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## **Aboriginal Tourism in Western Australia: A case study of Yawuru Nagulagun Roebuck Bay Marine Park**

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### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to examine, by way of a case study, both the creation and development of an Aboriginal-led tourism initiative within a national park in the North West of Western Australia (WA), and also the key stakeholders who have worked collaboratively through a joint management framework to enable its success. The park in question is Yawuru Nagulagun Roebuck Bay Marine Park, Broome, WA. The case study illustrates the interplay of four key components and the nexus that exists through their interconnectedness: ecotourism, Indigenous people, national parks and joint management (the approach taken in the management of the natural and cultural heritage). Through the examination of Yawuru Nagulagun Roebuck Bay Marine Park as a case study, it is possible to identify these components, measure their impact and to identify where barriers and challenges exist.

The chapter examines the nature of tourism in WA and specifically ecotourism; the development of Indigenous tourism and how it has been affected by land rights issues; the role of national parks and the interplay with Indigenous tourism; and finally tourism in the Kimberley region and the emergence of Aboriginal tourism development in the case study area of

Yawuru Nagulagun Roebuck Bay Marine Park. The chapter will conclude with a look at the challenges and opportunities that have been presented, and what can be learned.

The case study formed part of a wider qualitative research project, which employed multi-method triangulation (participant observation, interviews, document analysis and case study analysis) to identify the place of Aboriginal tourism development within the new shared governance structure of Joint Management (JM). To date there have been few examples in Australia of Aboriginal tourism development occurring within a joint management governance model, as JM is relatively new. The authors discovered the emergence of a parks – tourism – Aboriginal people joint management nexus (Shibish, 2015). Moreover, the research revealed that the interface between Indigenous people and parks is a newly emerging research area (Strickland-Munro & Moore, 2013). Therefore this case study aims to extend knowledge in these areas by demonstrating, through the practical application of JM principles, how Indigenous tourism can successfully be developed whilst meeting sustainability goals and overcoming the challenges that are often faced by individual stakeholders. This may enable others working in protected areas in the drafting of park management plans, the shaping of new policies and the prioritising of future goals by giving insights into the opportunities it presents to the wider community, not only in conservation terms but for the advancement of social/cultural preservation and economic development.

For the purpose of this study, the words Aboriginal and Indigenous are used in the following context:

- Indigenous people – a global or umbrella term for all pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies. When referring to people who are descendants from the original inhabitants of Australia, the term will only be used if it includes both mainland Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders
- Aboriginal people – refers to those Indigenous people on the mainland of Australia, and does not include Torres Strait Islanders. Where the discussion pertains solely to WA, the term Aboriginal is used.

## Background to the study

It is necessary to know something of the tourism framework to contextualise the development and success of Yawuru Nagulagun Roebuck Bay Marine Park. These include the tourism industry in WA and specifically ecotourism; the nature of Aboriginal tourism in WA (the cultural and historical background to Indigenous peoples); the development of tourism in the Kimberley region and the role that national parks and protected areas and their management play; and Aboriginal tourism in the region in which the case study is situated. Therefore, these aspects of tourism will be explored to provide background and meaning to the study.

### Tourism in Western Australia

Australia is valued and noted for its natural environment, being one of the main reasons for visitations by tourists from overseas (Tourism Australia, 2016c) and the State and Federal government tourism bodies' key marketing messages are based around Australia's natural beauty, wide open spaces, impressive landscapes and native wildlife. Market research commissioned by Tourism Australia in 2014 revealed international visitors identified Australia's greatest strengths as its unique landscapes, safe environment and welcoming people (Tourism Australia, 2016c). Australia's natural attractions and pristine environment are well regarded by all markets and core to its global tourism offering. The greatest drivers of international visitor demand are coastal, aquatic and wildlife experiences. This is reflected in an annual visitor spend of \$107.1 billion in 2014-15 from 83.2 million domestic overnight trips and 6.6 million international visitors, contributing \$43.4 billion to the Gross Domestic Product (2.7%) and providing jobs for 4% of the workforce (Tourism Research Australia, 2015).

In 2016 WA received 29.5 million visitors spending \$9.6 billion accounting for 10.7% of all visitors in Australia and generating approximately 97,000 jobs (Tourism Western Australia, 2016). Tourism Western Australia (TWA) has a strategy in place to increase the value of tourism in WA to \$12 billion by 2020. TWA emphasises the unique features of the state for attracting visitors using its brand marketing 'Experience Extraordinary' to generate interest in tourism and leverage engagement and economic potential. The strategy earmarks the development and marketing of Aboriginal tourism as having the potential to be a key component of the WA brand image (Tourism Western Australia, 2012).