

Discussion Paper on the National Landscapes Program – “Seeing the Results” Phase

Ecotourism Australia (EA) would like to acknowledge and thank Minister Hunt for his intervention which ensured the National Landscapes program secured initial funding for the “Seeing the Results” Phase. We would like to thank Parks Australia, Tourism Australia and Parks Victoria for their financial commitment to the program for 2015. In addition, twelve out of sixteen of the National Landscapes have also committed to collectively match Tourism Australia funding. This multi stakeholder funding commitment is a very positive statement of support for the program.

Since January 2015, Ecotourism Australia has been administering the National Landscapes Program on behalf of all invested NL stakeholders. This has included meeting, interacting with and formally surveying NL stakeholders, establishing and operating an EA NL working group and securing funding.

This discussion paper summarises the key concepts, actions and ideas that have arisen from these discussions in order to establish a clear program of work and specific measures of success for the “Seeing the Results” Phase under the directive of the National Landscape Chairs.

2005 - Background

Australia’s National Landscapes Program is a national long-term strategic approach to tourism and conservation which aims to:

- » promote Australia’s world-class, high quality visitor experiences
- » increase the value of tourism to regional economies
- » enhance the role of protected areas in those economies
- » build support for protecting our natural and cultural assets.

The program began in 2005, as a partnership between Tourism Australia and Parks Australia, after research by Tourism Australia showed nature motivated people to travel to Australia more than any other experience.

Since 2005, 16 areas have joined the program as National Landscapes. In order to become a National Landscape, each area had to undertake an extensive application process. National Landscapes accepted into the program were expected to participate in a range of activities, such as Landscape Positioning and regional planning to underpin regional success.

2015 – ‘Seeing the Results’

Ten years on, nature continues to be the strongest motivator for international markets for choosing Australia as a destination.

At the August 2014 Australian National Landscapes Forum, held in the Flinders Ranges, it was announced the program had entered the “Seeing the Results” phase where the federal government’s contribution to the administration of the program through Parks Australia and Tourism Australia would cease.

Over the past decade, the following achievements have been made:

- » Positioning guidelines completed for all Landscapes
- » Experience Development Strategies completed or almost completed for all Landscapes
- » New experiences and products delivered within the Landscapes
- » Significant marketing and PR activities undertaken
- » Strong networks developed at local and national levels between operators, Government, conservation and Indigenous stakeholders and the tourism industry

At the August Forum it was apparent that the industry and in particular that National Landscapes stakeholders had invested many years of hard work, time and resources into the program and did not wish to see the program unsupported. The 'return to industry' approach proposed only seemed feasible to National Landscape stakeholders if a body still held responsibility for driving the program forward during this next phase.

Therefore it was proposed that Ecotourism Australia be nominated to administer the program and co-ordinate the development of a transition plan for the Landscapes program to ensure financial sustainability and to continue its role as the leading locations of Australia's world-class, high quality visitor experiences for nature tourism in Australia. During this next phase, momentum will be maintained to continue to deliver on the hard work of all NL stakeholders including delivering on the Experience Development Strategies.

Our Position

Ecotourism Australia believes strongly in the National Landscapes program and its role in showcasing Australia's best of nature to the world, both now and into the future through further product development. Over the years, the program has delivered on its promise to tour operators by providing a clear pathway to improve quality, gain conservation benefits and access the international market. It is vital that the concept of National Landscapes continues its initial mandate by ensuring conservation outcomes remain a key focus.

This transitional phase is an opportunity for Landscapes to take charge of their destiny and build a new pathway that takes advantage of all the hard work and relationship building that has already been done. The original aims of the program remain relevant and current.

Feedback from NL Stakeholders

Ecotourism Australia received a 30% response from the 'Seeing the Results Phase' Planning Survey which was sent to forty NL stakeholders including National Landscape Chairs, State Tourism Organisations, Protected Area Management Agencies and Ecotourism Australia NL Working Group Members. Seven of the twelve responses were from NL Chairs.

The key findings of this survey, and from telephone interviews, were analysed and formed the basis of the below proposed direction for moving forward:

- Quality of products and experiences developed in the National Landscapes that meet the criteria of the signature product was indicated as the area of highest priority across the landscapes.

- The strength of engagement across stakeholders in the National Landscape ranked as the highest developed area where awareness of products and experiences in National Landscapes amongst International Visitors ranked as the lowest across the landscapes.
- The overall concept of the program has worked well with stakeholders indicating the effectiveness of facilitating collaborative partnerships across tourism, land managers and conservation interests and providing a framework for strategic planning to facilitate the development of world-class nature based products and experiences.
- Stakeholders believe there needs to be ongoing development to further realise the potential of the experience development strategies (EDS) in their landscapes including increased awareness and increased quality in order to facilitate increased visitation and increased yield.
- Stakeholders believe EA must provide a tangible link for driving the delivery of the EDS, investment and destination development. STOs and Tourism Australia have a significant push on developing new tourism investment. Thus it is strategically imperative for EA to ensure these elements continue as a core focus. EA can assist in driving investment through supporting high quality product developed in keeping with each NL's EDS.
- Stakeholders believe EA can play a key role in advocacy and lobbying to ensure the program has longevity and continues to be supported by Tourism Australia and Parks Australia.
- Ecotourism Australia can use their position to form lobby alliances with ATEC and TTF as well as their relationships with industry councils and protected area management agencies to continue to drive support for the program. Ecotourism Australia has the strength of international recognition and industry credibility to garner the multi-stakeholder support required for the program.

