

Briefing Paper for the Chief Government Geologists Committee

Subject: Geotourism, Geotrails and Geoparks A Regional Development Opportunity for Australia

Purpose

This submission to the Chief Government Geologists Committee, prepared by the Geotourism Standing Committee of the Geological Society of Australia – (refer Attachment E) is intended to inform the Chief Government Geologists Committee of recent geotourism developments in Australia and the potential of the geotourism industry offers for employing geoscientists and becoming an important customer for the goods and services of geological surveys of Australia and their equivalents.

Current Status

Geotourism is an emerging global phenomenon which fosters tourism based upon landscapes. Its definition has recently been defined as ‘tourism which focuses on an area's geology and landscape as the basis for providing visitor engagement, learning and enjoyment’, all of which serves to shape the character of a region (Attachment A).

Geotrails

Recently, it has been realised that a geotrail can deliver geotourism experiences through a journey linked by an area's geology and landscape ‘as the basis for providing visitor engagement, learning and enjoyment’.

Geotrails do offer the advantages of

- relating directly to the tourism experience of a journey linking destinations;
- having universal appeal, and do not compete with or impact on land management/access issues; and
- are relatively easy to establish and represent a very cost effective means of enhancing regional development.
- should be constructed around routes currently used by tourists i.e. geotrails should form logical journeys linking accommodation destinations;
- should meld the geological heritage features of a region with a cohesive story; and
- should incorporate and package in the biodiversity and cultural components (including mining heritage) of the region through which the geotrail traverses.

By way of example, through the auspices of the Geotourism Standing Committee, the GSA has recently made a submission in respect of an EOI for tourism services Uluru and Kata Tjuta National Park within the Red Centre National Landscape. The GSA believes there is a significant opportunity for regional tourism in the earth history story, not only relating to Uluru and Kata Tjuta but using the park as a base for exploring the geoheritage of the greater region. For example, the existing Red Centre Way (embracing the Mereenie Loop) represents an excellent example of a geotrail which can achieve this objective, as well as linking the Region to the various cultural and environmental interpretative facilities located in Alice Springs.

<http://www.slideshare.net/leisuresolutions/global-eco2015-geotourismangusmrobinson>

Western Australia's Mid West Development Commission (MWDC) has recently contacted both the GSA Geotourism Standing Committee and the Geotourism Forum of Ecotourism Australia Ltd (Attachment F), for advice relating to a project which seeks to establish WA's first major geotourism development to be built on

a geotrail model, focused on the Murchison sub-region of WA. The MWDC believes that the ancient Murchison geology provides the ideal platform for unique, nature based tourism experiences of global significance, particularly to the 'experience seeker / dedicated discoverer' market. The Mid West Tourism Development Strategy (2014) concluded that the region's iconic nature based tourist attractions were not developed to their potential and that its visitor appeal was not fully realised. The Strategy identified geotourism in the Murchison sub region as a potential 'game changing' tourism initiative, with capacity to help the region realise its potential as a major tourism destination in its own right.

In Victoria, the Kanawinka 'Geopark' covering the volcanic and karst region of western Victoria and south-east South Australia has now been marketed as a geotrail. Recently, two local government authorities (Mount Gambier and Southern Grampians) agreed to provide limited logistic support for a continuing geotrail arrangement and with added support of local community groups, still retaining the name 'Kanawinka Geopark'.

More information about geotrains is detailed in Attachment B

Geoparks

Geotourism attractions are now being developed around the world primarily as a sustainable development tool for the development of local and regional communities. A major vehicle for such development is through the concept of 'geoparks'. A geopark is a unified area with geological heritage of international significance and where that heritage is being used to promote the sustainable development of the local communities who live there).

