

# National Landscapes Forum

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O'Reilly's Retreat - Lamington National Park

Prepared by Shane Strudwick

Chair, Murray Tri-State Border Region

National Landscapes is a partnership between conservation (Parks Australia) and tourism (Tourism Australia) to promote superlative world-class Australian landscapes and experiences to the global Experience Seeker.

The forum began with a National Landscapes review. Currently eight regions in Australia have been officially announced as National Landscapes. They are the Australian Alps, Kakadu, Australia's Red Centre, Great Ocean Road, Flinders Ranges, Australia's Green Cauldron (Tweed region), Australia's Coastal Wilderness (SE Victoria and NSW) and The Blue Mountains. Around twenty landscapes will be chosen, however high standards and governance must be maintained by each region to remain in the National Landscapes Program.

The big picture tourism strategy is to position "Australia" as the brand and destination for Experience Seekers to reconnect in life through our unique and contrasting experiences.



## Tourism Australia Strategy - not a one off promotion

Tourism Australia is using a series of marketing strategies around a key message "Arrived as...Departed as...". Fundamentally, the strategy is about story telling. Stories about special places in Australian communities where visitors can see themselves as participants in our country where they can make their own stories. Places where visitors can reconnect with themselves. Stories that are authentic to just Australia and our culture.

In a noisy world market, every country is competing to improve their marketshare. Finding ways to brand "Australia" can be difficult. 'Come Walkabout' is a uniquely Australian term. The key message of 'Come Walkabout' intends to invite the visitor to lose and find themselves. Hence, arrived as...departed as. To overcome the challenge of Australia's location, cost and distance of travel - we need to use our experiences as a unique point of difference.

The movie *Australia* is a key part in Tourism Australia's strategy to cut through the marketing noise in the world. With the support of Fox Studios, *Australia* the movie will be shown around the world and Tourism Australia's marketing will position Australia the country as a great place for Experience Seekers to find their own story. The brand of "Australia" through the movie will be very powerful and supported in marketing through TVC's (commercials), print and associated partners world-wide. This is a significant push into world tourism markets.

The movie and TVC's use powerful emotion to create a story on how Australia transforms you through our country, people and landscapes. Tourism Australia's strategy is based on these stories and experiences.

**National Landscapes is a very important element to deliver and convey the stories and experiences message.**



The key thread to brand Australia is the flow from *Australia* the movie to [www.australia.com](http://www.australia.com) (Tourism Australia) and then to National Landscapes which is linked off the homepage (see left). The website is an important marketing tool. The selected National Landscapes regions will be positioned as the Best of the Best of Australia and must have an Experience Seeker focus along with international ready products that are unique and high quality. Standards must be high to compete on a world stage.

The Murray Border region has a unique opportunity. Our region due to its naturally rich assets and products has been considered from only 26 locations around Australia. We are well positioned and considered amongst the Best of the Best and are only a few steps away from significant international tourism strategies, markets and support. This is a whole of community approach and

stretches across Australia with regions connected by National Landscapes status. This means we have new regions to partner and market with long-term.

Not every business and product in the Murray Border region will be directly involved in the National Landscapes. The criteria is set by the National Landscapes Reference Committee and is yet to be released. There will, however be significant tourism echo benefits and new product development opportunities for operators to grasp ie tours, accommodation, attractions, bundling etc suited to National Landscapes standards and Experience Seeker's needs.

Tourism Australia will prepare a Tool Kit which includes international media exposure for National Landscapes regions. This means our communities can see significant energy and effort is underway to promote the regions and the program. As a region we therefore need to come together as a new community and leverage off this effort.

Tourism Australia expects to reach over 10 million visitors online in years to come with pages converted into multiple languages. They have also set up international media hostings and briefing programs. Additional modules are also being developed through the Aussie Specialist Program on each region which ensures international agents have specialist knowledge of each National Landscape region. There will also be National Landscapes images available on the Tourism Australia website, however we will need to invest into our own library as well. Products that meet the National Landscapes criteria will be promoted internationally and media fact sheets will be developed.

