land-based licences will no longer be required to be provided with an application.
- Vessel SPV certificates will still be required to ensure that they are suitable for the area of operation.

When does the new system come into effect?

The new licensing regulations will come into effect immediately.

What are the new licence terms?

The 'T'-class licence terms will be:

- two months (short season).
- up to one year, three years, five years, seven years, or up to 10 years, depending on the level of accreditation obtained by the operator.

The 'E'-class (restricted) licence terms will be:

- up to 10 years plus up to a five year renewal.

Existing 'E'-class licences in their first term may be extended up to a 10 year period subject to a performance review.

What are the fees and charges?

Fees and charges for 'T'-class licences have not changed. They are as follows:

- \$100 – application fee
- \$120 – two month licence charge
- \$350 – one year licence charge per year

Why do I need to obtain accreditation?

A recommendation of the review, endorsed by the State Government, is to make accreditation a requirement for all licensed operators. If accreditation is not maintained, or is suspended because of a breach of criteria, the licence can be withdrawn. Tourism WA has also introduced accreditation as a requirement to participate in its marketing programs.

What accreditation is required?

DEC will consider all appropriate accreditation programs on a case by case basis as new programs are introduced. These will be assessed for compliance with business accreditation standards as prescribed by Tourism Accreditation Australia Ltd, ecological sustainability, best practice interpretation and returns to local communities and the environment.

For DEC approved accreditation information please contact:

Australia Tourism Accreditation Program

Email: tcwa@tourismcouncilwa.com.au

Website: www.tourismcouncilwa.com.au

Eco Certification Program

Email: admin@ecotourism.org.au

Website: www.ecotourism.org.au

What accreditation is required?

- One year licence – ATAP, Nature Tourism Eco Certified
- Three year licence – ATAP, Nature Tourism Eco Certified
- Five year licence – Nature Tourism Eco Certified
- Seven year licence – Eco Certification
- 10 year licence – Advanced Eco Certification



What will new licence applicants need to do?

When the application is approved and the licence issued, the operator will have six months to achieve the required accreditation.

What do existing licensed operators need to do?

Existing operators will be required to attain accreditation before they apply to renew their licence.

Can existing 'T'-class licensed operators move directly to a longer term?

Yes, existing 'T'-class licensed operators can move directly to a longer licence provided they complete the application form, pay the required licence charge and gain the appropriate accreditation.

Can existing 'E'-class licensed operators move directly to a longer term?

Yes, existing 'E'-class licensed operators in their first five-year licence term may be moved to a 10-year licence from their current licence commencement date subject to a performance review.

What will the benefits of these changes be to a licensed operator?

- longer licence terms giving more security of tenure
- fewer documents to provide with most applications
- promotion on the accreditation programs' websites.

How will lease terms and conditions be improved?

The existing situation allows for 21 year leases only up to a maximum of 42 years. Where significant bona fide private sector investment is required, substantially longer lease terms may be needed. The amendments will provide longer lease periods of up to 99 years. Longer term leases will be reserved only for those high quality projects that require an equally high level of investment. These developments will still require a very

strong commitment to protecting and preserving the environment and be performance-based.

Where can I find more information about commercial operations on DEC managed lands and water?

Website: www.dec.wa.gov.au/commercial_licensing

Or contact the licensing officer:

Phone: (08) 9334 0119

Email: licensing@dec.wa.gov.au



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