



## 2030 TOURISM STRATEGY FOR THE ACT - DISCUSSION PAPER SUBMISSION BY THE AUSTRALIAN GEOSCIENCE COUNCIL INC.

The Australian Geoscience Council Inc (AGC) is the Peak Council of geoscientists in Australia. It represents eight major Australian geoscientific societies with a total membership of over 8,000 individuals comprising industry, government, and academic professionals in fields including geology, geophysics, geochemistry, mineral and petroleum exploration, environmental geoscience, geotourism, hydrogeology, geomorphology, and geological hazards.

A National Geotourism Strategy (NGS) was launched by the AGC on 7th April 2021 following a period of strategic policy development by an appointed Reference Group.

### Proposal

The AGC notes that in finalising a 2030 Tourism Strategy for the ACT, ‘the intent of the ACT Government is to develop a staged approach to achieving shared ambitions for Canberra as a global tourism destination.’

In response to the recently released THRIVE 2030 Visitor Economy Strategy of the Australian Government, the AGC understands that this approach will include ‘a first phase covering the period of 2023 to 2026, focused on short to medium term strategic actions that drive sector recovery and lead the Canberra region to a position where it can achieve consistent tourism growth (including growth in leisure, business and education visitation).’

For the ACT, the AGC notes that is acknowledged that the best opportunities for tourism growth in the short-term sit in the domestic tourism market, but believes that in the short-term, ‘building blocks’ can be put in place to develop international positioning. This submission details how the ACT can become a significant beneficiary of the outcomes of the National Geotourism Strategy.

The recently released **THRIVE 2030 Visitor Economy Strategy (Action 7.5) of the Australian Government** states ‘Grow and develop high-quality products and experiences around unique Australian locations and themes, including approaches which integrate sustainable nature tourism with economic opportunities for Traditional Owners, and capitalising on **emerging tourism trends such as geotourism.**’

**Action 7.7 also states:** ‘Enhance the visitor experience through use and availability of technology.’

**Reference:** <https://bit.ly/3DzUOeD>

### **Geotourism ('value-add' nature-based tourism)**

Geotourism adds considerable content value to traditional nature-based tourism (the primary motivator of travel to Australia) as well as cultural tourism, inclusive of Aboriginal tourism, thus completing the holistic embrace of 'A' (abiotic – landscape and geology) plus 'B' (biotic – flora and fauna) plus 'C' (culture) aspects.

Geotourism has been defined as 'tourism which focuses on an area's geology and landscape as the basis for providing visitor engagement, learning and enjoyment', but it is not a niche market. It has links with adventure tourism, cultural tourism, ecotourism, astrotourism, and agritourism, but is not synonymous with any of these forms of tourism, although in broad terms it embraces them all because it is essentially 'place-based.' Geotourism supersedes ecotourism, because the latter is practised in protected areas such as national parks, whereas geotourism is undertaken in all areas, including places where primary industry activities are prevalent, and in areas with Aboriginal land tenure.

Geotourism promotes tourism through visits to geological features (geosites), use of 'geotrails' and viewpoints, guided tours, geo-activities (such as geological time trails, fossil walks, rock gardens etc.), and patronage of visitor centres and museums. Supported by UNESCO, geotourism attractions are now being developed around the world primarily as a sustainable development tool for the development of local and regional communities. 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, with UNESCO Global Geoparks now currently representing 177 members from 46 countries.

The development of a National Ecotourism Strategy in 1994 and subsequent state/territory-based initiatives is considered as a particularly useful precedent and guide. Of significance internationally is that geotourism is booming, whereas the development of geotourism in Australia lags many countries' approaches, notwithstanding the fact Australia has taken the initiatives in several areas in development of the concepts underpinning geotourism.

According to the National Geographic Society of the USA, geotourism is:

- Environmentally responsible - committed to conserving resources and maintaining biodiversity.
- Culturally responsible - committed to respecting local sensibilities and building on local heritage.
- Synergistic - bringing together all elements of geographical character to create a travel experience that is richer than the sum of its parts and appealing to visitors with diverse interests.