Geoparks can choose to evolve through a series of levels from 'aspiring', 'national', 'regional' (e.g. European or Asia-Pacific Regions) to 'global'. There are now hundreds of geoparks around the world. Support to individual geoparks is offered through the Global Geoparks Network Bureau which is currently representing 120 members from 33 countries. The original target of the Global Geoparks Network is establishing 500 geoparks around the world. The number is growing at a rate of about 10 new global geoparks per year (Attachment C).

A decision to establish global geoparks as UNESCO sites was taken by Member States at the 38th UNESCO's General Conference, the governing body of the organisation, which met in Paris from 3-18 November 2015. This new branding formalises a relationship with Geoparks first established in 2001. Global Geoparks have become an increasingly important tool for UNESCO to engage Member States and their communities in the Earth Sciences and geological heritage. During the UNESCO's General Conference, Member States also decided to endorse the statutes of a new international programme: the International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme (IGGP). This allows the organisation to more closely reflect the societal challenges of Earth Science today and provides an international status to a former network of sites of geological significance.

In China, there are three levels of geoparks: provincial, national and global geoparks, as well as mining parks. They are all managed by local county or municipal governments under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Land and Resources. Currently, there are over 320 provincial geoparks in China, among which 200 have already gained national status. With 33 of these global geoparks (including Hong Kong Geopark) having acquired global status, China manages by far the largest number of global geoparks in the world.

One option for geopark development in Australia involves the establishment, at the behest of state and territory governments, of geoparks over lands (e.g. national parks) which are already protected whilst automatically removing any land alienation (perceived or otherwise) concerns about geoparks, it provides a mechanism for national parks to acquire enhanced branding attributes.

In NSW, one particular outcome arising from the Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia (SEGRA) 2015 Geotourism Workshop held in October, is interest expressed by senior officers of the Orana Regional Development Authority (RDA) and the NSW Department of Industry - Industry Policy, Economics & Regional Development, whereby a specific project proposal for the development of a geopark over an area embraced by the Warrumbungles National Park is now being mooted. It is proposed that this project would also have support from the local government authority and the Australian National University with its interest in the redevelopment of the Sidings Springs Observatory, and could well be eligible for applying for a major funding grant from an available State Government regional development funding scheme. It is conceivable that the Western Research Institute Ltd in Bathurst may also have a role to play in this regard in scoping out the economic benefits of this proposal. A preliminary project scoping meeting, convened by the RDA and also involving the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, is scheduled in Coonabarabran for 21 January 2016.

In North Queensland, the Shire of Etheridge Shire has advised that it wants to explore a case for a major geotourism initiative, a process which will involve close consultation with the Queensland State Government and other stakeholders in the tourism and mining areas. It is understood that this concept has support within higher echelons of the new State Government.

Australia's National Landscape Programme

In Australia a somewhat equivalent land use to geoparks is the Australian National Landscape (ANL) Programme. This government initiative has been led until recently by a partnership of Parks Australia and Tourism Australia, but embracing strong local development of strategies and activities. The programme represents a national long term strategic approach to tourism and conservation which aims to highlight the value of our remarkable natural and cultural environments as tourism assets, improving the quality of visitor experiences in those regions, and in turn, increasing support for their conservation. There are now 16 designated National Landscapes in Australia. With its integrative focus on landscapes as a whole, the development of geotourism within each landscape aligns with the core focus and sustainable development of each landscape region.

Designated Australian National Landscapes are similar to geoparks in that they

- have very similar goals relating to local development, education and experiential tourism (i.e. 'geotourism'); and
- share the concept of delineating boundaries defined by visitor experiences and are not based on any existing land management boundaries.

However, designated national landscapes do not focus on fostering geoconservation, but have a broader 'natural heritage' remit. Moreover, the potential exists for individual National Landscapes to seek geopark branding should there be a view that the global branding would enhance the geoscience attractiveness of these areas for international visitors and/or enhance regional development opportunities for state/territory governments.

