

# ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS' TOURISM POLICY: THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

Whitford, M  
School of Tourism, Faculty of Business, Economics and Law  
The University of Queensland, Australia  
[m.whitford@uq.edu.au](mailto:m.whitford@uq.edu.au)

## ABSTRACT

Tourism is viewed as a vehicle which can produce an array of benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander [ATSI] peoples. Although ATSI tourism is a small sector of the Australian tourism industry, its ability to facilitate diverse benefits should not be underestimated. While numerous Australian Governments have produced tourism policies to facilitate the development of ATSI tourism, the effectiveness and appropriateness of these policies have been questioned. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to determine the degree to which Australian State/Territory Government ATSI tourism policies can facilitate the development of ATSI tourism. This paper describes a qualitative study examining the foci of current Australian State/Territory Governments' ATSI tourism policies. The study concluded that ideally, these policies should demonstrate a more balanced distribution of foci across the economic, socio-cultural, ecological and political environments to avoid accusations of rhetoric and thus demonstrate a propensity for facilitating long term sustainable outcomes for ATSI tourism.

**Keywords:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tourism, Australian State/Territory Government policy, content analysis, sustainability.

## INTRODUCTION

“There is a demand globally for Indigenous tourism experiences and growing interest in the values, knowledge and traditions of Indigenous cultures” (Peeler cited in Aboriginal Tourism Australia, 2004, p. 1). Consequently, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander [ATSI] peoples in Australia are becoming an integral part of Australia’s tourism industry (Moore & Herron, 1997, Valuing Cultures, 2006). Underpinning ATSI tourism development have been attempts by various Australian Governments to initiate policies aimed at facilitating the growth of this small, yet significant sector of the Australian tourism industry (Whitford, Bell & Watkins, 2001). Whilst responsibility for ATSI tourism policy has traditionally rested primarily with the Federal Government, Australian States and Territories

have also been involved in the development of ATSI tourism (Zeppel, 1998; 1999).

The development, appropriateness and effectiveness of the ATSI tourism policy, at both Federal and State/Territory levels, have been questioned (Altman, 1989; Finlayson, 1993; Hollinshead, 1996; Whitford, Bell & Watkins, 2001; Ellis, 2003). Therefore, the purpose of this paper, which is part of a larger study, was to determine the degree to which the ATSI tourism policy, current in 2006 and developed by Australian State/Territory Governments can facilitate the growth and development of ATSI tourism. The two objectives of this section of the study were (1) to catalogue the distribution and authorship of Australian State and Territory Government policy developed in relation to ATSI tourism and 2) to ascertain which aspects of the broader economic, socio-cultural, ecological and political environments were reflected in Australian State/Territory Government ATSI tourism policies.

Before proceeding to discuss the methods and results of the study, it is necessary firstly to note that, for the purpose of this study, the term policy includes legislation, strategy, plan and/or discussion paper. According to Davis, Wanna, Warhurst and Weller (1993), there is little consensus about what constitutes a policy, therefore in this study, policy can simply mean a written document expressing intent on a particular issue, or imply a whole process in which values, interests and resources compete through institutions to influence action at all three levels of the federal system of the Australian Government. Secondly, the paper will identify the key events in the history of Australian Federal and State/Territory Governments' involvement in ATSI tourism policy. Thirdly, the paper will present a profile of ATSI tourism in order to provide the context for the ensuing empirical analysis and discussion of Australian State/Territory Governments' ATSI tourism policies.

### **An overview of Australian Governments' involvement in the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tourism**

Australian Governments have been involved in the growth and development of ATSI tourism to varying degrees from the mid twentieth century onwards. As early as 1965, the opportunity for ATSI peoples to become involved in the tourism industry via the sale of Aboriginal arts to inbound tourists was specifically recommended in the first Federal Government initiated major report on the tourism industry. The report, titled Australia's Travel and Tourist Industry 1965 was known as the 'HKF Report' and was commissioned specifically by the Australian National Travel Association (ANTA) on behalf of the Federal and State Governments.

ATSI peoples' involvement in the tourism industry was not highlighted again until the mid 1980s with the release of The Report of the Australian Government Inquiry into Tourism (Commonwealth of Australia, 1986). The report identified, among other things, the untapped source of employment opportunities gained by participation of ATSI peoples in cultural tourism. Similarly, ATSI employment

opportunities were highlighted in the Miller Report which also emphasized Indigenous arts and crafts as a priority industry above other tourism ventures (Commonwealth Department of Employment & Industrial Relations & Department of Aboriginal Affairs, 1985).

