WHAT IS THIS PAPER?

South Australia’s national parks, marine parks and reserves are valuable assets for community appreciation, recreation and general wellbeing. They protect our natural and cultural heritage, they maintain habitats for species that are vital to our way of living and our primary industries, and they provide opportunities for science and learning and job creation through tourism.

This discussion paper opens a conversation about how our protected areas can provide more opportunities for job creation and how we can reframe the relationship between government, industry and the community around:

• Nature-based tourism opportunities in national parks, marine parks and reserves.
• Working better together on nature-based tourism.

HOW CAN YOU BE PART OF THE CONVERSATION?

Survey and discussion paper

1. Complete a ten-minute online survey by 5pm, Monday, April 20.
2. Read this discussion paper and email a submission to parks@sa.gov.au by 5pm, Monday, April 20.

This paper provides some background on nature-based tourism in South Australia, Australia and across the world. It puts forward key focus areas to help create debate around real, meaningful and sustainable improvements.

The accompanying survey asks industry stakeholders to prioritise some different possibilities for nature-based tourism in parks. It also asks whether there are other new ideas which should be considered for action.

Workshops

A series of face to face consultation workshops will be held in Adelaide and regional areas in May 2015 to gain more detailed information and continue the conversation using the results of the online survey. Find out how to register for the workshops on page 10.

The workshops will ask for responses to big picture questions on nature-based tourism including:

• What is the role of Government in nature-based tourism in national parks, marine parks and reserves?
• What is the role of the tourism industry and operators in nature-based tourism in national parks, marine parks and reserves?

This consultation is the first step in the creation of an action plan being developed by the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources and the South Australian Tourism Commission for nature-based tourism in South Australia’s national parks, marine parks and reserves.
WHY IS NATURE-BASED TOURISM A PRIORITY?

Nature is a core motivator of travel and nature-based tourism is now recognised as a major economic contributor in many countries. Across the world, investment is being made in parks and is achieving a substantial return through the growth of the nature-based tourism sector.

The United States’ National Park Service has developed a plan called *A Call to Action – Preparing for a Second Century of Stewardship and Engagement* (2014). This plan recommit the National Park Service to the exemplary stewardship and public enjoyment of parks by promoting the contributions that national parks and programs make to create jobs, strengthening local economies and supporting ecosystem services. The plan aims to use the collective power of the parks, historic preservation programs and community assistance programs to expand parks’ contributions to society.

Parks Canada leverages parks to maximise the contribution they make to the Canadian economy. In 2011-12 Parks Canada stated that the combined annual expenditures of Parks Canada and its millions of visitors make a substantial and widespread contribution to the Canadian economy, both directly through its facilities, locations and services, and indirectly in the surrounding communities through spending on accommodation, restaurants, and other tourism-related businesses. In 2008-09, Parks Canada’s organisational and visitor spending totaled $3.3 billion and provided support for more than 41,000 jobs.

Parks agencies partner with traditional owners and the private sector to develop visitor infrastructure, establish new experiences, address infrastructure and transport needs and market products. Through coordinated planning, innovation and co-investment, new and exciting ways of sparking visitor interest in parks have been created. For example, Chile’s national park service hosts artist in residence programs to add creative and critical perspectives to conservation goals. Finland’s national park service offers free, open wilderness huts for one-night stays in roadless backwoods. Parks Canada has created a swimming with the salmon program, installed 125 ‘home comfort’ tent/cabin hybrids and partnered with the airline industry to help bring visitors to remote parks. Parks services in Australia, Canada and the United States have contributed 360-degree park imagery to Google Maps.

*The United Nations World Tourism Organisation reports that more than 30 percent of all travellers favour environmentally friendly tourism and are willing to pay between two and 40 percent more for it.*

Nature-based tourism in Australia

Along with food, wine and cultural experiences, nature is the number one driver of international visitors to Australia (International Visitor Survey, 2014, Tourism Research Australia).

About 40 percent of all international visitors to Australia travelled to a national park in 2013-14. Despite these promising figures, there are challenges. The proportion of visitors undertaking nature-based tourism is now substantively lower than 2005 levels (National Visitor Survey, 2014, Tourism Research Australia). Emerging economies are becoming increasingly active and successful in growing their tourism industry. The Federal and State Governments recognise this challenge and are heeding the call to grow Australia’s nature-based tourism industry.

For instance, the Tasmanian Government has developed a strategic action plan called Parks 21. This plan outlines the significant contribution that Tasmania’s parks and the associated nature-based tourism sector provide to the economy. It also establishes an agreed commitment to action between the Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service.

Nature-based tourism in South Australia

Nature-based tourism is also important for South Australia. In 2014 the Premier of South Australia announced a new economic agenda for South Australia with tourism highlighted as Economic Priority 5 – South Australia a growing destination choice for international and domestic travellers. The key measure announced by the Government was that tourism will increase tourism direct employment from 31,000 to 41,000 by 2020.