More information about the ANL programme is detailed in Attachment D

Conclusions

Geotourism offers another benefit by raising public interest in geoscience, particularly as a means of encouraging young people to see that a career path based on a geoscience qualification can open up a wider range of future employment opportunities. Based on the anecdotal observations of travellers enjoying a quality geotourism experience 'in the field', it is now being recognised that the educative (and 'excitement')

value greatly augments the more traditional experiences such as offered by special exhibitions and by natural history museums.

The concept of geotrails has been promoted this year through two major geotourism workshops which form part of the SEGRA 2015 and Global Eco 2015 conferences.

Recommendations

The Chief Government Geologists Committee (CGGC) acknowledges the importance and differences inherent in geotrails, geoparks and Australia's National Landscape Programme in the delivery of geotourism initiatives.

In the near future, the GSA Geotourism Standing Committee has identified that in some jurisdictions, there may be a move to gazette existing protected areas e.g. national parks, world heritage areas and the like as geoparks following a process of wide consultation with community groups, NGOs and government agencies. It is therefore recommended that the CGGC endorses in principal the relevance of geotrails and geoparks as key delivery mechanisms of geotourism in circumstances where they are deemed by Australian governments to be appropriate and necessary to support government development imperatives.

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Attachments to the Briefing Paper for the Chief Government Geologists Committee

Attachment A

Definition and Benefits of Geotourism

Geotourism is an emerging global phenomenon which fosters tourism based upon landscapes. Its definition has recently been defined as a form of tourism that specifically focuses on the geology and landscapes which shape the character of a region. This advances an earlier concept of geotourism as strictly 'geological tourism'. Geotourism promotes tourism to 'geo-sites' and the conservation of geodiversity and an understanding of earth sciences through appreciation and learning. This is achieved through visits to geological features, use of 'geo-trails' and viewpoints, guided tours, geo-activities and patronage of geosite visitor centres.

Geotourists can comprise both independent travellers and group tourists, and they may visit natural areas (including mining areas) or urban/built areas wherever there is a geological attraction. Urban examples are the sandstones of 'The Rocks' in Sydney (i.e. linking the geology to the early construction of Sydney's built heritage) or the city of Mount Gambier with its volcanic Blue Lake. This is a key distinction between geotourism and other forms of natural area tourism, because by definition, natural area tourism takes place only in natural areas.

Geotourism has been defined by the Geological Society of Australia as 'tourism which focuses on an area's geology and landscape as the basis for providing visitor engagement, learning and enjoyment'. It has links with adventure tourism, cultural tourism and ecotourism, but is not synonymous with any of these forms of tourism.

In summary, geotourism

1. Celebrates geoheritage and promotes awareness of and better understanding of the geosciences.
2. Adds considerable content value to traditional nature based tourism.
3. Provides the means of increasing public access to geological information through a range of new ICT technology applications.
4. Contributes to regional development imperatives through increased tourist visitation, particularly from overseas.
5. Creates professional and career development for geoscientists.
6. Can provide a means of highlighting and promoting public interest in mining heritage.
7. Celebrates geoheritage and promotes awareness of and better understanding of the geosciences.
8. Adds considerable content value to traditional nature based tourism.

The value of geotourism for public benefit has been exemplified by a number of GSA backed projects.

In 2013 a 'proof of concept' project promoting geoscience awareness on the Sapphire Coast of New South Wales was launched. GeoTreat, a smartphone based application, brings to life some 19 geosites forming part

of a key 'geojourney' along a section of the coastline south of Narooma and extending into Victoria (a national landscape region known as Australia's Coastal Wilderness). The geojourney is a geoscience awareness program developed by geologist Dr Anne Felton and Bruce Leaver, the Chairman of the Sapphire Coast Tourism Board and a member of the Geotourism Standing Committee. The GeoTreat technology being applied is a joint project of four Nordic countries - Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland, directed by the Geological Survey of Sweden and now involving the GSA as a collaborating partner. The GeoTreat concept was introduced to Australia at the 34th IGC held in Brisbane in 2012.

