

Update

Public Land Tour Operator and Activity Provider Licence Reform Project

Issue No 3 March 2006

The Project...

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) is leading a project to reform the licensing system for tour operators and activity providers operating on public land.

This project seeks to improve current licensing arrangements to encourage a viable, growing, nature based tourism industry on public land and ensure safe and sustainable use of that land.

Specifically, the project objectives are to:

1. Improve opportunities for industry investment and security;
2. Create a simpler and more efficient licensing system;
3. Encourage higher operating standards;
4. Improve management of capacity – both environmental and visitor;
5. Improve compliance;
6. Manage all organised groups in an appropriate and equitable manner.

Parks Victoria, Tourism Victoria and Tourism Alliance are closely involved in the project.

The project also has a Project Reference Group comprising Victorian National Parks Association, Camping Association Victoria, Outdoor Recreation Centre, Victorian Outdoor Education Association, Mt Buller Resort Management Board, Bus Association Victoria, Phillip Island Nature Park and Great Ocean Road Coast Committee of Management.

Directions Paper...

On the 1st of February 2006 the 'Directions Paper – Public Land Tour Operator and Activity Provider Licence Reform Project' was released. It was sent to a broad cross-section of industry and recreational groups.

The Directions Paper outlines a series of 'Proposed Policy Directions' in relation to the licensing system for tour operators and outdoor activity providers operating on public land. These Proposed Policy Directions are the result of extensive research and consultation.

The changes proposed by the Directions Paper include:

- Increased maximum licence terms to seven years;
- New incentives to encourage increased professionalism through certification and other schemes;
- The ability to transfer licences in limited circumstances;
- A clearer definition of which entities require a licence;
- Initiatives to reduce safety risks to, and environmental impacts from, those groups who do not require a licence;
- Changes to the fee structure, in line with Government guidelines;
- Processes for better managing visitation 'hotspots';
- A focus on achieving voluntary compliance through increased education and awareness programs, supported by tighter offence and penalty provisions;
- Initiatives to improve consistency and coordination between the Parks Victoria managed licensing system and the systems of other land managers.

The Directions Paper is available from www.dse.vic.gov.au/licencereforms. A small number of printed copies are still available by emailing the project team at licence.reforms@dse.vic.gov.au.

Benchmarking Survey...

In November 2005, Market Solutions conducted a survey of all tour operators licensed by Parks Victoria. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of licensed tour operators participated in the telephone interviews. The final report from the Tour Operator Licensing Reforms Benchmark survey is now available.

The study was an opportunity for the industry to inform DSE about what is working well with the current system, and what needs improving. This data will provide a benchmark measure of tour operator satisfaction and issues, against which any future changes to the licensing system can be assessed.

Following completion of the Public Land Tour Operator and Activity Provider Licence Reform Project, a follow up survey will be conducted to assess tour operator and activity provider attitudes. Comparing the results of the two surveys will enable DSE to measure the success of the project.

Thank-you to all those who participated in the survey. The final report is available on the DSE website: www.dse.vic.gov.au/licencereforms

Turn over for a summary of the key findings from the survey.

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Your Input...

Your comments on the Directions Paper will assist DSE to develop a licensing system that meets the needs of the tourism industry and recreational users, while protecting public land values.

Submissions on the document are currently being received. All feedback will be carefully considered and help inform a final policy position on tour operator licensing.

You can provide feedback in the following ways:

1. If you are a member of one of the industry organisations represented on the Project Reference Group, forward your comments to them so they can provide a response that reflects your interests.

2. Email your comments directly to the project team at:

licence.reforms@dse.vic.gov.au

3. Post your comments directly to the project team at:

**Tourism and Recreation Policy
and Projects**
Dept. of Sustainability and
Environment
Level 2, 8 Nicholson St,
East Melbourne
VIC 3002

The closing date for submissions is
Wednesday March 29, 2006.

Individuals requiring more time to
make a submission should contact
the project team via email.

Key Findings from the Benchmarking Survey...

The findings of the survey highlight areas of good performance and areas for improvement, as reported by the licensed tour operators. Some of the key findings are shown below.

- Licence application process described as easy and efficient.
- Fees seen as reasonable and fair.
- Moderate agreement that it is clear which businesses are required to hold a licence.
- Moderate agreement that the licensing system encourages higher standards and improvement, and that accreditation programs demonstrate tour operator professionalism.
- Low agreement that licence terms are long enough to give business certainty.
- Agreement that capping licence numbers and using competitive allocation is an appropriate way to manage capacity and safety issues at certain locations.
- Less agreement that booking systems are fair and reasonable.
- Licence conditions seen as appropriate and enforceable.
- Widespread belief that there are large numbers of unlicensed commercial operators using public land.
- Agreement that policing and enforcement of licensing needs to be improved.

Your Questions Answered...

A number of submissions have raised concerns that the definition of commercial activity in the Direction Paper (proposed policy direction 2.1) is too broad, encompassing non-commercial groups such as sporting, recreation and community groups.

The Directions Paper states:

"It follows that schools, clubs, some government programs and benevolent organisations that provide a broader public benefit, often in situations where the commercial market could not provide the social benefits at the same costs, should continue to access public land to conduct activities that are appropriate and consistent with legislative objectives and management plans, and should not require a licence to conduct such activities."

The intention of Proposed Policy Direction 2.1 is not to require all organisations that conduct activities on public land to obtain a licence. Rather, it is to differentiate between those organisations that are genuinely using public land for non-commercial purposes and those organisations that are using public land for activities that are commercially motivated. The submissions to date indicate that the definition proposed in the Directions Paper needs further refinement.

Future Updates...

To be placed on a mailing list to receive future updates about this project, email the project team at licence.reforms@dse.vic.gov.au.