



ACT
Government

Nature-Based Commercial Tourism Framework

Targeted Consultation

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

ACT Parks and Conservation Service

Nature-Based Commercial Tourism Framework

Targeted Consultation Report

The ACT Parks and Conservation Service (PCS) within the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) recognises that Australia's world-class natural beauty and wildlife is a key driver for domestic and international visitors to the ACT. There is demand for nature-based and cultural based visitor experiences in the ACT, however, we are currently the only jurisdiction in Australia that does not have a framework to formally regulate tourism activities on the conservation and plantation forest estate. Such a framework should aim to connect business and visitors with nature and culture in a transparent and sustainable way, with close attention to the protection of natural and cultural values whilst supporting local businesses and contributing to the local economy.

In 2020, a project examined the feasibility for a regulatory framework to manage commercial nature-based tourism operations in ACT parks, reserves, and plantations.

The resulting Feasibility Report was developed following through consultation with approximately 70 key internal and external stakeholders through a series of workshops and written responses, as well as incorporating insights from other state and territory park agencies and their management of commercial tourism. As a result of this consultation, 21 opportunities for improvement to the current arrangements in the ACT were identified and this informed the development of several options. The preferred option (Option 3 in the report – “Building Strategic Partnerships”) looks at taking a partnership approach, beyond a purely regulatory system, to ensure benefits for both conservation and commercial businesses. This will form the basis of a draft Nature-Based Commercial Tourism Framework (NBCTF).

This consultation (in late 2022) aimed to seek further stakeholder feedback on how to implement the option for Building Strategic Partnerships in the NBCTF to:

- support a spectrum of opportunities for nature-based tourism businesses to professionally showcase the natural and cultural values of ACT parks, reserves and plantations;
- support the outcomes intended by the ACT Wellbeing Framework and Tourism 2030 Strategy;
- enable PCS to manage and enforce compliance to safeguard appropriate conservation and cultural behaviours;
- ensure development within PCS-managed estate is sustainable, environmentally conscious, financially beneficial and aligned with ACT Government values;
- ensure process is clear, consistent and easy for operators to do business with PCS; and
- ensure protection against vulnerabilities related to public liabilities and commercial, visitor and operational risks.

The Conversation

We held a conversation online and face to face with stakeholders around the outcomes of the NBCTF Feasibility Report and moving forward with Option 3 – Building Strategic Partnerships.

An online survey was distributed to stakeholders and available for feedback from 9 November 2022 until 16 December 2022, with a total of 49 responses.

Two face-to-face sessions were held on 7 December 2022 at Namadgi Visitor Information Centre and on 9 December 2022 at the ACT Government Dickson Office Building.

Who We Engaged

The NBCTF Feasibility Report, survey and invitation to face-to-face sessions were sent to the same key internal and external stakeholders engaged during initial consultation in 2020. These include, but are not limited to:

- Heritage ACT
- Mountain Bike Project
- EPSDD Legal
- TCCS Licensing and Compliance
- PCS Licensing and Compliance, Forestry, Parks and Partnerships, Policy and Visitor Experience
- Dhawura Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee
- VisitCanberra
- EPSDD Conservator Liaison
- Woodlands & Wetlands Trust
- National Capital Attractions Association
- ParkCare Volunteer groups
- Recreational User Groups
- Range of commercial operators

Key Insights from the Community

Top 3 concerns with commercial tourism activity in PCS parks, forests and reserves

- Adverse environmental impact – 42%
- Exclusion of public due to commercial tourism activities – 36%
- Overdevelopment in wilderness areas – 13%

Selective licencing

Question: Selective licences (also known as exclusivity licences, which are used to limit the number of licences approved for certain areas, times, or activities) are a key consideration of this framework.

Which approach for selective licencing should be utilised in the ACT?

- A combination of both: 49%
- Expressions of Interest (EOI)/Tender - The government seeks responses to specific opportunities via an EOI/tender process: 45%
- 'Outside In' - Proposals for exclusivity can be made by external parties throughout the year: 6%

Suggested areas in which commercial tourism should be limited

1. All PCS estate – 18%
2. Bimberi Wilderness – 16%
3. Namadgi National Park – 16%
4. All designated wilderness zones – 11%
5. Canberra Nature Parks – 9%
6. Cotter Catchment – 9%
7. No areas – 7%
8. Box Gum Woodland – 4%
9. Sphagnum Bogs – 4%
10. Ginini Wetlands – 2%
11. Natural Temperate Grassland – 2%
12. Tidbinbilla – 2%

Permit fee distribution

- “Any commercial tourism operator should be charged a fee large enough to make significant contribution to administrative and on-ground management costs. Any use of public land for private commercial benefit should also provide maximum benefit to the public land”
- “I think it is important that the revenue raised from these activities goes back into the park. This model allows for necessary improvements/hardening of infrastructure as visitation increases, and prevents ground staff becoming resentful of the inevitable impacts of commercial activities in their reserve.”

What’s Next?

Using the feasibility study and consultation feedback, PCS will map out a detailed policy and process for commercial tourism activities in ACT parks, reserves and plantations, including:

- Regular engagement and communication with stakeholders
- Defining ‘commercial tourism’ and licencing requirements
- An application process that is simple and provides certainty
- Developing an appropriate fee regime and collection process
- Establishing compliance and support processes

Key Timings

9 November 2022 – NBCTF Feasibility Report released and online survey opened

7 December 2022 – Face to face stakeholder consultation at Namadgi Visitor Information Centre

9 December 2022 – Face to face stakeholder consultation at 480 Northbourne Dickson

16 December 2022 – Consultation period closed

March 2023 – Listening Report finalised outlining key findings from the consultation. Feedback received through the survey will inform process and system development of a draft NBCTF.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK

49 Individuals provided feedback through the online survey	11 Stakeholders attended face to face consultation sessions	130 Emails sent to stakeholders seeking feedback
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