The landmark 2003 Geotourism study, sponsored by National Geographic and conducted by the Travel Industry Association of America, found that 65 million American households are predisposed to support the principles of geotourism. As the global population of travelers increases and destinations become more globalised and homogenous, these principles are resonating with travelers across the globe.

According to the 2017 report 'Unlocking Our Great Outdoors' of the Tourism and Transport Forum (TTF) <https://bit.ly/2WgeNLb> international visitors to Australia are increasingly engaging in nature-based tourism. In 2016, it was reported that 5.2 million international visitors, or over two-thirds of all the international visitors to Australia, engaged in some form of nature-based tourism. In addition, nature-based tourism attracted 20.1 million domestic overnight visitors in 2016 and 23.6 million domestic day trip visitors. After recording flat growth between 2005 and 2011, nature-based tourist numbers have accelerated in more recent years. This has occurred for all three main categories of tourists – international, overnight domestic and day trippers.

This TTF report also highlighted the potential of 16 identified major landscapes developed by Tourism Australia and Parks Australia as the **Australia's National Landscapes program, one of which was the Australian Alps (inclusive of the Brindabella Ranges), the doorway to which is of course the Canberra Region.** Many of these landscapes offer the opportunity for particularly younger FITs (increasingly 'digital natives'), eager to combine a geotourism experience obtained through adventurous self-drive tours, by accessing newly developed geotrails as envisaged in the NGS.

The upsurge in domestic tourism experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic in recent years has reinvigorated interest by Australians in exploring the best of what regional and outback Australia has to offer, and the adoption of geotourism-focused product development offers the opportunity to excite first time visitors and importantly to encourage repeat visitation.

### **Geotourism as a driver of place-based regional economic development for the ACT**

Geotourism is increasingly seen globally as an instrument of regional economic development.

Through its 'place-based' and holistic approach, geotourism:

1. As previously stated, adds considerable content value to traditional nature-based tourism (the primary motivator of travel to Australia) as well as cultural tourism, inclusive of Aboriginal tourism, thus completing the holistic embrace of 'A' (abiotic – landscape and geology) plus 'B' (biotic – flora and fauna) plus 'C' (culture) aspects.
2. Incorporates other forms of nature-based tourism such as ecotourism, agritourism, and astrotourism, the latter which should preferably focus on how Aboriginal elders have traditionally 'read the stars.'
3. Celebrates geoheritage and promotes awareness of and better understanding of the geosciences, noting that a revised global framework for the application of criterion (viii) of the World Heritage Convention as it applies to World Geological Heritage has recently been released by the IUCN. <https://bit.ly/39Zb4vf>
4. Contributes to regional development imperatives in areas experiencing social and economic difficulties through increased tourist visitation, particularly from overseas – of increasing interest to local government and state based, regional development agencies.

5. Provides a means of highlighting and promoting public interest in mining heritage.
6. Provides the means of increasing public access to natural and cultural heritage content through a range of new interactive digital applications on smartphones that enable advanced and innovative ways of experiencing nature.
7. Engenders an increasing awareness of the importance in geology as a fundamental science that has had and will continue to have major impacts on civilisations.
8. Promotes tourism through visits to geological features (geosites) within and outside of national parks and nature reserves, use of geotrails and viewpoints, guided tours, geo-activities (such as geological time trails and fossil walks, rock gardens, rail trails, skywalks etc.), and patronage of local visitor centres and museums. In this regard, the 'Canberra GeoRegion' hosts the following significant geoscience attractions, noting that the nature reserves and other protected areas managed by the ACT Government highlight the other non-abiotic elements of natural heritage and cultural heritage.
  - The **Geological Time Walk** at Geoscience Australia's headquarters in Symonston.  
<https://www.ga.gov.au/education/classroom-resources/geological-time>
  - The **National Rock Garden** <https://www.nationalrockgarden.com.au/>
  - The **National Mineral and Fossil Collection**, also located at Geoscience Australia's headquarters. <https://www.ga.gov.au/data-pubs/nmfc>
  - The **National Dinosaur Museum** located at Nicholls.  
<https://nationaldinosaurmuseum.com.au/>
  - **Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve** <https://www.tidbinbilla.act.gov.au/>
  - Other **selected protected areas** managed by Parks ACT  
<https://www.parks.act.gov.au/find-a-park>



9. Encourages attractions to be developed as a sustainable tool for the growth of local and regional communities.
10. Offers the potential for new industries and employment opportunities through the development of major projects within Australia.

