Tourism-protected area partnerships in Australia: Designing and managing for success

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Why tourism-protected area partnerships?

- Inject money into protected area management
- Provide much-needed facilities and services
- Improved efficiency and biodiversity outcomes
- Government policy

Why a research priority?

Tourism White Paper (Cth, 2004):
- Need partnerships to grow tourism in protected areas

Pursuing Common Goals report (Cth, 2004):
- Need for partnerships between tour operators & protected area managers

TTF Australia activities since 2004:
- Emphasising the importance for the tourism industry of partnerships between the industry & protected areas

Recently released Project X report by TTF Australia:
- Key finding re 'harnessing our natural advantages' achieved by partnerships between tourism & protected areas

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The research project

- 2-year national project commenced in October 2006
- Researchers from WA, Victoria & Tasmania
- Project advised by Industry Reference Group (across Australia)

Research methods

- Selection of 21 partnerships with IRG
- Questionnaire to members of partnerships (n=100)
- Follow-up face-to-face interviews with same people (n=97)

The partnerships

1. Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve	ACT
2. Australian Alps National Parks	ACT/Victoria/NSW
3. Savannah Guides	Northern Territory
4. Lamington National Park – O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat	Queensland
5. Deep Creek Conservation Park	South Australia
6. Gluepot Reserve	South Australia
7. Heysen Trail	South Australia
8. Cradle Mountain Huts	Tasmania
9. Gordon River Cruises	Tasmania
10. Ross Female Factory	Tasmania
11. Dolphin Tours – Port Phillip Bay	Victoria
12. Great Ocean Walk	Victoria
13. Mount Buffalo Chalet	Victoria
14. Queenscliff Harbour Redevelopment	Victoria
15. Bibbulmun Track	Western Australia
16. Jurabi Turtle Interpretation Centre	Western Australia
17. Ningaloo Reef Retreat	Western Australia
18. Penguin Island Conservation Park	Western Australia
19. Purnululu National Park Safari Camps	Western Australia
20. Rockingham Lakes Regional Park	Western Australia
21. Walpole-Nornalup National Park – WOW Wilderness EcoCruises	Western Australia

Successful partnerships result in…

- 14 outcomes listed and all important (e.g. understanding, economic gain, relationships, access to funding)
- Most important were
  - Purpose of partnership achieved
    - 'If you do not achieve what you set out to do, where are you?'
  - Benefits to all partners
    - 'If cottages are maintained well, it attracts a different clientele – someone who is not likely to damage the Parks. We get revenue and…they manage people in a small area which is existing cleared land and provide good infrastructure.'
  - Improved information available for protected area management
    - Added to visitor experience, resulted in better mgt, improved community knowledge

Successful partnerships contribute to sustainable tourism through…

- 14 outcomes listed and all important (e.g. environmental quality, social and cultural benefits, local community engagement, waste minimisation)
- Most important were
  - Improved understanding of values of protected areas
    - 'A "halo effect" – gives a positive experience to an influential group, so they become advocates back in the community. '
  - Improved biodiversity conservation
    - Members contributed directly to biodiversity conservation through monitoring by volunteers, visitor education, promoting responsible visitor behaviour and implementing sustainable management
  - Increased social benefits to local communities
    - Increased economic viability and prosperity of the local community

Features contributing to success …partner-related

- 12 features of *partners* listed and all important, mostly present
- Most important were
  - Leadership provided
    - Often important agency role
  - Support provided by PA agency
    - Support through communication, inclusion and providing resources
  - Empathy between partners encouraged
    - Awareness of what required to achieve outcomes: appreciating others, using information
- Important but not always present
  - Power equally distributed (46% present)

Features contributing to success …process-related

- 20 features of *working together* listed and all important, mostly present
- Most important were
  - Open communication
    - Openness and ready availability of information
  - Trust
    - Sense of obligation, may take years
  - Agreement on purpose
    - Written agreement central
- Important but not always present
  - Partners dependent on each other (69% present)

Features contributing to success …context-related

- 12 features of the *working environment* listed and all important, mostly present
- Most important were
  - Written agreement developed by the partners
    - 'Provide[s] surety and security. It is the nuts and bolts of the actual partnership'.
    - 'This agreement covers risks, goals, legislation, actions. It is a pivotal point – needs to cover all those elements. Covers things like accountability'.
  - Legislation supports tourism in protected areas
    - 'At the moment they [legislation/regulations] are barriers to tourism'.
  - Adequate support (financial & organisational) for the partnership
    - 'Certainty is associated with financial support'.

Features contributing to success …context-related (cont.)

- Important but not always present
  - Shared accountability (50% present)
  - Legal support for implementation (57%)
  - Risk addressed (61%)
  - Written agreement (66%)

Most influential features (based on correlation analysis)…

FEATURES
- Decision makers involved
- Commitment
- Adequate support
- Shared accountability

OUTCOMES
- Purpose achieved
- Capacity strengthening
- Benefits
- Stimulation of innovation
- Improved understanding of others' interests

Overall contributors to successful partnerships

Communication
- Open communication
- Access to information
- *Trust*

Roles & powers
- Leadership
- Flexibility in roles
- Working with multiple levels

Understanding
- Helps balance conserving & use
- Working with partners' needs
- Commercial realities of tourism

Resources
- Staff
- Money
- Involvement
- Time

Regulations & agreements
- Written agreement
- Supportive legislation

What causes problems in partnerships?

- Lack of resources
  - Included staff, financial backing & time
  - *Solutions*: working with partners to get funding, communication, meetings
- Problems with regulations and agreements
  - Inconsistencies across jurisdictions
  - Short lease/licence terms
  - *Solutions*: adaptability/flexibility, negotiation (not courts)
- Lack of direction
  - Too diverse needs
  - Resistance to change
  - *Solutions*: focus on priorities, communication, accepting differences

Recommendations - Managing the *features* of partnerships for success

Recommendation 1. *Select* partners and *manage* the partnership itself to ensure
- ✓ Inclusion of decision makers
- ✓ Support from protected area agency
- ✓ Leadership
- ✓ Participation & empathy

Recommendation 2. Manage how the partnership *works* to ensure
- ✓ Communication, trust & commitment

Recommendation 3. Manage the *working environment* to ensure
- ✓ Adequate support
- ✓ Written agreement
- ✓ Supportive legislation

Recommendations - Managing the *overarching factors* for success

Recommendation 4. Achieving *open communication* by

- ✓ Two and multi-way exchanges
- ✓ 'Internal' and 'external' communication
- ✓ Addressing problems as soon as they arise
- ✓ Working with staff communication skills

Recommendation 5. Working effectively with *regulations and agreements* by

- ✓ Working innovatively
- ✓ Supporting legislation for tourism
- ✓ Continue to standardise/streamline licensing
- ✓ Work with all partners' legal obligations & liabilities

Recommendations - Creating *opportunities* for the future

Recommendation 5. Creating opportunities for innovation by:

- ✓ Working at multiple levels in organisations
- ✓ Taking a flexible, adaptable approach
- ✓ Fostering honesty and openness as a precursor to innovation

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