

A proposed Eco-Tourism Initiative located in the Mandurah/ Murray area, (The southern extremity of the Perth and Peel Metropolitan Region), in the form of an Interpretive Centre, focusing initially on water-birds and associated supporting Ecosystems. (This would progressively extend to a comprehensive coverage of Biodiversity with illustrative fieldwork including local freshwater, saltwater and bush-land sites). The Proposal to be a pilot initiative leading to the foundation of an innovative - WA ECO-DISCOVERY CENTRE.

Tourism Potential:-

This Proposal offers one compelling vision as to how this Eco-Tourism could be created and become established as a significant local 'industry.'

Ecology ? (its general meaning, not full scientific definition)

The principles of 'Ecology' have emerged from the accumulation of science proving **the inter-relatedness** of all living tissue and organisms with the minerals and climatic phenomena on our planet. (Mutual dependency at a global scale)

All living creatures and plants depend on those resources and each other, to different degrees, in different ways, but indefinite long-term **survivability for each and all living species** is only feasible if we respect and comprehend the characteristics of each, the natural cycle of birth, life and death that applies to each and from that understanding, how to achieve a balance of supply and demand on those resources.

Living creatures and organisms, including humans and all plants, **compete** for growth and survival, using various different types of naturally derived resources. This applies at all scales from the smallest micro-organisms to the largest living creatures and trees on the Planet. Furthermore, those natural resources are also themselves fundamentally subject to **constant change**, as a consequence of global geological and climatic fluctuations.

The power of our human species has now become in many ways dominant on the Planet, due to superior intelligence. Applications of this 'brain-power' have grown exponentially in recent decades, to seemingly be able to invent and control practically everything (except the natural processes that were responsible for our own evolution—although we are even bold enough to **try** to modify those)! This power is however beginning to 'sow the seeds of our own destruction' at least on Earth. Most of the catastrophic events that have occurred and will most likely to continue to occur on Earth, so far they affect humans, can be traced back to **lack of knowledge about, or humans deliberately ignoring, the principles of Ecology.**

Having been shocked and then become gradually more and more alarmed by many catastrophic events occurring to disrupt lives worldwide, humans are slowly realizing that many of those have been directly or indirectly attributable to human mistakes, misjudgments or misunderstanding the scale and influence of natural processes and evolution.

This realisation has given rise to the term ENVIRONMENT being 'in our face' and applied (uncritically) to almost everything we do or use today. Even our politicians make power plays for our votes by claiming to know more about it, or be able to control human impact on it more effectively!

ECOLOGY is in fact - all through, from its easily understood basic principle to the most detailed scientific enquiry into the workings of micro-organisms, **the principle that controls environments** for everything around us and everything we depend upon for life and survival.

We each have to learn to comprehend and appreciate that incredibly complex natural system we are part of (and from which we ourselves evolved). Then we will be able to know how to survive indefinitely into the future. Knowledge of Ecology then helps us to understand much better the options we have.

Being "ECO-friendly" as a result of ENVIRONMENTAL being seen as problematic to the average person, is becoming a term with positive connotations (even though probably not understood) - that suggests that 'if we are- and trust it, we will be OK !

Eco Tourism: This Concept has then two integral Ingredients –

a) Spreading more widely than at present an intimate comprehension of what Natural Ecology is. b) Doing this in **a creative, exciting, entertaining and novel way to attract Tourists** and to stimulate knowledge that the (i.e. Mandurah) **region is much more than a salt-water, sand and boating playground.**

Choice of a focal point -why here Mandurah / the Peel Inlet?

This Estuary and surrounding localities In Mandurah/ Peel has distinctive Estuarine Ecology of international significance. This is apparently barely known and still less understood locally – (except by a number of voluntary special-interest Groups). The most dramatic and sometimes spectacular visible element of this local ecology is the profusion of birds that are sustained by the extensive wetlands of the Peel Inlet, the Harvey Estuary, and their smaller adjuncts - Lakes McLarty and Mealup. Other elements of the Peel –Yalgorup system are also nearby. i.e Lake Clifton, Lake Yalgorup and Lake Preston.

These together support a diverse range of over 20,000 water-birds each year and are also an essential survival stopover, in an international chain of distant locations, for many thousands of annually migrating birds. In excess of 150,000 birds have been recorded present at one time .

Some of these birds are rare and even threatened with extinction (essentially as a result of human mistakes). Not only can those birds be witnessed here in Mandurah but there is also evidence locally of mistakes of human intervention in their environment, ignoring the principles of Ecology, that are actually leading to this potential extinction. A perfect place then to delight the curious (the rarity) and also explain the threats to which they are being subjected.

Birds are here and they travel thousands of kms to get here - why? – what attracts them? - what do they feed on? - why do they breed here? - will they always be here? – what would prevent them? – where would they go? – do they have, and are there alternatives? – why couldn't they go elsewhere? This 'Centre' will provide answers to all those questions and much more.

