

# Tourism Industry Influence on TWWHA Management in 2013-2015

A National Park such as this now set apart may and ought to be a most valuable possession in many ways, in which the "business asset" value may be the least worth taking into account - for there are things far more worthy to be thought of than the lucre to be obtained from tourists or by other means.

[Source - *The Mercury* 10 March 1915, on the reservation of Tasmania's first National Park at Mt Field]

The Tourism Industry Council of Tasmania (TICT) appears to have considerable influence with today's government when it comes to what can only be described as 'industrial' tourism in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage (TWWHA). The TNPA would argue that this is an undue, unhealthy and ethically questionable influence.

Clearly the government has an interest in increasing tourism in Tasmania for economic benefit. The government stated this in its election campaign and it reinforced this message on gaining power in March 2014. But an almost exclusive reliance on the tourism industry alone, and then only one arm of the tourism industry, is not a sound or balanced approach when considering something as complex and multi-faceted as the TWWHA.

The extent of TICT influence on government is revealed in the preparation and content of the following two documents released since March 2014, neither of which included public consultation:

## 1. Reimagining the Visitor Experience of Tasmania's Wilderness World Heritage Areas – Ecotourism Investment Profile

*Reimagining*, released in June 2014, is a glossy proposal for how the TWWHA can be further exploited and used to benefit commercial tourism. A project chaired by the TICT and managed by the TICT, its perspective is very much that of the tourism industry. The name also clearly indicates that this is about potential tourism investment, not about 'reserve appropriate' tourism.

The document's stated goals (objectives) are to:

- Develop a new vision for the tourism experience of the TWWHA for the next 30 years
- Identify sustainable, low-impact, and innovative tourism activities and concepts that could be developed in the TWWHA

- Provide government and industry leadership to progress identified vision and priorities
- Contribute to the development of the new TWWHA Management Plan

The document was prepared using, in part, government funds and included no community or expert, other than tourism, consultation. Why is it that this document had government facilitation, but the review of other aspects of TWWHA management (except for Aboriginal heritage) was not similarly encouraged or funded?

While some of the tourism experiences the document promotes might be appropriate in the TWWHA, there are a number of others that are clearly not appropriate, for example 'luxury in the wilderness' lodges (an oxymoron), extending motorised boating up the Gordon River (to date not considered sustainable due to wake erosion issues researched and demonstrated in the 1980s); aircraft flights and access to most of the TWWHA (destructive of wilderness quality and a potential risk to values through fuel spillages and accidents); and adventure activities such as ziplines, *via ferrata* and mountain biking (which exploit, but do not 'present', the values of the TWWHA). The document also displays considerable overreach by including the Tarkine (not part of the TWWHA) and a disconcerting lack of concern for accuracy, as evident from its provision of an out of date (2008) map of the TWWHA.

The TICT is keen to have us believe that it understands the need for tourism to be appropriate to the TWWHA and environmentally sustainable, and that the document will ensure "a reputation for quality experiences and environmental sustainability". The document however glosses over the potential impacts on the values of the TWWHA, including its wilderness character, and environmental sustainability (providing barely a paragraph on this aspect for each of the multi-page proposals it contains). There is also no mention of limits of acceptable use or cumulative impacts. Further, the term 'ecotourism' appears to be used solely as a marketing tool, justified on the basis that the tourism opportunity is based in a natural environment, and not, as they hope we will think, indicating that it is ecologically benign.

The Reimagining project aims "to inform Government policy making on tourism in natural areas and contribute to the public consultation process around the new TWWHA Management Plan". It would seem however that the bulk of the tourism concepts in *Reimagining*, including some of the more environmentally questionable, have been directly incorporated into the 2014 *Draft Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan* – with no public consultation and with no apparent assessment of their appropriateness in the TWWHA from a conservation point of view.

## 2. Parks 21

*Parks 21* is the new strategic action plan for tourism in Tasmanian parks and reserves, also described as a 'memorandum of understanding developed by the TICT and the PWS'. Released in December 2014, its stated aim is "to facilitate environmentally, socially and economically sustainable tourism activity in Tasmania's parks and reserves", as well as "to enhance the visitor experience in these wonderful places". It is also promoted as being "mutually beneficial" and as providing "the tools to both define and work together towards the concept of sustainable ecotourism."<sup>1</sup> [Source – PWS website, Jan 2015]

A review of the document reveals that it lacks the capacity, or tools, to deliver genuine environmentally sustainable tourism and fails to display any real commitment to environmentally sustainable tourism. The document lacks any –

- definition of environmentally sustainable tourism or sustainable ecotourism;
- actions for environmental impact assessment or proposed monitoring regime, and
- substantive guidelines or policy for how environmental sustainability is to be achieved.