Also in 2013, Cartoscope Pty Ltd, a NSW tourism publication company with links to the mining and exploration industry, received a TQUAL Grant under the Tourism Quality Projects program. This grant from the Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism supports innovative, sustainable and high quality tourism projects. This grant enabled Cartoscope to produce some 100,000 copies of a NSW Geotourism map identifying some 96 sites in NSW which are significant geological sites, museums or tours. There are short descriptions of the geology with map references and location flags on the map so the sites can be easily found. Both public and school teacher responses to the geotourism map and the media publicity has been very positive and has well exceeded expectations to the extent that the company is planning on publishing an updated second edition.

In May this year, the Queensland Division of the Geological Society of Australia launched a new application 'Geotourism Brisbane' which chronicles Brisbane's building stones as part of a self-guided walking tour originally developed for the International Geological Congress in 2012. The tour has recently been extended and built into a mobile app which presents a GPS linked map with hot-links to the history of each building and details of the building stones used along with both recent and historical photographs.

Geotourism Resources can be located at:

- <http://www.leisuresolutions.com.au/index.php/geotourism-industry-groups/>
- LinkedIn Discussion Group – Australian Geotourism Development
<https://www.linkedin.com/grp/home?gid=4013225>

Attachment B

Geotrails

A geotrail can deliver geotourism experiences through a journey linked by an area's geology and landscape as the basis for providing visitor engagement, learning and enjoyment.

At the SEGRA event convened in Bathurst on 22nd October 2015, the opening presentation by the workshop convenor and GSA Geotourism Standing Committee Chair addressed the development of a formative Red Centre Geotrail of which Uluru is now a global iconic attraction. Dan Cove, formerly Operations Manager of Jenolan Caves, and now the Chair of the Geotourism Forum of the workshop co-host (Ecotourism Australia) explained how geotrails can offer genuine potential for both adding new dimensions to a regional visitor experience and as a tool for encouraging extended travel time within a region. In his presentation, Ian D Lewis, Director of the Kanawinka Geopark/Geotrail, illustrated how the geopark promotes rural tourism and landscape care for the many volcanoes, famous caves and coastline features across the area of Western Victoria and South-Eastern South Australia, encouraging visitors to select from a number of highway trails through the region via accommodation hubs. Ken Moule, Chief Technical Officer of Global GBM, showed

how the contribution of technology to the tourism experience, opened the way for a new regional initiative 'around map enabled' mobile apps to economically promote attractions and enhance the visitor experience.

Dr Neil Williams, now a honorary professorial fellow at The University of Wollongong, put the case that the successful development of geotourism across Australia is dependent on quality information on the nation's geology, and how best to bring together geoscience and tourism expertise in support of further geotourism development across regional Australia. The final speaker, Phil Smart, President and Founder, Gondwana Coast Fossil Walk Inc. illustrated how, that in recent years, the geotourism potential of the Ulladulla rock platforms had been developed by his team of volunteers into a successful tourist attraction.

In summing up, the workshop convenor said that the concept of geotrails has provided an alternative and attractive approach to nurturing regional development by celebrating geotourism, geological and mining heritage. Geotrails can offer genuine potential by both adding a new dimension to a regional visitor experience and as a tool for encouraging extended travel time within the region. As a result of discussions held at the SEGRA 2015 event with regional development officials, two potential major geotourism projects are emerging, one in New South Wales and the other in Queensland.

