



Christmas Island

A Natural Wonder

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Northern Australia Inquiry into Opportunities and Methods for, and Impediments and Challenges to Stimulating the Tourism Industry in Northern Australia

The Christmas Island Tourism Association thanks the members and the secretariat for their time and consideration of the issues which face Christmas Island, the Indian Ocean Territories and Northern Australia to stimulate tourism to provide a strong economic base which supports a diverse and vibrant community. We were pleased to show you the work of Christmas Island Tourism and to illustrate our commitment, expertise and successes in developing regional tourism.

This submission expands on some of the issues raised at the hearing on 29 January 2018 in the attachment, highlights the key priorities to stimulate sustainable tourism and addresses some of the issues raised by the Committee and others.

The key priorities are an immediate increase in the number of fully-serviced international standard beds and for leaders and stakeholders to enable and empower the tourism industry through strategic planning, policies and actions.

Sustainable tourism based on the Islands' unique selling points has a viable future in the Indian Ocean Territories and particularly on Christmas Island. The unique nature is currently the primary reason for travel to Christmas Island. Nature based tourism can provide the platform to diversify the tourism offer as globally people seek authentic experiences connecting with locals eg. agri-tourism, soft adventure, wellness and cultural offerings. This is consistent with the Christmas Island vision of high value, low volume tourism. The success of this approach is demonstrated by the current investment in nature-based tourism, through Swell Lodge eco-accommodation in the Christmas Island National Park and the new global diving venture of Extra Divers Worldwide. Christmas Island Tourism was fundamental in attracting these investors and continues to support them through destination marketing, promotions and with local knowledge and assistance. These services benefit all members of Christmas Island Tourism as well as the region by attracting visitors.

It is critical for the future of Christmas Island and the region to sustainably grow tourism for the longer-term. The current economic base of mining and immigration is uncertain. Provided the correct investment, political settings and leadership are in place, tourism can continue to develop alongside these industries and in-time become a significant economic and community contributor.

Generally, the community, leaders and stakeholders have not yet fully embraced the possibilities and potential of tourism, and other new industries, to become significant contributors to the economy, jobs and culture. It is easier to seek to retain the status quo, even though the future of these industries are uncertain and pose a threat to the future economic stability of Christmas Island, than to create change. Economic uncertainty on Christmas Island also impacts on the economic stability of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.



Immigration activity

On the 22 November 2017, the Australian Government advised the community via media release, that the Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) and current immigration activity on Christmas Island would move into contingency as at 30 June 2018. People currently working at the facility have anecdotally suggested that the island could start to see a downturn from March, with operations winding back considerably by end of May, ready for the 30 June contingency date. A number of local people are employed at this facility, and the closure will result in unemployment, though we are to understand that a skeleton crew will continue to maintain the facility, ready for deployment if required. Others will move away from the Island, contributing to a decline in economic activity and services.

Whilst Christmas Island Tourism recognises that having the immigration facility on the island has had many economic and infrastructure benefits, it has been damaging for tourism and the island's brand and reputation. There has been feedback from visitors who advised that they waited until the boat arrivals and detention focus on the island diminished before finally putting Christmas Island back on their bucket lists. With the change of use in recent years, better security at the facility and a winding back of operations, Christmas Island is no longer making negative headlines, and Christmas Island Tourism has embraced the opportunity to re-engage with markets that were lost during peak immigration activity.

Christmas Island Tourism has seen a marked increase in engagement with our operators and the markets we continued to build networks with, despite being thwarted in our ability to convert the interest to bookings during the immigration era due to lack of accommodation, flights and hire car supply. Continual cuts in our funding over successive years has meant it is more challenging to continue our marketing, networking and development activities at pre-immigration levels and to provide the requested assistance to all entities who wish to add Christmas Island to their range of destinations on offer.

If the IDC continues to wind back and cease operations altogether on Christmas Island, this will no doubt contribute to a contraction of economic activity. Christmas Island Tourism definitely sees tourism, with more resources and without the hindrance of negative publicity generated by immigration activity, as being well poised to continue converting our headline to a more positive future.

