



Planning for People

Report of

**West MacDonnell National Park
Tourism Industry Think Tank**



March 11, 2008



Please Note - All views contained in this report are the personal contributions of individuals participating in the workshop. While highly valued, they do not directly represent government nor industry policy. The thoughts and ideas presented are public suggestions to inform the West MacDonnell National Park Joint Management planning processes and should not be taken out of context.

The participation of individuals in the workshop is appreciated and their input will be communicated to the planing process.

1. Introduction

The Parks and Wildlife Service of the Northern Territory is engaged in the development of the West MacDonnell National Park Joint Management Plan with the Traditional Owners of this country.

It was recognised that the tourism industry would provide a valuable contribution to the preparation of the draft Plan. It was also thought their direct involvement from the start would strengthen the plan and help galvanise a long term working relationship. The Tourism Think Tank was held on March 11th, 2008 and was attended by 23 representatives of the tourism industry, school users and Government stakeholders selected via a two stage Expression of Interest process. With the exception of the accommodation sector, it was agreed there was a good cross section of relevant people at the workshop.

The workshop was structured to gain maximum involvement of all participants in the discussions during the day. The participant list and the agenda used are attached to this report.

1.1 The Participant Expectations

Participants identified what they expected to gain from their involvement in the workshop. The primary expectations were:

- Gaining a greater understanding of the joint management process including how it might impact on tourism;
- An opportunity for industry to become engaged in the joint management process;
- An understanding of how different groups want to take West MacDonnell National Park into the future and participating in articulating the vision;
- A learning process to understand what the core recreational values are, what plans there are for the future and how joint management may impact on or enhance them;
- An opportunity to have their say and for Parks and Wildlife Service NT to listen;
- To both provide and hear new ideas and perspectives.

1.2 Participant feedback

Informal feedback has suggested that participants were extremely pleased with the Think Tank. In particular they expressed appreciation that:

- They were consulted;
- They had the opportunity to contribute;
- There was a good range of people from private and public sector;
- They would be consulted in the future;
- Participants were also happy with the approach adopted at the workshop.

2. Vision

The workshop participants were actively involved in discussions as to how they would like to see tourism being offered and visitors managed into the long term. They recognised that their vision for tourism would form a part of a greater vision for the joint management of the park.

The primary elements of the vision are:

- The park will continue to offer a natural experience that provides the visitor with a sense they are in a wild, rugged and remote area.
- There will be management of increased visitor numbers to maintain the experience.
- There will be opportunities for interactive learning about all aspects of the park. Aboriginal cultural experiences will expand and visitors will be able to leave the park with a better understanding of the Parks unique values.
- There will be partnerships between land managers, the Aboriginal community, the tourism industry and private sector.
- There will be a diversity of recreation experiences for everyone including opportunities to get away from it all ; to experience the outback at remote sites where you can experience the solitude.
- Information will be delivered in many ways ranging from a Visitor Centre through to contemporary technology. The use of a range of media will assist in creating appropriate expectations of the park and enriching visitor experiences.
- There will be a strong relationship between the tourism industry and Aboriginal people, building cultural awareness which is mindful of community needs and expectations.
- There will be user friendly systems and processes to enable engagement of relevant stakeholders in the park (commercial operators, partners, visitors).
- There will be improved economic benefits gained from the park to the region and the community.
- Infrastructure will be well planned and maintained and will be sensitively designed and low impact.
- The experiences that reflect the West MacDonnell visitor needs will be provided and managed beyond the current boundary (adjacent lands, other nearby parks, linkages etc.).

2.1 Guiding Principles

The workshop participants developed the following Guiding Principles that would be necessary if the vision is to be achieved.

Park values

1. Conservation values and the environment must be managed to the highest standards including effective strategies for primary park functions such as fire, flora, fauna, pests, and the implementation of strategies for use of sustainable energy.

2. The primary focus of education and interpretation should be on the natural and cultural values of the park.
3. All individuals and stakeholders must learn and appreciate that it is their responsibility to look after the park.

Visitor experiences

4. Visitor numbers must be managed to a level where they do not compromise park values and experience.
5. All infrastructure (both on park and adjacent) must be relevant to visitor needs, sensitively designed and sited to retain a sense of isolation and remoteness that is an important part of the visitor experience.
6. Recreational activities must be managed so there is minimal conflict between them and the experience is of the highest standard for each activity.
7. High quality, accurate and current information must be provided through the right media and outlet to suit the different park visitor markets.
8. In providing a diverse range of experiences for visitors to match market needs, some activities may best be provided outside the park.
9. Infrastructure should be in keeping with the landscape and be kept to a minimum. In particular, interpretive infrastructure, including signs, should be kept to a minimum given the potential of modern technology and the web as a personalized, invisible interpretive tool.

