

Australia's National Landscapes Program – promoting our World Heritage icons

Hilary Schofield

Australia has some of the world's most distinctive and diverse natural environments, with unique wildlife, spectacular landforms, exceptional national parks and outstanding World Heritage Areas. Australia is also home to the world's oldest living culture. Internationally, these natural and cultural assets make Australia one of the most desirable visitor destinations. However, converting interest into visitation or advocacy requires compelling communication and delivery of consistently high quality visitor experiences.

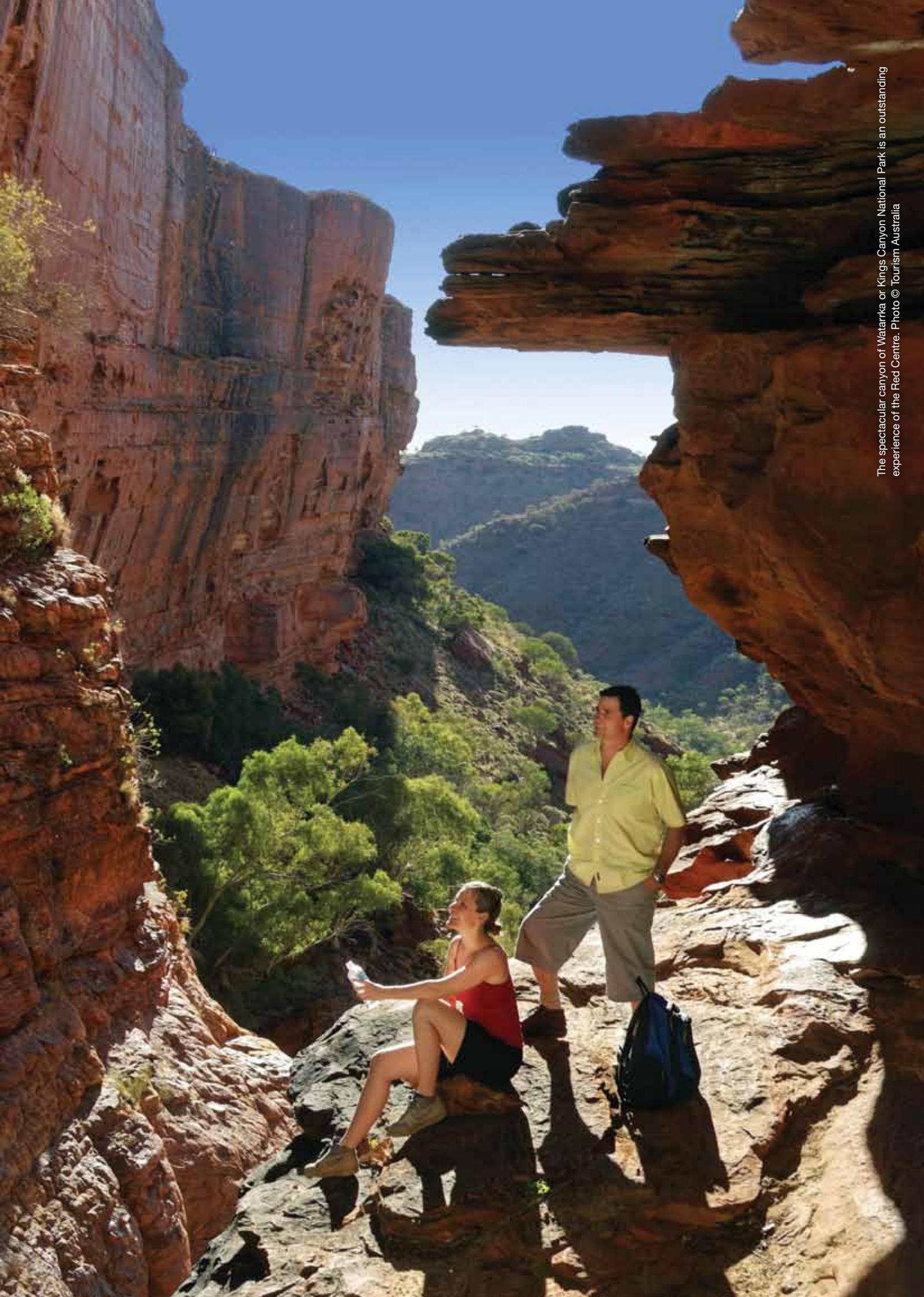
Australia's National Landscapes Program (Program) is a partnership between tourism and conservation managed by Tourism Australia and Parks Australia. The Program aims to:

- promote Australia's world class visitor experiences;
- increase the value of tourism to regional economies;
- enhance the role of protected areas in those economies; and
- build support for protecting our natural and cultural assets.