Phosphate Mining

During the recent hearing on Christmas Island, Phosphate Resources Limited (PRL) Director Clive Brown confirmed that the mine has approximately 5 years of life left, based on current estimates. Christmas Island Tourism are aware of an application currently before the Department of Environment and Energy for exploration permits to test-drill old drill lines on un-allocated crown land. If permitted to drill, this will be the first clearing in primary rainforest since the 1980's. PRL have also confirmed that if suitable material is found and mining is approved in this area, it would only provide the mine with possibly another 5 years of life. Christmas Island Tourism question's any long-term benefits for the economy and community on Christmas Island if such an activity were permitted to take place.

PRL in recent months has accepted 34 redundancies, a large percentage of those were long-term local residents. The mine has often (and rightfully) boasted about the high level of local employment in their company. In the last few years, they have been employing more off-island skilled labour and have not engaged in offering as many employment and training opportunities for locals. We would read this as an indication that PRL are taking active steps to reduce their employee liabilities in the short term, and engage skilled staff on limited

term employment contracts to diminish their training and re-deployment obligations were the mine to cease operations.

When it commenced as an entity in the early 1980's, the mine boasted a large number of local shareholders, people who believed in the phosphate industry continuing on the island and worked to extend the life of the mine so that they could have a choice as to whether to continue to live on the island with their families and enjoy the unique cultural communities and island benefits. Mining was viewed as a transition industry, providing an economic base to support the Island and enable other industries to develop. Our understanding is that the concentration of shares are now held by a few individuals, and the company is now majority foreign owned with profits heading off-shore. The mine provides some local employment and a range of social and community support programs. We understand minesite rehabilitation funding is a requirement under the lease arrangements and acknowledge the mine's involvement in the feral cat eradication program. However, removing primary rainforest, aside from some community program support, would provide very few long-term benefits for the economy and the community, thus sacrificing more of the Island's unique natural environment for such a limited and short term gain would be reprehensible.

Without an opportunity to see the submission by PRL, Clive Brown made mention that their submission included a section outlining the 'barriers to growing the tourism industry'. We note that this is in line with previous public submissions, where PRL continually highlight the negatives of growing and establishing a tourism industry, rather than acknowledging and engaging meaningfully to overcome some of these barriers, a role in which the organisation could have played a greater part in the past few decades and assisted their diversification and 'transition'. This indicates PRL are not working towards engaging meaningfully with an industry that has the best chance of assisting Christmas Island to move to a more varied and sustainable economy post-mining.

Whilst phosphate mining is continually facing this piece-meal extension of activities, the Federal Government, local Government and PRL, have not taken a long-term approach towards a post-mining economy. Christmas Island Tourism welcomes the proposed strategic plan, but cannot emphasise enough that it needs to include the tactical withdrawal of mining activities, and how replacement economic activity (including tourism) will be supported to reduce the impacts and move Christmas Island towards a long term sustainable economy and future.

Accommodation – new Gaze Rd Development

There is a shortage of fully serviced international standard beds. Peak periods, particularly during the annual red crab migration, are already heavily booked through to 2019 and customers have been turned away. Christmas Island Tourism has worked with property owners and a number of self-contained units have recently entered the market. This is not sufficient to meet peak demand, particularly for small groups. This market segment is growing due to the efforts of the tourism association and operators in developing product eg. photography, diving, golf, birdwatching and other natural experiences, and generating demand in the marketplace.

An investor has purchased land on Gaze Rd (the site is locally known as the Virgin's Castle) and has submitted plans and applications to build a 30/35-room international standard accommodation to meet the needs of the associated dive business and international flight between Christmas Island and Jakarta. This development would also assist in creating a critical mass for further tourism growth. After a year or so, the proponent is still waiting on

approvals to enable building to commence. The reasons for the delays are unknown and we are concerned that the development may not be realised and call on the government to assist in identifying the blockages to facilitate orderly approvals for this and future developments.

