

Commercial Tourism Framework Feasibility Project

Request for written feedback from our key stakeholders

Response to request for input provided by Red Hill Regeneration Group on 17 July 2020

1. Introduction

As the Nature-based Tourism strategy (NBT) continues to be developed, ACT Parks and Conservation Service (PCS) seeks to support the strategy with benefit to Canberrans, visiting friends and family, and international tourists, by linking Canberra's natural assets, attractions, amenities, infrastructure and businesses, that are located or operate from PCS managed land.

This will enable PCS and local enterprise to work together to provision the delivery of unique and sustainable tourism experiences.

PCS plays an important role in developing nature-based tourism within ACT. We have the vision of connecting business with nature in a simple and sustainable way.

A Commercial Tourism Framework that governs these tourism activities is seen as a key priority for us to realise this vision. The ACT is currently the only jurisdiction in Australia that does not have a formal and regulated framework for tourism in the Territory's parks and reserves and seeks to implement one that will make doing business with PCS an easy and mutually beneficial process and relationship.

2. We value your feedback

As one of our key stakeholders, we would like your feedback on what to include when designing the Commercial Tourism Framework.

The following areas are in scope for the framework:

- Defining our value proposition to attract appropriate nature-based tourism opportunities to ACT parks and reserves and support the operation and growth of local business.
- Defining what channels we can use to create awareness and deliver services to tourism operators. This includes establishing strategic partnerships with other stakeholders to explore opportunities to deliver even better outcomes
- Defining governance structures that effectively monitor, track and improve the performance of tourism operators when developing the quality of visitor experience (Inc. appropriate conservation measures, promoting wellbeing etc)

This framework will be supported by an efficient internal operating model that clearly defines roles and responsibilities, with lean processes, technology that makes interactions easier, and strategic data that will be used to continuously improve the service offering.

The next section outlines the specific areas we are seeking feedback for.

Please can you write your response in the section provided noting there is no limit to the number of words used. The more feedback the better!

Please can you complete and submit your written response to parks.tourism@act.gov.au by COB 14th July.

If you have any questions regarding how to complete the response, please contact Jac Travers via email on parks.tourism@act.gov.au.

Thank-you for taking the time to provide your feedback!

3. Questions

Please answer the following questions.

- 1. What should our Value Proposition include to help attract appropriate nature-based tourism opportunities to ACT parks and reserves and support the operation and growth of local business and suitable prospects?**

You may wish to consider the following when providing your response:

- Types of activities in the parks
- Going beyond regulatory role and providing additional benefits for having licence e.g. ongoing support to help establish the tourism operator's business
- Building relationships with tourism operators
- Types of licences on offer
 - Annual (options based on tenure) – 1, 3, 5 year (or more)
 - Selective licences (licence offering exclusive access to tour operators – based on an Expression of Interest process)
 - Day passes for smaller operators
 - Opportunities to scale across state boundaries
- Licence fees and usage fees
- Exploring use of discounts for certain areas
- Other revenue streams
- Access to park (day and night?)
- How to support Aboriginal tourism operators
- Opportunities to utilise undervalued assets
- Branding considerations

Please write your response here (no word limit).

The Red Hill Bush Regenerators, along with all other ParkCare groups, acknowledges that the Value Proposition for the Canberra Nature Park must first and foremost be conservation of the natural landscape and ecology. This means that there must not be a conflict between commercial operations and the conservation values of each Reserve. The Nature Conservation Act enshrines this in stating: The main object of this Act is to protect, conserve and enhance the biodiversity of the ACT.

- (2) This is to be achieved particularly by—*
- (a) protecting, conserving, enhancing, restoring and improving nature conservation,*

Overall, we are doubtful that Canberra Nature Park and Red Hill Nature Reserve in particular is suitable for commercial tourism. However, the Nature Reserves in the Canberra region can provide varied bush experiences in close proximity to visitor accommodation. The formed trails allow visitors to exercise; experience and learn about Australian fauna, flora and geology; take in some wonderful views over Canberra and the surrounding districts; and, in some Reserves such as Red Hill and Black Mountain, enjoy a café.

Whatever activities are promoted and permitted in Canberra Nature Park, the key purpose of the Reserves needs to be maintained as the number one priority – a reserve for nature.

Both the type and extent of the activities promoted and permitted should be limited to a level that does not jeopardise the capacity of the Reserves to continue their role as nature preservation precincts. There is already a great deal of pressure on some reserves such as Red Hill where illegal cycling and unregulated track formation by both bike riders and walkers threaten the key purpose of the reserve. Group activities, such as orienteering, need to be approved by Parks and Conservation Service (PCS). They can be a problem in the Reserves where the behaviour or presence of animals can be significantly affected by people moving at speed or getting too close, especially if there were to be a larger number of events and/or increased numbers of participants. There is also increasing pressure on some Reserves such as Red Hill by adjacent commercial developments.

The management of ACT Canberra Nature Park reserves has been significantly under-resourced for a number of years and this situation is not likely to improve. It will be critical to ensure that any promoted tourism experiences do not put greater pressure on PCS staff, volunteers and the level of conservation. There is little ability to manage existing demands let alone new pressures.