At the State/Territory level, the Northern Territory Government apparently recognised the importance of Indigenous tourism during the 1980s, employing several Tourism Development Officers with a specific brief to develop Indigenous tourism initiatives. Meanwhile, in 1986 the Queensland Government's Department of Aboriginal Affairs gave approval for the establishment of the Dreamtime Cultural Centre in Rockhampton and the formation of the privately owned and funded Tjapukai Aboriginal Dance Theatre in a village called Kuranda (near Cairns, Queensland) in the following year. Also in 1986 however, the Federal Government released the Kennedy Report (Commonwealth Department of Sport, Recreation & Tourism, 1986) which suggested, among other things, the development of a National Tourism Policy to facilitate Indigenous involvement in tourism in culturally appropriate ways. The following year, the Department of the Arts, Sport, the Environment, Tourism and Territories [DASETT] declared that Australia's Aboriginal culture provided a unique contribution to the national heritage and offered significant opportunities for the diversification of Australian tourism. During 1989, the Federal Government Industries Assistance Commission [IAC] acknowledged that growth in tourist activity was occurring on or near Indigenous land, with increasing emphasis being placed on ATSI culture and heritage in the promotion of tourism, but admitted the net effect of exposure to tourism on the ATSI peoples was not clear. Yet one outcome of such tourism promotion was evident in a study conducted by the Australia Council in 1990 (Altman, 1992), which found that forty-nine percent of international visitors surveyed were interested in seeing and learning about Aboriginal art and culture.

In 1992, the National Tourism Strategy (Commonwealth Department of Tourism [DOT], 1992) was released. The strategy noted the need to develop a national Aboriginal Tourism Strategy to not only facilitate the growth of ATSI tourism enterprises and opportunities but also to foster links with the tourism industry. Concomitantly, the Queensland State and the Northern Territory Governments' interest in ATSI tourism appeared to be increasing. This was reflected by the formation of an ATSI tourism unit within the Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation in 1992 and the appointment of an Aboriginal tourism officer in 1993. In the same year, the Northern Territory Tourist Commission [NTTC], in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission [ATSIC], hosted a conference for Indigenous tourism entitled Indigenous Australians in Tourism. This resulted in the NTTC examining an array of issues pertaining to the growth and development of Indigenous tourism which would later inform the

development of an Indigenous tourism strategy. In essence, Indigenous tourism was gaining momentum, visibility and significance at both State/Territory and Federal Government levels.

Also in 1993, the Federal Government's DOT identified as a priority for future action in the National Tourism Strategy Progress Report No 1, the need to provide opportunities for Indigenous employment in the tourism industry through the development of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tourism Strategy [NATSITIS] (Commonwealth Department of Tourism, 1993). The NATSITIS Major Consultancy Report completed in June 1994, was undertaken to identify and establish the potential of ATSI participation in the Australian tourism industry. The Draft NATSITIS was released in October 1994. This strategy specified objectives to enhance opportunities for self-determination, self-management and economic self-sufficiency in tourism for ATSI people. One specific outcome from the Draft NATSITIS was the establishment of Aboriginal Tourism Australia (ATA) established in 1995. ATA was established by Indigenous operators to support Indigenous people's involvement in the Australian tourism industry. It provided leadership and a focus for the development of Aboriginal tourism, consistent with Aboriginal economic, cultural and environmental values.

In 1996, ATSI tourism continued to gain momentum in the Northern Territory as the NTTC published its first Aboriginal Tourism Strategy. Queensland however, according to Fourmile (1992) was lagging "well behind its counterpart in the Northern Territory with regard to the official promotion of its State's Indigenous cultures." Nevertheless, in 1997, QTTC launched A Framework for the Future, declaring QTTC would be actively involved in promoting the development of ATSI tourism products along with other special interest groups, which included markets such as wine, farming and rural tourism. In the same year, Tourism Victoria produced its first industry development plan for Aboriginal tourism, however the catalyst for ATSI tourism came in 1997, with the launch of the Federal Government's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tourism Industry Strategy [NATSITIS], providing a blueprint for the future development of ATSI tourism in Australia (Parkin, 2001).

One such development was the acknowledgement, in the Victorian Government's Tourism Industry Strategic Plan 2002-2006, of Aboriginal tourism as a product segment offering potential growth. Additionally in 2002, the incorporation of the Western Australian Tourism Operators' Committee Association Inc. [WAITOC] marked an important development in Indigenous tourism. WAITOC was the only group of its type in Australia and was acknowledged as the peak industry representative body for Indigenous operators in Western Australia. Other initiatives for Indigenous tourism developed by the Western Australian Government included assisting "Aboriginal people to set up and participate in

economically and socially beneficial tourism ventures based on their culture and affinity with the environment (WATC 2001, p. 3).

Perhaps however, the next major milestone for Indigenous tourism development occurred on the 20<sup>th</sup> November 2003, when the Australian Federal Government's Tourism White Paper was released. The White Paper announced, among other things, that "tourism offers particular opportunities for Indigenous Australians" including "much needed opportunities for employment, social stability and preservation of culture and traditions" (Commonwealth, 2003, p. 41). The White Paper identified the potential of utilising tourism as a means of realizing some of these opportunities but noted that the "tourism market is only meeting half the demand for Indigenous tourism products" (Commonwealth, 2003, p. 4). On 1 August 2005, Indigenous Tourism Australia [ITA] was officially established as part of Tourism Australia. ITA is funded by the Australian Federal Government as part of its commitment to grow quality Indigenous niche tourism experiences in Australia.