The Program was inspired by the need to make Australia's wealth of over 9,000 national parks, protected areas, World Heritage Areas and reserves more 'digestible' and easily understood by our domestic and international visitors. It does so by identifying regions (National Landscapes) with distinct and outstanding character and the potential to offer a world-class experience.

Protecting the natural and cultural environment is a key aim of the Program which encourages all elements of the tourism industry to undertake conservation initiatives that improve the visitor's experience and contribute to the environment. Examples of this range from improved threatened species interpretation and opening a wildlife hospital to visitors at Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary in Australia's Green Cauldron; to local arts groups promoting regional biodiversity values through exhibitions (with a percentage of funds raised donated to projects such as Landcare); to new 'voluntourism' products (e.g Conservation Volunteers Australia surveying yellow-footed rock-wallabies in the Flinders Ranges National Landscape).

Visitor experiences are not defined by land tenure. Accordingly, Australia's National Landscapes extend beyond individual national parks, World Heritage Areas,



The spectacular canyon of Watarrka or Kings Canyon National Park is an outstanding experience of the Red Centre. Photo © Tourism Australia

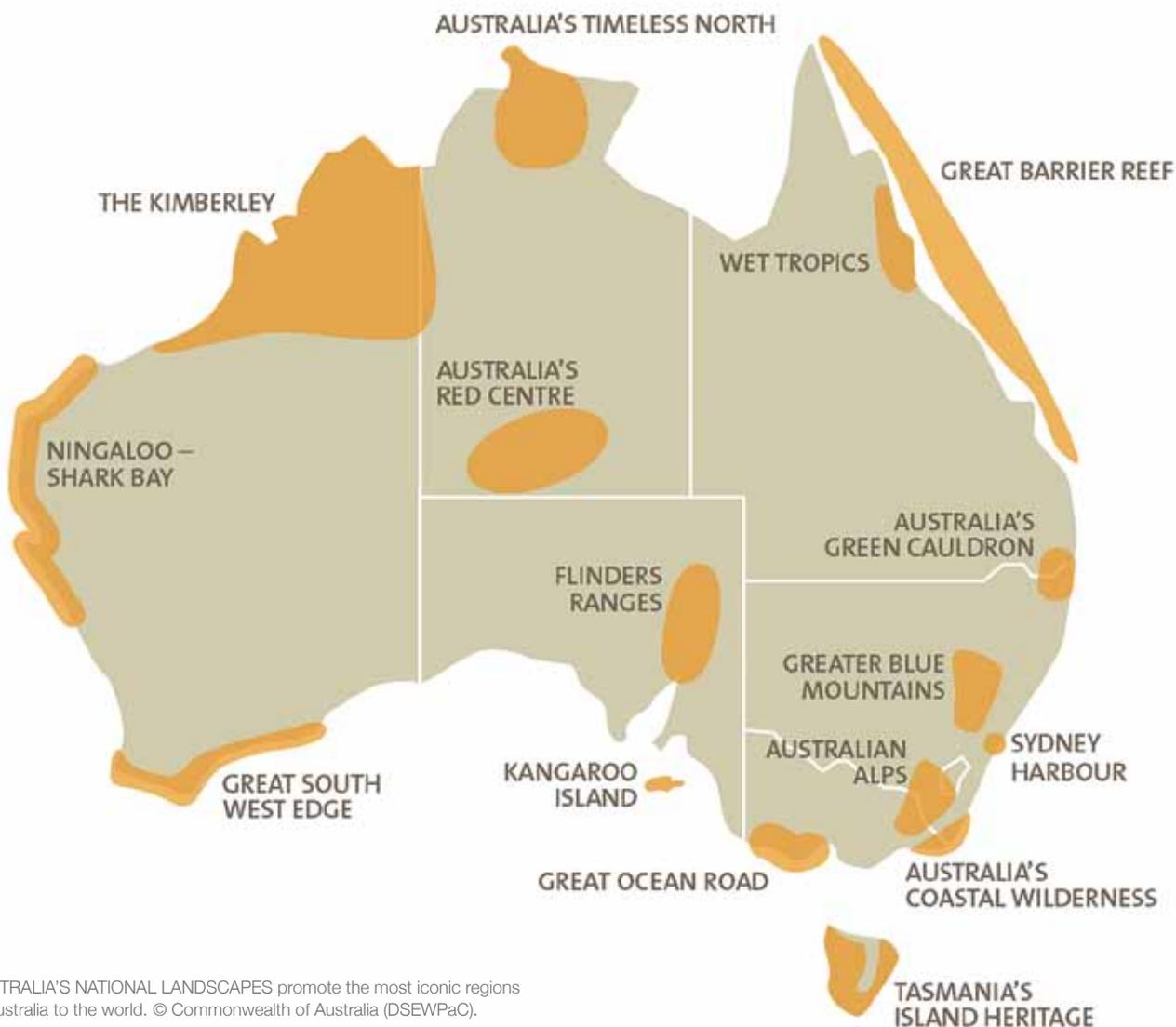
and state borders. It is the landscape itself, and the experience offered by the environment, that defines each National Landscape. Each Landscape incorporates a range of protected areas and management regimes that protect and provide the core attractions of these world-class environments.

