

Geotourism, Geotrails and Geoparks

A Tourism Development Opportunity for Regional Australia

Geotourism

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;
- 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 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 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 geotrails is detailed in Attachment B

UNESCO Global 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 some 72 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.

At the biennial Global Geoparks Network conference (GGN 2016) held at Torquay in the English Riviera UNESCO Global Geopark in September 2016, it was announced that two Australian 'Pre-Aspiring' UNESCO Global Geopark projects would be developed during 2017. These projects celebrate two outstanding examples of volcanic geological heritage in Australia.

https://www.gsa.org.au/Public/Geotourism/Activities%20and%20Projects/Public/Geotourism/Activities_and_Projects.aspx?hkey=d8a4199b-1900-42ca-8da2-6fe732931d96

One project embraces **the Warrumbungles** in the Orana Region of New South Wales <http://www.warrumbungle.nsw.gov.au/news/articles/unesco-geopark-for-warrumbungle-region> and the other embracing **the Etheridge** area of Far North Queensland – known as 'The Golden Heart of the Gulf'. These major geotourism projects are being driven by local government with the support of Regional Development Australia with steering committees being established to coordinate the work that needs to be undertaken to formally lodge nominations by the end of 2017 through the auspices of the Australian Government, at which stage these projects will be able to formally graduate to 'Aspiring' UNESCO Global

Geopark Status. It is expected that the entire preparation, nomination and decision making process may take up to three years to complete.

The Geotourism Standing Committee is in the process of establishing various technical reference groups to provide expertise in areas of geoscience, geoheritage and mineral heritage, as well as other areas of natural heritage. For both projects, it is anticipated that representatives of the two state Geological Surveys and the National Park Services will also be closely engaged in the nomination process, given that the project areas embrace both protected and non-protected areas. Of interest is the fact that both these projects were outcomes arising from the Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia (SEGRA) 2015 geotourism workshop held in Bathurst. A geotourism spotlight session held at SEGRA 2016 in Albany, WA has also resulted in follow-up discussions with regional development agencies relating to the potential for geopark development in Western Australia.

In regard to the Warrumbungles project, it is proposed that this project would also have support from the Australian National University with its interest in the redevelopment of the Sidings Springs Observatory and the Black Skies designation of the Warrumbungle National Park. It is proposed that the Western Research Institute Ltd in Bathurst will have a role to play in scoping out the economic benefits of this proposal as well as for other geotourism initiatives in regional Australia, with seed funding already approved jointly by the Geological Society of Australia and the Australian Geoscience Council.

In North Queensland, the Shire of Etheridge Shire has advised that its project has support within higher echelons of the State Government because of its potential to develop tourism along the Savannah Way.

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 in the future for individual National Landscapes to seek UNESCO Global Geopark recognition should there be a view that this 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

Overview

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 geotourism has been promoted in recent years through major workshops which have formed part of various SEGRA, Global Eco, and Australian Earth Science conferences. It is therefore not surprising that apart from the Geological Society of Australia, geotourism is now being supported by the Geoscience Society and Heritage Committee of The AusIMM, by the Australian Institute of Geoscientists, and by the umbrella organisation – the Australian Geoscience Council (AGC).

Given the emergence of the two Pre-Aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark proposals and a wide range of other geotourism projects, the Governing Council of the GSA has funded the establishment of a public portal on geotourism on its upgraded web site

<https://www.gsa.org.au/Public/Geotourism/Public/Geotourism/Geotourism%20and%20Geotrails.aspx?hkey=754eb036-9266-452e-95b8-e135a1db04d1>

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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, although in broad terms it actually embraces them all!

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 which has generally focused only on a region's biodiversity.
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 as well as cultural tourism, inclusive of indigenous tourism, thus completing the holistic embrace of 'A' (abiotic) plus 'B' (biotic) plus 'C' (culture).

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.

Geotourism Resources can be located at:

- <https://www.gsa.org.au/Public/Geotourism/Public/Geotourism/Geotourism%20and%20Geotrails.aspx?hkey=754eb036-9266-452e-95b8-e135a1db04d1>
- <http://www.leisuresolutions.com.au/index.php/geotourism-industry-groups/>

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 addressed the development of a formative Red Centre Geotrail of which Uluru is now a global iconic attraction. Dan Cove, then Chair of the Geotourism Forum of Ecotourism Australia Ltd 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. Ken Moule, then Chief Technical Officer and now Chief Executive 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. 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.

Geotrials 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 development of geotrails was also discussed at the Geotourism Spotlight Session of SEGRA2016 held in Albany, Western Australia.

