



16 June 2021

Dr Matthew Butlin  
Presiding Commissioner, Tourism Regulation  
South Australian Productivity Commission  
GPO Box 2343  
ADELAIDE SA 5001  
[sapc@sa.gov.au](mailto:sapc@sa.gov.au)

Office of the Chief Executive  
81-95 Waymouth Street  
Adelaide  
GPO Box 1047  
Adelaide SA 5001  
Australia  
Ph: +61 8204 9000  
[www.environment.sa.gov.au](http://www.environment.sa.gov.au)

Dear Dr Butlin

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Commission's review into South Australia's tourism regulation, focusing on nature-based and agriculture-based tourism sectors.

Industry Context:

The last 18 months have been incredibly challenging for South Australia's tourism sector due to drought, the 2019/20 summer bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 restrictions in particular have had a state-wide impact on nature-based tourism businesses, by impacting the supply of visitors from interstate and overseas. Intrastate visitation was also impacted initially, until people's confidence and desire to travel locally was restored, in the latter half of 2020.

Businesses offering touring experiences have been most affected, as South Australians typically prefer self-drive, self-organised and relaxation experiences when holidaying. In contrast, tourism businesses offering accommodation in regional South Australia have been the least affected, as intrastate visitation has supplemented and, in some cases, surpassed traditional interstate and overseas visitation.

Tourism Activation within SA Parks:

Any company, organisation or individual seeking to carry out fee for service tourism activities within the SA parks system requires a Commercial Tour Operator (CTO) licence. Activities may include guided tours, instructional or educational courses and leisure activities that are conducted for fee or reward. Further details about CTO licensing and fees can be found on the [National Parks and Wildlife Service website](#).

During the COVID-19 restrictions, the Department for Environment and Water (the Department) has waived CTO annual licence fees and visitor use fees for its 130+ licensed CTOs. A number of commercial lessees of government-owned properties have also enjoyed rent relief during the COVID-restriction period.

Role within the Industry:

Importantly, the Department is not only a licensing authority and regulator of tourism in parks. It is also an enabler of tourism through the provision of the parks system, as well as a tourism operator at several sites around South Australia, including Cleland Wildlife Park, Seal Bay on Kangaroo Island, the Old Adelaide Gaol and at Naracoorte and Tantanoola Caves. The Department also runs a suite of camping and accommodation experiences in over fifty parks and reserves, operated through its [Parks Online Booking System](#).

As a tourism enabler, the State Government has committed up to \$130 million for [improving SA's National Parks, gardens and reserves](#). This investment, spanning a diversity of projects across 30+ parks, will help build the capacity of parks across our state to conserve our natural landscapes and wildlife, boost the state economy and strengthen local communities. This investment at a state-wide level will also help build resilience for nature-based tourism and broaden the attraction of South Australia to visitors from around the globe.

Process Improvements:

In 2021/22, the Department is keen to provide enhanced services and drive stronger partnerships with its CTOs by reviewing the currently manual administration processes which are often labour intensive. This could include the implementation of online application, approval and payment systems and we note that some other states and territories have already transitioned to online systems. As part of this work the Department will also review of its CTO licensing processes, fees and charges using other states and territories as benchmarks.

In seeking to support the tourism industry the Department is also working closely with the environment sector, local government and friends of parks groups to get the best outcomes for South Australia's parks system. A recent example of this is the \$5 million investment into the pilot program of the [Nature-based tourism Co-investment Fund](#) (part of our [Parks 2025](#) investment program), to assist organisations to deliver sustainable, quality tourism experiences in the state's national parks, reserves, botanic gardens, and Crown land. This pilot program aims to activate tourism in a sustainable way, with engagement of the local community and a contribution to conservation outcomes some of the key elements of the fund. This is to ensure that the mix of social, environmental and economic outcomes are balanced well.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to the Commission's review into South Australia's tourism regulation. I look forward to seeing the results.

Yours sincerely



**JOHN SCHUTZ**

Chief Executive, Department for Environment and Water

Enc. Attachment 1 – website addresses

Attachment 1 – Websites addresses referenced in the letter:

- CTO licensing and fees - [www.parks.sa.gov.au/permits-and-licences](http://www.parks.sa.gov.au/permits-and-licences)
- Parks Online Booking System - [www.parks.sa.gov.au/booking](http://www.parks.sa.gov.au/booking)
- Improving SA's National Parks, gardens and reserves - [www.parks.sa.gov.au/park-management/improving-sa-national-parks](http://www.parks.sa.gov.au/park-management/improving-sa-national-parks)
- Nature-based tourism Co-investment Fund – <https://coinvest.parks.sa.gov.au>
- Parks 2025 investment program - [www.parks.sa.gov.au/park-management/improving-sa-national-parks](http://www.parks.sa.gov.au/park-management/improving-sa-national-parks)