Relationships

10. All stakeholders in the park must be identified and a cooperative relationship developed between joint management partners and the stakeholders (working together not alone).
11. Government resources should not be used in ways that compete with work being done by the Territory private sector.

Social and economic benefits

12. Any economic benefits and revenue to the Government generated should be directed back into the park.
13. There must be opportunities for employment of the Aboriginal community so culture can be maintained and passed on to family.
14. The plan needs to be robust but flexible to changing trends in society and visitor needs.

3. Key Experiences

The workshop participants identified what were seen as the most important recreational values of the West MacDonnell National Park which must continue to be available for the visitor.

These were:

1. A place where you can experience the 'Real Australia' and experience it in many ways from driving through to stopping and enjoying it at visitor sites.
2. The opportunity to get 'Back to basics' and experience a significant contrast from everyday life in remote sites where you are close to nature and culture.
3. Interactive learning experiences about the unique culture and nature of the area and enabling you to meet locals.
4. The range of visitor sites and infrastructure that offers experiences that are accessible to different groups.
5. A range of walking opportunities from low key self reliant through to more developed walks that still enable an experience of the West MacDonnell Ranges landscape.
6. Adventure activities including scenic flights.
7. The range of visitor services available (eg accommodation, kiosk, transport etc).
8. Individual experiences such as photography, bird watching.

3.1 Threats and management strategies for key experiences

The workshop participants considered each of these important recreational values and identified any threats or conflicts, which had the potential to impact on them. Strategies for dealing with these were then identified. These are documented in the following table. The 'Real Australia' and 'Back to basics' experiences were grouped together as similar.

Unique characteristics	Threats	Strategies for management
Experiencing the Real Australia and Back to basics		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quite accessible but still remote compared to other places ▪ The vistas are unique to this place ▪ Remoteness, solitude ▪ Doesn't take long to get out amongst it ▪ Outback characters ▪ Can have a real fire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An imbalance – too accessible, too many people ▪ Not enough opportunities to spread people out ▪ Change to natural environment – fire, ferals, weeds ▪ Visitor impacts eg 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The need to have alternative opportunities, perhaps outside the park ▪ Working in with pastoralists, traditional owners and tourism to open up other areas

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 	<p>litter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Everything is too rushed – people don't slow down ▪ Reducing accessibility of 4wd bush camping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Marketing quality products to experience the Real Australia of the West MacDonnell Ranges ▪
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Interactive learning experiences

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Examples include Aboriginal culture, nature, birds, art, 4WD school based outdoor education, photography ▪ Varied landscape can provide experiences tailored to suit visitor needs ▪ Landscape visually stunning from car or other means ▪ Spiritual experience - you feel something special ▪ Ability to attract diverse groups of people i.e. psychologists/ yoga/artists groups ▪ Park big enough to escape – solitude, feeling of space ▪ Can have a real fire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overuse (overcrowding) resulting in decline of experience, physical damage such as wear and tear (track facilities) ▪ Lack of park management ▪ Bad experience arising from quality of tour operators ▪ Protection of sensitive sites – cultural and natural ▪ Young aboriginal people not interested in working in the industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sound, sensible and specific management ▪ Operator accreditation and permitting ▪ Managing access (eg. direction of travel, exclusive access) ▪ Management of natural resources eg. firewood ▪ Cooperation and communication between stakeholders and partners ▪ Keep it simple ▪ Training and education eg Desert guides ▪ Keep reassessing usage and dispersal around park ▪ Keep feeling of space
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Range of sites and infrastructure accessible to different groups

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Currently good balance of accessibility and range of experiences from basic to extreme. ▪ Catering for different needs of visitor from wheelchair/ pushchair to adventure walkers – accessible in some way to all user groups ▪ Having good balance of access and facilities not all the same ▪ Access and facilities need to be appropriate to the experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Balance is lost ▪ Management and communication becomes fractured and decisions are made in isolation ▪ Lack of resources to upgrade and renew visitor infrastructure ▪ Overcrowding of sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good governance model to ensure all voices are heard ▪ Defining the balance in sites and infrastructure and monitoring ▪ New developments are considered with all user groups in mind ▪ Resources being based on user pays
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Range of walking opportunities

