

NSW National Parks and Tourism Planning:

A chronology of recent events highlighting the role of tourism industry lobbyists

(compiled by Ian Brown, 3-8-09)

1989: The Tourism Task Force is formed to deal with the aftermath of the pilots' strike and as a voice for the Australian tourism industry.
(Reference: www.ttf.org.au).

2003: The Tourism Taskforce is rebranded as the Tourism and Transport Forum (TTF) to include the transport and infrastructure sectors. TTF is "a national, Member-funded CEO forum, advocating the public policy interests of the 200 most prestigious corporations and institutions in the Australian tourism, transport, aviation and investment sectors" and the "peak industry group" for these sectors.
(Reference: www.ttf.org.au).

(As at the end of 2008, recent TTF claimed achievements include "the successful introduction and implementation of the \$235 million Tourism White Paper and the \$11.8 billion Auslink White Paper, and the increasing acceptance among Governments of the Public Private Partnership model of infrastructure funding." In the future, TTF are "set to play a key role in the framing of the National Tourism Strategy and Aviation White Paper – having worked with the new Federal Government to drive both strategies onto the agenda".)
(Reference: www.ttf.org.au).

2004: TTF publishes an influential report: "A Natural Partnership: Making national parks a tourism priority".

2005: The NSW Government amends the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 by introducing a new Part 3A to "streamline" approval processes for major projects. The amendments limit public participation and the environmental assessment required for major projects.
(Reference: Environmental Defender's Office, www.edo.org.au/edonsw/site/part3a.php)

2006: TTF conducts a media and lobbying campaign in NSW highlighting the state's poor tourism performance.
(Reference: TTF media releases obtained from NSW government under FOI).

2003-07 (prior to 2003 and March 2007 NSW elections): Significant corporate members of TTF (including Property Council, Lend Lease, Leighton, Macquarie Bank and Multiplex) donate a total of close to \$1 million to the NSW Labor Party, at least \$776,000 of it prior to the 2007 election.
(Reference: Records of the NSW Electoral Funding Authority and Australian Electoral Commission, available at www.democracy4sale.org).

2007 (undated, before March): In the lead-up to the NSW state election of March 2007, the TTF sends a submission to all NSW MPs entitled "State Tourism Recovery Plan for NSW". The submission states that Sydney is the only Olympic city to have

suffered a decline in visitor numbers after the event and that NSW was losing market share to other states. It also says: "This document shows how Treasury's lack of support for tourism is damaging our Olympic legacy. The industry can no longer accept excuses as to why the rest of the country is prepared to invest in tourism and reap the benefits, but not NSW".

(Reference: TTF submission obtained from NSW government under FOI).

2007 (February): NSW Premier establishes a review into tourism in NSW, headed by John O'Neill. The head of TTF writes (26 February) to Mr O'Neill on his appointment to say he was 'personally delighted with the Premier's announcement of your role in the reviews, which accords with our requests of the Government'. O'Neill report follows in April 2008.

(Reference: TTF letter obtained from NSW government under FOI).

2007 (March): NSW state election. Labor is returned to power.

2007 (July): TTF releases an Action Plan for putting more tourism into Australian National Parks (based on "A Natural partnership", 2004). Recommends private investment in National Parks, increased tourism focus for park management and 'pre-approval' by government of development opportunities which are then offered to industry. Suggests more tourism can supply funds for conservation through 'partnerships' but offers no quantitative evidence to support the claim.

(Reference: <http://www.ttf.org.au/Content/ntpi07.aspx>)

March 2008: TTF releases a Queensland Action Plan for putting more tourism into National Parks. Recommends amending park legislation to make tourism a principle objective and to allow private tourism development in parks.

(Reference: <http://www.ttf.org.au/Content/ntpql08.aspx>)

April 2008: John O'Neill delivers his report into Tourism in NSW to the Premier. O'Neill is subsequently appointed to head a new body, Events NSW.

10 June 2008: O'Neill report into tourism in NSW is publicly released. Refers to National parks as 'state-owned tourism assets'. Calls for a shift in 'philosophy' away from protection as the priority for park management, and opening of parks to private tourism development. Criticises tourism planning and management in NSW, and the low level of government support.

(Reference: "Review into Tourism in New South Wales, Final Report, for the Premier of New South Wales The Hon. Morris Iemma MP", by John O'Neill AO, April 2008. Seems to be no longer readily available on internet.)