The key socio-economic benefits of geotourism development are also detailed as an attachment to this submission.

**The significance of the National Rock Garden as a key geoscience attraction – a project supported by the Geological Society of Australia (an AGC member society), the Australian National University, and the Minerals Council of Australia**

Canberra is home to a range of national institutions, some of which are largely government funded (e.g., significantly the National Gallery of Australia, the Australian War Memorial, the National Museum of Australia, the National Botanic Gardens, the National Library, and Questacon) and some of which are largely privately funded but which should be given consideration for being government funded (e.g., the National Rock Garden and the National Dinosaur Museum).

In the context of Canberra, the AGC argues that it is hard to look past the recommendations of the 2018 Parliamentary Inquiry into Canberra's National Institutions as a plank for the long-term sustainable growth of the visitor economy. Some key recommendations, include the following.

- **Recommendation 1.** That Canberra's national institutions develop and articulate a shared narrative that directly connects them with Australia's story.
- **Recommendation 2.** That Canberra's national institutions make a stronger concerted effort to undertake collective branding and marketing, including the use of joint campaigns capitalising on major events and exhibitions occurring during the same season.
- **Recommendation 5.** That the Australian Government, in conjunction with Canberra's science-focused national institutions, develop a program to encourage and promote engagement in science education by school students visiting Canberra.
- **Recommendation 12.** That the Australian Government develop a business case for the establishment of a natural history museum in Canberra.

In 2021, the AGC is also aware that a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works recommended that construction of a National Collections Building be funded at the CSIRO Black Mountain Science and Innovation Park to house the National Insect Collection, National Herbarium, National Wildlife Collection, Australian Seed Centre, and the Dadswell Memorial Wood Collection. While such a building would secure safe storage of the collections, with appropriate research facilities, there would be no provision for public display of the collections. This aspiration could, however, be achieved if a Natural History Museum were built in Canberra, which would also allow for geoscience displays from the National Rock Garden and the National Dinosaur Museum, as well

as the National Mineral and Fossil Collection (currently housed at Geoscience Australia).

It is understood that the National Rock Garden has signed an agreement with the ACT Government to relocate from its current site on Barrenjoey Drive, to a 1-hectare site within the National Arboretum Canberra, which will enhance collaboration between the two institutions (Recommendation 2, above). The displays will be arranged as themed rock clusters along a meandering, fully wheel-chair accessible path, with complementary planting of native willow trees. While several planned rock displays are either too valuable or too fragile for outdoor display, they could, however, be spectacularly displayed inside a Natural History Museum or a similar building. Refer <https://bit.ly/3cej8cl> for further information about the National Rock Garden and other key geosites in the ACT (included in a presentation by Dr Douglas Finlayson, Chair of the GSA ACT Heritage Subcommittee, delivered in Canberra on Sunday 14 August 2022 as part of the ACT Government 2022 Science Festival).

It is also understood that the National Rock Garden is committed to aligning its displays with geoscience school curricula, wherever possible (Recommendation 5, above) and is also collaborating closely with Indigenous Elders to ensure that First Nations stories are highlighted, all consistent with the specific intent of Action 7.5 of the THRIVE 2030 Strategy. These outcomes can be achieved through a range of informative and stimulating on-site signage, linked to further, more detailed on-line resources.

In reflecting on the value of these existing and proposed natural heritage assets (inclusive of the National Rock Garden and any future Natural History Museum) to attract international tourism to our national capital, it is worth learning from the success of the Smithsonian Museum attractions in driving elevated levels of tourism to Washington DC.