The easier we show how to get to our National Landscapes region the more likely we will be experienced. So the big question is : What is the key message or element about the Murray Border region that makes it special on the world stage? How do we see our region's story? What emotional connection do we offer the Experience Seeker?

Our branding audit will help us develop the positioning statement as the core message for the Experience Seeker. The positioning statement highlights the essence of our region and should be adopted as the vision to develop our region's message and marketing strategy from.

## National Policies and Strategies

What's of great importance are Federal Ministers are supporting the National Landscapes program. Currently there is a new National Tourism Strategy Plan under development. What's promising is that Ministers are talking about possible support across departments and policy which is all linked to the National Tourism Strategy which may include benefits for the National Landscapes program. This also has bipartisan support as it was launched by the previous Liberal Coalition and adopted by the current Labour Government. Conversations are underway regarding the future of the Australian Tourism Development Program (ATDP). If it continues, the National Landscapes program and regions may be supported to develop necessary infrastructure, products and capacity using ATDP.

## **State Tourism Organisations (STO)**

The current situation is that this strategy has been developed by Tourism Australia and Parks Australia. There is significant and promising support by Federal Ministers including discussions around the new National Tourism Strategy Plan. There has been significant media attention internationally and the pending launch and promotion of the *Australia* movie. Eight regions have been included in the National Landscapes program and have undertaken, or are in the final process of finalising their Product and Brand Audits to begin working on their Master Tourism Plan. The Australian Alps is currently the most advanced in the process. Other regions such as our Murray Border and Kangaroo Island have begun the first steps for submission and inclusion into the program.

STO's recently met with Tourism Australia regarding the project and have given in principle support to the National Landscapes strategy. The key to success for this strategy is nationwide support which includes State Tourism Ministers, STO's, Regional Tourism Organisations, local government, regional development and Parks associations. We all need to champion this strategy. National Landscapes success largely relies on grassroots embracing the National Landscapes philosophy supported by the above organisations.

Tourism Australia supports National Landscapes with international marketing and promotions with Parks Australia and the Federal Government creating support for National Landscapes in National Tourism Strategies. The benefits for all regions and their communities will be significant. Particular reference to National Landscapes and nature-based tourism is imperative in all future Strategic Plans at national, state and local levels in our region.

Our region's challenge is working with 3 state tourism bodies, Tourism NSW, Tourism Victoria and the South Australian Tourism Commission. It would be beneficial if all 3 bodies gave this program and our Steering Committee 100% support while keeping the process simple and grassroots focussed. Steering Committees ultimately manage their own programs, branding, governance and product development, however STO support is valued and important.

STO's were interested in engaging with Steering Committees regarding product development. Another part of the conversation extended into alignment with Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW) involvement. STO's could flag export ready products within the ATDW that are linked back to National Landscape regions. STO's also indicated having a role on the Steering Committees and expressed an interest in working with media programs and were keen to participate in Master Planning.

## **Bundling opportunities**

Bundling will be the key to align new and existing product and marketing to create unique Australian experiences and competitive advantages. Like-minded operators can come together to create a smorgasbord of experiences which are complimentary and targeted correctly. A simple example would be combining canoeing experience with picnic hamper to create romantic escape canoe trips. Part of the National Landscapes Tool Kit to be developed for operators will include advice on how to do business with National Landscapes branding, bundling products and making business internationally ready.

There is also the important need to educate local operators on the region's experiences, landscapes and understanding the Experience Seeker market. One example is "who cares about culture"...the target market does. It's about expanding high yield, low volume product and developing local awareness on rich heritage and natural assets while focussing on a specific market. This will spill over to every demographic eventually. Developing interpretation of the region and within that, the opportunity to develop new markets will emerge. We all need to ensure we are educated about sustainable tourism practices to protect our natural assets long-term and other products.