Sixteen National Landscapes have been announced to date. Sydney Harbour is the most recent addition to the Program. It joins The Wet Tropics, Tasmania's Island Heritage, the Great Barrier Reef, Australia's Red Centre, Flinders Ranges, the Australian Alps, the Great Ocean Road, Australia's Coastal Wilderness, Australia's Timeless North, Australia's Green Cauldron, Greater Blue Mountains, the Kimberley, Kangaroo Island, Great South West Edge, and Ningaloo-Shark Bay. Of the set of National Landscapes, nine incorporate World Heritage Areas, underscoring the value of World Heritage to Australia's tourism industry.

The Role of World Heritage Areas within the National Landscapes

Consumer research confirms that 'nature' and 'journeys' are the most motivating experiences for travel to Australia (Tourism Australia, 2010). Australia's National Landscapes provide plentiful opportunities for visitors to connect with nature and undertake a range of journeys (spiritual, emotional and physical). In many cases a World Heritage site nested within a National Landscape provides the iconic drawcard to a region (think sunset over the flood plains in Kakadu National Park, connecting to the worlds oldest living culture at Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, or swimming with whale sharks off Cape Range National Park in the Ningaloo Coast World Heritage Area).

While the icon value of World Heritage sites is often difficult to differentiate from external factors such as economic cycles, marketing and ease of access



AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL LANDSCAPES promote the most iconic regions of Australia to the world. © Commonwealth of Australia (DSEWPac).

(Buckley, 2002) we do know that a significant per cent of visitors are influenced in their travel decision by the World Heritage brand (King, 2011). We also know that World Heritage Areas are significant drivers of economic growth. In 2008, Australia's then 15 World Heritage Areas contributed over \$16 billion in annual direct and indirect national output and around 83,000 direct and indirect national jobs with 95 per cent of these impacts from visitor expenditure (Australian Government, 2008).

However, World Heritage Areas should not be considered in isolation from their surrounds. This is equally true for tourism management as it is for the effective management of ecological threats such as climate change, weed species, or feral animals. By considering World Heritage Areas in a landscape context there is greater opportunity to engage with local communities; build constituencies of support; and ensure appropriate access, accommodation, marketing and partnership opportunities. Australia's National Landscapes Program helps to connect individual sites to a wider context and can benefit World Heritage Areas in five key ways:

1. Partnerships – The Program provides a framework that supports networks of stakeholder collaboration: tourism organisations and operators working with protected area agencies, heritage managers, local councils, conservation groups, government agencies and Indigenous communities. By collectively working to agree a brand identity for the Landscape, such groups are able to plan and deliver the promise of their region. By combining forces, funds are leveraged and the Landscape is marketed with a consistent message.

