

Ecotourism in Australian Public Forests

IFA Forestry Policy Statement 5.6

The Institute of Foresters of Australia (IFA) advocates ecotourism in forests to improve public awareness of the environmental and cultural values of native forests, promote knowledge of conservation and management, augment resources for management of forest resources and provide an enhanced visitor experience. Ecotourism must be managed to achieve ecologically sustainable outcomes.

The Issue

Many tourism and recreational activities are marketed as ecotourism; however, the standard of opportunities and care for the environment can vary widely between businesses.

Background

The Australian Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program defines ecotourism as 'ecologically sustainable tourism, with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas, that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation'. A variety of activities are marketed as ecotourism; the common elements usually being commercially based tourism with an emphasis on environmental values. It often focuses on national parks, but is also conducted in public forests.

Ecotourism can provoke resource management issues relating to quality access, protection from wildlife and maintaining other forest uses and values. Not all businesses that market themselves as ecotourism providers actually provide services that meet ecotourism standards. Certification provides assurance that a product or service meets best practice of ecological sustainability, natural area management and provides high quality ecotourism experiences developed using factual information.

Policy

The IFA supports and encourages:

- Accreditation for ecotourism providers through an appropriate certification program.

The IFA considers that ecotourism should follow these principles:

- Minimise impact on forest values
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect
- Provide positive experiences for visitors and hosts
- Provide funding for national parks and state forests to support forest management
- Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people.