## **Product and Brand Audits and Master Planning**

Master Planning will be necessary once the Murray Border region completes its Product and Brand Audit (paid for by Tourism Australia). The outcome of the audits needs to satisfy Tourism Australia and Parks Australia's Experience Seeker needs. The Product Audit allows us to list our region's experiences and products which connect with the target market. The audit consultant appointed by Tourism Australia will visit our region and experience what makes us truly unique from an Experience Seeker point of view. The consultant will want to experience our region as a visitor.

This report will identify what we have which is international ready and where our product gaps are. What's important are our core attributes and the tourism sector align with Tourism Australia's key brand pillars of - Nature in Australia - Australian Journeys - Aboriginal Australia - They must be unique and world standard. Once the Product Audit is complete and the Reference Committee is satisfied we will progress onto the Brand Audit.

The Brand Audit through a specialist brand consultant will hold workshops in our region (number to be confirmed) which should identify the essence of our region. This is likely to give us our positioning statement, logo and the necessary identifying brand of the region. What is critical following the Brand Audit is the governance of the brand once the Steering Committee approves its use. The Steering Committee will have ownership of the brand.

The Master Planning follows the audits and will outline long-term strategies for the region and will include governance, marketing, product development, funding etc. Product development is the responsibility of the Steering Committee in the Master Plan and will be overarched by the requirements of the National Landscapes Reference Committee. The Master Plan will outline the main and core priorities on the ground. The Master Plan will also identify key stakeholders and their long term involvement.

Governance long-term is very important. Management of the National Landscapes brand and our region's brand according to the Reference Committee's requirements will ensure we remain as a National Landscape region. As other regions are beginning their Master Planning stage we can draw on their experiences. The Australian Alps have created an Incorporated body and constitution to move forward. Other regions are exploring future Governance structures and our Steering Committee will need to also consider the best options as we move forward.

We also had sessions on the ATDW and internet based marketing around social media. These were more in depth and I'll discuss these with the Steering Committee later.

## Conclusion

Following the forum there were a number of actions Tourism Australia and Parks Australia need to follow up on and they will continue to update us as they progress through addressing each item. Conservation is the key to this project and the traditional approaches to tourism may need to be reconsidered with a heavier focus on protecting, appreciating and embracing our precious and unique environment. There will be new markets that operators can develop with a quality, Experience Seeker focus, however good Governance is essential.

As a Steering Committee we need to create a real passion and energy in our region towards this project. Our successful acceptance as a National Landscape will ensure long-term viability for the Murray Border Tri-State region. We have a great opportunity to work across borders through bundling and with other National Landscape regions such as the Flinders Ranges. We have an opportunity to give our community something to strive for. If we look after our country the people in our community will show and guide others to do the same. It's an opportunity to maximise social and economic advantages for our part of rural Australia.

We need to ensure we have good communication and transparency with our community and key stakeholders. As a committee, creating a vision for what we want to achieve will ensure we're all pulling in the same direction which is particularly important as we straddle 3 states. The Australian Alps had an MOU in place for over 20 years via their Parks Associations. We are starting fresh and need to establish new, cooperative relationships and friendships. We can't afford to bring parochial positions into this program as we're now one community. Other parts of the Murray not included in the National Landscapes region will also benefit.

What became very clear during the Forum was the fundamental need to be very savvy with our web-based marketing. This will give us an excellent strategic advantage long-term as we can begin our planning today. Once we complete the brand audit we know we'll have world-class, international ready assets and products to begin marketing. If we find and create the stories of our region to engage the Experience Seeker and use quality images, video and rich media we can begin to communicate powerfully. Sharing this footage with Tourism Australia ensures they have good material to promote our region. We will then convert leads generated into visitation and sustainable economic benefits. Smart, quality marketing will be very important.

Thank you to the SATC for covering the accommodation and flights for Duncan Mackenzie and myself and to the Riverland Development Corporate for their support and Sam's time. I'm very much looking forward to what we can achieve together for the Murray Border region. This is an exciting time and great opportunity to embrace.

Shane Strudwick  
shane@rivermurray.com | 0409 678 654