Strategic Planning and the future

This work will assist in attracting new investors and the Commonwealth land release. In her statement to the Committee, The Administrator for the Territories of Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, Mrs Natasha Griggs, identified the need to create a one-stop shop for investors to actively encourage and facilitate investment in the Christmas Island tourism industry and advised the creation of a new position being regional investment officer for the Indian Ocean Territories Regional Development Organisation and the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development is preparing an investment prospectus for the Indian Ocean Territories. These are all important steps in building tourism and other industries and we look forward to working together to strategically grow tourism and the economies of the region. Staff and members of Christmas Island Tourism, have networks, skills and access to information that can strengthen outcomes.

There is also a gap in providing advice for small business, which would assist existing and new tourism businesses. The Service Delivery Arrangement with the West Australian Small Business Development Corporation is no longer operating.

A Regional Tourism Organisation

The Christmas Island Tourism Association has identified the strength of the tourism associations in working together to promote the diverse and complimentary nature of the destinations, acknowledging the close transport, business, cultural and historical ties. This philosophy is incorporated in our approach to our activities and is evidenced by invitations to the Cocos Keeling Islands Tourism Association to develop joint marketing plans and to jointly participate in specific trade/consumer events and marketing activities. A tourism operator on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands is also a member of the Christmas Island Tourism Association in an effort to maximise marketing exposure, particularly to the international markets, which we are active in.

The Christmas Island Tourism Association initiated conversations with the Cocos Keeling Tourism Association as far back as 2013 to explore the possibilities of creating stronger networks through an overarching organisation. The outcome was a Memorandum of Understanding, which has since been updated and the initiation of “Australia’s Indian Ocean Islands” as a brand and a marketing identity through social media, interactions with Tourism Australia and for Tourism Awards.

Christmas Island Tourism Association subsequently applied for grant funding to enable both tourism organisations to hold facilitated workshops to consider how best to strategically use the strength of the organisations and destinations and potentially form one regional tourism organisation. It was anticipated that the process would encompass all members and stakeholders and would take time to develop a workable model that takes into account the unique circumstances of the Indian Ocean Territories. The grant application was not successful.

A more regional approach has been discussed on a number of occasions over the years with our funding body, the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development and Christmas Island Tourism has indicated support for the concept.

Due to the governance arrangements of the Indian Ocean Territories and the legislation which applies to the West Australian Tourism Organisation the Indian Ocean Territories does not fall under its umbrella. The Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development have indicated, as part of their ongoing reviews of the Service Delivery Arrangements with the Western Australian Government an arrangement with Tourism Western Australia is being considered. Care must be taken any agreement would add value to the current tourism arrangements.

Christmas Island Tourism has a strong working relationship with Tourism Australia and actively participates in social media, Tourism Australia's Aussie Specialist Programs and work closely with Tourism Australia's representatives in Asia and Europe. In the last year this has provided the opportunities to present Australia's Indian Ocean Islands in Europe and Asia, for representatives of the Australian High Commission in Singapore and Tourism Australian to attend the opening of Christmas Island Red – an Exhibition at the Singapore Museum, destination information on Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands translated into Bahasa on Tourism Australia's Indonesian website and a Christmas Island feature by Tourism Australia in Singapore.

Christmas Island Tourism Association
16 February 2018

Attachment

Additional information to support the issues raised at the hearing on Christmas Island
29 January 2018

Christmas Island Tourism Association

The ongoing and consistent efforts and activities of the Christmas Island Tourism Association over its 20 years of operations has recently resulted in renewed interest and investment in the region.

This has been achieved by developing and sustaining the industry building blocks: networks, relationships, expertise and a strong positive reputation over the long term.

Christmas Island Tourism has a goal to increase visitors to 5,000 visitors per year from 2020.

