

Corporate Social Responsibility or Government Intervention? A case study of sustainable tourism development at Ningaloo in Western Australia's North West

Associate Professor David S Wood
Executive Dean, Humanities
Curtin University of Technology
Chair Ningaloo Sustainable Development Committee
D.Wood@curtin.edu.au

Professor Jack Carlsen
Chair of Tourism
Curtin University of Technology
Jack.Carlsen@cbs.curtin.edu.au

Abstract

Implicit in notions of sustainable development is an holistic triple bottom line approach that seeks to preserve essential ecological processes, protect human heritage and biodiversity and foster inter and intra-generational equity whilst recognising political dimensions of tourism (Hall 2000; WCED 1987). Sustainable tourism seeks to achieve these goals and at the same time meet the needs of tourists and the long-term viability of tourism enterprises without compromising alternative uses or processes (Butler 1993). Sustainable tourism involves community interactions (Murphy 1994) and monitoring and management to achieve its social and environmental objectives (De Lacy, Battig, Moore & Noakes, S. 2002; Hall 2000; Harris & Leiper 1995) and occurs in a regulatory environment (Conlin & Baum 2003; Griffin and De Lacy 2002)

Corporate and social responsibility (CSR) is primarily concerned with successful enterprises and their relations with employees and communities. Proponents of CSR argue that it is in the interests of the tourism industry to maintain a destination's appeal and competitive advantage and the belief that, consequently, self-regulation is an effective pathway to sustainability (Bramwell & Alletorp 2001). CSR approaches to sustainability frequently involve regulation through codes of conduct and other devices for corporate compliance, which appear not to have broad appeal amongst tourism operators (Griffin and De Lacy 2002). It seems then that the key factor that differentiates conventional approaches to Sustainable Tourism from CSR is the role of government intervention in tourism destinations. This paper presents a case study of tourism and tourism development at Ningaloo in Australia's North West and argues that achieving sustainable tourism and sustainable tourism development, at a regional level, involves extensive government intervention and regulation in planning and management, an approach beyond the domain of CSR.

In July 2003, Dr Geoff Gallop, Premier of Western Australia, announced that a development at Maud's Landing, adjacent to the iconic Ningaloo Marine Park, would not proceed because the "... proposed Coral Coast Resort (was) environmentally unacceptable" (Gallop, 2003). In 2003, it was also revealed that informal camping along the Ningaloo coast was not only environmentally damaging but returned little economically to the local communities abutting Ningaloo (WAPC, 2003; Wood 2003). Further, it was confirmed that Coral Bay, a popular tourist town, lacked appropriate services and infrastructure and that the town itself was destroying the environments upon which it depended (WAPC 2003).

However, whilst tourism and tourism development are responsible for environmental degradation in some locations along the Ningaloo coast, it supports communities and townships that would otherwise be in decline (WAPC 2003; Carlsen and Wood 2004). Furthermore, tourism spending provides a rationale for the employment of staff to manage and monitor the fragile Ningaloo Reef.

Understanding local imperatives for development to sustain towns and communities and in response to inappropriate development proposals such as nearby Mauds Landing, the

Western Australian Government developed a regional plan for Ningaloo. Once the plan was adopted, the government gave it legal power through a Statement of Planning Policy and an Interim Development Order that bound local government and development corporations in the region to comply with the regional plan when considering development applications. Once the legislative requirements to protect Ningaloo were in place, the government established the Ningaloo Sustainable Development Committee (NSDC) charged with planning decision making for the region and established the Ningaloo Sustainable Development Office (NSDO) in the region's major town to research and document development proposals. It is worthy of note that whilst the government appoints the Chair, the NSDC is comprised predominantly local people.

The NSDC has now approved a variety of developments at Ningaloo. It has set conditions for development to meet sustainability criteria and has completed significant research enabling certainty for the physical location of developments. Decision-making has been consensual and to date, developers have readily complied with strict development criteria. There is a feeling amongst local communities and throughout the State that Ningaloo is in safe hands and that the State will achieve compliance with its plans.

Supporting sustainable development and the work of the NSDC, the Western Australian Government has funded new infrastructure to limit the impact of waste on natural environments. The government has also dramatically increased management resources for the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) that manages Ningaloo's terrestrial and marine environments and regulates tourism operators.

Before the state intervened in tourism and tourism development at Ningaloo, developers carved out large tracts of land for resorts, uncontrolled and unplanned development polluted fragile natural environments and pastoralists rented the public domain to campers for personal gain. Tourism operators cared little about the costs and benefits of tourism to local communities and land and natural resource planners and managers were starved of resources. It is argued that, following government intervention, Ningaloo *is* achieving sustainable tourism at a regional level through regulation and industry compliance. This paper will argue that CSR alone is incapable of delivering sustainable tourism development, and that some form of government intervention is critical to the sustainable process.

References

- Bramwell, B., & Alletorp, L. (2001). Attitudes in the Danish Tourism Industry to the Roles of Business and Government in Sustainable Tourism. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 3, 91-103.
- Butler, R. W. (1993). Tourism - An Evolutionary Perspective. In V. L. Smith & W. R. Eadington (Eds.), *Tourism Alternatives: Potentials and Problems in the Development of Tourism* (pp. 31-46). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Carlsen, J. & Wood, D. (2004). Assessment of the Economic Value of Recreation and Tourism in National Parks, Marine Parks and Forests, Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre Monograph.
- Conlin, M. V., & Baum, T. (2003). Comprehensive Human Resource Planning: An Essential Key to Sustainable Tourism in Small Island Settings. In C. Cooper (Ed.), *Classic Reviews in Tourism* (pp. 115-29). Clevedon: Channel View.
- De Lacy, T., Battig, M., Moore, S., & Noakes, S. (2002). *Public / Private Partnerships for Sustainable Tourism*. Singapore: APEC Secretariat.
- Gallop, G (2003). 'Open letter to the people of Western Australia', Department of Premier and Cabinet, Perth.
- Griffin, T., & De Lacy, T. (2002). Green Globe: Sustainability Accreditation for Tourism. In R. Harris, T. Griffin & P. Williams (Eds.), *Sustainable Tourism: a Global Perspective* (pp. 58-88). Burlington: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Hall, C.M. 2000, *Tourism Planning: Policies, Processes and Relationships*, Prentice Hall, Harlow.
- Harris, R., & Leiper, N. (1995). Sustainable Development and Tourism: an Overview. In R. Harris & N. Leiper (Eds.), *Sustainable Tourism: an Australian Perspective* (pp. xvii-xxxiii). Chatswood, N.S.W.: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Murphy, P. (1994). Tourism and Sustainable Development. In W. Theobald (Ed.), *Global Tourism: the Next Decade*. Oxford: Butterworth.
- Western Australian Planning Commission (2003). *Future Directions: Sustainable Tourism and Land Use Scenarios for the Carnarvon-Ningaloo Coast*, Western Australian Planning Commission, Perth.
- Wood, D. (2003). "Tourism on the Carnarvon-Ningaloo Coast Between Quobba Station and Exmouth and its Implications for Sustainability of the Coast", in *Future Directions: Sustainable Tourism and Land Use Scenarios for the Carnarvon-Ningaloo Coast*, Western Australian Planning Commission, Perth. Published electronically and available at <http://www.planning.wa.gov.au/cgi-bin/index.cgi?page=/whatsnew/content.html>.
- World Commission on Environment and Development. (1987). *Our Common Future*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.