Key challenges

The change of Government priorities have left a significant gap and the Landscapes are seeking reassurances that the Government agencies are still committed and engaged in the program, its purpose and its outcomes. It is recognised that the actual program may well alter to better meet current ways of working.

There needs to be a tangible benefit for new and existing product to gain 'Signature Nature Criteria' status – i.e. preferential listing on Tourism Australia and State Tourism Organisation's websites to incentivise tour operators to adopt the criteria. Without incentives there is little reason for tour operators to invest their efforts into attaining this recognition.

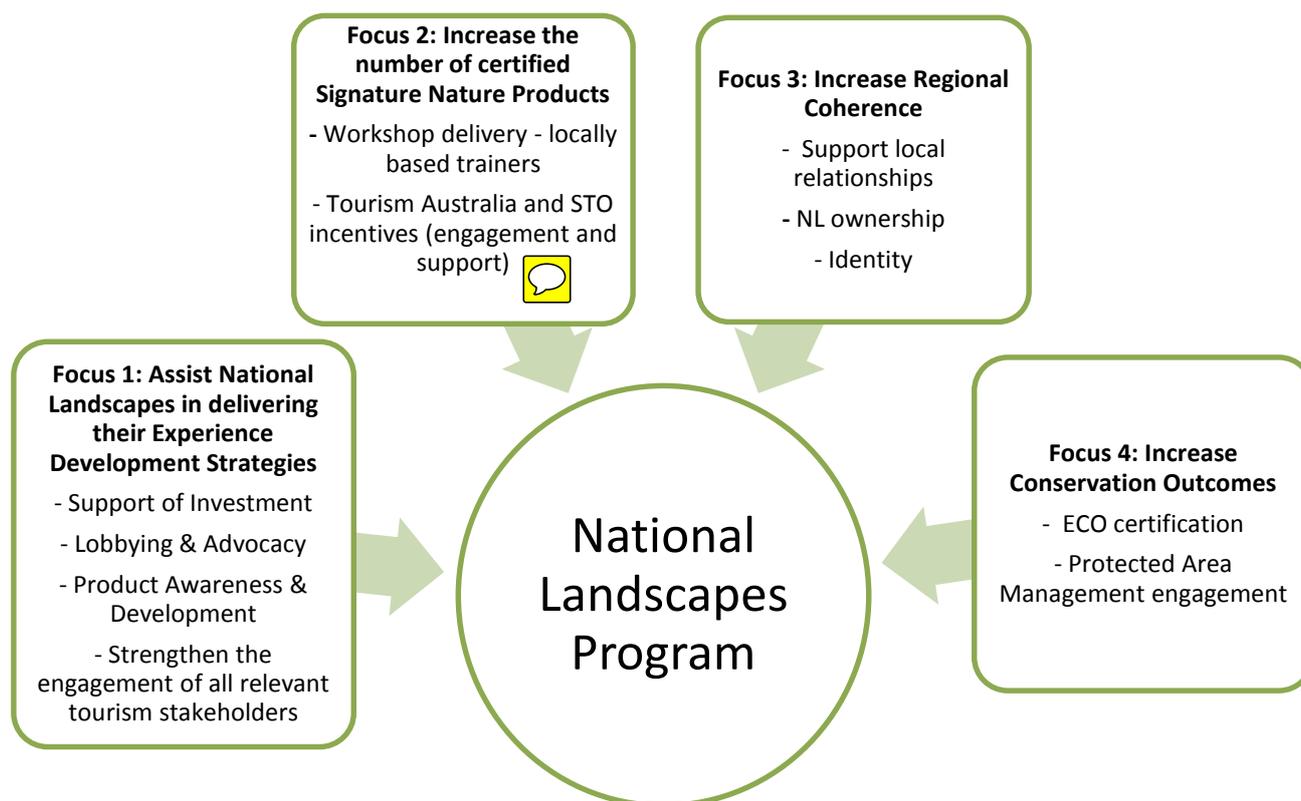
Tourism Australia has committed to the \$25,000 financial contribution for the first year of the program. They have also committed to the "Seeing the Results" tasks: *"market signature products through their digital, social and public relations channels"* and *"concentrate on driving the marketing of signature nature and cultural tourism experiences within the National Landscapes to international markets including building on the success of the Natural Australia App and the Natural Australia Magazine"* (Source: Seeing the Results Phase FAQ, page 1).

Moving towards the proposed key areas of focus (outlined below) requires new relationships and agreements with Regional and State tourism organisations and State Protected Area Management

Agencies. As the national agencies involvement and engagement diminish, the importance of STO, RTO and PAM active engagement and positive support is essential to the survival of the program.