With approximately 1,200 visitors per annum from around the globe, around 95% of visitors would recommend Christmas Island to friends and families and just under 50% also visit the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

Recent Highlights

- A Global dive operator has opened an Australian business on Christmas Island and is due to introduce a second boat. Christmas Island Tourism introduced this operator to Christmas Island in 2009.
- Regular and reliable flight between Jakarta and Christmas Island as part of the dive operations. Christmas Island Tourism supports this flight through its global marketing activities.
- The first eco-tourism accommodation venture in an Australian Commonwealth National Park is being built. The operator, first visited Christmas Island as a 10 year old and was reintroduced through the activities of Christmas Island Tourism.
- Investment in accommodation – new builds and renovation.
- Taxi Service has recommenced on a full time basis after many years of limited operations. Christmas Island Tourism promotes this business and is currently working with the operator to extend his offer.
- Growing recognition and greater collaboration with industry for marketing. This is a result of new entries to the market, using existing networks and creating partnerships for mutual benefit for examples joint marketing and attendance with Extra Divers at targeted international dive shows, consumer and agent roadshows with domestic wholesaler Broome, Kimberley and Beyond. This extends our reach and is driving interest to the region.
- Growing recognition and greater collaboration with local stakeholders and industry.
- Renewed interest in fishing charters as a result of renewed access to the Asian market through the northern flight.
- Providing work experience and offering a school based traineeship for students of the Christmas Island District. Christmas Island Tourism also employs casual staff who are students of the Christmas Island District High School or recent graduates. This provides real work experience and assists their pathway to fulltime employment.

Air Services and Airport Arrangements

Ongoing reviews and improvements to air services and airport arrangements to ensure reliability, frequency and affordability of services between Perth, Christmas Island, the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and a South-East Asian hub is needed.

Northern Flight

The northern flight is critical for tourism. This route is operated by private enterprise, and is at best, tenuous.

There are large populations and tourism markets to the north in Asia and Europe who are seeking authentic, nature based experiences. Christmas Island Tourism is active in these markets and have actively sought partnerships and developed networks to extend the reach and raise awareness of Christmas Island as a nature-based destination.

A reliable northern flight supports investment in tourism evidenced by renewed fishing charters and accommodation eg. *SeaSpray* and *Virgins' Castle*.

The Australian Government cannot provide direct support for the northern route due to legislative and policy restrictions. It is time to look differently and for the Australian Government to act in its State Government role for the Indian Ocean Territories by providing incentives to attract and/or retain international flights. Such initiatives include increasing marketing budgets through the Christmas Island Tourism Association, reviewing airport charges to provide incentives for tourism and appropriate charges for other international flights eg. non-commercial aircraft and increasing demand through facilitating new international standard accommodation, amenities and activities.

Cabotage is often cited as the answer to attract and retain international flights and as such removal of the restrictions on the Christmas Island - Cocos (Keeling) Islands route is supported as this would provide a positive signal to the market place. We acknowledge the political difficulties that a policy change to cater for a small route would entail and any increased supply also needs an increase in accommodation and activities to meet the associated demand. It would be anticipated that with correct investment and policy settings the private market would address any demand for accommodation, activities and flights.

There is now competition on the northern flight with flights between Christmas Island and Jakarta and Christmas Island and Kuala Lumpur. Previous experience shows when there is not sufficient demand to support two flights, both have folded. This is extremely detrimental for tourism. More beds of international standards and ongoing marketing and promotional efforts are required to create the demand to support the flights. The local population and export industries are not of sufficient quantum to support all the flights currently operating.

Southern Flight

We often hear 'it's cheaper to travel to Europe' than visit Christmas Island. The cost to travel to the Indian Ocean Territories is high, even though the service is underwritten by the Australian Government. The high costs impacts on tourism.

Christmas Island Tourism currently seeks to attract the niche markets, which can afford to, and desire to, travel to Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and our marketing efforts are clearly targeted towards these markets.

There should be advantages of being within the large Virgin Australia network eg their marketing reach, support for media and agent familiarisation visits and other incentives routinely offered by airlines but the underwriting arrangements seem to inhibit the capacity of the airline to provide these benefits to Australia's Indian Ocean Islands. Greater flexibility and responsiveness is required to enable tourism wholesalers and agents to maximise bookings. An example is there seems little capacity to increase 'bums on seats' through lower priced group fares and last minute tourism deals.