For example, in the Wet Tropics National Landscape, the Wet Tropics Management Authority championed the Program as it aligns with a strategic focus to support a sustainable nature-based tourism industry that delivers the highest standards of presentation of the natural and cultural values of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

The Authority took a leadership role in the effort to have the Wet Tropics recognised as a National Landscape. Their motivation was to ensure that maximum community, industry and conservation benefits flow from the management of the World Heritage Area. Benefits include provision of outstanding visitor experiences, awareness of the values and conservation needs and understanding of the deep spiritual and cultural connections of Rainforest Aboriginal people to the Wet Tropics.

The Wet Tropics Steering Committee challenges participants to work together and 'think big', leveraging their funds and ideas for a common benefit. The membership balances tourism and environmental

expertise and is currently made up of representation from the following organisations:

- Regional Tourism Organizations (Tourism Tropical North Queensland / Townsville Enterprise)
- James Cook University
- Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service
- The Alliance for Sustainable Tourism
- Gulf Savannah Tourism Network
- Daintree Coast
- Wet Tropics Management Authority
- Conservation Volunteers Australia
- Cairns and Far North Environment Centre
- Regional Councils
- Several individual tourism operators

2. Point of Difference – Through a series of workshops and research the Landscapes uncover their world class experiences and unique 'point of difference'. For Landscapes that feature World Heritage Areas, this is a chance to feature elements of Outstanding Universal Value and increase community understanding of what makes an area stand out from the rest of the world. This work then underpins planning, tourism development, and marketing. The process significantly deepens understanding of a Landscape's World Heritage values.

3. Planning – Each Landscape completes an Experience Development Strategy (EDS). The EDS is a planning tool to improve the availability of world class experiences to the target market.

This methodology (DSEWPaC, 2012) takes a visitor centred approach and is useful for considering how tourism experiences can interpret and present natural and cultural values. For example, in the Flinders Ranges National Landscape the steering committee considered how tourism products, sustainability initiatives, services, information, access, marketing, and infrastructure could be improved to "reveal the story of life on earth" and connect visitors to the outback culture and geoheritage of the region. As a result, a number of tourism projects were identified, including "Showcasing the Ediacaran story" experiences that will enable the visitor to go home with an appreciation of the significance of the first known multicellular animal life on Earth - the Ediacaran fossils (Flinders Ranges, 2011). Since completion of the EDS the region has successfully secured additional funding and support for implementation of projects.

4. Protection – Protecting the natural and cultural values of the National Landscapes is clearly central to ensuring long term success. Building support for the protection of values is an explicit aim of the Program. In recent years, the Program has helped widen constituencies of support for protected areas and

increased understanding of the role natural assets play in our tourism economy. Each year the nature-based tourism sector contributes \$23 billion to Australia's economy and in the 2012 March quarter, international visitors undertaking nature-based activities increased 7.4 per cent, nearly twice the increase seen in the overall international market (Tourism and Transport Forum, 2012).

5. Promotion - Opportunities associated with being a National Landscape are significant. Landscapes have access to a dedicated marketing program led by Tourism Australia. This includes the consumer site Australia.com (see link) with content translated into 17 languages and exposure to international trade, social and media engagement. World Heritage Areas within the National Landscapes can tap into these sophisticated and targeted promotional opportunities. For example, Australia's Red Centre, which incorporates the World Heritage Area Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, has formed a 'Red Hot Stories Team' who worked to establish themes and stories for 2012. The stories showcase what the region has to offer visitors, profile the natural and cultural values of key sites and identify conservation activities currently underway in the region. In 2012, visitation to the consumer site grew by 40% to 212,000 visits and the average length of stay was 12.5 minutes, demonstrating very strong market interest in National Landscapes content worldwide.

The top five markets accessing Australia's Red Centre page were the United States, Australia, United Kingdom, New Zealand and Canada (Australian Government, 2012). In addition, the region was profiled in seven editions of Tourism Australia's Media e-Newsletters; featured in the Downunder Travel Bulletin distributed to 11,200 travel agents worldwide; and featured in training modules to educate travel agents worldwide about the region. Over 22,000 media visitors accessed Australia's Red Centre suggested itinerary, media fact sheet, conservation fact sheet, and wildlife calendar and similar results were achieved across other Landscapes.