In summary, the National Rock Garden, as a key geotourism asset, stands ready to work closely with other Canberra-based national institutions, to grow the visitor economy, not only for the short term but for the longer terms as defined by the national THRIVE 2030 strategy.



## **The National Geotourism Strategy (NGS)**

Launched in April 2021 by the AGC, the NGS is being implemented to support the orderly development of major geotourism projects and activities in line with overseas trends and domestic regional development imperatives.

The seven strategic goals of the NGS are:

1. Assessment and promotion of new digital technologies to highlight and interpret natural and cultural heritage, highlighting geology and landscape.
2. To define an approval pathway for major geotourism projects. Currently the AGC is of the view that the establishment of the NGS offers the best means of ensuring an orderly development of geotourism based on having first gained government support and endorsement, recognising that each state and territory has individual needs and priorities. The NGS is aiming to establish a national set of administrative procedures for 'georegional' assessment to provide for potential geopark nomination at state and national levels and, as approved by governments, at a UNESCO Global Geopark level.
3. To establish a framework for creating high quality, sustainable geotrails.
4. To establish a national listing for geoheritage sites suitable for geotourism, noting again the revised global framework for the application of criterion (viii) of the World Heritage Convention as it applies to World Geological Heritage has recently been released by the IUCN. Geodiversity provides many essential ecosystem services, e.g., surface and groundwaters, soils, rock weathering and carbon sequestration, habitat diversity. Geodiversity in the form of landscapes also generates many key tourist attractions. Geodiversity is also an essential element of Aboriginal culture, with landscape respected as an ancestor.
5. To develop geotourism in regional mining communities with potential geoheritage and cultural heritage sites. This goal focuses on geotourism opportunities in regional areas which occur outside parks and reserves, but which may contain interesting features and narratives including geological, biological, and cultural elements. Goal 5 is designed to develop geotourism in areas with regional communities (especially past and present mining communities) not covered by significant conservation legislative protections, but which are still worthy of recognition and promotion. It unites a cross-section of representatives from mining groups, Aboriginal heritage and tourism groups, conservation, tourism, as well as academia to explore tourism potential in places containing geodiversity that have been exposed or modified by human activities (especially mining & quarrying), or has significant additional value to people, through cultural history, recreational use, or educational opportunity.
6. To strengthen Australia's international geoscience standing through geotourism excellence.

7. To develop and enhance geoscience interpretation and communication skills for everyone actively involved in the presentation of geosites, enabling the provision of accurate and thematic information in an accessible manner.

Key documents relating to the launch and further development of the NGS can be downloaded.

- NGS Goals <https://bit.ly/34lfCiq>
- Media Release, Launch of the National Geotourism Strategy, 7 April 2021 <https://bit.ly/3HEcyaB>
- Media Release Explanatory Notes and Contact Details for Participating in Working Groups <https://bit.ly/3n6yiT2>
- Media Release, THRIVE 2030, 7th April 2022 <https://bit.ly/3ufYI9w>

#### NGS Goal 1: Innovation: digital and new products

In developing the NGS for Australia through **the implementation of Goal 1**, the AGC has recognised that state-based geotourism maps, supplemented by publications, may well be eventually replaced by digital technologies (e.g., 3D visualisation, augmented reality, virtual reality, holograms, and live streaming using smartphones and drones) and GIS and other technologies as a cost-effective means of accessing and better communicating geological content for tourists and visitors.

There exists a major challenge to structure digital frameworks which capture and interpret key elements of natural and cultural heritage sourced from a wide range of directories, and which define the holistic nature of geotourism, having regard to the process of digital transformation which is impacting on all industries. The imperative driving this goal will be meeting consumer needs, particularly from international visitors, now increasingly accustomed to the use of digital devices to underpin all aspects of their tourism experience, including the booking and sharing of experiences.

Moreover, it is recognised that these technologies provide a means of interpreting geosites (including sites of cultural significance) where measures need to be put in place to protect geological heritage or have regard to Aboriginal cultural sensitivities. These technologies can also be applied to reimagine visitor information centres (VICs) to include geosite interpretation capabilities and to assist visitors in accessing digitally enabled information. The AGC is currently assessing the feasibility through the development of a pilot project of providing a publicly accessible digital platform for this information.

