

General Comments.

The language used in the discussion draft of the Tourism Master Plan for Australia's Coastal Wilderness appears to be from the style used in advertising brochures for holiday and resort destinations. While this is understandable, it can also be misleading, laughably inaccurate and even offensive. For example, the use of the adjective "undiscovered" in the first line of the text would probably be regarded as offensive to the descendants of the Kurnai, Bidjil, Thaua, Yuin and other indigenous people, just as the phrase "Captain Cook discovered Australia" can cause offence.

The document also uses terms such as "iconic accommodation" without explaining what is meant. The meaning in this context may be familiar to tourist industry insiders but is not at all obvious to the general reader. If "iconic" means in some way unique and authentic, then what could be more so than the existing accommodation available at Pt. Hicks or Greencape Lighthouses?

The brand positioning statement (page 1) refers to the tall forests of the coastal wilderness. While there are still some extant oldgrowth forests along the coast, they can not reasonably be regarded as "tall" when considering the range of heights of forest types within the whole southeast region. Tall forests still exist in small pockets in Glenbog, Tantawangalo, Coolangubra, Errinundra and Snowy River regions. However, they are impossible to access without driving through vast areas of pine plantations or regrowth forests from intensive logging operations. I guess tall is a relative term. However, the way the whole report ignores the transformation of what were essentially wilderness forests only 40 to 50 years ago into industrial forests and plantations is quite misleading. This spin of omission is a bit like the way the Chinese Government is pretending that nothing much happened at Tiananmen Square 20 years ago. The point of these comments is that overselling the "unspoiled wilderness" qualities that may still exist in some parts of the region is misleading when applied to the region in general. This may lead to disappointment and anger on the part of visitors.

Specific Comments.

Page 4. "For the Experience Seeker" the second last dot point says:

"visit authentic destinations that are not necessarily part of the tourist route."

This point contains the essence of why this tourism strategy is potentially self-defeating. Success of the strategy could ensure the ultimate sterilisation of the very attractions (wilderness, remoteness from development) which it is seeking to use as the main hook. There is great potential for a "lose-lose" outcome-failed developments and the loss of wilderness and biodiversity conservation values.

This area already has clear examples of this on private land. When driving into Eden from the south, one used to have a glimpse of a magnificent view across Twofold Bay to the south and east. Then the Bayview Motel built a second storey and blocked out the view almost completely. One has no particular reason to stay at the Bayview Motel (its location is noisy and no-one believes a name these days) because there is no view apparent. A similar thing happened at Shadrack's Creek. There used to be a beautiful glimpse of the bay through oldgrowth trees, with idyllic camping sites available along the shore. Then a new owner built rows of ugly cabins which blocked out the view from the highway. ("They all looked like little boxes made of ticky-tacky.....").

The Southeast coast is adequately served by a range of accommodation on private land, and excellent bush camping is available within several national parks. There is no need to compromise the scenic, biodiversity and wilderness values of conservation areas by the addition of new accommodation developments.

Page 13 Eden and Ben Boyd.

Luxury accommodation at Cattle Bay may or may not be built by a private developer. The merits of the site are questionable. It is south-facing, cold and windy with a view of woodchip piles and the multipurpose wharf.

There should be no government support or encouragement for this development. In my view it has already taken up an excessive amount of council staff-time getting to this stage.

Page 13 Snowy River and South East Forests.

This section touches on the Errinundra National Park. The map shows the bizarre border of this park which reflects a history of intensive logging. (Was the use of the spelling “Erruinundra” a Freudian slip?)

The Errinundra Plateaux was, until recent decades, an amazing tall oldgrowth-forest wilderness and a fantastic source of sustained baseflow for streams flowing in all directions. Intensive logging has seriously compromised the scenic, biodiversity and catchment values of this region. Nevertheless, it is still remarkably beautiful in parts, with magnificent tall eucalypts, sassafras rainforest gullies, tall tree ferns and the gorgeous East Gippsland Waratah.