Christmas Island Tourism understands delays happen due to weather and technical issues and safety is paramount. The length of time for a recovery flight and communications are of concern to travellers, the tourism industry and the community. We have collected stories of the impacts of these delays which are attached for your information on the basis that they remain confidential for privacy reasons. We understand there are ongoing discussions between the government and Virgin Australia regarding the delays.

A common concern of travellers is the lack of information provided by Virgin in the event of flight changes. Communications have improved, however, individuals still report issues due to lack of access to mobile phones and internet plus the delays in providing updated information to the Virgin Call Centre. Christmas Island Tourism continues to work with Virgin Australia on these issues and improved communication infrastructure on both Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Island for mobile phones and internet would help to address this.

Christmas Island Airport

During the hearing on Christmas Island, there was much discussion about the facilities at the Christmas Island airport, particularly the length of the runway. There have been recent improvements at the airport and as tourism grows further improvements, such as wifi access, more streamlined arrival arrangements eg baggage, inviting departure areas, traffic management will be required to facilitate passenger movements.

We defer to the expertise of the operators of the Christmas Island Airport and the flights to determine what is needed to cater for modern aircraft, which are likely to fly to the region.

Cocos (Keeling) Islands Runway Upgrade

Once completed this upgrade can provide additional opportunities as the increased capacity will allow a greater variety of aircraft to land. This may address the length of delays for recovery flights and allow greater flexibility in scheduling flights.

To utilise any increase in flight capacity, additional accommodation is needed on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

The upgrade of the runway needs to be managed to minimise tourism impacts during construction eg. use of tourism accommodation, so as not to disrupt the current growth and interest in both Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

Maintain and upgrade tourism/community amenity

Maintain and upgrade tourism/community amenity to provide safe and high quality experiences. Amenities include boardwalks, roads, seating, signage, shelters, jetties, heritage and cultural assets, airport, parks and open space, toilets, waste management, streetscape etc.

Many of these are owned or managed by the Australian and local governments. We acknowledge the limited resources, large portfolio and competing priorities of the owners of the assets. However, a strategic, proactive approach is required to ensure these facilities are sufficiently maintained and safe to meet visitor expectations.

Maintaining assets would improve streetscapes and may provide confidence, motivation and incentive for the private sector to invest in the external appearance of their properties.

Consideration should be given by the Australian Government to appropriately divest some of the assets to private enterprise and/or the not-for-profit sector to reduce the burden, empower the community, encourage investment and to avoid situations such as the dereliction of the CI Club. In so doing, consideration must also be given to enhancing community capacity to appropriately manage assets.

Flying Fish Cove

Commitment by the Australian Government is needed to create an inviting multi-use space at Flying Fish Cove. This area should be the tourism and community hub but currently is tired and bordering on dangerous. The 2017/18 Ministerial Statement and Portfolio Budgets Statements states that funding was provided in the 2016/17 for a Master Plan for Flying Fish Cove on Christmas Island.

Work has not commenced and is now awaiting an assessment by geotechnical experts for risks and hazards from the surrounding cliffs. This funding must be quarantined or new funding provided for the purpose of a Master Plan with a commitment to implementing the outcomes.

Waste Management

Visitors and many residents expect modern waste management practices. Poor waste management practices are frequently commented on by visitors, particularly those from Europe.

There is very little recycling available on Christmas Island with most waste being bulldozed into landfill. This includes items which could be reused or repurposed.

The Shire is implementing Local Laws to reduce single use plastic bags and this step is welcomed.

There is a need to innovate and work together to develop sustainable solutions.

Jetty

The recent jetty upgrade was not designed for use by small commercial craft, needed to support the tourism industry – specifically diving.

During 2017, the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development commenced work on a design to improve the safety and efficiency for passenger transfers. This needs to be given a priority, particularly with a second dive boat for Extra Divers due shortly and Wet'n'Dry Adventures returning from an extended break.