More information about what Goal 1 sets out to achieve relating to virtual and augmented reality experiences are explained in the following two video presentations to a recent Earth Sciences (AESC 2021) conference.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GzhjHq4XQ7Q&t=5s>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KqC\\_r7esrj0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KqC_r7esrj0)



The application of digital tools in recent geotrail development in New South Wales is outlined in the following two video presentations.

- Warrumbungle National Park Geotrails  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1oZeqdUg0>
- NSW Geological Survey <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fkdbez3Meh8>

Recent developmental work in support of the Flinders Ranges WHA nomination from South Australia highlights the use of virtual reality <https://ab.co/2TW8Fty>

The following link details an interesting example of a virtual tour from Rottnest Island, Western Australia <https://bit.ly/3HCsjPI>

In another prime geotourism location (the Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion of New South Wales), drone technology has been used to highlight coastal geomorphology and sedimentary rock features <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=holu30ie8OE>

In effect, the outcomes arising from the implementation of **Goal 1 represents a direct response to Action 7.7 of the THRIVE 2030 Visitor Economy Strategy.**

#### NGS Goal 3: Delivering geotourism products and experiences through Geotrails

Geotrails are journeys that offer the advantages of

- relating directly to the tourism experience linking destinations particularly of geological or geographical interest;
- having universal appeal, and do not compete with or impact on land management/access issues;
- being easy to establish and representing a cost-effective means of enhancing regional development;
- forming logical journeys linking accommodation destinations where available;
- melding the geological heritage features of a region with a **cohesive story**; and
- incorporating the biodiversity and cultural components (including mining heritage) of the region through which the geotrail traverses.

Geotrails not only link natural landscapes, wilderness, and protected areas, but also include human modified environments like quarries, road sections and urban settings. Geotourism argues that to fully understand and appreciate the environment, visitors firstly learn about the Abiotic (non-living) elements of climate, landscape, geology, and soils, as these determine the distribution of Biotic (living) elements of animals and plants. Both components influence the cultural landscape of how people inhabited the area in the past, as well as how they live there today. These become the key ABC (Abiotic, Biotic, Cultural) elements of geotourism/geotrails, which provides a cohesive approach to interpreting natural areas.

In NSW over recent years, the Geological Survey of New South Wales (GSNSW) has developed in conjunction with Councils, universities, and community groups, three outstanding localised geotrails <https://bit.ly/3OnKFWC>

- the Newcastle Coastal Geotrail linking fourteen geosites along about 10 km of coastal walk from near Newcastle CBD at Nobbys Beach in the north, to **Glenrock State Conservation Area** to the south;
- the **Port Macquarie Coastal Geotrail** covering about 4 km of coastline from Port Macquarie CBD south to the Sea Acres National Park; and
- a series of geotrails of the **Warrumbungle National Park** have recently been highlighted in a video production of the Department of Regional NSW.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1oZeqdUg0>

These geotrails are supported with smartphone apps as virtual tours and provide a unique and interactive experience for visitors, school groups, and local communities.

- Apple: <https://apple.co/3FaAPUD>
- Android: <https://bit.ly/3kzaINv>

Geotrails are also an effective vehicle for promoting broader community interest in geoscience and recognition of it as one of the four fundamental sciences along with physics, chemistry, and biology. As such there are long-term educational and cultural benefits in fostering the appreciation of how our Earth influences landscape, ecology, and our lifestyles.

### **Potential geotrail development within the ACT**

The ACT offers a plethora of significant geosites, many of which can be linked by establishing new geotrails outside of and, where appropriate, linked to existing protected (e.g., Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, Namadgi National Park, and other areas managed by Parks ACT) or publicly managed, non-protected areas. These sites include Woolshed Creek, Mount Ainslie, the State Circle, Cotter Dam, the Acton Peninsula, Molongo Gorge, and can also include public buildings such as Parliament House and St John's Church in Reid both of which highlight important building stones of geological and historical significance. Other 'stand-alone' geosites of interest include Black Mountain, Mount Stromlo, Cotter Caves and Mine Site, and Paddy's River Cave and Mine.