The extent to which the Federal Government's White Paper influenced State and Territory Indigenous tourism policy development is perhaps debatable. Nevertheless, in 2004 both the Northern Territory Government and the Queensland Government launched their respective Indigenous tourism policies and in 2006 the NSW Government, Western Australian Government and the Victorian Government also launched their new Indigenous tourism policies. Also in 2006, the Federal Government's Business Ready Program for Indigenous Tourism was granted funding of \$4 million over four years from 2004-05. The program was initiated to assist Indigenous tourism operators in six regions of Australia develop, establish and run successful tourism businesses such as the Alice Springs based Aboriginal Art and Cultural Centre and the Cairns Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park (AusIndustry, 2006). The program is consistent with Government aims to achieve economic independence for Indigenous Australians and demonstrated Federal commitment to the growth of ATSI tourism.

### **Profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tourism**

ATSI tourism "encompasses all tourism activities that involve Australian Indigenous peoples and are sensitive to Indigenous culture" (Tourism Queensland, 2004, p. 5). Contemporary history reveals that both the Australian tourism industry and ATSI peoples became aware of tourists' interest in "experiencing Indigenous art or craft and cultural displays, or visiting an Indigenous site or community" during the mid 1900s (Tourism Research Australia, 2005, p. 2). Consequently, ATSI tourism has become a growing component of Australia's tourism industry owing to increased interest, awareness and the desire to experience Indigenous culture, art and lifestyle (Tourism Western Australia, 2005).

From 2004-2006, the interest in ATSI tourism primarily centred on the international market (Tourism Queensland, 2006). International visitors spend around \$2.2 billion each year, representing approximately 19% of all expenditure by international visitors (Tourism Research Australia, 2005). In 2004, international visitors who participated in Indigenous activities in Australia spent \$4,036 per person during their stay, totalling \$2.2 billion and far outweighing the per trip expenditure of other international visitors, largely due to their longer trip length (Tourism Research Australia, 2005). The largest expenditure items for these visitors were accommodation, food and drink, accounting for 44 per cent of total expenditure per person for international visitors experiencing Indigenous activities (Tourism Research Australia, 2005). While cultural tours dominate the current product range (Tourism Queensland, 2006), international visitors indicate that they would most likely seek out day tours or short tours and incorporate an Indigenous element into a broader holiday (Tourism Queensland, 2006) rather than travel exclusively to participate in ATSI tourism activities (Tourism Research Australia, 2005).

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to determine the focus of Australian State/Territory Government ATSI tourism policies, and as this study is part of a larger research project the interpretive research design developed by Whitford, Bell and Watkins (2001) was employed to maintain consistency of data collection and analysis. Berno (1996, p. 392) believed that qualitative methodologies using secondary data such as published Government text, “can be linked theoretically to the growth of tourism to gain an historical representation of what some of the socio-cultural changes associated with tourism may have been”. Thus the study drew on the principles of both hermeneutic and content analysis.

### **Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutic analysis, concerned with identifying contextual circumstances, was selected for the study to strengthen the interpretive approach. Hermeneutics is a theory of meaning that originated in the nineteenth century, emphasizing a detailed reading or examination of text in an attempt to discover and interpret embedded meaning (Neuman, 1997).

The hermeneutic principle of contextualization was deemed applicable to this study as Hall, Jenkins and Kearsley (1997) maintained it is imperative to establish the context of tourism development in the analysis of tourism policy, as demonstrated by authors including Altman (1989) Craik, (1991), Finlayson (1993) and Zeppel (1998). The hermeneutic principle of contextualization

requires “the subject matter to be placed in its social and historical context so that the intended audience can see how the current situation under investigation emerged” (Myers, 1995).

### **Content analysis**

To widen and strengthen the interpretive design of the study, the principles of content analysis were also utilised. Content analysis is a technique used for gathering and analysing the content of text, by categorising and coding data. The technique employs objective and systematic counting and recording procedures, to produce a more quantitative description of the symbolic content in a text (Neuman, 1997).

The content analysis procedures used in this study followed Neuman’s (1997) use of manifest and latent codes. Neuman (1997) explained manifest coding as coding the visible surface content in a text and thus represents a highly reliable method because the phrase or word either is, or is not, present. However, manifest coding does not take into account the connotation of words and phrases, when such words and phrases may have multiple meanings in the context in which they are written. Therefore, latent coding is employed to look for the underlying, implicit meaning in the content of the text, even though, according to Neuman (1997), latent coding may be less reliable than manifest coding, as it depends on the coder’s knowledge of language and social meaning.