Funding tourism associations

Adequate and ongoing funding for tourism associations is required to enable marketing, visitor servicing, product development and industry capacity building.

Adequate funding, a long term outlook and a functional regional approach is required to enable marketing, visitor servicing, product development and building industry capacity.

Tourism funding for Christmas Island Tourism has been cut over the last four years from \$420,000 to \$342,500, while expectations and costs have increased. Reinstatement of the budget to Christmas Island Tourism would cost \$77,500 per annum which is a small cost to the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development but would make a significant difference to Christmas Island Tourism's ability to support regional economic and community development.

Budget cuts have impacted on activities at this critical juncture when increased marketing and building capacity is needed to support the opportunity provided by the international dive operations, increased global and domestic agency networks, northern flight and the decreased negativity in the Australian media about border security.

Annual funding agreements are usually not in place until October each year, creating uncertainty and requiring Christmas Island Tourism to keep cash resources to remain solvent and continue activities until funding is agreed. This does not provide sufficient capacity nor confidence to build tourism and to participate and engage in the strategic planning and implementation processes which are a priority for the region's future. Longer term funding arrangements would provide additional certainty and reduce annual workloads of the tourism associations and the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development in negotiating annual agreements.

Unlike most small destinations across Australia, the Christmas Island Tourism Association does not have the support of regional and state tourism bodies for domestic and international marketing. Although We understand a Service Delivery Arrangement is being considered as part of the Department's ongoing reviews. We urge care and request consultation to ensure any changes add value to the tourism industry.

Internationally, a strong relationship combined with unique content has enabled promotions through Tourism Australia including access to the Aussie Specialist program, social media and country based programs. Whilst these programs are often provided through the state and territory tourism associations, Christmas Island Tourism has forged and maintained a direct relationship with Tourism Australia to ensure the region is considered for these programs.

Red Tape and Barriers to Investment

A reduction in red tape, barriers and delays to facilitate private investment in tourism and other industries is needed. The governance arrangements for the Indian Ocean Territories are unique and complex. These complexities combined with the additional costs and challenges of being remote create barriers to investment. Improved communication, engagement and responsiveness between the Australian Government, stakeholders and the community would assist and specifically work is needed to:

- reinstate the local community grant program;
- reduce delays for development including heritage approvals and land release;
- find a solution to the market failure of insurance; and
- facilitate the proposed water entry near the dive operators and for new accommodation.

There is a lack of transparency of government programs, budgets, priorities and achievements which can result in barriers, frustrations and a disconnect between government, the local community and stakeholders resulting in policies and projects which do not always taking into account local needs and conditions eg. Jetty upgrade to cater for small commercial craft. There is a lack of awareness of the various outcomes and successes generated by the government, which translates to a perception that the community does not appreciate the government's efforts.

There are some positive changes with communication and a more proactive approach being taken at a local level.

Grant Programs

The communities of the Indian Ocean Territories had access to a community grant program through the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, which has not been funded for two financial years. We understand the Department is keen for the grant program to be available but there are issues with the Department of Finance that are yet to be resolved. These grants replaced the range of state-based grants available to communities across Western Australia

Access to grants must be given a priority as community groups have limited access to alternate grants. These grants support tourism both directly and indirectly for example the replacement of the binoculars at Territory Day Park, the jungle mural at the airport arrival hall and other art works, building and retaining culture through community groups are examples of past grants.

Access to Commonwealth funded grants should also be considered. For example the national tourism and demand driver infrastructure grant 2014-17 run by Austrade excluded the Indian Ocean Territories.

Christmas Island Tourism is not aware of all the programs and grants available across Northern Australia and would anticipate that this would be reviewed as part of the strategic planning and new investment arrangements.

Heritage Approvals

Heritage is important for tourism and the community and must be considered in developing the streetscape, upgrading existing buildings and for new developments. Most of the Settlement and Kampong are heritage listed.