Through the auspices of the NGS Working Groups, assistance is offered to develop these concepts for the ACT Government.

### **The Development of major geotourism projects through the National Geotourism Strategy**

Currently the AGC is of the view that the establishment of the NGS offers the best means of ensuring an orderly development of geotourism based on having first gained government support and endorsement, recognising that each state and territory has individual needs and priorities.

The Australian Government's THRIVE 2030 Visitor Economy Strategy sets out to assist the tourism industry and governments in setting a plan for sustainable long-term growth of the visitor economy over the next ten years. The Strategy is underpinned by a vision that delivers quality experiences for visitors, includes businesses that are globally competitive that are profitable, grow sustainably and providing jobs, growth and infrastructure that benefit Australian communities.

One of the key Actions of this strategy is to ‘grow and develop high-quality products and experiences around unique Australian locations and themes, including approaches which integrate sustainable nature tourism with economic opportunities for Traditional Owners, and reflect emerging tourism trends such as geotourism.’ The AGC is pleased to see that the goals of the AGC’s National Geotourism Strategy (NGS), launched over 12 months ago, are complementary to this Action, and that there is recognition within the THRIVE 2030 Strategy for the need to integrate natural and cultural heritage. These are core to the design of geotourism offerings. The inclusion of a geotourism case study within the Strategy documentation – the NSW Glen Innes Highlands aspiring ‘GeoRegion’ – represents a major step in and advancing geotourism concepts.

### **Implication of the THRIVE 2030 Visitor Economy Strategy for geotourism development nationally**

Within the framework of the National Geotourism Strategy (NGS) and as a significant first for Australia, the Glen Innes Severn Council (in the New England Region of Northern NSW) has recently **approved a comprehensive Tourism Destination Management Plan <https://lnkd.in/g5yk5aNu> that has embraced 'geotourism as a holistic approach to featuring natural and cultural heritage into the relevant customer experiences.'** The Plan also proposes the development of various trails including a rail trail, all with potential development as geotrails. In addition, the Council has decided to investigate the potential of the Glen Innes Highlands being developed as an outstanding ‘GeoRegion’ and to review the NGS, with the intention of approaching the Australian Geoscience Council to conduct an audit of this proposition, with early input anticipated from the Geological Survey of NSW and from other geoscientists with local knowledge and experience, particularly from the University of New England located in Armidale.

On Page 43 of the Australian Government’s recent Strategy document, the aspiring Glen Innes ‘GeoRegion’ and the National Geotourism Strategy feature in a prominently displayed case study, inter alia,

*‘Geotourism puts Glen Innes Highlands on the map In the Northern Inland region of New South Wales, Glen Innes Highlands is embracing an emerging global trend: geotourism. Geotourism is a nature-based experience that describes how geology shapes the character of a region. It uses storytelling to connect: • landscapes, landforms, and the night sky • flora and fauna • First Nations and European cultural heritage. Geotourism helps communities develop experiences that protect and explain the natural and cultural heritage of important regions. This ensures tourism has community acceptance and delivers socioeconomic opportunities. A region rich in natural and cultural heritage The Glen Innes Highlands region boasts major landforms, waterways, vegetation, wildlife, and cultural heritage. It aims to become a model geotourism destination in line with the National Geotourism Strategy. Local First Nations peoples, state government agencies, local councils and other interest groups are working together to develop ‘geotrails.’ These will connect the region’s: • Australian Standing Stones monument • local mining heritage sites • World Heritage national parks • museums • festivals and events. The geotrails being developed include: • New England Rail Trail • Glen Innes Highlands Skywalk • Fossickers Way Touring Route • Stonehenge Recreational Reserve • World Heritage Way • World Heritage Walk • State Tourist Drive 11 – Miners Way. The geotrails will be brought to life through interactive visual and sound experiences and digital interpretations. Aiming to be recognised by UNESCO. UNESCO recognises 169 Global Geoparks in 44 countries. Glen Innes aims to be 1 of 3 Australian geo-regions nominated as an Aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark. The others are: • the Kuring-gai Chase National Park and Northern Beaches coastline of New South Wales • the Murchison region of Western Australia.’*

The AGC is of the view the ACT offers considerable potential for geotourism being adopted as a key driver of tourism destination management planning and stands ready to provide any further advice about how this concept can be incorporated within the 2030 Tourism Strategy for the ACT.