### **Procedures for selection of Australian State/Territory Government policies**

A purposive method of selection was used to determine the policies to be included in this study. The documents were to be current public policy published by Australian State/Territory Governments pertaining to a) ATSI tourism specifically, and/or b) ATSI tourism focused in at least one section. The documents to be included would be (a) plans, (b) strategies, (c) reports, (d) discussion papers and/or (e) policies, and were to consist of direct or indirect references to ATSI tourism. The final policy sample set consisted of seven public policies that satisfied the selection criteria.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A matrix was utilized to catalogue the seven ATSI tourism policies that met the selection criteria. The policies were chronologically arranged and inserted into the matrix and the variables analysed in the matrix appear in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Matrix to catalogue ATSI Tourism Policies

<b>Number and Title</b>	<b>Publication Date</b>	<b>Parameters of Policy</b>	<b>Government Source/ Author</b>
Systematically numbers and labels policy for ease of identification	Identifies the year of publication.	Identifies the total number of document pages and the number of pages and percentage of content relevant to ATSI tourism	Identifies the source of policy, the organisation(s) and/or Government department. e.g., Tourism Victoria

To examine the focus of ATSI tourism policy in relation to the broader economic, socio-cultural, political and ecological environments, each policy was analysed by determining the frequency and percentage of content that reflected the four major environments. These environments were: 1) the economic environment which “encompasses such factors as productivity, income, wealth, inflation, balance of payments, pricing, poverty, interest rates, credit, transportation, and employment” (e.g., increase ATSI economic independence), 2) the socio-cultural environment which is “the aggregate of patterns and norms that regulate a society’s behaviour including the values, beliefs, and customs that are shared and transmitted by the society” (e.g., Indigenous self-determination), 3) the ecological environment which constitutes “physical forces in nature including climate, weather, and natural resources (e.g., preservation of ATSI land) and 4) the political environment which includes “the Government/business surroundings that affect and shape market opportunities, including the Government’s role as both a controller through legislation and regulation and as a customer of business” (e.g., the whole Government approach) (American Marketing Association, 2006, p. 1).

To assess the focus of these tourism policies, it was necessary to create a matrix, as shown in Table 2, in which the focus of policies could be recorded under an appropriate environment (e.g., ATSI employment was listed under the economic environment).

**Table 2:** Focus of ATSI Tourism Policies

<b>Environments</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>% of sample set references to ATSI tourism</b>
Focus of Policies Relating to the Economic Environment Focus of Policies Relating to the Socio-cultural Environment Focus of Policies Relating to the Ecological Environment Focus of Policies Relating to the Political Environment	Record each focus only once per policy, as identified. Total the foci of policies appearing in each environment	Express as a % of total references made to ATSI tourism

However, the focus of a policy was recorded in only one environment despite the indistinct boundaries between the economic, socio-cultural, political and ecological environments. For example, "increase ATSI employment opportunities" may be regarded as a focus relating to both the social and economic environments, but for the purpose of this study would only be placed in one environment (e.g., economic environment). When all policies were analyzed in relation to policy focus, the data were recorded numerically and then expressed as a percentage of the seven policies (e.g., an economic focus within the policies was identified 410 times producing a score of 62.8% of the identified policy foci references). These percentages were then ranked to identify the predominant environment within the set of seven policies.

Importantly, there were several limitations to this research design. First, policies were analyzed only in terms of the written content contained within them and did not include aspects such as the policymakers, formulation, implementation and evaluation of the policies. Second, where policies were not specifically focused on ATSI tourism, but included sections that referred to an ATSI issue, only these sections were analysed in full. This could result in misinterpretation of the policy even though the researcher was familiar with the broad context of each policy. Third, during the analysis of the documents, the researcher's own awareness of factors outside the social and historical context may have distorted meanings and understandings (Gadamer, 1976). Subjectivity is an essential part of the interpretive analysis and the researcher's values and interests and Anglo-Celtic background may have influenced interpretation of the text pertaining to ATSI peoples.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of this study demonstrated that ATSI tourism, to varying degrees, is now on the agenda of Australian State/Territory Governments. Perhaps spurred into action by the Federal Government's 1997 NATSITIS, Australian State/Territory Governments that have developed policies in relation to ATSI tourism include the New South Wales Government, the Northern Territory Government, the South Australian Government, the Victoria Government and the Queensland Government as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Catalogue of Australian State/Territory Government ATSI Tourism Policies

<b>Number and Title</b>	<b>Publication Date</b>	<b>Parameters of Policy</b>	<b>Government Source/Author</b>
1. Principles for Developing Aboriginal Tourism.	2006	Total pages = 14 ATSI tourism content = 100%	Tourism NSW
2. Towards 2020 – New South Wales Tourism Masterplan	2002	Total pages = 83 ATSI pages = 7 ATSI tourism content = 8.5%	Tourism NSW
3. Northern Territory Indigenous Tourism Strategy	2004	Total pages = 26 ATSI tourism content = 100%	Northern Territory Tourist Commission [NTTC]
4. South Australian Tourism Plan 2003-2008: Inspiring partnerships for sustainable tourism	2002	Total pages = 76 ATSI pages = 9 ATSI tourism content = 11.8%	South Australian Tourism Commission
5. Listening Looking Learning - an Aboriginal Tourism Strategy for Western Australia 2006-2010.	2006	Total pages = 30 ATSI tourism content = 100%	Tourism Western Australia
6. Victoria’s Aboriginal Tourism Development Plan 2006-2009 Tourism Victoria	2006	Total pages = 36 ATSI tourism content = 100%	Tourism Victoria
7. Push The Limits – Make The Difference. Indigenous Tourism Strategy Including Indigenous people in Tourism	2004	Total pages = 17 ATSI tourism content = 100%	Tourism Queensland

