

Climate change governance in Australian tourism: Collaboration for low-carbon tourism

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Introduction and aims

The Australian tourism industry is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change on natural areas and the destination choices of long-haul travellers concerned about carbon emissions. Human impacts on biodiversity, natural resources and the atmosphere are also increasing, along with research interest in environmental, climate, and sustainability governance. Governance involves the development of new relationships between the state (i.e. politicians, bureaucracy), civil society and corporate interests, where citizens and diverse interest groups actively engage with government and business on key policy and planning issues (Marsh, 2002). Governance structures and processes are expressed in policy networks based on 'strategic development of partnerships and alliances between public and private spheres' (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007, pp. 54-55). Beaumont and Dredge (2010) examined the structure and operation of three different local tourism governance networks for their effectiveness and impact on sustainable tourism management. Collaborative governance for planning and policy-making 'refers to cooperation, support and mutual assistance between actors and agencies in the pursuit of common interests' (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007, p. 461). For example, collaboration between tourism organisations and land trusts in the USA is based on mutual conservation goals and preservation of scenic natural areas (Chancellor, Norman, Farmer & Coe, 2010). This paper assesses the collaborative governance of climate change in Australian tourism, focusing on the carbon reduction initiatives promoted by government tourism agencies.

Background context

Climate change adaptation and mitigation is an emerging issue in the Australian tourism industry. The federal government recognised tourism's vulnerability to the impacts of climate change in Australia and established a National Tourism and Climate Change Taskforce in 2007. In 2008 a national plan entitled *Tourism and Climate Change—A Framework for Action* outlined five areas of action designed to achieve the following outcomes: (1) improved understanding of tourism's vulnerability to the physical and economic impacts of climate change; (2) a tourism industry prepared for future constraints on carbon but still able to contribute economically; (3) repositioned marketing strategies that address the challenges and opportunities of climate change; (4) an industry informed by effective outreach and communication; and (5) 'a cooperative approach to implementation' (DRET, 2008, p. 5). One of the outcomes of the second action area was the *Climate Change Guide: Mitigation and*

Adaptation Measures for Australian Tourism Operators, which explained the issue of climate change, and provided details for implementing mitigation and adaptation measures (DRET, 2009). Climate change tourism workshops were conducted throughout Australia in 2009. The Sustainable Tourism CRC also researched the impacts of climate change on five tourism destinations: Kakadu, Tropical North Queensland, Blue Mountains, Barossa Valley and Victorian Alps (STCRC, 2009; Turton, Hadwen & Wilson, 2009). However, the collaborative governance of climate change responses by Australia government tourism agencies has not previously been analysed.

Previous research on tourism governance has examined how the operation of three local government tourism networks influenced sustainable tourism policy initiatives. These included a council-led, participant-led and LTO-led tourism network operating in the Redlands City Council area of south east Queensland (Beaumont & Dredge, 2010). To achieve sustainability, the council-led network focused on economic development and marketing of tourism rather than environmental or social sustainability. The participant-led network developed actions to improve the environmental and social outcomes of tourism on North Stradbroke Island, while the LTO-led network obtained funding for a sustainable tourism committee and supported environmental accreditation. The three groups collaborated on environmental and community aspects of sustainable tourism at different levels. Hence, 'there is a need to further explore the multi-network governance structures wherein different networks focus on different versions of sustainable tourism policy' (Beaumont & Dredge, 2010, p. 26). Wray (2009) reviewed the interactions of key stakeholders in the evolution of tourism policy and planning at Byron Bay. This research demonstrated the need for specific expertise of various stakeholders and coordination between government agencies at both a vertical and horizontal level. Collaboration theory has been applied to community tourism planning by Jamal and Getz, (1995), who outlined guidelines for achieving collaboration, while Johnston and Tyrell (2005) note that tourism agencies benefit from collaboration with community groups on sustainability projects. Examples include collaboration for sustainable tourism through on-ground conservation activities by the Waitomo Caves Landcare Group in New Zealand (Pavlovich, 2001), and by Land Trusts in the USA (Chancellor et al., 2010). This paper addresses collaborative governance of climate change in tourism by assessing the responses of government tourism agencies and their involvement with various stakeholders.

Approach/methods

Information on climate change, sustainability and green business practices is drawn from the corporate websites, annual reports, tourism plans, fact sheets, and case studies produced by these state or territory tourism agencies from 2007 to 2010. This paper highlights emerging climate change governance in Australian tourism involving federal and state government agencies, tourism industry groups and environmental consultants. Climate change mitigation by tourism agencies and operators involves collaborating with government green business programs, carbon footprint auditors and offset providers. Government tourism agencies also vary in their integration of climate change issues into sustainable tourism planning and management (Zeppel & Beaumont, 2011).