Nature-based trips account for $1.1 billion in expenditure in South Australia (BDA Marketing Planning). In 2014 in South Australia nature-based activities such as going to the beach, bushwalking or visiting a national park were undertaken by:

- 301,000 international visitors (77 percent of total)
- 889,000 domestic visitors (17 percent of total)
- 976,000 day trip visitors (9 percent of total)

The proportion of international visitors who participate in nature-based tourism is higher in South Australia (77 percent) than the national average at 74 percent, demonstrating the strength of our offerings. However, South Australia faces the same challenge as the rest of the country, with the figure lower than the 2005 level of 84 percent (International Visitor Survey, 2014, Tourism Research Australia).

Our state opportunities are abundant, as South Australians are the custodians of an outstanding parks system that includes 20 national parks, 19 marine parks and numerous other protected areas which cover more than 25 percent of the state. However, there has not yet been a coordinated and concerted effort to harness the full potential of South Australia’s parks for nature-based tourism.
NATURE-BASED TOURISM INDUSTRY AIMS

The South Australian Government wants to work with traditional owners, industry and the community to:

• Protect our parks so that they can continue to be among the best in the world, drawing visitors from South Australia and across the globe.

• Open the way for more innovative opportunities to improve the economic benefits of parks and remove barriers to investment. These opportunities will help us move towards new ways of delivering exceptional visitor experiences in environmentally, culturally, socially and economically sustainable nature-based tourism development.

• Support the aspirations of the tourism sector, traditional owners and the broader community for appropriate and sustainable nature-based tourism development.

• Enable South Australia’s nature-based tourism experiences to be further recognised worldwide and the state to be a leader in sustainable best practice destination management.

HOW DO WE GET THERE?

These objectives can’t be delivered by government alone – they require a strong partnership between business, Government and the community.

This section of this paper presents focus areas to help guide your thinking when completing the online survey or making a submission. The focus areas are:

• Partnerships and support
• Consumer marketing
• Visitor experiences
• Destination management
• Businesses opportunities

You may consider other ideas or focus areas to be more important, or prefer the focus areas to be summarised a different way. The online survey lets you tell us what you think about the focus areas.

The survey also includes a series of discussion points, but don’t let them constrain your thinking. We need to hear new and bold ideas and significant concepts to enable us to reach future aspirations.

It’s not likely that everyone will agree with the discussion points. They list some very different options that are intended to provoke lively debate, encourage brave new ideas and allow different views from the tourism industry to be heard. From this we can distil the best priorities for growth.

This is the first stage in a process to allow growth of quality nature-based tourism to actively contribute to and support much stronger sustainable visitor management of our parks and reserve systems and contribute to the South Australian tourism industry’s job targets.
PARTNERSHIPS AND SUPPORT

South Australia’s protected areas are valuable assets that provide a foundation for nature-based tourism and make a significant contribution to the state’s economy. We need to find ways to work better together to enhance the economic contribution of parks and strengthen their natural and cultural values.

Tell us your views on how Government, industry and the community can work together to:

• Establish sustainable commercial frameworks to facilitate private investment.
• Increase nature-based tourism investor confidence.
• Increase the financial sustainability of parks and reserves.
• Minimise visitor impacts.
• Hold successful events in parks.
• Support private investment on public land.
• Enhance the equity of access to public land.
• Establish clear guidelines for nature-based tourism development on public land.

We invite your comments on ideas such as:

• Government implementing fast track approvals for programs and infrastructure through periodic requests for expressions of interest from the private sector.
• Government identifying market opportunities, identifying appropriate sites and seeking expressions of interest to create agreed new product and experiences.
• Leasing existing Government-managed commercial ventures to private operators.
• Creating a fund to support private investment in parks and reserves.
• Improving training and development for parks staff in partnership with private operators.
• Reviewing processes, costs and durations for commercial tour operator licencing.
• Granting exclusivity licences for park access.
• Government offering co-marketing opportunities to tourism operators as part of tourism business licences.
• Creating planning mechanisms to give clear guidelines for nature-based tourism development.
• Creating a framework for formally investigating any grievances between tourism operators and Government.
VISITOR EXPERIENCES

From flying over Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre National Park to holding a koala at Cleland Wildlife Park or canoeing Coorong National Park, South Australia’s parks, reserves and marine parks offer a diverse range of memorable visitor experiences. Working in a competitive and changing nature-based tourism environment requires Government and industry to continue to innovate to present engaging experiences.

Tell us your views on how Government, industry and the community can work together to:

• Increase visitor expenditure and satisfaction.
• Build successful destinations.
• Create high yield experiences.
• Develop indigenous cultural tourism.
• Use technology to develop new visitor experiences.