The policies developed by these Australian State/Territory Governments will largely determine, among other things, the degree of growth and expansion of ATSI tourism. Encouragingly, 100% of the content in five of the seven policies specifically focused on these factors. For instance, the overall aim of Queensland’s Indigenous Tourism Strategy (Tourism Queensland, 2004, p. 6) was “to grow Indigenous involvement in the tourism industry to not only capitalize on the potential for the industry to provide wealth creating opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but also to expand the tourism product and appeal for domestic and international tourists”.

Indeed, ATSI tourism product and business development were a major focus of Queensland's Indigenous Tourism Strategy. These foci were placed into the economic environment, which was the predominant focus appearing 410 times (62.8%) and accounting for over half of the foci of the seven Australian State/Territory tourism policies, as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Focus of ATSI Tourism Policies

Focus of Policies relating to the Economic Environment	Frequency	% of references in sample set to ATSI tourism
1. Facilitate successful ATSI tourism businesses	86	13%
2. Develop ATSI tourism product	50	7.7%
3. Barriers to successful tourism enterprises	47	7.2%
4. Tourism as a vehicle for employment opportunities	42	6.4%
5. Increase education opportunities	41	6.3%
6. Develop partnerships to facilitate successful ATSI tourism businesses	28	4.3%
7. ATSI tourism as a means of developing domestic tourism	27	4.1%
8. ATSI tourism as a vehicle for regional development	25	3.9%
9. Integration into mainstream tourism industry	20	3.1%
10. Utilise events to promote positive economic outcomes	14	2.1%
11. Tourism as a vehicle for economic independence	11	1.7%
12. Investment opportunity	8	1.2%
13. Promotion of Australian tourism to compete in the global tourism industry	7	1.2%
14. Encourage entrepreneurs	2	.3%
15. IP and copyright	2	.3%
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>62.8%</b>
<b>Focus of Policies relating to the Socio-cultural Environment</b>		
1. Preserve and respect ATSI culture in a sustainable manner	48	7.4%
2. Ensure tourism is strengthening and benefiting communities	20	3.1%
3. Tourism as a vehicle to facilitate self determination and empowerment	19	3%
4. Facilitate authenticity in ATSI tourism experiences	16	2.5%
5. Consider tourism impacts on ATSI communities	13	1.9%

6. Facilitate reconciliation	3	.4%
7. Capacity building	3	.4%
8. Enhancing cultural awareness and sensitivity	2	.3%
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>19%</b>
Focus of Policies relating to the Ecological Environment		
1. Facilitate sustainable tourism outcomes	72	11%
2. Conservation of natural and cultural ATSI heritage	9	1.4%
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>12.4%</b>
Focus of Policies relating to the Political Environment		
1. Increase cooperation and coordination	20	3%
2. Adopt a whole of Government approach	9	1.5%
3. Undertake a consultative process	8	1.3%
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>5.8%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>652</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Note:* Frequency: denotes that the individual focus was cited in a policy at least once.  
 Percentage: sum of issues expressed as a percentage of 7 policies.

The second most predominant environment was the socio-cultural environment. The focus of policies pertaining to the socio-cultural environment appeared 124 times and accounted for 19% of the focus of policies. The ecological and political environments combined, accounted for the remaining 18.2% and appeared 81 and 37 times respectively in the focus of the policies. Importantly, Table 4 clearly shows there was an array of foci identified in the ATSI tourism policies that related to at least one of the four environments. Moreover, it would appear reasonable to suggest that the foci of these policies will shape the future of ATSI tourism as public policy will be instrumental in creating the environment in which ATSI tourism develops and grows (Schmiechen cited in Brownbill, 1997; Tourism Western Australia, 2005). This begs the question then, as to whether the Australian State/Territory Government ATSI tourism policies can facilitate the growth and development of ATSI tourism.

### **ATSI tourism policies = Focus on economic + socio-cultural + ecological + political issues. Is the equation sustainable?**

The results of this study clearly show that the foci of Australian State/Territory Government ATSI tourism policies were skewed towards the economic environment. This result becomes significant considering that the second most predominant focus appearing 72 (11%) times in the ATSI tourism policies was the development of sustainable tourism outcomes. Sustainable tourism development must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987). Yet, the extent to which any form of ATSI tourism development can grow and contribute to the enhancement of the host environment, natural or human and still maintain an acceptable balance between short-term returns and longer-term viability and sustainability (Pigram & Wahab 1997; Hall & Lew, 1998) is debatable, owing to the unbalanced focus on issues relevant to the four environments of the ATSI tourism policies.