Findings

Tourism agencies for Queensland, the Northern Territory, Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania have been the most pro-active in collaborating on climate change issues (Table 1). Queensland has the most online information for tourism stakeholders about climate change, sustainability, carbon offsetting and going green, with emissions reductions initiatives for tourism businesses part of the Sustainable Regions Program, and Tourism Environmental Indicators for operators. The Northern Territory also has website information and fact sheets about climate change, and implemented the Outback Offsets (n.d.) program in 2008/09 for three tour operators by purchasing carbon credits from a landfill gas plant in Darwin. Victoria has integrated climate change issues into nature tourism and environmentally sustainable tourism plans with climate change information to be added to their website. Both Tasmania and Western Australia have a climate change section on their corporate website, with a green tourism program implemented for operators in Tasmania (Tourism Tasmania, 2010), and a carbon footprint pilot study of selected tourism operators in WA (Tourism WA, 2010). Collaborative governance of climate change is more developed in states with climate change policies, destinations vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (e.g. Great Barrier Reef, Qld), or dependent on long haul travellers (Qld, WA, NT).

Table 1 Carbon mitigation by government tourism agencies

	Climate Change Programs	Key Drivers	Carbon Agencies
Tourism Queensland www.tq.com.au	'Sustainability & Climate Change' website Sustainable Regions Program Tourism Environmental Indicators Benchmark 2010 Offsetting Your Carbon Footprint fact sheet	Impacts of CC CPRS National Carbon Offset Standard <i>Qld. Climate Smart Adaptation Action Plan</i> National Action Plan on <i>Tourism & Climate Change</i>	Carbon Reduction Institute Climate Action Certification Dept of Climate Change Earthcheck, EC3 Global ecoBiz GHG Protocol NABERS
Tourism NT www.tourismnt.com.au	'Going Green' website 'Outback Offsets' (2008/09) www.outbackoffsets.com 'Tourism – Make the Switch' (08/09) (renewable energy) Carbon Offsetting fact sheet Report agency emissions	CPRS Consumers & CC Impacts of CC <i>Five Year Tourism Strategic Plan 2008-2012</i> NT Climate Change Policy & Coordination Unit National Action Plan on <i>Tourism & Climate Change</i>	Alice Solar City Climate Action Certification Earthcheck ecoBiz NT Greenhouse Challenge Plus NABERS Hotel PE International (Outback Offsets)
Tourism WA www.tourism.wa.gov.au	'Climate Change' website Carbon Footprint Pilot Study (2009)	Consumers & CC Impacts of CC WA Office of Climate Change National Action Plan on <i>Tourism & Climate Change</i> National Climate Change Adaptation Framework <i>Climate Change Guide</i>	Carbon Neutral Dept. of Climate Change DEWHA GHG Protocol ISO Standard Sustainable Infrastructure Australia (SIA) WA Small Business Development Corporation
Tourism Victoria www.tourism.vic.gov.au	'Tourism Excellence' website www.tourismexcellence.com.au Tourism destination carbon	Impacts of CC Consumers & CC National Climate Change Adaptation Framework	CarbonDown Carbon Innovators Network Climate Action Certification

	footprint study (planned) Audit own carbon footprint	National Action Plan on <i>Tourism & Climate Change</i> CPRS <i>Our Environment, Our Future</i> (Vic. Govt. strategy)	Greenhouse Challenge Plus Grow Me The Money Sustainability Victoria
Tourism Tasmania www.tourismtasmania.com.au	'Climate Change' website Green Tourism www.greentourism.org.au	Consumers & CC National Tourism & Climate Change Taskforce Tasmanian Climate Change Strategy Reducing Tas. Govt.'s Carbon Footprint CPRS	Climate Change Office Tas. Climate Managers Earthcheck EC3 Global EcoSmartBiz Greenhouse Challenge Plus Tony Charters & Associates
SA Tourism Commission www.tourism.sa.gov.au	2 website pages - Green SA & Environmentally Sound Technology Resources	CPRS & higher costs Promote low carbon tourism	Climate Action Certification

CC = Climate change; CPRS=Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme; DEWHA = Department of Environment, Water, Heritage & the Arts; GHG = Greenhouse gas; ISO = International Standards Organisation; NABERS = National Australian Built Environment Rating System

State tourism agencies are collaborating on many of the actions suggested in the Sustainable Tourism CRC study, *The Impacts of Climate Change on Australian Tourism Destinations* (STCRC, 2009; Turton, Hadwen & Wilson, 2009). These include providing information to tourism operators about dealing with climate change, greener business practices, developing low carbon tourism and carbon offsets, and marketing clean green products. However, few government tourism agencies are auditing and reporting on their own carbon footprints and mitigation initiatives.

This study reaffirms the collaborative roles of government tourism agencies in tourism planning, provision of climate change information, training, and industry outreach. Collaborative governance of climate change in Australia tourism requires cooperation, support and assistance from research agencies, sustainable business programs, and carbon consultants or offsetting companies. This review will assist government tourism agencies to improve collaborative governance of climate change impacts through policies, strategic plans, carbon reduction programs and other green business advice to reduce emissions of tourism operators. Future research could also apply collaboration theory (Jamal & Getz, 1995) to other areas of tourism governance.

Keywords: climate change, collaborative governance, government tourism agencies; Australia

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