The West Coast 'Living Earth' GeoTrail, a co-venture of Mineral Resources Tasmania, Department of State Growth Tasmania, and West Coast Council is currently undergoing continuing development with work being directed at enhancing the quality of the interpretation. This geotrail, connecting the mining centres of Zeehan, Rosebery and Queenstown, currently provides information to enable visitors to understand and appreciate the geological processes and landscapes which are featured throughout the geotrail. Each site has a roadside sign, either a large sign with information and explanations, or a small sign showing the relevant QR Code web-link to the Living Earth website. <http://thelivingearth.com.au/>

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, visitors will experience a living museum created by ancient events left behind, visiting 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 concept of a geotrail is explained by a well-illustrated BBC story of a road in remote north-west Scotland that 'takes you through the story of our planet, from the dawn of the planet to the rise of complex animal life': <http://www.bbc.com/earth/story/20161125-the-road-that-reveals-the-scope-of-earths-history>

Attachment C

UNESCO Global Geoparks

UNESCO Global Geoparks are single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with a holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development.

While a geopark must demonstrate geological heritage of international significance, the purpose of a geopark is to explore, develop and celebrate the links between that geological heritage and all other aspects of the areas natural, cultural and intangible heritages. It is about reconnecting human society at all levels to the planet we all call home and to celebrate how our planet and it's 4,600 million year long history has shaped every aspect of our lives and our societies.

Geoparks are both a development concept as well as a branding tool. They achieve these goals through conservation, education and geotourism. Geoparks can comprise both protected and non-protected areas and enable and celebrate sustainable development of primary industries.

Geoparks can evolve through a series of levels from 'pre-aspiring', '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. 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.

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.

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>

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 brand 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.

At the biennial Global Geoparks Network conference (GGN 2016) held at Torquay in the English Riviera UNESCO Global Geopark in September, it was announced that two Australian 'Pre-Aspiring' UNESCO Global Geopark projects would be developed during 2017. These projects (Warrumbungles in NSW and Etheridge in North Queensland) celebrate two outstanding examples of volcanic geological heritage in Australia.

Attachment D

Australia's National Landscape (ANL) Programme

Established some years ago, the ANL Programme included 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) announced in 2014 that they had stepped back from a central coordination role, and would instead encourage local steering committees and the tourism industry to further advance this concept. As geotourism continues to develop both globally and within Australia, it is believed that more opportunities for geoscientist employment within government land management agencies will take place in these areas.

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 <https://www.gsa.org.au/Public/Geotourism/Public/Geotourism/Geotourism%20and%20Geotrails.aspx?hkey=754eb036-9266-452e-95b8-e135a1db04d1>

This Committee, which has a highly experienced and qualified membership, enjoys representation now from every state and territory of Australia.

The Geotourism Standing Committee is now moving to establish state/territory based subcommittees with groups already established in South Australia and Tasmania. The GSA has also been active in promoting interest in geotourism symposia at various Australian Earth Science Conventions (AESC) and the 34th IGC, and recently through collaboration with the Geotourism Forum of Ecotourism Australia.

A highlight of the AESC2016 was the signing by then GSA President Graham Carr and Professor Anze Chen of the Memorandum of Cooperation between the Geological Society of Australia and the Geological Society of China. This Memorandum of Cooperation seeks to promote better understanding and closer cooperation between the two associations for the promotion and advancement of geotourism. Professor Anze Chen, who was visiting Australia for the first time, is highly regarded as the father of geopark development in China.

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, 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.

Discussions have recently been established with the Convenor of the National Rock Garden in Canberra to examine ways in which geotourism initiatives and the Garden can best be formally implemented through the auspices of the Geotourism Standing Committee.

Attachment F

Geotourism Forum of Ecotourism Australia Ltd <http://www.ecotourism.org.au>

The peak nature-based tourism industry association, Ecotourism Australia Ltd (EA) established in November 2013 a new industry grouping, the Geotourism Forum, to advocate and nurture the development and growth of geotourism recognising 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 held 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 and at the 2016 Global Eco Conference held in Hobart.

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 late 2014, EA wrote to the then 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. The Minister also indicated that he needed 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.

As a result of recent discussions between the Chair of the Geotourism Standing Committee of the GSA and the Department of Environment, it is now understood that state/territory government backed proposals would be welcomed and would be referred to the Australian National Commission for UNESCO. It is understood that both Warrumbungle and Etheridge Shire Councils have written to the Canberra based Secretary General of the Australian National Commission of UNESCO to advise him that the 'pre-aspiring' nomination process has commenced.