We invite your comments on ideas such as:

• Identifying new wildlife and hands-on experiences and tours.
• Broadening nature-based tourism experiences to build on the South Australian food and wine brand.
• Developing indigenous cultural tourism.
• Government providing access to capital to assist with developing new parks experiences.
• Government becoming a more or less active tourism experience operator.
• Creating guidelines for increasing the diversity of activities, experiences or structures available in high visitation, hardened impact sites.
• Opening heritage building sites to commercial management.
• Coupling existing parks accommodation sites with commercial tour experiences.
• Government shifting to contemporary ways of managing tourism such as online bookings, taking group bookings, building partnerships with local accommodation outside parks or cross selling.
• Promoting unique wildlife experiences and assets that are close to Adelaide.
• Returning the money raised in individual parks directly to each site.
• Introducing Wi-Fi to parks and reserves.
DESTINATION MANAGEMENT

Parks provide employment opportunities and are an integral part of their local communities and regional economies. Collaborative management of tourism destinations is increasingly important and will assist nature-based tourism to be successful, sensitive and sustainable and lead the way for the rest of South Australia’s tourism industry.

Tell us your views on how Government, industry and the community can work together to:

• Take a long-term approach to destination planning, development and management.
• Shift the responsibilities for managing specific tasks between Government and private operators.
• Work with local governments and communities to reduce barriers to growth, make significant competitive improvements and trigger regional visitation.
• Increase involvement with Aboriginal communities.

We invite your comments on ideas such as:

• Government developing partnerships with park boundary neighbours to open land on the edge of parks and reserves to increase visitation and minimise infrastructure.
• Parks staff becoming active in sustainable destination management planning undertaken by regional tourism entities.
• Local communities delivering experiences and services in parks.
• Exploring the role Natural Resources Management Boards should undertake in parks.
CONSUMER MARKETING

Nature-based tourism continues to grow in Australia, but South Australia faces strong competition from other nature-based tourism destinations across the country and the world. Effective marketing of the state’s nature-based attractions is one of the keys to realising their economic potential.

Tell us your views on how Government, industry and the community can work together to:

• Increase visitation and yield.
• Attract broader visitor markets.
• Improve the perception of South Australia as a nature-based tourism destination.
• Link nature to the food and wine experiences for which the state is renowned.
• Strengthen the National Parks South Australia brand.
• Better use and share market research information.
• Use technology to reach new and existing visitors.

We invite your comments on ideas such as:

• Developing collaborative nature-based tourism marketing campaigns.
• Improving information provision in and around national parks, marine parks and reserves.
• Improving online visitor resources.
• Offering co-marketing opportunities to tourism operators as part of tourism business licences.
• Including information on commercial tours on Government websites.
• Allowing tourism operators to use the parks brand.
• Allowing travel agents and online booking websites to sell park products.
• Extending parks online booking services to services and activities around parks.
• Changing photography licencing.
BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

The South Australian Government recognises that working within the state’s protected areas can present unique challenges for both government and business. Community and visitor expectations of best practice management continue to evolve and ensuring visitation is sustainably managed is essential.

Well-run parks significantly contribute to the surrounding economy (and more widely), but they can’t do this without a framework that helps the tourism industry and parks to work more collaboratively and achieve shared outcomes.

The tourism industry’s ability to deliver high quality visitor experiences in our parks also requires further development.

Tell us your views on how Government, industry and the community can work together to:

• Make it easier for the tourism industry to operate in parks.
• Foster entrepreneurship.
• Encourage industry to work together.
• Strengthen the tourism skills of staff working in parks.
• Recognise excellence in tourism operation and best practice.
• Use technology to service government, business and visitors.

We invite your comments on ideas such as:

• Reviewing existing fee structures.
• Recognising excellence from commercial tour operators who support their local area.
• Developing formal agreements to forge closer working relationships between the Government and tourism industry.
• Developing partnerships between Government and the tourism industry to remove red tape.
• Developing partnerships between Government and the tourism industry to further quality improvement and create signature experiences.
• Establishing a nature-based tourism industry advisory group.
• Encouraging tourism operators to experience the state’s parks and reserves.
NEXT STEPS

Don’t forget to add your voice to the conversation:

1. Complete a ten-minute online survey by 5pm, Monday, April 20.
2. Read this discussion paper and email a submission to parks@sa.gov.au by 5pm, Monday, April 20.

Thank you for your contribution. Your views will feed into the first stage of an action plan being developed by the South Australian Government for nature-based tourism in South Australia’s national parks, marine parks and reserves.

The plan will be released in mid-2015. It will present the results of this consultation, suggest areas for action and flag opportunities for further community consultation.

WORKSHOPS

When Early May 2015

Where Adelaide, Kangaroo Island, Eyre Peninsula, Flinders Ranges and Limestone Coast. Dates and locations to be confirmed.

Register your interest

Your interest in the workshops will be registered when you complete the survey with an email address or make a submission.

You can also email parks@sa.gov.au

SELECTED REFERENCES

This discussion paper has been informed by many existing regional tourism plans, National Landscape Plans, Natural Resource Management plans, international parks strategies and other key strategic plans and papers including:

South Australian Tourism Plan 2020

People and Parks: A Visitor Strategy for South Australia’s National Parks, Marine Parks and Reserves