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provides a cultural experience (living landscape / culture) and a diversity of landscapes that is relatively easy to access ▪ Mystique, spiritual feeling from being in remote area ▪ Offers a walking experience for everybody – old, young, etc ▪ There are ▪ Solitary experiences as well as opportunities for off track experiences ▪ Well marked walks at high use sites ▪ Good walkways into certain areas and other areas that are easy to access ▪ Long distance walks ▪ Robust environment to handle walkers to a certain extent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conflict over wanting increased numbers and maintaining integrity of the experience, landscape etc ▪ Too many people with limited management may result in impacts on the environment (eg camps – rubbish) ▪ Lack of emergency protocols ▪ Lack of education and awareness of walkers and the environment through inappropriate or inadequate information dissemination ▪ Growth in Commercial operators impacting on individual experience including competition for campsites between commercial operators and private users ▪ Management of group sizes already exists for commercial groups but not private ▪ Impacts on remote walking experiences of opening up areas for growth in day visitors ▪ Inadequate day walks for growing numbers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Standard approach to management of group sizes ▪ Effective management of impacts / rubbish etc including minimum impact education program ▪ Opening up other areas for camping ▪ Value adding to the Larapinta Trail with more walks ▪ Developing walks that incorporate cultural aspects potentially through Aboriginal homelands ▪ Controlled camel tours / trek ▪ Implementing communication system and standard response for walkers ▪ Development of management systems for Larapinta including ▪ One way trails / one way loops ▪ Booking system
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Adventure activities

<p>Current and potential:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rock climbing – outdoor education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The threats and conflicts were identified as the same as for the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognise our kids will need new adventures – we need to manage these –
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mountain biking ▪ Cycling – camping ▪ Abseiling ▪ Scenic flights ▪ Camel treks ▪ Hang gliding <p>Unique ways to experience the West MacDonnell Ranges</p>	<p>walking opportunities (above) plus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Safety ▪ Restrictions ▪ Conflicts between users ▪ Environmental impacts 	<p>identify suitable areas to do these things</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide alternatives ▪ Consider what is suited to the national park and what should be elsewhere
Visitor Services Available		
<p>Some visitor services are available:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Two kiosks (Standley Chasm and Ormiston Gorge) ▪ Accommodation Glen Helen ▪ BBQs – free to use ▪ Larapinta Trail shelters ▪ Camp sites – bush camping <p>Close to the town for other services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Over development or inappropriate development ▪ Government involvement in businesses ▪ Lack of maintaining historic areas, and cultural sites ▪ Impacts of development outside the park – (eg mining, dams) ▪ Joint management not working effectively eg fire management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensuring effective communication ▪ Government encouraging and supporting local enterprise ▪ Appropriate lease terms and conditions for business ▪ Involvement of Aboriginal people to work in parks and educate visitors about joint management ▪ Clear guidelines on the national park regulations provided outside the park ▪ Funding – user pays ▪ Monitor joint management
Individual activities		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Landscape / flora and fauna / Aboriginal culture. ▪ Diversity of photographic opportunities. ▪ Close ups ▪ Panoramic ▪ Variety of subjects ▪ Colour and uniqueness ▪ Can always find your own space – serenity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increasing numbers of people ▪ Access – closing off more areas ▪ Maintaining current areas (with limited resources) ▪ Over regulation of visitors with too many rules ▪ Conflicts with other users and activities (eg high volume with individual) ▪ Failure to deal with land management issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Effective Land management ▪ Interaction with Aboriginal people ▪ Planning and consultation between groups ▪ Offering and managing a diversity of locations and activities

such as wild-fires,
feral animals,
vandalism

4. Opportunities and threats that the joint management process offers tourism

At the commencement of the workshop, participants were asked to identify what they saw as major opportunities and threats that could arise through the Joint Management planning process. These are documented below.

Opportunities	
Relationship between Aboriginal community and tourism industry	<p>Better understanding of culture and Aboriginal perspectives</p> <p>Authentic appropriate tourism experiences</p> <p>Partnerships between tourism industry and Aboriginal community</p> <p>Involvement in park management such as information, signage, interpretation</p> <p>Greater awareness by visitors of long history and enduring nature of relationship of Aboriginal people with land</p> <p>Employment in tourism and service industries</p> <p>Training of tourism industry by Aboriginal community to better deliver to the visitor</p> <p>Ongoing engagement between tourism and Aboriginal community in joint management plan</p>
Tourism industry engagement	<p>Step back, look at current tourism experience and determine the right future</p> <p>Work together to create the best experiences for the visitor</p>
Regional context	<p>Consider the West MacDonnell National Park in the wider landscape when planning for recreation activities, land management etc.</p> <p>Expand the park boundary.</p>
Accommodation	<p>Accommodation – the potential to meet some of the demand by partnerships or using off park land.</p> <p>Camping – the need to implement a range of strategies including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ providing a number of different standards within one node; ▪ continuing to retain remote campsites (perhaps booking them);

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ education re other more remote sites; ▪ permit conditions re removal of waste (portable toilets); ▪ planning for 'grey nomads' camping/trailers;
Sustainable industry	<p>Sealing of the Red Centre Way will increase visitor numbers.</p> <p>Improved Marketing opportunities through joint management and better cultural experiences.</p> <p>Further opportunities for businesses.</p> <p>Big opportunities for region given growth potential associated with effective marketing to the right markets.</p> <p>Potential for employment and prosperity through different businesses within and out of the park.</p> <p>Increase length of stay through offering a special experience.</p> <p>Development of West MacDonnell Ranges tourism 'package' including guide, maps, souvenir, value for money that includes contribution to park management.</p>

Participants identified the following threats to tourism.