In order to achieve sustainable ATSI tourism development, Australian State/Territory Governments may need to consider becoming more consistent in producing policies underpinned by the triple bottom line. For instance, Queensland State Government's Indigenous Tourism Strategy (Tourism Queensland, 2004, p. 3) noted that "while tourism is recognized as one of Queensland's key economic drivers, its strong financial performance is balanced by the increasing importance of triple bottom line sustainability within the tourism industry".

The triple bottom line is a concept advocating the necessity to "not only to make a profit, but also to care about people and protect the environment and to be accountable for all three" (Adams, 2004, p. 1). The development of the concept has emerged as a result of increasing awareness of social and environmental issues (Hall & Lew 1998). The triple bottom line focuses not just on the economic factors, but also on environmental and social factors, capturing the whole set of values, issues and processes that must be addressed in order to minimize any harm resulting from activities and to create economic, environmental and social and cultural value (Adams, 2004).

While several of the policies advocated the need to employ a triple bottom line approach to the development of ATSI tourism, it remains doubtful if it will be possible to move from principles to praxis as there would appear to be an inherent deficit within the focus of the seven ATSI policies.

### **ATSI Tourism and the Cultural Quandary**

The need to preserve and respect ATSI culture in a sustainable manner was identified in 7.4% of the content of the seven ATSI tourism policies. Indigenous societies are often 'showcased' for economic purposes and culture is viewed as a commodity that can be packaged for the tourist (Robinson, 1999). Moreover, according to Ryan and Huyton (2000, p. 82) incorporating Aboriginal tourism into the mainstream tourism industry may lead to, among other things, the commoditization

of culture. Commoditization of ATSI culture is the process of making ATSI cultural productions, including material objects, events and performances, or even people and ways of life available for purchase or barter (Jafari, 2000, p. 91).

There is an ongoing debate relating to the commoditization of ATSI culture which centres on whether tourism corrupts ATSI culture or whether it has helped retain and assist diversity (Ryan, 1997; Whitford, Bell & Watkins, 2001). On the one hand, the debate argues that the commoditization of ATSI tourism products may facilitate 1) increased pride, preservation and revival of culture through cultural presentations and 2) cultural education of visitors (Boissevain, 1996; Cohen 1988). Therefore, there has been a trend in ATSI communities “to commodify culture for the commercial market in tourism and the large scale marketing of souvenirs and clothing objects.....” (Reconciliation & Social Justice Library, 1999, p. 1) for economic advantages. In essence, commercial relationships based on commodifying aspects of Indigenous social and cultural life “offer more than a fistful of dollars, they offer ATSI people opportunities for economic status, empowerment and dignity” (Reconciliation & Social Justice Library, 1999, p. 1). Importantly, any advantage or benefit gained from such actions is dependent upon providing appropriate regulation and protection to Indigenous cultural copyright and intellectual property. Consequently, Indigenous Protocol Guides have been developed “to protect authenticity of Aboriginal tourism product and cultural intellectual property utilised for tourism purposes” (Tourism Western Australia, 2005, p. 18).

On the other hand, the debate claims that ethnic, cultural or adventure tourism can turn exotic cultures into commodities and individuals into amusing objects for tourism consumption (Kleiger cited in Hollinshead, 1996). For example, ATSI peoples are often stereotyped as the ‘noble savage’ who is half-naked with a spear (Darwin, 1969; Pitcher et al 1999). Surely then, Government policy must avoid ATSI peoples’ involvement in tourism and ATSI tourism product becoming “...picturesque subject matter for advertising” (Commonwealth Department of Employment & Industrial Relations & Department of Aboriginal Affairs, 1985, p. 318). Additionally, ATSI tourism policies should also be cognisant of other negative impacts of the commodification of ATSI culture including 1) loss of meanings, beliefs and value of the culture, 2) the degrading of traditional culture, 3) the exploitation of participants, 4) the simplification of the culture, and 5) exposure of secret/ sacred knowledge to others (Boissevain, 1996; Whitford et al, 2001). Thus, in order to turn rhetoric into reality and adopt a triple bottom line approach that may facilitate sustainability, Australian State/Territory Government ATSI tourism policies should not only focus on and incorporate goals that address social aspirations, but should also focus on facilitating respect for and preservation of ATSI culture (Smith, 1996). Robinson (1999, p. 385) however, warned that “while tourism policies have generally been successful in economic development terms they are largely inadequate to deal with issues relating to community values and the variance between value systems and traditions developed over centuries”.

To address this culture gap, collaborative policy development is vital (Getz and Jamal, 1994; Robinson, 1999).

