

## REVIEW OF AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL TOURISM POLICY - CONCLUSIONS

Australian tourism has performed quite well in the last decades and has made a strong contribution to the national economy. An efficient government sector, a flexible labour market and a competitive business sector can be considered as some of the major factors which contributed to the successful performance of Australian tourism.

The Australian tourism industry contributes significantly to job creation, export earnings and regional development. In 2001-02, tourism generated 4.5% of Australia's Gross Domestic Product and a direct employment of 5.9% of working Australians. The industry accounted for 11.2% of total exports and was the largest export earner within the services sector. However, as with other countries Australia has been significantly affected by exogenous factors (e.g. 11 September 2001, the Bali bombings, the war in Iraq, and the SARS epidemic).

The OECD Tourism Committee reviewed Australian tourism policy, programmes and instruments on 11 July 2003. The Tourism Committee has identified the "Green Paper: A Medium to Long Term Strategy for Tourism" as a significant step forward for the establishment of a renewed tourism policy strategy. Among the key policy themes noted by the Tourism Committee in the Green Paper were improving tourism industry profitability and sustainability; greater visitor dispersal to regional Australia and the development of niche markets; strengthening collaborative marketing between Federal and State/Territory governments; improving the quality of the tourism product; stronger government and industry partnerships to support tourism growth; and an enhanced research and statistics capacity to underpin informed decision-making by governments and industry. A final policy statement or "White Paper" by the Australian Government was expected by the end of the year.

Amongst the current tourism mechanisms and policy orientations operating in Australia, the Tourism Committee noted:

- The good co-ordination and involvement of all levels of Federal, State, Territory and local government agencies in the development of the tourism sector. In this regard, the *Tourism Ministers' Council* and its senior officials committee have played a strong role to facilitate consultation and policy co-ordination on tourism matters. This good co-ordination has often generated considerable synergy effect in tourism sector development.
- The tourism crisis response mechanisms that bring together tourism industry stakeholders and others to provide effective responses to unanticipated events. One of the main mechanisms, the *National Tourism Incident Response Plan* - which was developed in consultation with industry - provided a good response framework to deal with impacts on the tourism industry and mitigate the negative effects.

- The *See Australia* domestic tourism marketing initiative based on public-private partnership arrangements between Federal, State and Territory governments and industry. This initiative is intended to encourage Australians to take a break and enjoy domestic holiday experiences. Overall, it has contributed to strengthening the Australian tourism industry and underpin growth in domestic tourism demand.
- The significant effort made to develop environmentally sustainable tourism in order to ensure Australia's unique and spectacular natural and cultural environment continues to be one of its principal attractions to international tourists and a drawcard for Australians travelling within Australia. The current development of the *National Strategy to Promote Sustainable Heritage Tourism Opportunities* will contribute to the promotion of sustainable tourism down to the local level.
- The ongoing effort to enhance the diversification of the tourism products. The emphasis on the international visitor dispersal and niche product development is an exemplary approach to generate greater awareness of the tourism product within local areas and facilitate the growth of the future tourism market.

The Tourism Committee recognised the tourism reform process currently underway in Australia, and invited Australia:

- To continue to recognise the importance of education and training. The diversification of tourism products and the development of yield and niche markets require high levels of skills for tourism employees. Tourism authorities should continue to work closely with other government agencies and industry stakeholders to cope with the new industry demands for tourism skills.
- To keep up its efforts for the competitive international aviation access which is critical to Australian tourism's growth prospects. Considering Australia's geographic isolation, vastness and widely dispersed population, a continuous liberal and pro-competitive approach to its air services policy is appropriate action to support its inbound and domestic tourism growth.
- To maintain its attention to the provision of infrastructure, through a better national co-ordination of the planning and funding of tourism infrastructure development. Continuous effort in this regard should provide a good basis for the establishment of efficient and competitive tourism networks.