**Summary of responses to specific topics of interest for the development of the 2030 Tourism Strategy for the ACT**

What else is needed to better position the Canberra region to attract more domestic and international travelers into the future?

The development of a comprehensive Tourism Destination Plan that has embraced geotourism as a holistic approach to featuring natural and cultural heritage into the relevant customer experiences.

Which suggested action areas do you believe should be the priorities for focus in each proposed strategy phase (i.e., 2023 to 2026 and 2027 to 2030)?

Action Areas 7.5 and 7.7 of the THRIVE 2030 Visitor Economy Strategy should be given top priority for both strategy phase.

To unlock the full potential of the Canberra region's tourism assets, what aspects of our tourism offering need to be better highlighted or developed?

Undoubtedly, the aspects that highlight the region's outstanding natural and cultural heritage.

How do you want the Canberra region tourism industry to be defined by the year 2030? What do you see as the enablers or obstacles to progress?

From the perspectives of outbound tourism operators of key tourism markets, the Canberra region to be defined as one of Australia's outstanding GeoRegions with natural and cultural heritage interpretive attributes rivalling other national capital cities worldwide, and of stature and reputation of which all Australians can feel proud.

What should we be thinking about now to collectively reset and transform the way that Canberra is positioned as a globally competitive tourism destination?

Embracing geotourism within a framework as defined by the National Geotourism Strategy.

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## **Attachment**

### **Key Socio-Economic Benefits of Geotourism Development**

The benefits of geotourism development in Australia are many including:

1. **Tourism Industry** development benefits in the context of addressing the current COVID-19 pandemic can be realised through the holistic approach of geotourism which enhances the value of traditionally structured, nature-based tourism by **generating new product development** (i.e., including geology, landscape, flora and fauna, as well as cultural heritage attributes, both Aboriginal and post European settlement).
  
2. **Employment benefits** through the adoption of a strategy to support and promote geotourism include the following, all of which have the potential to significantly improve Aboriginal employment, and more broadly, regional employment:
  - New domestic employment and consulting opportunities for natural/cultural heritage professionals, design of interpretation signage/boards, design of geotrails.
  - Management roles in geoparks and mining parks, regional development, and local government agencies supporting the visitor economy.
  - Direct employment opportunities in tour operations resulting from increased tourism visitation.
  - Opportunities for pastoralists and farmers to value-add and diversify by developing 'farm stay' tourism experiences.
  - Creating indirect multiplier effects across other industries to service the additional visitation.
  
3. **Societal benefits** for local communities, particularly in rural and regional Australia, include the following:
  - A mechanism for celebrating and raising awareness of mining heritage, past and present.
  - An opportunity to enhance community engagement and build value into Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) considerations.
  - By celebrating geological heritage, and in connection with all other aspects of the area's natural and cultural heritage (and most significantly, Aboriginal heritage), geotourism enhances awareness and understanding of key issues facing society, such as using our Earth's resources sustainably.
  - By raising awareness of the importance of the area's geological heritage in society today, geotourism gives local people a sense of pride in their region and strengthens their identification with the area.
  - The NGS acknowledges the need to protect the scientific and cultural sensitivity of some geoheritage and geosites, and to ensure protection from geotourism where appropriate.

- Education opportunities and early employment experience for school-age children who are more sensitive to protecting and nurturing our environment.

In summary, the over-riding socio-economic benefits of geotourism are measurable economic outcomes through the enhancement of traditional nature-based tourism resulting in additional day and over-night visitors, increase visitor spend, direct and indirect regional economic output, household income and wages, and local (including Aboriginal) employment.