### **ATSI Tourism and the Development of Policy**

There is a need for collaborative policy development, including participation in joint policy decision making (Getz and Jamal, 1994; Ryan, 2002) and this was highlighted by Tourism NSW (2006, p. 4) who warned that the “expansion of Aboriginal tourism must be done in consultation with, and in a manner which is acceptable to, Aboriginal communities”. Indeed, many of the State/Territory ATSI tourism policies advocated greater inclusion of ATSI peoples in the development stages of ATSI tourism because “tourism which is endorsed by the Aboriginal community will have a greater chance of success than that which fails to gain community approval” (Tourism NSW, 2006, p. 9). Therefore, it would appear imperative that Australian State/Territory Governments commit to working collaboratively with all relevant stakeholders in progressing ATSI tourism development to ensure a well coordinated and sustainable approach to ATSI tourism development. Arguably, the degree of success achieved by each of the Australian State/Territory Governments will be dependent upon the extent to which cross-departmental and Government consultation and cooperation is achieved across the broad range of agencies and departments associated with ATSI peoples and tourism (Altman, 2003). Importantly, Altman (2003) said that ATSI policy should also incorporate the broader principles of access, equity, mechanisms for consultation and decision making and community empowerment. Moreover, Altman (2003) warned that such an approach should not be viewed as a panacea for all policy problems but rather as a mechanism promoting consultation, cooperation and cohesion between all ATSI tourism stakeholders. Such a collaborative approach may not only avoid inevitable tensions between the foci of the policies, but would also demonstrate a proactive attempt to address the current pervasiveness of the economic environment of the ATSI tourism policies.

### **ATSI Tourism and the Bottom Line.**

While there is little argument that there is an overarching need to address economic issues in order to facilitate ATSI tourism development, it would appear reasonable to suggest that an inflated focus on the bottom-line of the balance sheet will not enhance the sustainable outcomes espoused by the seven ATSI tourism policies. Therefore, the frequency of focusing on the economic environment, as shown in Table 4, surely must raise cause for alarm if ATSI tourism policies are purportedly designed to facilitate sustainable development of ATSI tourism. Concomitantly, there is an array of barriers, identified in 7.2% of the seven Australian State / Territory tourism policies and shown in Table 5, which have a clear economic focus. Undoubtedly, such barriers must be overcome in order to facilitate successful ATSI tourism enterprises, but at what cost?

**Table 5:** Barriers to Successful ATSI Tourism Ventures

Lack of sustained support for new businesses and partnerships
Poor coordination between related Government programs
Lack of Government capital expenditure
Lack of skills and access to services for Aboriginal enterprises
Consumer difficulty in obtaining information about Indigenous attractions
Without such integration, the sector risks being regarded by the wider industry as too much of a niche and marginalised.
Lack of practical advice and one-to-one support to assist the establishment of their business or cultural activity,
Lack of ongoing support to ensure their business is sustainable.
Lack of sustainability has meant that the sector has remained very small and is under-represented in the tourism industry.
Training programs do not always meet the needs of the sector and are, therefore, avoided by many
Assistance is not tailored to address cultural needs such as different approaches to making and using profits, and protocols for respecting traditional heritage.
Government services lack coordination, requiring different approaches to different agencies and sometimes generating multiple visits to businesses on similar topics.
A lack of data regarding currently accessible Indigenous attractions and events, the size of the tourism market for those attractions and the expectations and satisfaction levels of customers.
A lack of understanding of Aboriginal community capacity, their social goals, operating environment, profit objective and even the relative importance of tourism to some enterprises.
Difficulty accessing and maintaining consistent communication with some businesses.
Lack of funds available for marketing activities and association memberships.
Lack of engagement with the local and regional tourism structures.
Lack of adequate staffing and an orientation to customer service.
Difficulty in booking packaged itineraries that pay standard industry commissions.
Lack of information about what experiences and products are available.
Lack of a product that imparts knowledge and builds awareness through engagement, interaction and entertainment.
Reluctance to engage with the sector possibly because of perceived political agendas.
Lack of feedback systems for customers to comment on their experiences.
Lack of training to enable businesses to achieve higher standards of interpretation and customer service.

The perception that Government financial and other resources are predominantly available to public sector or semi-public sector enterprises is creating some friction within the sector.
There are currently few partnerships and funding opportunities for skills development for Aboriginal tourism businesses are lacking.
There are very limited opportunities for industry aspirants within the sector to gain hands-on experience
Misunderstanding among the sector about the authenticity component of the program.
Many Aboriginal tourism businesses are not sustainable in the long term and it is vital to the growth of the industry to understand why.
This plan makes reference to the lack of coordination among State Government departments and agencies with regard to Aboriginal affairs and Aboriginal tourism issues in particular.