The potential for tourist drives in the Errinundra is seriously compromised by the dangerous logging truck traffic in the warmer months. Much of the area is inaccessible in winter due to (quite justified) road closures. Touring the area in early November, when the Waratahs are in full bloom, can be a frightening experience.

It would be reckless to encourage car touring in these forests without a strategy for safe traffic management.

Page 18. Priority Projects.

The proposal to provide new accommodation at Mowarry Point cannot be justified. A new “ecolodge” would require improved vehicle access for staff, a water supply and sewerage treatment works. It is impossible to provide these things without compromising the conservation values of the Ben Boyd National Park.

Accommodation outside the park and at Greencape lighthouse is adequate for any reasonable requirements of those using the light to light walk. Those unable to walk very far have existing camping facilities at Saltwater and Bitangabee.

Marine National Parks.

Some fully protected areas in the Eden region where spear-fishing is banned would be helpful. For snorkellers, it is remarkable how fish behaviour is so different in areas frequented by spearfishermen compared to more isolated sites.

These reserves need not be large areas, and unless they are well-signed and enforced, they will not be of much value. The local opposition to marine protected areas by a vocal minority and certain opportunist politicians is unlikely to be sustained once further evidence of the value of other temperate marine protected areas to regenerating fish stocks is forthcoming.

The Eden Marine Discovery Centre should take a lead role in organising baseline surveys of fish stocks to see if the recent commercial licence buybacks are working. I understand that the biomass of several commercial finfish species got down to around 5 to 10% of the original estimated stocks

before this action was taken. Without baseline data, it will be impossible to know if the strategy is working and if the rules governing recreational access need to be fine tuned.

Page 19. Air Access.

The current air access to Merimbula is appropriate and commercially sustainable. Any attempt to introduce a competitor airline will compromise the viability of existing services. Small and isolated destinations are a natural monopoly, and competition from surface transport keeps prices in reasonable check.

The introduction of large jet aircraft to Merimbula is an outrageous suggestion that would further compromise the residential and tourist amenity of Merimbula and Pambula. Progressing the upgrade to the Merimbula Sewerage Treatment Plant should be the first priority of any government funding in this area.

The current plans for blue-water access at Mallacoota will have an unacceptable impact on headland vegetation. Wind erosion on the southern coast of Gippsland can be rapid once there is vegetation disturbance, as the loss of the land-connection to Gabo Island since European settlement has shown.

Page 22 Iconic Accommodation.

Some clear thinking and clear definitions are required here. What is meant by iconic accommodation and what is the market? Many millions were squandered in the period after foreign banks were invited to trade in Australia on luxury accommodation in resorts, mainly in Queensland. Ordinary Australians ended up paying for these mistakes through higher mortgage interest rates.

Large picture windows may look good on a brochure but they are likely to be frequently obscured by sea spray and can be a hazard for birds.

New accommodation within conservation reserves might be seen as unfair competition for existing tourist resorts and facilities. There are questions about the viability of new accommodation, given the plight of resorts such as Murramarang (now in receivership?).

The proposal to place tourist cabins at the Davidson Whaling Station can not be supported. The EIS for the Eden Navy Wharf and ammunition facility shows that any further development at the Davidson Whaling Station would be within the NATO exclusion zone and could only operate under a ministerial waiver. The Navy Wharf is a legitimate military target and any proposal to expand tourist or residential facilities nearby is quite immoral.

Page 23 Tours and Transport.

There are potential pitfalls if tours are not well run by competent operators.

A few years ago, I met some tourists who related their very unpleasant experience of going on a tour of the forests with "Creation Tours." They felt that it was a propaganda exercise designed to justify woodchipping. They were angry at having been earbashed by a "redneck" apologist for the loggers.

I'm not sure what any tourism peak body can do about this sort of thing. It is difficult to rely on a "buyer-beware" principal, since you don't know what a tour will be like until you try. Perhaps the role of Forests NSW in vetting those who wish to traverse State Forests as part of a tour is an issue.