There is a fascinating story to be told. e.g. -Many birds reside in the System and move seasonally to and from outback areas with the annual natural cyclic, extreme drying, that occurs inland. Due to the special biotic characteristics of this region it has always been an essential breeding and survival base for birds that migrate annually for huge distances internationally. Hence the reason the Locality is listed as a vital area of natural environment (supposed to be protected for perpetuity) by an International Treaty known as RAMSAR to which Australia is a signatory – Is this working? If not, why not?

Choice of particular location.- (The what, where and how?).

'Identity', 'Location' and 'Communication' are vitally important to developing a Tourism destination.

So, in framing a Concept for practical delivery of an experience, we start by selecting a **central focus** for presentation. Our **main local asset**, (waterbirds in huge numbers and variety). Then **where and how** can they to be **accessible** (preferably by relatively discreet viewing to avoid disturbance). Followed by practicalities of delivering the experience and relating that to potential clients (a central point – **a building** with resources and services concentrated –with outgoing transportation to first-hand viewing with skilled guides)

While thousands of birds move around within the Peel- Yalgorup System, the **Mandurah Quay zone of Peel Inlet, with its adjacent Len Howard Reserves, is of special value to the establishment of this concept**, since it hosts concentrated numbers and a wide range of different species, some very rare. Furthermore, it is close to the City of Mandurah that has other Tourism facilities and is readily accessible from, but not

disrupted by, the popular Old Coast Road. (**Convenience** and **visibility** for impulse-visiting are important factors in Local Tourism promotion. **Unique content**, is also a vital factor for attracting **International** Tourism.

Some more of the Background Story.-

Our **own Estuary and surrounding locality In Mandurah/ Peel**, if we wish to present and **manage it creatively**, can provide an almost unique, concentrated opportunity for both local, national and international **visiting adults and their off-spring to better understand what Ecology is, in an entertaining and educative experience.**

For the young especially, many emotional connections can be stirred by close encounters with other living creatures. That can in fact be a firm foundation for a caring, socially aware future lifestyle, (in contrast to the selfish degenerative behavior currently emerging in our midst).

In Australia, humans in just over 2 centuries -through incoming energy, skill and ingenuity have made large areas of land more productive and capable of supporting a much larger human population than previously. (Notably however, the indigenous people of Australia survived through their experience and understanding of working **with** natural resources, rather than against them).

Because the land surface of this Continent is geologically very old and a majority flattened through natural erosion, the areas suitable for continuous human habitation in volume, are essentially in the coastal regions of the Continent.

That is also true for a high proportion of other living creatures and today we must find and retain the means to co-exist with them – or in the long term certainly risk our own human survivability in the large numbers we now are.

In Western Australia In the Peel –Yalgorup Region including the City of Mandurah the geologically eroded flat landscape hinterland has very slow natural drainage to the ocean. The Peel-Yalgorup system of lakes and wetlands provided diverse habitats for water birds thousands of years before large scale human occupation. That is now under enormous pressure; - from this recent human 'invasion' and, is undoubtedly under serious threat of rapid deterioration, due to the cumulative effects of this.

Access and Interpretive Resources.-

Personal access and observation close to free living wild-life can cause disturbance and must be carefully supervised and controlled. However, those risks can certainly be minimized with sensible overall management, planning and supervision by persons interested in, educated and properly trained for such tasks (hopefully with the active

assistance of the many very active special-interest voluntary groups that already exist in the region).

**The Central and distinctive feature of this Proposed Initiative will be -
'Remote' Access and observation.**

In today's world of advanced communication technology there are now many technical devices available for remote viewing – miniaturized, remotely-controlled, weatherproof video cameras, night vision lenses etc. Many of these can have applications in achieving much closer and continuous observation of wild animals and their behaviour in their own undisturbed habitat than is practically possible for first hand human observation. (Ref: e.g. David Attenborough's 'Life of mammals' and other TV series, where one can with the aid of such technology get up close and personal with myriad wild creatures).

Furthermore, because we are all now very familiar with 'armchair' and 'portable viewing devices as a primary source of connecting with the world – Remote Viewing Technology is a first choice of means to make an initial connection with potential Eco-Tourism clientele.

An ECO CENTRE,-

A practical focus for Tourism presentation in this case requires a building (this may begin with a modest structure or assembly of temporary structures, but serious presentation to Tourists does immediately point to something purpose-built). Consider the Functions.-

Presentation to Visitors, will essentially have an 'interpretive' function, with a combination of closely integrated purposes.- The Design Brief will incorporate the following;-

- a) Live audio- visual monitoring and presentations to visitors.
- b) Audio-visual technical support – including discreet field placement and maintenance of hidden cameras and production of externally marketable video material.
- c) Venue for face to face lectures, seminars and assistance with personal interpretation.
- d) A 'home base' for fieldworker/ wardens who are making continuing contact with visitors and taking them on guided interpretation field visits.
- e) A base for short-stay field work Researchers and students to interrelate their findings, give specialist talks and contribute to a public accessible data-base of local relevance.

f) A meeting point facilitating voluntary, locally experienced amateur contributors to interact, organize presentations to and generally mingle with visitors to share their expertise and enthusiasm.

As the Tourism service generated from the Eco Centre expands and visitor numbers rise, a number of small satellite field interpretation centres will be established, staffed part-time in periods of high demand, in order to maintain efficiency of the service to visitors.