- 2. What channels can we use to create awareness and deliver services to tourism operators? What strategic partnerships should be established to explore opportunities to deliver even better outcomes?**

You may wish to consider the following when providing your response:

- Promotional support for tourism operators
- Networking with key partners to support commercial tourism e.g. establishing formal relationship with the Tourism Industry
- Linking with other websites such as Trip Advisor, Visit Canberra, Airline websites, hotels, Australian Tourism Data Warehouse, Air BnB etc...

- Better utilisation of the PCS website
- Better user experience when contacting PCS

Please write your response here (no word limit).

The above considerations are not the responsibility of ParkCare groups or PCS staff. A website or other online presence can promote the best of these experiences and note some clear limitations such as walkers keeping to formed paths, taking and leaving nothing and bicycles using only formed roads and not using walking tracks (many cyclists choose to ignore or misinterpret the current regulations). However, past experience indicates websites are under-resourced and eventually wither.

3. What governance and regulatory structures should be established to effectively monitor, track and improve the performance of tourism operators (Inc. promoting wellbeing), and protect sustainability and conservation outcomes?

You may wish to consider the following when providing your response:

- The importance of accredited tourism operators
- Criteria to determine which tourism operators should be licensed
- Consideration for what conditions should be inserted into the licence (which tourism operators must comply with)
- Incentivisation schemes to ensure sustainability and conservation outcomes are protected
- Use of a compliance program
- Considerations for what should be included in the legislation
- How to measure the visitor experience
- How to measure the tourism operator experience
- Balancing governance with trying to avoid unnecessary red tape

Please write your response here (no word limit).

Tourism operators who use Nature Reserves must be licensed. They should be guided by the current requirements for Canberra Nature Reserves and there should be penalties available for when these requirements are breached. The Government may wish to establish a list of licensed operators for reference by the public. Operators would need to contribute to a trust fund to ensure there are sufficient funds to finance compliance activities. Measuring tourism experience is not a function of park carers and PCS staff.

4. Please provide any additional comments for what should be included in the framework that you haven't already mentioned.

Please write your response here (no word limit).

There is no information provided to us as a 'critical stakeholder' to support the need for commercial tourism in the Reserves. It is also not demonstrated how the extent of such activities would provide a cost benefit to the ACT and preferably to the Parks and Conservation Service (PCS). Without this information, it is not possible to contribute with any degree of usefulness. The Centenary Trail was built some years ago but there does not appear to be any information which supports the concept of commercial tourism for such an activity.

Some aspects to consider:

1. Things to support - passive recreation activities such as bird watching, frog census, butterfly identification, conservation, community planting, indigenous education activities. These must be undertaken only when it is possible without jeopardising the conservation values of the reserves. Any commercial activities must provide sufficient income to PCS to fully cover the costs involved for any involvement of their staff or resources and not reduce the current efforts of PCS to support Nature Reserves in Canberra.

2. Things to regulate or not permit - cycling, large group activities such as bush running/orienteering, competitive sports, domestic pets, drones. These are already problematic for Canberra Nature Reserves and adding commercial activities would only exacerbate the issues.

3. Things to encourage - brochures with trail maps and guidelines, sign-posted walking trails with distances (Switzerland good example), tree and plant species signing (Botanic Gardens example), general interpretive information, clear activities guidance e.g. where to cycle, dogs on leash etc. If these aspects are introduced to support commercial activities, they should be fully funded from the operators of these activities. We currently struggle to produce these items and keep them current. There would need to be mechanisms in place for ensuring that any material produced is accurate, maintained and regularly updated. It is difficult to envisage this being achieved in Nature Reserves.

4. Things to remember - appropriate ongoing operational budgets, to manage and maintain infrastructure, support weed and feral animal control are critical.

5. Things to avoid - tourists and visitors will not be attracted to nature reserves which are weed infested, degraded by overpopulation of feral and native fauna, inadequate and poorly maintained signage, confusing and excessive use of inconsistent signage, inadequate provision of information and poorly maintained and eroded tracks. If commercial activities are to be introduced to an area such as Red Hill, there would need to be a huge investment to bring the area up to a higher standard of conservation to make it an attractive destination.



Attachment: Invitation to comment

My name is Andy Corbett and I am the Managing Director of CorbettPrice.

We are a consulting firm that has been engaged by ACT Parks and Conservation Service (PCS) to undertake a feasibility project to establish a formal and regulated framework for tourism. In developing this framework, we appreciate that protecting the natural and cultural values across the Territory's parks and reserves is paramount. There are real advantages in developing a framework that will make doing business with PCS a simple, easy and mutually beneficial process and relationship.

The framework will be used to support nature-based tourism in the ACT, to benefit Canberrans, visiting friends and family, and international tourists, by strategically linking Canberra's natural assets, attractions, amenities, infrastructure and businesses, that are located or operate from PCS managed land.

We will be conducting extensive consultation across PCS and with critical stakeholders to ensure we have the right evidence in place.

You have been identified as a critical stakeholder, and we would like to invite you to participate in providing your feedback to help shape the design of the framework.

Attached is questions for feedback on this project. Please can you write your response in the section provided noting there is no limit to the number of words used. The more feedback the better!

Please can you complete and submit your written response to parks.tourism@act.gov.au by COB 14th July.