IMPROVING THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE:
EVALUATION OF INTERPRETATION COMPONENTS OF GUIDED TOURS IN NATIONAL PARKS

By E. Kate Armstrong and Betty Weiler
Technical Reports
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National Library of Australia Cataloguing in Publication Data
Armstrong, E. Kate.
Improving the tourist experience : evaluation of interpretation components of guided tours in national parks.

Bibliography.
ISBN 1 920704 53 1 (PDF).

1. National parks and reserves - Public use - Victoria. 2. Ecotourism - Victoria. I. Weiler, Betty. II. Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism. III. Title.

333.7809945

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Acknowledgements
This research was supported by the Australian Co-operative Research Centres Program through the CRC for Sustainable Tourism. The authors would also like to thank the following organisations and individuals:
• Parks Victoria for providing invaluable funding, resources and support and especially Russell Mason, Ty Caling, Rob Black and Dino Zanon.
• The Victorian Tourism Operators Association (especially Mark Hancock) for providing input and resources.
• La Trobe University and Monash University for providing resources and support for Kate Armstrong and Betty Weiler.
• Tim Phillips for his research assistance in the earlier stages of the project and Marion Paterson for volunteering for fieldwork and for research assistance in the later stages.
• Karen Garth of Eco-Adventure Tours and David Graham of Phillip Island Nature Park who participated in the piloting phase of the project.
• The 20 tour operators, their guides and the tour participants who must remain anonymous. Without their willingness and cooperation this research would not have been possible.
CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................... v
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ....................................................................................................................... vi
Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................... 1
Report Structure ................................................................................................................................... 1
Objectives ............................................................................................................................................. 1
Scope Of The Study ............................................................................................................................... 2
Industry Involvement In The Research ............................................................................................... 2
Research Outcomes ............................................................................................................................ 2
Literature Review .............................................................................................................................. 2
Chapter 2 METHODOLOGY ................................................................................................................. 7
Selection And Development Of Research Methods And Tools ............................................................. 7
Pilot Study .............................................................................................................................................. 7
Population, Sampling Frame, Recruitment and Sample Size ............................................................... 7
Sampling and Recruitment ................................................................................................................... 9
Data Collection And Analysis ............................................................................................................. 10
Methodological Limitations ................................................................................................................ 10
Chapter 3 RESULTS ............................................................................................................................ 11
Profiles Of Tours And Tour Operators Sampled .................................................................................. 11
Tour Participant Profile ...................................................................................................................... 13
Messages Delivered By Guides .......................................................................................................... 18
Messages Received By The Visitors ................................................................................................... 23
Delivery Techniques ........................................................................................................................... 26
The Characteristics Of The Tour Operations ...................................................................................... 30
Feedback On Parks Victoria And Victorian Tourism Operators Association ..................................... 35
Chapter 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS ............................................................................... 36
Primary Objectives: The Methods and Tools ...................................................................................... 36
Secondary Objectives: Evaluation of a Sample of Operators ............................................................... 36
Further Research and Conclusions ..................................................................................................... 40
REFERENCES ........................................................................................................................................ 41

Appendix 1 - On-site Evaluation Instrument ....................................................................................... 43
Appendix 2 – Visitor Survey ................................................................................................................ 47
Appendix 3 - Questions for in-depth interviews with tour operators ................................................. 49
Appendix 4 – Information Sheet for Operators .................................................................................. 51
Appendix 5 – Information Sheet for Tour Guides .............................................................................. 54

AUTHORS ............................................................................................................................................. 57

LIST OF FIGURES
Figure 1: Types of activities undertaken by the tour operators ................................................................. 11
Figure 2: Life stages of tour participants ........................................................................................................ 13
Figure 3: Origins of the tour participants ......................................................................................................... 14
Figure 4: Attendance of Australian and international visitors on the different types of tours .......................... 14
Figure 5: Travel parties of the tour participants ............................................................................................... 14
Figure 6: Relative importance of visitor motivations to participate in a tour .................................................. 15
Figure 7: Levels of satisfaction with the guided tour .......................................................................................... 17
Figure 8: Types of messages delivered by guides compared with messages received by visitors .................. 24

LIST OF TABLES
Table 1: Activities offered by operators listed on the TOMS database ranked from most to least frequently offered .................................................................................................................................................. 9
Table 2: Types of tours according to region ....................................................................................................... 10
Table 3: Basic profile of tour operators .............................................................................................................. 12
Table 4: The best aspect of the tour identified by the tour participants .............................................................. 16
Table 5: Recommended improvements to the tours ............................................................................................ 17
Table 6: Types and frequency of messages delivered by tour operators ............................................................ 18
Table 7: Types of messages received by respondents ........................................................................................... 23
Table 8: Examples of environmental messages received by respondents .......................................................... 25

LIST OF MAPS
Map 1: Geographical regions used in the study ................................................................................................. 8

