

Parks & Culture: Values of Parks

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Sustainable Tourism Online is an EarthCheck initiative.

Sustainable Tourism Online (STO) is a comprehensive online information resource delivering substantial research, data and tools within three main sustainability themes – Destinations & Communities, Business Operations, and Parks & Culture. STO also offers relevant information and knowledge on broader sustainability tourism topics.

Developed by Australia's Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC) in 2010 to support sustainable policy, planning and practice, STO provides access to tourism research and tools developed by STCRC as well as other trusted sources of information.

Protected areas contain a range of values. Understanding the values and benefits of protected areas is essential for park management. Values provide meaning and allow us to better understand the worth of a park or place. They provide the initial motivation for creation, determine the direction for management and allow evaluation of effectiveness. (For more information see [Managing Protected Areas: A Global Guide](#)).

1. RANGE OF VALUES

Protected areas are valued for many reasons. Understanding the values people assign to protected areas is fundamental to successful park management. Protected areas contain both **intrinsic (non-use) and instrumental (use) values**. (For more information see [Managing Protected Areas: A Global Guide](#)). Something is of intrinsic value if it is of value, or in itself. In other words, value exists irrespective of any benefits that humans may derive from them. Instrumental values can be defined as the value derived from the actual use of a good or service.

The Earth's natural systems are under an enormous strain as can be witnessed by the unprecedented loss of biodiversity and the failure of natural systems. National parks and other protected areas conserve biodiversity and provide ecosystem services that derive from the earth's natural processes such as fresh air and water, climate regulation and assimilation of waste. The important role that ecosystem services play is not well understood and is not adequately recognised in economic markets, government policies and land management practices (see The Value of Parks).

Natural areas, bush land and green space provide opportunities for exercise and other forms of recreation while national parks also allow for more active forms of recreation and outdoor pursuits and adventure activities like bush walking, kayaking and mountain biking, all of which contribute to a healthier lifestyle, personal health benefits and reduce the potential for and incidence of depression.

Parks also bring people together to relax with family and friends, socialize and enjoy each other's company. Many ethnic communities use local **green spaces, urban and peri-urban national parks and regional parks** as a location to bring their community together and celebrate their culture. Many national park volunteers who contribute to caring for and managing national parks also benefit from the social and personal interactions.

National parks are also the home to parts of Australia's rich history and heritage including the history and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. '[Cultural heritage](#)' sites remind us of our past and provide a sense of identity and meaning for the present and future.

National parks also act as a scientific laboratory and classroom for studying, education and learning about the natural environment. They act as a baseline for measuring changes to natural systems and the broader environment. Some species may hold the answer to medical and other scientific challenges facing human kind.

Now more than ever **national parks, marine parks and other forms of protected areas** are major draw cards for Australia's tourism industry and are multi billion dollar contributors to the tourism industry, which in turn has both **direct and indirect economic impacts** on local and regional economies, as well as providing a source for local and regional employment. National parks also employ large numbers of people and significant economic activity is generated through developing and maintaining parks. Parks also create financial opportunities underpinning the businesses of thousands of tour operators providing commercial services to tourists.

The focus of Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC) economic valuation research has been on developing a robust and widely supported methodology for measuring the direct visitor expenditure that can be attributed to a national park or group of parks and other protected areas in a region.

The STCRC has developed a handbook that provides a step-by-step guide capable of developing a study, which adopts the 'spending by tourists' approach to measuring economic value of tourism to national parks. It allows for a study of national park tourism in a single sub-state region or for the compilation of state / territory level estimates, based on a representative selection of regions in the state / territory.

Research undertaken by the STCRC on the economic impacts of national parks and other protected areas includes Queensland National Parks, the Great Barrier Reef, Ningaloo Marine Park and Cape Range National Park, the south west forests of Western Australia, Kakadu National Park, north eastern New South Wales, Watarrka National Park (NT), Tasmanian National Parks, the Gold Coast (including its hinterland and beaches) and the Australian Alps.

Other points of focus for the economic valuation of tourism include cultural heritage, wildlife tourism and festivals and events.

2. RECREATION AND TOURISM AS A KEY VALUE OF PARKS

Protected areas contain important recreation and tourism values. Much of **Australia's \$40 billion tourism industry** is based on Australia's natural environment and rich biodiversity and stunning landscapes, most of which can be found in protected areas.