Source: Tourism Victoria (2006, p. 13-14)

Identified amongst the array of barriers were 1) a lack of ongoing support to ensure business is sustainable, 2) a lack of a product that imparts knowledge and builds awareness, 3) a lack of skills and 4) a lack of engagement with the local and regional tourism structures. Interestingly, the most predominant focus of the policies, identified 86 times (13%), was the need to facilitate successful ATSI tourism businesses that "... are both financially viable and that provide significant community benefit (and) will involve sustained efforts in the areas of investment attraction, education, training and development support" (The Northern Territory Indigenous Tourism Strategy, NTTC, 2004, p. 13). Not surprisingly then, the development of an appropriate ATSI tourism product was the third most predominant focus appearing 50 times (7.7%) in the policies. For instance, Tourism Victoria (2006, p. 5) saw the need to "investigate opportunities for further development of built products and experiences that highlight traditional and modern Aboriginal cultural experiences". Additionally, Tourism Western Australia (2006, p. 24) saw the need to "get the market-ready product to market, using the best pathways for each individual Aboriginal tourism product (i.e. promote effectively)". Ensuring the ATSI tourism product is market-ready is important as there is a demand, albeit to varying degrees, for Aboriginal tourism products (Ryan & Huyton, 2000). Arguably though, the development of any new ATSI tourism product needs to "ensure that all new Aboriginal tourism products demonstrate cultural/intellectual integrity and provide culturally appropriate experiences" (Tourism Victoria, 2006, p. 31).

In some cases however, the "development of Indigenous tourism product is challenged by low literacy and cultural factors such as inexperience in cross-cultural communication, customer service and presenting in a public group"

(National Tourism & Heritage Taskforce, 2003, p. 13). Consequently, the seven policies also focused (i.e., 41 times) on the need to increase educational opportunities for ATSI peoples relating to tourism in order to, among other things, “provide culturally appropriate training and education to Aboriginal people about the tourism industry and Aboriginal tourism opportunities in particular” (Tourism Western Australia, 2005, p.10). Therefore, policies addressed issues including a lack of management and operational skills, which not only prevent the confident planning and management of ATSI tourism ventures (PATA 1990; Taylor & Hunter, 1997), but also their ability to be competitive in mainstream tourism.

Importantly, the seven policies also noted 25 (3%) times that ATSI tourism ventures should be integrated into the mainstream tourism. For instance Tourism Victoria (2006, p. 17) declared it was “essential that Aboriginal tourism businesses link with the mainstream tourism industry for networking purposes and to receive industry information”. Arguably, the need for such integration should not be underestimated as it may lead to “multiple pathways for Aboriginal people to enter the industry, not only through business development but also through mainstream tourism businesses wishing to employ Aboriginal people” (Tourism Western Australia, 2005, p. 6).

Therefore, each of these economic foci identified in the policies is undoubtedly significant and has the potential to impinge on the future development of ATSI tourism if left unaddressed by policy. It would appear reasonable to suggest however, that in order to achieve sustainable tourism outcomes as espoused by the policies, the foci equation constituting the economic plus the socio-cultural plus the ecological plus the political environments pertaining to Australian State/Territory Government ATSI tourism policies needs to be recalculated. Ideally, policies would demonstrate a more balanced distribution of foci across the four environments to not only avoid accusations of rhetoric, but importantly to demonstrate a propensity for facilitating long term sustainable outcomes for ATSI tourism.

## **CONCLUSION**

In 2007, there were seven Australian State/Territory Governments with ATSI tourism policies which suggests, among other things, that the publication of NATSITIS in 1997 may have been a catalyst for increasing the significance of ATSI tourism, to varying degrees, at the Australian State/Territory Government level. Indeed, the very existence of an Australian State/Territory Government ATSI tourism policy bodes well for the future of ATSI tourism. The simple presence of an ATSI tourism policy however, does not necessarily translate into the effective and appropriate facilitation of future sustainable ATSI tourism development and it may be assumed that the foci of these policies will significantly influence future outcomes in ATSI tourism development. While the policies articulated the

need for sustainable outcomes, there was an obvious imbalance in the foci of the economic, socio-cultural, ecological and political environments.

In fact, the results of the study revealed that overall, issues pertaining to the economic environment were clearly predominant over issues pertaining to the socio-cultural, ecological and political environments. While there is little argument that policies should focus on significant economic issues which must be addressed if sustainable outcomes are to be achieved, policies should also take into consideration that ATSI tourism enterprises may be established for reasons other than economic benefits, including community development, cultural education and preservation. Thus, the Government should be cognisant of the notion that sometimes economic benefits are only a minor consideration of ATSI peoples, thus policy, advocating the need for sustainability, should attempt to get the foci equation right and produce a more even distribution of policy foci across the four environments.

Whilst keeping in mind that the conclusions of this study emanated from an analysis of written policy documents, further research should not only investigate the experiences of the people who developed the policies, but also the views and experiences of ATSI peoples. Such research would augment the results of this study, in addition to building further understanding of the policy development process as it relates to ATSI tourism. Importantly, illusions of knowledge are detrimental to progress, thus there is a need to commit to a quest for greater understanding of ATSI peoples' perspectives as this is the only way to progress ATSI tourism in a sustainable manner.

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