Proposed Key Areas of Focus

Ecotourism Australia have proposed four key areas of focus for the program moving forward based on the original aims of the program and feedback from National Landscapes Stakeholders and through our role as Program Administrator. Ecotourism Australia will facilitate a collective approach to the program and engage all relevant tourism industry stakeholders.



Proposed Program Outcome and Works Program

Ecotourism Australia's National Landscape Measures of Success

Ecotourism Australia will continue to administer the National Landscapes Program in the direction of the original program aims:

1. Promote Australia's world-class, high quality visitor experiences
2. Increase the value of tourism to regional economies
3. Enhance the role of protected areas in those economies
4. Build support for protecting our natural and cultural assets

Suggested: Ecotourism Australia's Programme of Work 2015 – 2016

Ecotourism Australia's contribution to these outcomes will be measured by:

1. Conducting quarterly teleconferences for NL Chairs
2. Facilitating annual forums for National Landscapes in conjunction with the Global Eco Conference
3. Acknowledgement of Australia's Best of Nature portfolio by State and Regional Tourism Organisations
4. Meaningful linkages for National Landscapes program with regional, State and National Tourism Organisations including lobbying and advocacy
5. Provision of tourism input to protected area management agencies on behalf of nature based tourism industry within the context of National Landscapes – achieving positive conservation outcomes
6. Developing a sustainable financial model for the program moving forward. The strong support shown to date indicates the strong belief that the program should continue, but also recognises changes are needed.
7. Developing a workshop toolkit and trainer program to be delivered in each NL

Annual Forum for National Landscapes

We propose that this year's NL forum would take place on Monday 16 November, 2015 in conjunction with the 2015 Global ECO Conference, 17– 19 November on Rottnest Island, Western Australia. The results of the NL stakeholder survey suggest strong support for an annual NL forum and we suggest this is a logical time to host a one day annual forum for National Landscapes. This is a very logical integration that helps ease the cost of attending multiple conferences and forums held annually across Australia.

It is proposed that through the current funding for National Landscapes, room hire, morning and afternoon tea, AV and event coordination will be covered. As per previous forums, accommodation and travel arrangements would not be included. We can build in optional excursions. Additionally, for participants wishing to attend the Global Eco Conference a 25% discount to conference registration would apply.

Workshop Program – Product Development – high quality nature based tourism experiences

Ecotourism Australia will be developing a workshop program that can be delivered by a local national landscape representative. The local representative will be chosen based on a selection criteria process. EA will be providing a 'train the trainer' program to equip the local representative to deliver the training.

Each workshop will incorporate a breakdown of the ECO certification program and Signature Nature Product criteria alongside expert videos for each areas (i.e. marketing, conservation and business management planning) as well as local guest speakers such as tourism operators providing best practice case studies. EA will invite experts in different areas to contribute (such as Tourism Australia delivering on marketing and Conservation Ecology Centre delivering on Contribution to Conservation).

Ecotourism Australia will also be developing a workshop sponsorship package as part of the workshop program. A face to face workshop for trainers will be delivered in conjunction with the Annual National Landscapes Forum and Global ECO Conference.

National Landscapes – Calendar of Events 2015

Outlined below are the confirmed events for NL for 2015. This calendar of events will be updated prior to each teleconference with any additional significant events.

Date	Event
Monday 16 March	EA CEO + NL Working Group Chair Meeting with Tourism Australia regarding their agreed actions
Monday 16 March	EA CEO + NL Working Group Chair Meeting with NSW Parks
Thursday 9 April	National Landscape Chairs Teleconference # 1 2015
May (date TBC)	Parks Victoria hosted Victoria National Landscapes Workshop
Sunday 21 – Thursday 25 June	Australian Tourism Exchange in Melbourne (NL representation by EA)
Thursday 2 July	National Landscape Chairs Teleconference # 2 2015
Thursday 24 September	National Landscape Chairs Teleconference # 3 2015
Monday 16 November	National Landscapes Annual Forum 2015 – Rottnest Island
Tuesday 17 – Thursday 19 November	Global ECO Conference 2015 – Rottnest Island
Thursday 10 December	National Landscape Chairs Teleconference # 4 2015

NL Chairs Teleconference # 1 2015

Ecotourism Australia proposes for the first quarterly NL Chair teleconference to take place on 9 April 2015 from 09:30am – 10:30am **QLD time**. This teleconference will be hosted via Redback conferencing and all access details will be provided via email.

Agenda Items for NL Chairs Teleconference #1 2015

The focus of the first NL Chairs Teleconference will be: identifying how the future success of the program will be measured and what needs to be done to achieve these measures of success.

Next Steps for NL Chairs:

1. RSVP for NL Chairs Teleconference #1 which will be held Thursday 9 April, 2015 from 09:30 – 10:30am by accepting the calendar request by Thursday 2 April, 2015.
2. Consider Ecotourism Australia’s 2015 – 2016 Program of Work and Measures of Success – will be discussed at the NL Chairs Teleconference # 1
3. Consider agenda items for the 2015 NL Annual Forum – will be discussed at the NL Chairs Teleconference #1
4. Consider the outcomes of the meeting with Tourism Australia which was held on 16 March 2015