Threats	
Cultural	<p>Lack of respect for country resulting in impacts on sites and spiritual values.</p> <p>Lack of involvement of Traditional Owners in park once it is marketed for cultural experiences.</p> <p>Absence of information and clarity of process for Traditional Owners.</p>
Management	<p>Visitor safety.</p> <p>Lack of resources to manage impacts or to establish appropriate infrastructure for growth in visitor numbers.</p> <p>Failure to enforce regulations/rules.</p> <p>Failure to plan for the impact of the sealing of the Inner loop or Mereenie loop early enough.</p> <p>Managing environmental concerns associated with facilities suited to groups.</p>
Visitor experience	<p>Access including for Free Independent Travellers.</p> <p>Failure to manage growth in numbers changing the experience people are seeking.</p> <p>Being unable to 'fulfil the promise' to the visitor.</p> <p>Being able to deliver international standard facilities in poor economic climate.</p> <p>Managing the Larapinta Trail experience with growth in</p>

	<p>numbers.</p> <p>Inappropriate signage (particular in towns).</p>
Communication	<p>Poor communication because of numbers of people involved in management.</p> <p>Lack of collaboration between private and public sectors.</p> <p>Too many 'chiefs'.</p>
Economic sustainability	<p>Sustainability between government and private sector.</p> <p>User pays based on different approaches to different groups (commercial vs private).</p> <p>Lack of understanding of business by Aboriginal people in businesses.</p> <p>Government undertaking business that is better undertaken by the private sector (eg media) and that detracts from their core business focus.</p>

5. General Issues for consideration

The following summary of primary tourism issues were raised during the workshop and should be considered in the joint management planning process.

Visitor experiences, activities and facilities

- Management of growing numbers of visitors.
- Potential for implementing strategies such as booking systems, one way travel (Larapinta Trail) and permits.
- Planning at a landscape scale to sustain desired visitor experiences (remote, natural, outback, etc.) which are provided beyond the park boundary.
- Delivering the right experiences for the right visitor markets – not trying to be all things for all people.
- Providing a range of accommodation by identifying appropriate range and standard and considering appropriate siting (on and off park).
- Commercial tourism opportunities – lease/licence/permit processes, terms and conditions to provide the best visitor experience and viable businesses.

Information, interpretation and education

- Development of interpretation strategy for the park.
- Identifying strategies to deliver a range of interactive learning experiences.
- Ensuring Information is delivered in the right ways to create appropriate expectations of the park and enrich the visitor experience.

Visitor safety

- Ensuring adequate information and strategies to ensure visitor safety.

Major visitor nodes

- The need for identifying limits to acceptable change (eg footprint associated with car parking) whilst providing the appropriate standard of visitor experience.
- Planning for adequate visitor nodes to provide for a range of user groups with opportunities for higher numbers as well as remote experiences not conflicting with one another.
- Siting and design guidelines for infrastructure to minimise visual and environmental impacts on park.

Other

- Payment for use of discretionary park facilities and services (eg camping, walks, guided activities).
- The need to plan in the short, medium and long term for growth in visitors associated with the sealing of the Red Centre Way.
- The opportunities for partnerships in the delivery of quality tourism experiences – including partnerships between Aboriginal community, government and private sector- including infrastructure, experiences, and services.

6. Future involvement in Park Management

Participants considered the way in which they would like to be involved with park management on an ongoing basis. The following were the views expressed.

They would like to have ongoing involvement aimed at:

- Understanding what is happening and how the joint management plan is progressing.
- Expressing a view on planning and management issues.
- Being informed on a regular basis about park activities and management.

In terms of the Joint Management Process, it was agreed that it would be ideal for the following to occur:

- Circulation of draft workshop report to people who have been at the workshop.
- Circulation of draft Tourism Section of the Joint Management Plan.
- Comment as part of public exhibition process of Draft Joint Management Plan.

7. Concluding comments

A range of issues were identified through the workshop process that will require detailed strategies and consideration in the planning process. The ongoing engagement of the tourism industry in these discussions will be necessary.

Additional detail from the workshop is attached to this report to assist this discussion.

APPENDIX ONE:

Tourism Think Tank workshop outputs

1. Participant Introductions

All participants were asked to comment on three topics:

1. Their expectations from the workshop;
2. Opportunities they saw for tourism from joint management;
3. Threats to tourism from joint management.