The Future

Australia's National Landscapes Program has proven its effectiveness as a model for collaboration and partnership. However, the Program is still in its foundation stages. It will take sustained effort to increase community and visitor understanding of Australia's natural and cultural values, build support for protection, deliver conservation success, secure new resources, offer well designed sustainable visitor infrastructure, and deliver world class tourism products.

The current planning horizon of the Program extends to 2020 and beyond to align with policy objectives in Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, 2010) and Australia's National Long Term Tourism Strategy (Australian Government, 2009). As the Program continues to evolve there is a huge opportunity for World Heritage sites to increase engagement, capitalise on their point of difference, share stories, promote new experiences, contribute to EDS planning and build advocacy and support.

References

- Australian Government (2012). Australia's National Landscape Program 2012 Outcome Report, March 2011 – June 2012. Tourism Australia and Director of National Parks, Sydney. Available at: http://www.tourism.australia.com/en-au/downloads/Outcome_Report_-_Australias_Red_Centre.pdf [Accessed 5 December 2012].
- Australian Government (2010). Tourism Experiences Fact Sheet: Driving Visitation to Australian Using Experience Themes, Tourism Australia. Available at: http://www.tourism.australia.com/en-au/downloads/Experience_Fact_Sheet.pdf [Accessed 5 December 2012].
- Australian Government (2009). National Long Term Tourism Strategy, Department of Resources Energy and Tourism, Canberra. Available at: <http://www.ret.gov.au/tourism/Documents/tmc/DRET%20Tourism%20Strategy.pdf> [Accessed 5 December 2012].
- Australian Government (2008). Economic Activity of Australia's World Heritage Areas, Final Report, BDA Group and Gillespie Economics, Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, Canberra. Available at: <http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/publications/report/pubs/economic-activity-report.pdf> [Accessed 5 December 2012].
- Buckley, R. (2002). World Heritage Icon Value: Contribution of World Heritage Branding to Nature Tourism. Available at: <http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/ahc/publications/commission/books/pubs/iconvalue.pdf> [Accessed 5 December 2012].
- DSEWPaC (2012). National Landscapes - Experience Development Strategies. Available at: <http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/publications/landscapes/experience-development.pdf> [Accessed 5 April 2013].

Flinders Ranges (2011). Flinders Ranges Experience Development Strategy, Department of Resources Energy and Tourism, Canberra. Available at: <http://www.ret.gov.au/tourism/Documents/nltts/working-grps/dmp/Flinders-Ranges-Experience-Development-Strategy.pdf> [Accessed 5 December 2012].

King, L. M. (2011). Investigating the role of the World Heritage brand in attracting visitors to protected areas in Queensland, Australia. PhD thesis, James Cook University. Available at: <http://eprints.jcu.edu.au/21186/> [Accessed 5 December 2012].

Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council (2010). Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010 – 2030, Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Canberra.

Tourism and Transport Forum (2012). Nature-based Tourism Report, March Quarter 2012. Available at: <http://www.ttf.org.au/Content/ttfstatsnaturalreport.aspx> [Accessed 5 December 2012].

Links

<http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/national-landscapes/index.html>

<http://www.tourism.australia.com/nl>

Author

Hilary Schofield

Director, Commonwealth Marine Reserves Stakeholder and Community Engagement, Parks Australia

At the time of the Symposium:

Director, Planning, Tourism and National Landscapes
Parks Australia

33 Allara Street Canberra, ACT,

hilary.schofield@environment.gov.au

Biography

Hilary joined Parks Australia in 2008 and until late 2012 helped to develop and champion Australia's National Landscape Program with Tourism Australia. During this time she was responsible for protected area planning and tourism development in Parks Australia's terrestrial reserves including Uluru-Kata Tjuta and Kakadu National Park. As member of the National Long Term Tourism Strategy Working Group for Destination Management Planning and the Indigenous Tourism Working Group, she was closely involved with representing protected area interests in the development of national tourism policy.

Hilary holds qualifications in geography, environmental science and postgraduate energy studies. She has previously held executive level positions with the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, the Australian Greenhouse Office and the Tasmanian Government on a range of energy, climate and environment issues.

Snorkling off Coral Beach in the pristine waters of Ningaloo World Heritage Area
Photo © Tourism Australia

