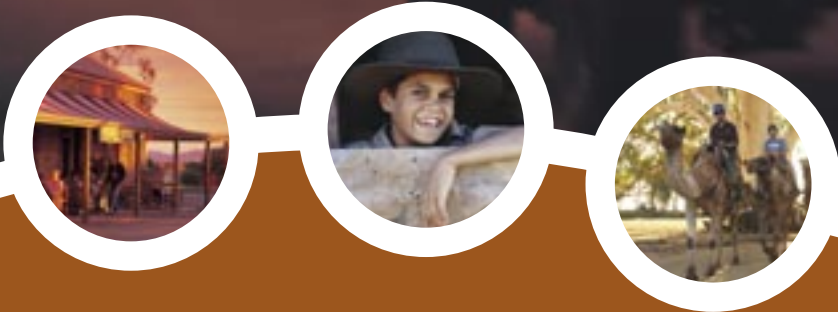


OUR OUTBACK

PARTNERSHIPS AND PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS IN TOURISM SUMMARY

A vision without action is merely a dream. Action without vision just passes the time. Vision coupled with action can change the world.

(J. Barker, 1992)



Making our outback stronger through tourism

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SUSTAINABLE
TOURISM



Services



DESERT KNOWLEDGE
AUSTRALIA

Prepared for: **Desert Knowledge Australia** Prepared by: **National Centre for Studies in Travel and Tourism**



PROJECT BACKGROUND

This important project provides the foundation and direction to guide the future development and co-ordination of cross-border tourism across Outback Australia. The study was commissioned in February 2005 with funding obtained under the Australian Tourism Development Program. The project was managed by Desert Knowledge Australia on behalf of a working party representing six organisations from five States and Territories.

For the purpose of this study Outback tourism was taken to extend across Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia, Victoria and the Northern Territory, covering the following 12 regions:

- Katherine (NT)
- Australia's Golden Outback (WA)
- Tablelands (NT)
- Outback (SA)
- MacDonnell (NT)
- Flinders Ranges (SA)
- Alice Springs (NT)
- Mallee (VIC)
- Petermann (NT)
- Outback (NSW)
- Australia's North West (WA)
- Outback (Qld)

To gain the widest possible range of views the consultancy team held workshops in 23 communities, where a total of 268 stakeholders gave input. As well, a further 50 interviews were conducted.

This project recognises the importance of Outback Australia as a visitor destination, the underlying priority requirement to improve networking, and subsequently, the need to more effectively encourage industry growth.

Together with the individual State and Territory tourism strategies, the 'Our Outback' project will build on existing Outback initiatives and will become the foundation for crossborder development and marketing of Outback Australia's tourism infrastructure, products and experiences. This foundation is essential for building of partnerships, alliances, communication, and co-ordination – and ultimately the competitiveness of the Outback regions.

WHAT IS CROSS-BORDER TOURISM?

Visitors are not interested in regional, State or Territory boundaries. They are interested in the things they can see and do – the wide variety of experiences offered across the Outback.

Cross-border tourism promotes a situation where Outback communities and operators can work effectively together without the artificial constraints of State or Territory borders. Ideally, cross-border tourism is about operators, organisations and communities working together to:

- Manage and develop tourism across local, State and regional boundaries;
- Share information, new ideas and innovation;
- Share limited resources (co-operative initiatives); and
- Deliver economic and social benefits to Outback communities.

OUTBACK TOURISM TRENDS

In the last five years domestic and international tourism across Australia has been affected by a wide variety of external and internal events including natural disasters, acts of war and terrorism, global economic uncertainty, and more recently, rising fuel prices and the spectre of bird flu.

Key trends include a continuation of the on-line revolution for information and bookings, a dramatic growth in the 4WD vehicle market, off-road caravans and trailers, short-break and drive holiday consumers designing their own Outback holidays, a shift in inbound tourism, changes in the demographic structure of Australia with the ageing of the population, changing family structure, increasing transport costs and a fluctuating global and domestic economy.

