

4. ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

BACKGROUND

- Environmental sustainability involves maintaining the qualities of the physical environment over the long term. In a business sense, it involves incorporating environmental demands into infrastructure decisions and day-to-day business operations.
- Industry is becoming much more aware of the environmental consequences of economic development, and is increasingly taking a sustainable approach to business operation and investment.

KEY ISSUES

- VTIC recognises that economic development and environmental sustainability are not competing objectives, and balanced policy responses can create positive results and enhanced social, environmental and economic outcomes.
- Action taken now by industry to lead the development of environmentally sustainable operations and investment will help avoid over-regulation and excessive red-tape in the future.
- The tourism industry as a whole should be encouraged to consider the following environmental principles in undertaking all aspects of operation:
 - Maintaining and restoring natural assets
 - Using resources more efficiently, and
 - Reducing or eliminating (where possible) everyday environmental impacts.
- There is a definite role for government policy and regulation in protecting environmental assets. The policy framework should focus on defining broad goals and priorities and be integrated with industry and business development policies and programs.
- Nature-based tourism is a growth market in Australia, but Victoria lags competitively. Victoria has the natural assets to compete effectively in this segment, but requires infrastructure investment, investment attraction and product development, as well as advertising and promotion.
- There is an onus on all businesses to use water responsibly, and take active steps to reduce water usage where possible. However, it should be acknowledged that the tourism industry is a legitimate water user like any other industry, and also relies on environmental flows for water-based tourism products and experiences.
- Visitors are increasingly environmentally aware, and seeking tourism products and services that are environmentally friendly. For some, this includes seeking to make their trip 'carbon neutral' by purchasing 'offsets', which effectively provide money for projects that reduce the production of greenhouse gases. An increasing number of businesses are offering this service.
- Energy policy has a major impact on the environment, due to the impact of carbon dioxide emissions on global warming. In Victoria, brown coal is a major source of reliable and competitively priced energy. Efforts to minimise unnecessary greenhouse emissions must recognise that the best solutions will be least cost, sustainable, efficient and reliable. Alternative energy sources have a complimentary role to play in meeting future energy demand, but this role should always be subject to full cost benefit analysis and objective consideration.



POLICY POSITION

- Environmental policy and regulation should be based on an outcome-oriented approach, which encourages innovation, risk management, and industry leadership. It must be balanced and have regard for maintaining the competitive position of the Victorian tourism industry.
- A whole-of-government approach to policy-making and implementation should be developed, with strong cooperation and coordination between Government agencies, in conjunction with industry and the wider community.
- A supports a whole of Government 'Nature Based Tourism' strategy to facilitate public and private sector investment and growth in this under-developed segment of the tourism industry.
- Environmental water flows must be secured to support water-based tourism products and experiences. VTIC also supports the development of 'carbon offset' schemes to assist travellers in making their trip 'carbon neutral'.
- VTIC supports the development of renewable energy infrastructure where it is commercially viable, can be achieved without a significant adverse impact on a region's natural and cultural environments, and where community views have been taken into consideration.

POLICY DEVELOPED: JUNE 2007