Participant expectations

- Learn from others and from park staff about joint management
- Have a greater understanding of the process and would be able to be champions for joint management
- That it presented a process for operators to be engaged in joint management
- Would gain a sense of what the core rec values are
- Would be able to contribute to the future vision
- Have a greater understanding of how every one wants to take the West Macs into the future.
- Would understand how it might impact on their own operations
- An opportunity to have your say
- Could expect Parks and Wildlife Service NT to listen
- Get an appreciation of plans for future infrastructure and resources
- See how Dept. Business, Economic and Regional Development can support joint management, Parks and operators
- Gain some new ideas and perspectives

New opportunities

A range of opportunities associated with cultural values and Aboriginal community:

- Potential for cultural interaction and learning,
- Better understanding of aboriginal people and values
- Involvement of Aboriginal people in providing authentic appropriate experiences as well as high quality interpretation (eg signs, interps)
- Potential for partnerships
- Economic development
- Input from Traditional Owners on tourism experiences
- Aboriginal employment
- Awareness by visitors of long history of Traditional Owners living on country
- Increased credibility of indigenous tourism
- Marketing opportunities associated with indigenous tourism
- Able to step back, take a look at where tourism is and where it should be heading

- Potential to identify what core values are to be maintained
- Working together to create best experiences
- Increasing the diversity of recreational opportunities
- Retaining old values (how it was done 100 years ago) as tourism experience
- Increasing numbers associated with the Red Centre Way
- Jay Creek
- Better information and signage about what is here for tourists
- Looking at the regional context and the opportunities available across the landscape including recreational opportunities eg walks
- Workshops to support high quality tour guide information
- Increase length of stay through special experiences
- Integrating views and interests of range of stakeholders
- Government resources becoming available
- Further opportunities for businesses
- Big opportunities for region given growth potential
- Employment and prosperity for different businesses within and out of park

Threats

- Lack of respect for country resulting in desecration of sites
- Global warming
- Lack of involvement of Traditional Owners in park once it is marketed for cultural experiences
- Access including for Free Independent Travellers
- Visitor safety
- Potential conflicting issues from so many people involved
- Access to Alice Springs
- Looking at concerns not opportunities
- Too many people resulting in a change to the nature of the experience
- If there is a focus on the short term then the values may be impacted
- Overuse of individual sites and the area in general
- Failing to enforce rules and regulations
- Lack of trail use fees and charges
- Failing to manage the Larapinta Trail experience
- Inadequate resources to complement growth resulting in impacts on environment, experience and infrastructure
- Cost to tour operators
- Increased restrictions
- Lack of collaboration between private and public sector
- Living up to the promise
- Inability to create International standard facilities in poor economic climate
- User pays being applied in different ways to different groups (eg

- commercial vs Free Independent Travellers)
- Absence of information or clarity of process for Traditional Owners
- Failing to manage people's expectations
- Inappropriate signage (particular in towns)
- Too many chiefs
- Lack of understanding of Aboriginal people in businesses

2. Progressing the vision

The summary elements of the vision outlined below resulted from the synthesis of the thoughts from four workshop groups. The workshop outputs are 1-4 below

Summary

- Natural / remote / wilderness
- Management of increased visitor numbers to maintain the experience
- Opportunities for interactive learning (media etc)
- Partnerships between land managers / Aboriginal / community and tourism / private sectors
- Opportunities to get away from it all / experience the outback / remote / stars at night / solitude
- Diversity of recreation experiences for all
- Information delivered in many ways from Visitor Centre to Information Technology / phone based technology
- Strong relationship and awareness between tourism industry and Aboriginal people
- User friendly systems and processes
- Improved economic benefits to region and community
- Well planned and maintained low impact infrastructure
- Experiences and management beyond current boundary

Group 1

Vision

- Unchanged natural environment – no massive changes
- Maintain and broaden opportunities to continue experiences, i.e. remoteness, isolation.
- Visitors able to leave the West MacDonnell National Park with a better understanding of the values of the park.
- Community of Alice Springs proud to have a world class park on their door step.
- Differing walking opportunities to spread impacts and reflect range of interests

How does it vary from today?

- Caters for more visitation
- More time to take in the experience

- More information available in range of accessible formats.
- Park for our children to maintain with a pristine environment and a sense of solitude
- People leave with better understanding

Group 2

Vision

- Wilderness and outback (feeling of space), nature and culture
- Good management of increased visitors numbers
- Sensitive infrastructure development with infrastructure away from key attractions
- Use of technology (interpretation) telling stories (culture) history/nature
- Public transport such as mass movers or shuttles
- Excellent knowledgeable tour guides
- More indigenous experiences and guides
- Alternative nodes and experiences planned
- Diversity of experience – cycle / walk / geographically
- Diversity and refreshed product
- Unsealed road and 4WD experiences available
- Expansion of current park boundary
- Partnerships with adjoining pastoral and aboriginal land
- Bike path to Glen Helen (from Alice Springs)
- Careful development of Larapinta Trail (numbers limited to maintain experience)
- People are better informed of conditions etc. visitor information /education visitor safety
- Visitor centre

How does it vary from the present?