A review of domestic and international visitation trends over the past four years has indicated that Outback Australia has struggled to keep pace with tourist industry growth on a national basis.

This highlights the importance and timely commissioning of the project for the future wellbeing of Outback tourism.

CHALLENGES

Key challenges include:

- Building industry capacity;
- Offsetting seasonality (as much as practicable);
- Increasing market share; and
- Improving infrastructure and services.

With the large number of stakeholders and organisations involved, by far the greatest challenge is to build and maintain strong cross-border unity at all levels.

KEY ISSUES

The extensive consultation process identified 14 primary key issues (not listed in priority order) which have been taken up in the action plan:

- Leadership and co-ordination
- State, and regional tourism networks
- Outback branding and positioning
- Consumer research
- Transport and infrastructure
- Touring routes
- Product development assistance
- Industry capacity
- Local government
- Land management, visitor management
- Access
- Licensing, permits and regulation
- Visitor Information Centres
- Information distribution/websites and technology

WHAT IS IN THE ACTION PLAN?

The Action Plan is based on the 14 key issues identified above. These issues have been grouped into five main categories:

- 1) Leadership and co-ordination;
- 2) Positioning and brand management;

3) Access, infrastructure and investment;

4) Information, research and communication; and

5) Industry capacity building, products and experience.

On the basis of these categories, five strategic objectives were developed and a series of actions formulated to achieve each objective.

The implementation process has been divided into four time periods:

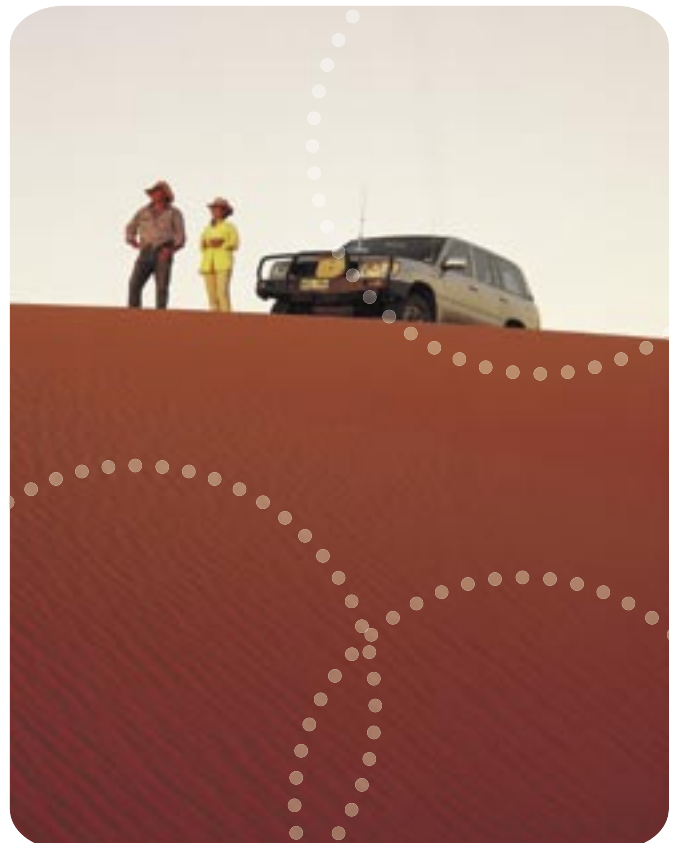
I Mobilisation (3-6 months)