Geotrails were also discussed at the Geotourism Workshop forming part of the Global Eco Conference of Ecotourism Australia held at Rottnest Island on 19th November, 2015. To supplement various presentations by representatives of the GSA Geotourism Standing Committee, Dr Ivor Roberts and Michael Freeman of the WA Department of Mines and Petroleum, referring specifically to the Rottnest Island geological setting explored links between geotourism and ecotourism, focusing on how geotourism can expand the visitor's experiences in natural areas, allowing for enhanced revisiting through the increased depth of understanding of how the features formed through geological times to arrive at their present forms. Alan Briggs from Murdoch University referred to research being undertaken which considers the process for establishing a community led geopark, initiated by the community, for the community. In a keynote address to the main conference, Dr Young Ng provide information about how geoparks in China have considerably contributed to public interest in geology and have boosted visitation to regional areas of the country. The convening of the Global Eco Geotourism Workshop has resulted in government officials from South Australia, Western Australia and Norfolk Island all expressing interest in reviewing how the application of geotourism can stimulate regional development and tourism visitation.

A recent regional development proposal in Tasmania, the Cradle Coast GeoTrail (embracing four regions across Tasmania and King Island), has provided an alternative and attractive approach to celebrating geotourism, geological and mining heritage (in Northern and West Coast regions) and which has been well received by Tourism Tasmania as a credible strategy to support the 'Tasmania's Island Heritage' National Landscape (Attachment D). It is understood that Mineral Resources Tasmania, a division of the Department of State Growth, is soon to launch a web site to support the West Coast segment of this geotrail.

Queensland's 'Dig The Tropic' <http://www.digthetropic.com.au/> is an operating example of a geotrail. Dig The Tropic is a themed Geo-Tourism Trail linking the wonders of the Southern Great Barrier Reef with the mysteries of Queensland's Outback. It is the only known trail of its kind in the world, enabling visitors to experience a self-drive trail like no other. Following the Tropic of Capricorn, you will experience a living museum created by ancient events left behind. Visit sites such as the Stone House Museum, Age of Dinosaurs Museum, Lark Quarry, the Sapphire Gemfields, Capricorn Caves and the Great Barrier Reef.

NSW's 'Modern Mining Trail' <http://www.modernminingtrail.com.au/> represents another operating geotrail example. This is a unique opportunity to travel through Central NSW on the Modern Mining Trail and explore Australia's mining – past, present and future. The Modern Mining Trail incorporates Parkes, Bland, Orange and Cobar regions through their Visitor Centres, featuring the following modern mines: Northparkes Mines, Newcrest's Cadia Valley Operations, Peak Gold Mine (Cobar), Peak Hill Open Cut Experience, Barrick Cowal

Gold Mine, and Great Cobar Copper Mine. The Modern Mining Trail region is also home to a number of tourism experiences that have linkages to history of mining and the role that modern mining plays in communities today. Attractions include: the Henry Parkes Centre, the CSIRO Parkes Radio Telescope, Peak Hill Open Cut Gallery and the Big Fish Fossil Hut, Age of Fishes Museum, Canowindra, the Golden Memories Museum in Millthorpe, West Wyalong's Barmedman Mineral Pool, West Wyalong Heritage Museum and the Bland Shire Heritage and Gold Tour, the Great Cobar Heritage Centre and associated Miner's Heritage Park and Heritage Walk.

Attachment C

Geoparks

Geotourism attractions are now being developed around the world primarily as a sustainable development tool for the development of local and regional communities. A major vehicle for such development is through the concept of 'geoparks'. A geopark is a unified area with geological heritage of international significance and where that heritage is being used to promote the sustainable development of the local communities who live there.

The Global Geoparks Network currently ascribes five program areas i.e. education, science, culture, women and sustainable development. UNESCO Global Geoparks tell the 4,600 million year story of Planet Earth and of the geological events that shaped it as well as the evolution of humanity itself. Not only do they show evidence of past climate changes, they also inform local communities of present day challenges and help them prepare for hazards such as earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions.

UNESCO Global Geoparks strive to raise awareness of geodiversity and promote protection, education and tourism best practices. Together with World Heritage sites and Biosphere Reserves, UNESCO Global Geoparks form a complete range of sustainable development tools and make an invaluable contribution to the realisation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals by combining global and local perspectives.