- Currently limited diversity in activities.
- More adventure activities
- Current infrastructure levels area appropriate. Remains 'understated'.
- More comprehensive interpretive material.
- The experience of camping, freedom etc. is maintained
- The values that we cherish today ie camp fires etc. are maintained

Group 3

Vision

- Purity, remoteness, wide open spaces isolation
- Increased representation of ecosystems
- Broader park experiences
- Interaction with local Aboriginal people in an informal way
- Local users – make sure that capability is maintained
- Too much infrastructure would ruin experience

- Keeping low key
- Vistas of minimal impact
- Maintain values while accommodating the growth that will occur

How does it vary from the present?

- Economic sustainability
- Well planned and maintained infrastructure
- Safe and accessible
- Strong communication with industry – traditional owners, management, park, users
- Increased awareness of activities and opportunities within community eg school

Group 4

Vision

- Keep natural and pristine
- Combat against vandalism (reducing)
- Clear communication must be continued
- Aboriginal – continuation of knowledge
- Aboriginal people working with others for relationship to be sustained
- Unique experience to be continued (cultural)
- Infrastructure must meet demand and protect the values of the park, including communication
- Restriction on numbers on certain walks eg Larapinta Trail – wilderness walk
- Continue the current experiences
- Accreditation for guides

How does it vary from the present?

- More opportunities for people to visit areas beyond iconic spots (room to move)
- More guided walks – Traditional Owners and rangers
- More positive experience with Aboriginal people through involvement in the industry at large
- Different levels of access – mountain biking, wheelchair, rough tracks, vehicle tracks
- Range of physical access options
- Jointly run accommodation options – cabins, eco accommodation , low key low impact

4. Guiding principles

Draft Guiding principles were developed as a group based on workshop discussions as follows:

1. Visitor numbers to be such that they don't compromise park values and experience
2. Primary focus of education and interpretation should be on natural and cultural values

3. Economic benefits / revenue (government / private) generated will be directed back into the park
4. Identify all stakeholders and develop cooperative relationship between joint management partner and all stakeholders (working together not alone)
5. There will be opportunities for employment of Aboriginal community so culture can be maintained
6. Infrastructure will be relevant to visitor needs while all or any infrastructure must be with the intent of retaining wilderness feel or experience (aesthetic, well sited – including living area in the park being managed to retain the visitor experience)
7. Infrastructure should be in keeping with the landscape and be kept to a minimum. In particular, interpretive infrastructure, including signs, should be kept to a minimum given the potential of modern technology and the web as a personalized, invisible interpretive tool
8. Managing activities so there is minimal conflict between them and the experience is optimised for each activity
9. Quality, true, current information provided through the right outlet (Visitor Centres, collateral) to suit the market
10. Maintaining conservation values and management of the environment and highest standard (fire, flora, fauna, pest, sustainable energy, footprint)
11. Responsibility of all individuals and stakeholders to look after the park
12. Plan needs to be robust but flexible to changing trends
13. A diverse appropriate range of experiences will be provided to match market some activities may best be provided outside the park
14. Government resources should not be used in any way that competes with work being done by the Territory private sector

4. Recreational experiences

Participants identified and ranked all the important recreational experiences of the West MacDonnell National Park. They were then asked to identify what the really special attributes were of each of the main recreational experiences/values, what the threats were to maintaining it, and strategies that could be adopted to ensure the values remained.

Ranking of recreational experiences

1. Real Australia (experience it many ways)

2. Back to basics – remoteness – nature culture (contrast to normal life) (include access by 4WD)
3. Interactive learning experiences (cultural, nature, birds etc and meeting locals)
4. Range of visitor sites / infrastructure accessible to different groups
5. Range of walking opportunity (low key self reliant - more developed walks)
6. Adventure activities including scenic flights
7. Visitor services available (eg kiosk, transport etc)
8. Individual experiences / eg photography, bird watching)

Managing the recreational values

1. Real Australia

2. Back to basics

What is unique?