The best the *Parks 21* document can come up with, and which is patently inadequate, is:

- a key objective for 'Sustainable Experience Delivery' (the other two being Enhanced Tourism Focus & Enterprise and Economic Activity);

and the following policies -

- 'The PWS and TICT will drive and promote tourism operator-led conservation initiatives such as the PWS Green Guardians, and other programs and certification schemes';
- 'The TICT will engage and provide advocacy on strategic policy issues affecting parks and reserves'; and
- 'Licensed operators are required to obtain and maintain accreditation with a TICT endorsed tourism accreditation program as a condition of their Commercial Visitor Services licence'.

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<sup>1</sup> The TICT already has a long established partnership with the government tourism agency Tourism Tasmania, established through *Tourism 21, The Tasmanian Government & Tasmanian Tourism Industry Joint Strategic Business Plan*. The first Tourism 21 was brought out in the late 1990s, and the most recent update was August 2013. Interestingly this document has absolutely no mention of environmentally sustainable tourism.

A statement that also sounds warning bells is that “Parks 21 recognises that the PWS is a significant tourism agency in Tasmania”. This is news to the TNPA which thought that the PWS was a reserve land management agency with a priority to ensure conservation!

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The above two documents were prepared and released without any conservation expert or community consultation. They have in effect been handed to Tasmanians as a *fait accompli*, ignoring all best practice and policy for consultation.

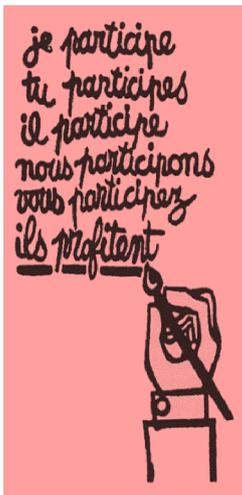


Figure 1. French student poster - “I participate, you participate, he participates, we participate, you [plural] participate – they profit” (Source – Arnstein, S.R., 1969, ‘A

Ladder of Citizen Participation’, JAIP, Vol. 35 (4), pp. 216-224)

They demonstrate that the TICT has been positioning itself as the key industry stakeholder in relation to Tasmania’s reserved land system; and that it wishes to be in total control of all things tourism-related. This includes environmentally sustainable tourism – which the TICT does not have the expertise to measure or assess, nor does the PWS on its own have this capacity, given that the scientific expertise to do this was removed to another part of government over a decade ago.

The tourism industry does not have the expertise to take on its proposed ‘guardian role’, especially in relation to ensuring environmentally sustainable tourism. The industry, in particular the TICT, also has a clear conflict of interest as its members are, and will potentially continue to be, among the commercial tourism operators exploiting the TWWHA.

The government can only be construed as irresponsible by continuing to engage with the TICT at this inappropriately close and exclusive level <sup>2</sup>, particularly given the very opaque nature of the relationship and the proposals it is keeping secret from the public.

The TNPA acknowledges that there are many successful small tourism businesses already operating directly and indirectly with the TWWHA and other Tasmanian reserves that act responsibly and have environmentally sustainable practices. Very few of these businesses however are pushing for new tourism developments or for control of the management of tourism in our reserves.<sup>3</sup> It is likely in fact that these businesses will be impacted by the new businesses being proposed, for example in the *Reimagining* document.

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### **And what is not being said about tourism in Tasmania's reserves!**

Over the past decade or so there has been a huge waste of public resources on administering potential developments in the TWWHA and other reserves, which have not proceeded (e.g. Cockle Creek East) or which have proceeded in vastly modified form (e.g. Pumphouse Point), because the initial proposals were pushed through and were not appropriate.

Dealing with these tourism development issues has also tied up the PWS and diverted their attention and resources from core conservation and management issues.

The public are currently not allowed to know what returns the government gets from these businesses, what the cost of these operations is to government, what conditions are placed on these businesses, whether they are meeting these conditions, or whether the reserves are being used to support unsuccessful or marginally successful businesses. All such information is protected behind a commercial-in-confidence firewall.

Potential economic and social benefits will be maximised by locating developments outside the TWWHA and in or near existing communities, not in the TWWHA reserves which have much greater associated establishment and running costs.

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<sup>2</sup> See reference 2: TNPA Letter to Mercury Dec 2014 Parks 21 Response

<sup>3</sup> The owner of one of these businesses is Ian Johnstone of the successful Maria Island Walk, who has been publicly lobbying in the last year for a hut based commercial walk on the South Coast Track with, one assumes, himself as the concessionaire.

The types of tourism developments that are being proposed are commercial developments that will provide private profits to a few (including, potentially, foreign investors), not maximise benefits to the broader Tasmanian community, nor providing for broad community access.

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