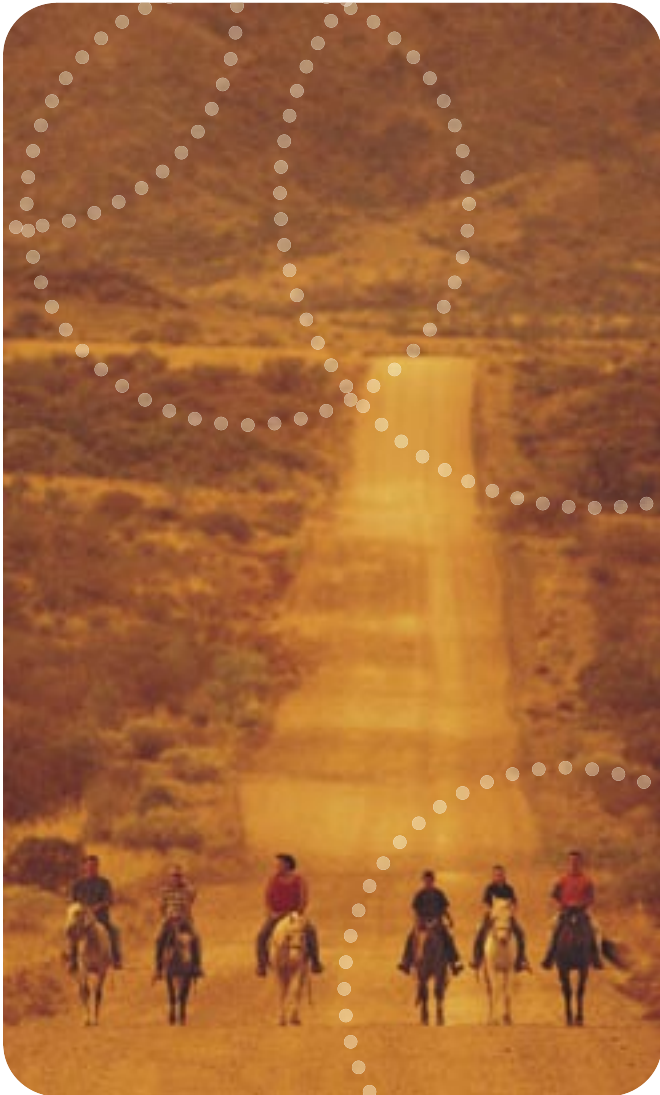
II Immediate (6-12 months)

III Medium Term (12-24 months)

IV Ongoing (2 years +)

It is important to note that this Action Plan is not aimed at solving the broader problems of Outback Australia or to address the variety of issues facing the future of Australia's tourism industry. Rather, it provides a limited number of priority recommendations that can realistically be implemented to improve the performance of Outback Tourism across the nation.





LEADERSHIP AND CO-ORDINATION

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1

To establish a national Outback Tourism project co-ordinating mechanism with strong, effective and committed leadership.

- Reconvene and continue the role of the Project Management Committee and Reference Group with a new name, 'Project Implementation Committee' to reflect its new role.
- Develop an Outback Marketing Alliance representing State/Territory and regional tourism organisations.

- Appoint a national co-ordination position located in Alice Springs to support the Project Implementation Committee and new Marketing Alliance.
- Develop a consistent set of national code of practice regulations covering travel safety and environmentally sensitive and sound bush travel.
- Develop a sustainable and practical benchmarking tool to assist Outback communities to monitor social, economic and environmental impacts.

POSITIONING AND BRAND MANAGEMENT

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

To establish clear positioning for Outback Australia highlighting the points of difference for each region.

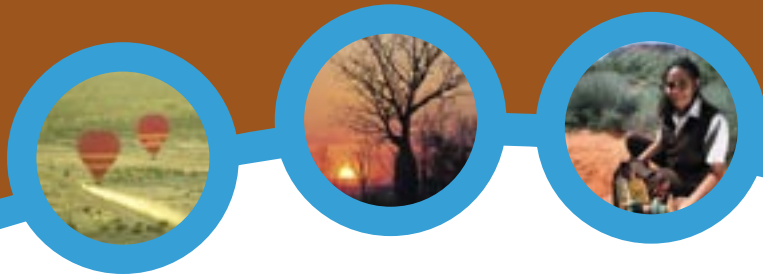
- Develop an Outback Australia Marketing Plan including packaging for domestic and international markets.
- Develop national positioning for Outback Australia integrating State and Territory experiences.
- Develop and implement an Outback Australia co-operative marketing program for international markets.
- Prepare national consumer market briefs for operators covering current markets, industry trends, niche market needs, cross-region and border boundaries, merchandising and visitor support.