- Quite accessible but still remote
- Other places not so accessible – need to protect these characteristics
- Uniqueness – vistas, remoteness, solitude
- Doesn't take long to get out amongst it
- Outback characters

Threats and conflicts

- Imbalance – too accessible, too many people
- Not enough opportunities to spread people out
- Change to natural environment – fire, ferals, weeds
- Management of visitor impacts ie. litter
- Everything is too rushed – people don't slow down
- Accessibility of 4wd and bush camping

Strategies to retain experience

- Need to have alternative opportunities, perhaps outside the park
- Working in with pastoralists and tourism operators to open up other areas
- Marketing quality experiences (good tours don't sell)
- Education
- Effective land management
- Interaction with Aboriginal people
- Planning and consultation
- Diversity of locations and activities

3. Interactive learning experiences (cultural, nature, birds etc and meeting locals)

What is unique?

- Point of differentiation from other destinations
- Ability to attract diverse groups of people ie psychologists/ yoga/ artists groups
- Park big enough to escape – solitude
- Varied landscape – tailor to suit visitor needs
- Visually stunning from car on landscape
- Spiritual experience - feel something special
- Can have a real fire

Threats and conflicts

- Overuse (overcrowding)– decline of experience, physical damage, wear and tear (track facilities)
- Lack of park management
- Bad experience – quality of tour operators
- Protection of sensitive sites – cultural and natural
- Young aboriginal people not interested in the industry (or don't have the drive)

Strategies to retain experience

- Management sound sensible and specific;
- Operator accreditation and permitting;
- Managing access (direction of travel; exclusive access);
- Management of natural resources ie firewood;
- Cooperation and communication between stakeholders and partners;
- Keep it simple;
- Training and education ie Desert guides;
- Keep reassessing usage – dispersal around park assisting in these activities, keep feeling of space

4. Range of sites / infrastructure accessible to different groups

What is unique?

- Important to cater for different needs of visitor ie wheelchair/ pushchair / adventure walkers – accessible to all user groups
- Having good balance of access / facilities not all the same
- Currently good balance of accessibility and range of experience from basic to extreme
- Access and facilities appropriate to experience

Threats and conflicts

- Balance is lost
- Management and communication becomes fractured and decisions made in isolation
- Lack of resources to upgrade and renew

- Overcrowding of sites

Strategies to retain experience

- Good governance model to ensure all voices are heard
- Define the balance and monitor
- New developments are considered with all user groups in mind
- Resources – user pays??

5. Range of walking opportunities – low key / self reliant

What is unique?

- Cultural experiences (living landscape / culture)
- Easy to access
- Good walkways into certain areas
- Lot of other areas that are easy to access
- A walking experience for everybody – old, young, etc
- Mystique, spiritual feeling from being in remote area
- Diversity of landscapes that is relatively easy to access
- Robust environment to handle walkers to a certain extent
- Solitary experiences
- Opportunities for off track experiences

Threats and conflicts

- Too many people more numbers impact on environment (eg camps, rubbish)
- Lack of emergency protocols
- Lack of education and awareness of themselves and the environment
- Commercial impacts
- Commercial competition – for campsites, with private uses
- Group sizes
- Conflict over wanting increased numbers and maintaining integrity of the experience, landscape etc
- Restricted access
- Opening up areas

Strategies to retain experience

- Management of group sizes already exists for commercial groups but not private
- Management of impacts / rubbish etc
- Opening up other areas for camping
- Opening up other areas for experiences
- More walks, value adding to the Larapinta Trail
- Controlled camel tours / trek
- Walks to incorporate cultural aspects and through Aboriginal homelands
- Booking system
- One way trails and one way loops

- Communication system and standard response
- Outside of Larapinta Trail not much info available
- Better information on short walks around key sites
- People require more than signs for information dissemination
- Better day walks
- Better marked walks
- More long distance walks

6. Adventure activities

What is unique?

- Rock climbing – outdoor education
- Mountain biking
- Cycling – camping
- Abseiling
- Scenic flights
- Camel treks
- Hang gliding
- Niche markets will develop
- Aren't too many alternatives for some activities
- Best country to fly in

Threats and conflicts

- Safety
- Restrictions
- Conflicts between users
- Environmental impacts

Strategies to retain experience

- Recognise our kids will need new adventures – we need to manage these – identify suitable areas to do these things and provide alternatives

7. Visitor Services Available (Experiences)

What is unique?

- Visitor Services available eg kiosk, transport
- Two kiosks in Standley Gap and Ormiston Gorge
- Accommodation at Glen Helen
- BBQs are free to use
- Trail huts
- Camp sites – bush camping
- Close to locals – township

Threats and conflicts

- Over development or inappropriate development
- Government involvement
- Lack of maintaining – historic areas and cultural sites

- Outside the park development – mining, damming
- Joint management – does not happen eg fire management

Strategies to retain experience

- Communication
- Clear guidelines on the national park regulations outside the park
- Funding – user pays
- Government – encourage and support
- Local enterprise
- Involve Aboriginal people to work in parks and protect and educate visitors – joint management
- Access and monitor joint management

8. Individual experiences / eg photography, bird watching)

What is unique?