However, the process to obtain heritage approvals is not clear and takes too long, which adds to the complexity and the costs for investment and may result in needed developments not being realised.

Release of Land

The Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development initiated an Expression of Interest program to support the release of land, in early 2017. There has been no visible outcomes from this process. Access to land could enable sustainable development to support tourism.

Insurance

Availability of insurance on Christmas Island is limited and more so on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. When it is available it is expensive.

This does not enable some business and personal risks such as house, contents (including commercial and personal) and vehicles to be mitigated, therefore inhibiting investment.

We have recently been advised of developments to support access to insurance across Northern Australia and are pleased by this development. We commend the efforts of those concerned.

Strategic Planning

It is positive that work has commenced to develop and implement a strategic plan/structural adjustment program to transition the economy to post immigration and post mining. Economic development organisations, Christmas Island Tourism and other stakeholders eg the Regional Development Organisation (RDO) and the Indian Ocean Group Training Association (IOGTA) must be adequately resourced to facilitate outcomes.

The Christmas Island National Park

It is necessary for adequate and ongoing funding for the Christmas Island National Park visitor servicing and environmental programs be provided. The unique selling point for Christmas Island and the reason it attracts domestic and international visitors is nature. Without a healthy environment and access to natural places and stories, tourism will suffer.

The culture and heritage adds to the experience but the current offerings are not sufficient to draw numbers in their own right.

Parks Australia and Christmas Island Tourism have a strong relationship which supports marketing and visitor services. A recent collaboration resulted in Google Trekker visiting both Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. The visit to Christmas Island resulted in extraordinary media coverage and we anticipate greater media exposure once the images are released through Google. This will provide ongoing images and footage to a global network and support and enhance future marketing efforts.

Parks Australia have been proactive in enabling the eco-accommodation development in the National Park and ensuring that strict environmental standards are met. Parks have recently refurbished the Dales area and have plans to upgrade the facilities at the Blowholes. Locally the Park supports the visitor experience through providing facilities and visitors may attend bird rehabilitation and visit the captive breeding program for reptiles on a regular basis. Parks also support ad-hoc requests for small group tours and visiting media.

There are opportunities to enable new visitor experiences such as mountain biking and caving in the Park, but these have not yet been developed, possibly due to limited resources and competing priorities.

World Heritage Listing

World Heritage Listing for Christmas Island would increase tourist visitation; provide better planning, management and resources to improve interpretation, visitor facilities and protection; and promote local and national pride in the site. World Heritage sites are places that are important to, and belong to, everyone. Listing would provide a boost to develop cultural and heritage tourism.

A commitment is needed to commence the process and support the group of experts across a range of disciplines who have already identified some of the outstanding values which meet listing requirements:

- *superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance*
- *outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic feature*
- *outstanding examples representing significant ongoing ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals*
- *the most important and significant natural habitats for in situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of Outstanding Universal Value from the point of view of science or conservation*

Better Communications

Ensure the fibre optic cable due to land on Christmas Island in 2018 is available to the community and business at fair prices.

The cable is being installed to meet Defence needs and there have been informal indications that it would be available to the community.

Access to high speed internet is expected by visitors and can also enhance visitor safety and provide additional marketing and promotional opportunities. There may be opportunity to improve the mobile phone system and this needs to be explored.

High speed internet can bring economic development. A plan is needed to identify and attract new business and upskill existing business. This could be through the strategic planning process.

Casino Licence

The issue of a casino licence must be resolved to enable the casino to reopen or the site to be used for another tourism venture. This facility is wasted, decaying and blocks public access to Waterfall Bay. If the facility is operating there is the potential to diversify tourism.

Christmas Island Tourism supports a casino licence with the risks borne by the private operator, who is best able to assess its viability.

A casino would form part of the tourism offering and would add value to the visitor experience through increased food, accommodation and nightlife and support for services such as transport. Should a casino licence be granted, focus on the current nature based tourism offer must be maintained and a continuation of developing the cultural, heritage and agri-tourism products.