The Centre personnel will, apart from their main role interacting intensively with visitors, develop and maintain local information displays at field locations; plan and supervise construction of observation 'hides' in accessible localities; and (in conjunction with Local Councils, operate, as and when appropriate as Wild Life Protection Rangers)

The 24/7 remote wild-life viewing can be reticulated to homes and personal mobile communication devices via commercial Contracts as special interest Aps and with Pay TV providers. This would be the 'front end' of creating a widespread public appetite to know more about the Peel- Yalgorup system habitats -(forms of large-scale free advertising.)

Such an up to date assembly of resources, with its further development potential, may be a virtual first in Australia and would certainly score favourably with potential Sponsors, as well as get Mandurah and the Peel-Yalgorup wetlands wild- life system noticed in a fairly dramatic way.

(Already successful ventures in WA that have some, though not all features in common with this initiative are e.g The Gravity Centre at Gingin; Ningaloo Reef; and the Broome Bird Observatory/Roebuck Bay.

Funding.-

The project could be of interest to the Mandurah City Council. However, adjacent Shires that include sections of Peel- Yalgorup such as Murray may also be canvassed for support.

The concept might attract some minor funding support from current WA State Government agencies. e.g. Regional Development and Lands (via the 'Royalty's for Regions' Rural Development funding initiative); Environment & Conservation; and Tourism WA.

Other potential contributing sources could be the Commonwealth Government via the Depts. of Environment, Water etc. ; Agriculture Fisheries & Forestry; possibly, indirectly, Education; and the CSIRO for technical support. External Organisations such as -The Lotteries Commission, and large private sector companies may also be attracted to make donations – the latter usually have a general 'constituency' policy to support what might be seen to be Environmentally Constructive Initiatives.

Once established, the ECO CENTRE – set up as a not-for-profit Trust, could of course recoup operational costs via entry and provision of service charges (such as for Warden assisted transport). Also, if the Centre becomes a dependent component of e.g. private sector transport/ catering/ other relevant services from private businesses – some competitive renewable ‘preferred contractor’ contracts could be established.

Initial Support required to develop, cost and present a detailed budget submission to potential funding and support agencies?

Assistance (perhaps pump-priming support ‘in kind’) is invited from any source - such as local Government Agencies – in the form of i.e. part time Secretarial / Basic telephone, computer- web site location and a Venue for meetings? (However, it is recognised that those will have strict time-scale and other constraints involving other bureaucracies and politics.)

Preferably, one or more large entrepreneurial private-sector Companies could recognise at least ‘constituency-value’ in being directly associated with this venture? Even become part of it as a means of promoting their own objectives, or perhaps simply a charitable gesture with obvious future community benefit ?

In Conclusion.-

The Peel-Harvey Estuary and surrounding localities in the South-west of WA , if we can present and manage it creatively, can provide a rare, concentrated opportunity for both local, national and international visiting adults and their off-spring to better understand what Ecology is, in an entertaining and educative experience.

Such an up-to-date assembly of resources as proposed above, may be a virtual first in Australia and could certainly score favourably with potential Sponsors, as well as get Mandurah, Murray and the Peel-Yalgorup wetlands wild- life system noticed in a fairly dramatic way.

Future Planning.- ‘WA Eco-Discovery Centre’

The objective and core methodology of this Initiative is **PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**.- If established initially on the above Tourism Eco-Centre principle, the intention would be to **progressively** extend the **educational** function and widen the scope to become the **WA Eco-Discovery Centre** to attract public engagement in a wider range of biotic and abiotic elements of ecosystems e.g. biotic control factors linked to inland and ocean-margin beach /dune and bush-land ecosystems; ocean marine life, fish, crustaceans and invertebrates; and Biodiversity presented in a historic and futures global perspective.

Local Groups and Associations that would be invited to collaborate in advancing this initiative include.-

Peel Preservation Group; Birds Australia; Waterbird Conservation Group Inc.; Wetlands Conservation Society Inc.; Regional Development Australia; WA Seabird Rescues; Natural Heritage Trust; Barragup Swamp Management Committee; Friends of Paganoni Swamp; Lake Mealup Preservation Society Inc.; Urban Bushland Council WA Inc.; Naragebup Environment Centre; -(no doubt others will be suggested as the Concept is canvassed more widely).

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(A folder of 89 relevant photographs of wild-birds taken in, or very close to the 'Ramsar'-protected Len Howard Reserves on the Peel-Harvey Estuary, is available separately by email or post on request.- By courtesy of the Mandurah Quay Home Owners Association (Residents from an adjoining area who are justifiably very proud of their local conservation record.)

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('Apology' – Although this concept proposal began as a compelling personal initiative, I openly invite anyone who may be interested to collaborate to help make it happen, or even implement it themselves. However, I realise you probably don't know me and deserve to at least have clues – I live locally, formerly - architect, civic design team leader, landscape architect, academic, HM appointed independent professional/ technical advisor to British Government on Environmental Education, speaker for the British Government at the first UN World Conference in Environmental Education etc.)

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