The Global Geopark brand is a voluntary, quality label and while it is not a legislative designation, the key heritage sites within a geopark should be protected under local, regional or national legislation as appropriate. UNESCO offers support to Global Geoparks on an ad-hoc basis via requests from Member States. Geopark status at any level, including 'global' does not imply restrictions on any economic activity inside a geopark where that activity complies with local, regional or national legislation. The focus of geoparks is on promotion and appreciation of geological heritage, geology and landscapes. These earth heritage sites are part of an integrated concept of protection, education and sustainable development <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/earth-sciences/global-geoparks>

For example, in the Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark (Ireland), there are many quarries – dolomite, limestone, cement factory, and there is active exploration for shale gas, which would need to be extracted by fracking technologies. All of these operations are undertaken in compliance with Irish legislation from both jurisdictions in the country. In Gea Norvegica Global Geopark (Norway) are located large larvakite quarries which export polished ornamental stone all over the world. In Magma Global Geopark (Norway) one of their partners is Titania A/S which operates as a mining company extracting ilmenite in Norway for the European titanium pigment industry.

There are six Global Geoparks in Europe that are geoparks specifically because of their mining history, and that mining continues in some of these territories.

In summary, a geopark achieves its goals through conservation, education and tourism. It seeks to conserve significant geological features, and explore and demonstrate methods for excellence in conservation and

geoscientific knowledge. This is accomplished through protected and interpreted geosites, museums, information centres, trails, mine sites, guided tours, school class excursions, popular literature, maps, educational materials and displays, and seminars. Geoparks are capable of being community-driven. Geoparks stimulate economic activity and sustainable development through geotourism. By attracting increasing numbers of visitors, a geopark fosters local socio- economic development through the promotion of a quality label linked with the local natural heritage. It encourages the creation of local enterprises and cottage industries involved in geotourism and geoproducts. The geopark concept is an iconic one, applicable across all continents.

Attachment D

Australia's National Landscape (ANL) Programme

The ANL Programme currently includes the following regions: Australian Alps (New South Wales/Victoria), Australia's Green Cauldron (New South Wales/SE Queensland border region), Great Barrier Reef and Wet Tropics area (Queensland), Australia's Red Centre and Australia's Timeless North (Northern Territory), Australia's Coastal Wilderness (New South Wales/Victoria), the Flinders Ranges and Kangaroo Island (South Australia), the Great Ocean Road (Victoria), the Greater Blue Mountains and Sydney Harbour (New South Wales), the Kimberley, Ningaloo-Shark Bay and Great South West Edge (Western Australia), and Tasmania's Island Heritage.

As part of the 'Seeing the Results' phase of the programme, Parks Australia (and Tourism Australia) have announced that they have stepped back from a central coordination role, and instead have offered limited funding to Ecotourism Australia Ltd (EA) – refer Attachment F to enable it to administer the programme and co-ordinate the development of a transition plan for the programme to become financially sustainable. EA has currently sought commitments from all of the national landscapes so as to secure the Tourism Australia matching funding.

With EA now assuming a coordinating role, it is envisaged that as geotourism continues to develop both globally and within Australia, it is believed that more opportunities for geoscientist employment within government land management agencies, areas embraced by the national landscapes, and within the tourism industry will be created.

Attachment E

Geotourism Standing Committee of the Geological Society of Australia

In 2011, the GSA established a Geotourism Sub Committee of its Geoheritage Standing Committee to investigate and develop the opportunities offered by geotourism. In November 2014, the Governing Council of the GSA upgraded the status of the Sub Committee to a Geotourism Standing Committee <http://gsa.org.au/heritage/Geotourism.html> This Committee, which has a highly experienced and qualified membership.

The recently retired CEO of Geoscience Australia and immediate Past President of the Australian Geoscience Council, Dr Neil Williams, has also joined the Standing Committee.