ACCESS INFRASTRUCTURE AND INVESTMENT

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3

*To encourage investment in soft and hard * infrastructure to provide safe and convenient access across the Outback and to underpin sustainability of Outback communities.*

- Undertake a national Outback transport strategy including road/rail/air/sea travel modes.
- Develop an Outback Australia visitor flows management model and document visitor hot spots to determine where management support is needed.
- Streamline and simplify cross-border commercial tour operator licensing arrangements for protected areas.
- Develop a national Outback Drive Touring Program to identify routes of national significance.



- Develop public access plans and protocols for Outback travel with emphasis on culturally and environmentally sensitive areas.
- Establish national, State and Territory support for development of a major east/west drive route across Central Australia.

* *Soft infrastructure* : plans, policies, research data.
Hard infrastructure : physical infrastructure.

- Seek partnership funding to provide one-on-one business mentoring programs.
- Facilitate access to Commonwealth, State and Territory small business incubator and business support programs for development of successful Outback businesses.
- Work with Tourism Australia, State/Territory tourism organisations and peak industry bodies to develop and complement a National Outback Tourism Awareness Program.
- Facilitate implementation of selected national cross-border projects.

INFORMATION, RESEARCH AND COMMUNICATION

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4

To establish user-friendly, practical research information for operators, and easy access, up-to-date information for visitors.

- Collect and collate existing market research from relevant agencies and national, State and regional tourism organisations.
- Ensure the information needs of 'Our Outback' are considered in the national tourism research agenda by identifying research priorities for Outback tourism and partnering with research teams.
- Develop an Outback Tourism Portal to facilitate a link to all current sources of information for visitors and businesses.
- Establish sufficient ongoing support to assist VICs to play a more strategic role in the provision of up-to-date product information and booking systems/services for remote towns and businesses.

INDUSTRY, CAPACITY-BUILDING, PRODUCTS AND EXPERIENCES

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5

To create an environment that can foster strategic business partnerships, viable quality products and experiences and build industry business capacity over time.

- Encourage State and regional tourism organisations, regional economic development boards and local governments to form partnerships to either:
 - a) Continue supporting; or
 - b) establish new positions . . .
 for regionally based dedicated Outback Tourism Product Development Officers.

PREREQUISITES FOR SUCCESS

It should be kept uppermost in mind that this project is just the starting point. To implement the 'Our Outback' initiative, gain the economic, environmental and social benefits, and bring the recommendations to reality, the following issues will need to underpin the implementation process:

- An integrated whole-of-Outback approach must be adopted, then followed through with action. Outback stakeholders need to work together with the aim to channel and maximise scarce resources.
- Industry sectors at all levels must place emphasis on cross-border networking and coordination.
- Stakeholders must recognise that competition is strong. Throughout Australia new and innovative products are continually being developed and aggressively promoted, giving the visitor market an ever-increasing choice of options.
- To gain maximum visitor satisfaction a high level of service and professionalism must be regarded as a benchmark, not an option.
- Emphasis must be placed on Outback visitor dispersal initiatives.

FURTHER INFORMATION

A full report including case study examples can be accessed from the Desert Knowledge Australia website, or by contacting Desert Knowledge Australia on the details below.

For more information on the 'Our Outback' project contact:

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Report from the Desert Knowledge Australia Cross-Border Outback Tourism Project.

Photographs courtesy of: SA Tourist Commission, NT Tourist Commission, Tourism WA, Tourism Queensland & Tourism NSW