- Landscape / flora and fauna / Aboriginal culture
- Diversity of photographic
 - Close ups
 - Panoramic
 - Variety of subjects
 - Colour and uniqueness
- Can always find your own space – serenity

Threats and conflicts

- Numbers of people
- Access – closures
- Maintaining current areas
- Over regulated – too many rules
- Other users and activities
- Wild-fires, feral animals, vandalism

5. Other issues and ideas

Participants were asked to identify any other issues and ideas that they considered important to be recognised in the discussion towards the joint management plan.

The following were raised:

- Importance of a good Visitor Centre in the appropriate location
- West MacDonnell Ranges Visitor centre should be adjacent to the regional Tourism information centre in town
- It should be an attraction in itself
- The regional information centre needs to be expanded.

Commercial licence issues

- Increased fee costs for commercial operators disproportionate to that of individual users
- Recognition and incentives for accredited operators

- Access to park by interstate operators not paying fees
- Imbalance in fees based on tours into parks.
- Exclusive facilities access to full paying or accredited operators – not the free public
- Affordable access for helicopter landings

Challenges

- Ensuring visitor experience is maintained
- Managing growing numbers
- Sustainable businesses
- Ensuring systems and processes are accessible
- Capacity building for indigenous tourism experiences
- Training
- Conduct tour guide training with Traditional Owners

Funding

- User pays – annual fee for operators
- Small fee for self drive (eg pass for 7 days all NT parks)
- Assist Aboriginal operators
- Promote private enterprise
- Partnerships
- Government

Visitor site improvements

- Campsite upgrades – toilet/showers layout
- Glen Helen
- West MacDonnell Ranges guidebook
- Manage congestion
- Additional bush camps at all locations
- Controlled toilet facilities
- Use of access tracks to tour operators

Accommodation

- Potential for accommodation off park with partnerships
- Camping – different standards within one node separated (high use nodes)
 - remote campsites
 - education re other more remote sites
 - permit conditions re removal of waste (portable toilets)
 - planning for campervans and recreational vehicles / grey nomads camping
- Glen Helen higher capacity / levels etc and alternatives
- Need to plan for sealing of road and the growth in numbers soon as it is about to happen
- Managing visitor numbers
 - Potential for opening of new areas (eg on Aboriginal land or Owen)

Springs, Serpentine Gorge)
Looking beyond the park
Possible new opportunities on outstations
Implement Minimum impact education

Site planning

- Standards of facilities suited to groups – environmental concerns
- Parking – what are the limits?

User Pays

All visitors make economic contributions:

- Introduce a visitor package (guide, maps, souvenirs, value of money)
- Under no circumstances should government money be used to do what the private sector is already doing

APPENDIX TWO:

Workshop Participants

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS	
David Curl	David Curl Pty Ltd
Steve Shearer	Territory Rent A Car
Peter Grigg	Tourism Central Australia
Mechelle Collins	Alice Springs Helicopters
Warwick Rock	Australia Pacific Touring
Phil Taylor	Wayoutback Desert Safaris
Simon Reu	Lone Dingo
Dave Armstrong	St Philips College (Outdoor Education)
Monica Talbot	St Philips College (Student)
Jungala	Jungala Tours
Audrey	Standley Chasm Traditional Owner
Shane Fewtrell	World Expeditions
Danny Brennan	Tailormade Tours
Jodi Kaesler	Dept of Business Economic and Regional Development
Peter Donohoe	Central Land Council
Maree Meredith	Central Land Council
John Stafford	Tourism NT
Andy Hood	Tourism NT
Andrew Bridges	Parks and Wildlife Service NT
Jill Catchlove	Parks and Wildlife Service NT
Jonathan Veal	Parks and Wildlife Service NT
Dianne Scopel	Parks and Wildlife Service NT
Gary Weir	Parks and Wildlife Service NT

APPENDIX THREE:

Workshop Agenda

WORKSHOP AGENDA	
0830-0840	Welcome
0840-0905	The Joint Management Plan and the planning process
0905-0915	The workshop outcomes and agenda
0915-0940	Introductions and Expectations
0940-1020	Vision
1020-1040	Progressing the vision
1040-1115	Morning Tea
1115-1130	Ranking of recreational experiences
1130-12.15	Visitor experience and recreational values
12.15-1.00	Visitor experience and recreational values – feedback and summary
1.00-1.45	LUNCH
1.45-2.30	Guiding principles
2.30-3.00	Agreement to vision and guiding principles
3.00-3.45	Other issues and ideas
3.45-4.15	Other issues and ideas outstanding
4.15	Participation in park management
4.45	Close