It is worth noting that through its Heritage Committee, The AusIMM has provided strong support for the concept of geotourism and geoparks in its draft Australian Heritage Strategy of the Australian Government. http://www.ausimm.com.au/content/docs/policy/0107aus_jun_2014_draft_heritage_strategy_final.pdf

Other GSA members (i.e. Geoff Sharrock and Tom Bateman), who are respectively designated members of

both The AusIMM and the AIG, are also members of the Standing Committee.

The Geotourism Standing Committee is now moving to establish state/territory based subcommittees with early interest being expressed from Western Australia and Queensland. The GSA has also been active in promoting interest in geotourism symposia at various Australian Earth Science Conventions and the 34th IGC, and recently through collaboration with the Geotourism Forum of Ecotourism Australia.

Attachment F

Geotourism Forum of Ecotourism Australia Ltd

The peak nature-based tourism industry association, Ecotourism Australia Ltd (EA) <http://www.ecotourism.org.au> established in November 2013 a new industry grouping, the Geotourism Forum, to advocate and nurture the development and growth of geotourism recognizing that it is sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing the earth's geological features in a way that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation, and is locally beneficial. The purpose of the Geotourism Forum is to advise EA of how best geotourism can be advanced and nurtured having regard to the EA's interest in inspiring environmentally sustainable and culturally responsible tourism. <http://www.ecotourism.org.au/membership/become-a-member/geotourism-forum/>

The Geotourism Forum convened a geotourism workshop at SEGRA 2014 in October at Alice Springs. The SEGRA workshop informed participants about the globally emerging role of geotourism (which is generally defined as sustainable tourism focusing on an area's geology and landscape as the basis for providing visitor engagement, learning and enjoyment) in developing Australia's National Landscape Programme. SEGRA 2015 was in Bathurst in October 2015. The Geotourism Forum also co-convened a major geotourism workshop as part of the 2015 Global Eco Conference held at Rottnest Island, Western Australia, 17 – 19 November, 2015

At an Asia Pacific Geotourism Conference held in Hong Kong on 30th November 2013, steering committee representatives of the Geotourism Forum initiated discussions with a senior representative of the Chinese Academy of Tourism Earthscience of the Geological Society of China and representatives of a number of Chinese Global Geoparks that are interested in developing structured relationships with Australian national landscapes/world heritage areas, and the ecotourism/geotourism industry.

In recent months, efforts have focused on discussions with the Geological Society of China to develop a broader co-operation arrangement with geotourism interests in Australia i.e. the Geotourism Standing Committee of the GSA and the Geotourism Forum of EA, on the basis that such an agreement might well be endorsed by the respective national governments. At this stage, it is proposed that any co-operation agreement could embrace areas of activity which could include:

- growing and enhancing the level of best practice 'nature-based' tourism in both China and Australia;
- progressing protection, conservation and presentation of the geoheritage of natural and mixed protected areas, Geoparks (in China), national parks and reserves (in Australia), Australian National Landscapes and areas on the World Heritage List (as defined in the World Heritage Convention 1972) areas (both countries);
- exploring opportunities to promote ecotourism and geotourism;
- raising the profile of China and Australia as world- leading 'nature-based' tourism destinations;
- exploring other co-operative projects such as participation in conferences; and
- fostering the development of 'sister park' relationships between China and Australia.

In late 2014, EA wrote to the Minister for Environment, the Hon Greg Hunt MP in response to his expressed need to understand better how a coordinated review of the opportunities that could be achieved through Australia embracing the concept of geotourism and the introduction of geoparks, as well as advice that could assist government in the delineation and assessment of geopark proposals. The Minister has subsequently advised EA that, after reviewing the national policy UNESCO's Global Geopark Network, he is 'positively disposed' towards Australia joining this initiative subject to a number of funding conditions. He has also indicated that he needs to consider how best to progress Australia's involvement in this initiative having sought the views of state and territory environment ministers and the Australian Local Government Association.