Australia's national parks in 2001 attracted around **80 millions visitors each year** (see [Pursuing Common Goals](#)) and it could reasonably be expected to have exceeded 100 million visitors per annum currently. Visitation to national parks is increasing and will continue to increase as the world's population becomes more crowded and affluent. Sixty eight percent of all international visitors to Australia can be classified as nature-based tourists. As people become more aware of the human impacts on the environment the demand to see the world's rare and beautiful natural areas will grow. Protected areas in Australia and overseas will be exposed to increasing visitor numbers and changing visitor patterns and activities, leading to increased '[Visitor Monitoring](#)' and concerns regarding the possible '[Visitor Impacts](#)' that visitors may have on the natural values of these areas.

Outdoor recreation in national parks is also a major contributor to the economy through the purchasing of goods and equipment and businesses providing outdoor recreation services, life skills programs and outdoor education courses to schools, tourists and other groups.

National parks, marine parks and other protected areas provide a wide range of recreation opportunities including nature appreciation, walking, camping, four wheel driving, horse riding, mountain biking, scenic driving, swimming, sailing, and snorkelling, to name just a few.

The relationship between the tourism industry and national parks is mutually beneficial as tourism provides support (through economic and social benefits) for establishing and protecting parks. Park-based tourism also creates new opportunities for regional economies, builds a support base that helps educate people about parks, contributes to protecting park values and assists park managers in lobbying for a greater share of public resources.

The success of this relationship relies on effective park management to sustain an appropriate balance between use and protection.

This includes accommodating the tourism industry while recognising the full range of park values for which other users and nonusers appreciate parks.

2.1 GOVERNANCE MODELS AND STRATEGIES

While the concept of governance is not new its application in protected area management is a new development. Governance is not ‘management’, which is involved in addressing sites or situations, but about who makes the decisions and how. Governance of protected areas has been defined as the regulatory processes, mechanisms and organisations that determine the direction of management, the use of power, and how stakeholders are included in decision-making (see [‘Stakeholder Representation and Engagement’](#)). Recent research proposes seven principles of good governance for protected areas – legitimacy, transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, fairness, connectivity and resilience (see [Managing Protected Areas](#)).

Today there is agreement that good governance requires the inclusion of community members and stakeholders in decisions regarding the management of protected areas. In practical terms this is reflected in joint management and co-management arrangements, public consultation, and more inclusive forms of public participation in [planning](#) and decision-making (see [Transforming Parks and Protected Areas](#)).

The approaches to governance can be classified into three broad types; top-down (hierarchical), market driven (deregulated) or collaborative (distributed/shared).

Current research has identified a number of management models each with different governance implications including the centralised versus decentralised model, scientific model, ecological integrity model, ecosystem based model, active and adaptive management model, adaptive ecosystem management, cooperative management, shared community (integrated) model, community oriented model, shared management model, and parastatal model. Developing models that suit the unique circumstances of each park is relevant to maintaining sustainable park systems. Choosing the correct model will depend on the political, social, cultural, demographic and ecological environment. A trend is occurring towards models allowing greater financial independence from government funding as well as partnerships with stakeholders and businesses.

2.2 MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Park managers rely on a number of principles to provide for recreation and tourism while protecting conservation values. These include:

Sustainability

- **Ecological sustainability** – natural systems differ in their capacity to accommodate human activity. The resources we have available to manage for tourism are finite and therefore the challenge is to shape, manage and if needs be control the type, scale, intensity, duration and frequency of human activity.
- **Heritage values** – most protected areas contain important links to our cultural heritage including Aboriginal, colonial and contemporary history.

Management

- **Planning** – planning is an essential tool of continuous improvement and the provision of quality services. Planning is the tool that evaluates and integrates values, constraints and opportunities into management solutions.
- **Staff skill and expertise** – park and tourism sustainability depends on carefully managing visitors. It requires professional, skilled and experienced staff. Management should be based on the best available science, and precautionary and adaptive management principles.
- **Quality** – development and maintenance of a high standard of visitor facilities, services and programs that meet visitor needs and expectations.
- **Innovation** – the needs, preferences and expectations of visitors vary greatly and change over time as does technology such as GPS's, tents and other outdoor equipment. The natural environment is also dynamic and thus park managers need to be forward thinking and creative to ensure management outcomes remain relevant and are sustainable.
- **Accountability** – includes ensuring value for money for park services, reinvesting revenues in local areas where they are generated, communicating with stakeholders, monitoring use and reporting on achievements.