19 June 2008: NSW Ministers for Tourism and Environment jointly establish a 'Taskforce on Tourism and National Parks'. Based on an interpretation of State Plan objectives (to increase tourist visits to NSW, to increase investment in rural and regional areas and to increase visitation to State Government parks and reserves by 20% by 2016). Draft report due at the end of September and final report by November 2008. The announced 21 July deadline for public submissions was extended after pressure from environment groups. Environment groups were not directly represented on the Taskforce, despite having in-depth involvement in National Park creation and management for more than 50 years. Taskforce is comprised of chair plus 9 members, one of whom represents TTF. Two conservation-oriented independent members of Taskforce are appointed in their personal capacity, not representing or having the resources of any group. The remaining 6 members are all employed by the NSW government.

(Reference:

http://corporate.tourism.nsw.gov.au/Sites/SiteID6/objLib28/NationalParksTaskforceTOR_4web.pdf)

11 July 2008: In a meeting with environment groups, the Chair of the Taskforce on Tourism and National Parks raises the prospect of amending National Park legislation to facilitate tourism development.

13 August 2008: Minister for Tourism announces the 'release' of a 'draft strategy for NSW tourism' in response to the O'Neill Report, but no document is publicly available. The main points of a strategy to be put to cabinet in September were discussed with industry and then endorsed at an industry meeting on 13 August with no input from the broader community. Minister says a 'greater focus' on National Parks is a 'key component' of the strategy.

(Reference:

http://corporate.tourism.nsw.gov.au/Sites/SiteID6/objLib57/080813_DraftTourismStrategy_web.pdf)

11 October 2008: NSW Premier Nathan Rees announces a major festival program on Sydney Harbour National Park islands for 2009, called "Island Hopping". The Sydney Morning Herald reports that Mr Rees said the festival was a first step to finding a way to "use our national parks to give families a greater opportunity to experience their natural beauty". NPWS staff apparently did not know about the plan before the announcement.

(Reference: Sydney Morning Herald 11 November 2008).

October 2008: TTF publishes a report *Tourism Infrastructure Policy and Priorities* which makes recommendations to major national policy reviews. Recommends reform of "planning, regulatory and approval regimes to permit sustainable private tourism infrastructure in national parks and other reserves". Includes priorities for infrastructure in NSW national parks, such as new accommodation. NSW environment groups were not consulted on the report.

(Reference: www.ttf.org.au/Content/tourisminfrastructure1008.aspx)

6 November 2008: TTF welcomes a NSW Government decision to lower the \$20 million threshold for certain projects to be determined by the Joint Regional Planning Panels - to \$10 million for tourism developments and \$5 million for ecotourism developments. TTF has "long been advocating" this change, and did so within the Taskforce on Tourism and National Parks.

(Reference: www.ttf.org.au, media release 6 November, documents obtained under FOI)

3 December 2008: NSW Government releases and endorses the FINAL report of the Taskforce on Tourism and National Parks. No interim report was released and the Government has not asked for public comment on the final report or on proposed changes to the National Parks and Wilderness Acts. The report delivers most of the remaining TTF agenda, including legislative changes to promote tourism and private development in parks. The report repeats the TTF claim that tourism in parks can produce revenue for conservation without substantiation. The government makes no announcement of any timeframes or special funding attached to the implementation of the report.

On the same day TTF issues a media release congratulating the government on adopting the report and emphasising the TTF's role in its development.

(References:

http://corporate.tourism.nsw.gov.au/Sites/SiteID6/objLib57/081203_RELEASE_-_Tourism_Taskforce_Report_FINAL.pdf,

<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/parks/tourismtaskforce.htm>,

<http://www.ttf.org.au/Content/natparkstaskforce031208.aspx>)

May 2009: Australia's Coastal Wilderness National Landscape Steering Committee releases a draft Tourism Master Plan for Australia's Coastal Wilderness National Landscape. It proposes three sites within Ben Boyd National Park and Mimosa Rocks national Park for the development of new tourist accommodation. NSW NPWS is represented on the Steering Committee.

(Reference:

http://www.begavalley.nsw.gov.au/Home/Latest_News/090522ACW_TourismMasterPlan.pdf)

June 2009: Consultants working for NPWS on a new plan of management for Arakoon State Conservation Area propose up to a dozen new cabins on the coast in the park.

(Reference: various media reports)

June 2009: New research by NPWS raises estimated NSW park visits to 38 million p.a. (from previous estimate of 22 million).

(Reference

<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/research/NationalParkVisitsNSW.pdf>)