Visitor Experience

- **Spectrum of experience** – providing the widest possible range of recreation opportunities encourages a broad base of experiences and inturn public assets and avoids pressure to promote, upgrade access and develop all sites to the same level.

- **Sense of place** – planning and management of tourism should endeavour to maintain or enhance the inherent qualities that give every natural area its own special character.
- **Visitor satisfaction** – a primary aim of park-based tourism is to ensure high levels of visitor satisfaction. Providing a quality visitor experience is critical to developing appreciation for nature and parks and developing a supportive constituency. Visitor surveys are an essential tool in monitoring visitor satisfaction.
- **Enriching visitor experiences** – reconnecting people to the natural environment through stories, dance, art and songs that interpret the natural and cultural environment are a powerful means of developing appreciation for nature and providing enjoyable and memorable visitor experiences.
- **Visitor safety** – park managers have a legal (duty of care) and moral responsibility to consider the safety of visitors, within an environment that contains inherent dangers.

Working with Community

- **Equity** – in addition to meeting anti-discrimination laws and policies park managers seek to ensure the community has access to and participate in the widest possible range of activities that do not diminish conservation and cultural heritage values and do not impair other forms of use or the enjoyment of others.
- **Community and stakeholder involvement and consultation** is a key tool in achieving equitable community outcomes for park tourism.
- **Partnerships** – business and communities are essential contributors to meeting park management goals. Park managers need partnerships with tour operators, recreation groups, industry bodies, businesses and Indigenous organisations.

2.3 PARKS AND LEGISLATION

Legislation forms the legal basis for the workings of government. Such Legislation provides the broad direction and functions for achieving the objectives and roles of protected areas including designating different [types of protected areas](#). In Australia the responsibility for land management, and hence management of national parks and other conservation reserves,

generally resides with the States and Territories. The Australian Federal Government manages a small number of national parks including Uluru-Kata Tjuta and Kakadu National Parks.

The several hundred national parks in Australia and thousands of other conservation reserves are managed by government agencies in each of Australia's eight states and territories. All national park management agencies in Australia operate under legislation that contains similar core elements including the functions of 'care, protection and management' of park values and 'facilitating that level of demand for recreation that does not impair these values'. In addition, an increasing number of protected areas are privately owned, in particular the properties held and managed for nature conservation (and in some cases tourism) by the Australian Wildlife Conservancy and Bush Heritage Australia. Australia also has 36 Indigenous Protected Areas covering 23 million hectares and managed by Indigenous people.

This function of fulfilling recreational demand, as central to the legislated purpose of national parks was conceived in the creation of the very first national parks and the first national park legislation ([The National Parks Service Organic Act, 1916](#)) which confirmed the purpose of national parks as:

"...to promote and regulate the use of the...national parks...which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

NSW became the first Australian State to introduce a dedicated [National Parks Act in 1967](#). This legislation includes an objective of:

"fostering public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of nature and cultural heritage and their conservation..." and to

"..provide opportunities for public appreciation and inspiration and sustainable visitor use and enjoyment..."

While the States and Territories have primary responsibility for land use, planning and management (which includes the management of national parks), issues of national significance relating to the natural and cultural environment are controlled under Commonwealth legislation, namely the [Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation \(EPBC\) Act 1999 \(Cth\)](#). This legislation provides protection for a range of national values including certain threatened species, and the values within Australian National Heritage areas and World Heritage properties. Any proposals that could threaten national values (as defined) needs to be considered under the EPBC Act 1999 (Cth) and referred to the Commonwealth for assessment.

National park legislation also provides specific direction for the preparation of national park management plans (see our ['Visitor Planning'](#) section) and associated public consultation requirements. In addition, the legislation and subsidiary legislation (Regulations) set the parameters for licensing and leasing commercial operations (predominantly tourism operations) in national parks and other protected areas See sections ['Visitor Management'](#) and ['Partnerships'](#) for further information.