LIST OF BOXES
Box 1: Matches between message delivery and receipt on tour 1 .................................................................... 25
Box 2: Matches between message delivery and receipt on tour 10 ................................................................. 26
Box 3: Matches between message delivery and receipt on tour 14 ................................................................. 26
Box 4: Techniques for making technical information more accessible ............................................................ 28
ABSTRACT

Interpretation and education in protected areas are increasingly being delivered by tour operators licensed to operate in those areas. Interpretive guided experiences delivered by tour operators are thus seen as an important vehicle for delivering messages about minimal impact behaviour, heritage values, conservation and protected area management. This report presents the methods and findings from a study funded by the Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism which sought to evaluate the interpretation components of a sample of tour products offered in protected areas in Victoria in the first half of 2001. Research methods included participant-observation of tour products, a self-complete visitor survey and in-depth interviews with tour operators. The report includes tour operator and participant profiles, an analysis of the content and delivery of the tour products, and recommendations for managing licensed tour operators in protected areas.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of a detailed study of interpretation provided by nature-based tour operators operating on protected land in Victoria, Australia over the period 2000-2001. This 12-month study was conducted under the Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism Pty Ltd by an industry-university collaborative team comprising La Trobe University, Monash University, Parks Victoria and the Victorian Tourism Operators Association (VTOA). The Universities provided research staff and office resources, Parks Victoria provided advisory, funding and office resources and VTOA was primarily involved in an advisory role.

The primary objectives of this research were to:

1a research and develop a method and set of tools for evaluating the effectiveness of interpretation experiences on guided tours conducted by licensed tour operators in natural and cultural settings;
1b trial the tool in selected Victorian National Parks by assessing the interpretation conducted by a sample of nature-based tour operators against established criteria; and
1c revise and present the tool in a form suitable for ongoing use by Parks Victoria and other park management agencies.

The secondary objectives, which were achieved in the process of developing, trailing and revising the tool, were to:

2a evaluate the content and delivery of interpretive experiences offered by a sample of licensed tour operators in Victorian National Parks;
2b assess the degree to which those operators achieve Parks Victoria’s organisational goals and objectives;
2c explore the characteristics of tour operations which might explain or be associated with the provision of quality interpretation; and
2d recommend future management actions and identify training needs for Parks Victoria and VTOA in relation to managing and monitoring tour operators.

This research project adopted three methods for data collection – observation and audio recording of tours, self-complete visitor surveys and in-depth interviews with the tour operator. The research instruments are at Appendices 1 to 3. The population for this study comprised Victorian nature-based tour operators who held a current permit issued by Parks Victoria to conduct tours in protected areas. The study was restricted to three specific areas of the State (Yarra Valley, Great Ocean Road and Grampians) and to 20 operators conducting tours during the summer and autumn of 2000-2001. After consultation with Parks Victoria and VTOA it was decided to concentrate on five key activities - bush walking, vehicle-based sightseeing (including mini-bus, 4WD and coach), canoeing-kayaking-rafting tours, rock climbing-abseiling and horse riding.

Messages delivered and received

Over the 20 tours approximately 60 hours of commentary were recorded. Looking at the 20 tour products as a whole, it is notable that two tours delivered no environmental messages in seven identified categories despite the fact that they claim to be nature-based or ecotour operators and they are operating within a protected area. Most tours featured only a few messages with the exception being two exemplary operators who delivered 19 and 17 messages respectively. If viewed as a single audience, tour clients were exposed to numerous messages about minimising their on-site impacts (27%), followed by messages about the roles and actions of protected area managers (19%), and the significance or heritage value of the area (19%). The fewest messages were those encouraging conservation actions by individuals (1%), while general conservation messages were delivered somewhat more frequently (17%). This leads to the conclusion that tour operators as a whole are delivering more minimal impact messages and less long-term conservation messages.

From the visitor’s perspective, tour guides are clearly important deliverers of messages as indicated by the types and frequency of messages reported by the visitors. Although there was some evidence amongst the tour audiences that they did not receive a clear message/s from their guide, most visitors could readily identify messages. The nature of those messages was diverse but, despite the lack of prompting for environmental topics in the visitor survey, environmental messages were clearly received by a reasonable number of visitors. Furthermore, 26 per cent of responses to the question aligned to the message categories gained from Parks Victoria’s policy and planning documents.
The tour participants displayed an array of motivations for participating in a tour and these were interesting to consider in light of the messages received, reported satisfaction with the tour and recommendations for improvement. In rank order, the tour participants were motivated to attend a tour:

- to have fun;
- do a tour that was environmentally responsible and/or did not adversely affect the environment;
- learn something new;
- have a guide;
- have a direct and active involvement with the natural environment;
- visit a place or have an experience that they could not on their own;
- be with people with similar interests;
- spend time with family and/or friends;
- be physically challenged; and
- be intellectually challenged.

There was variability in the quality of delivery amongst the 20 tour operators. Some were exemplary in terms of Ham’s (1992) EROT (enjoyable, relevant, organised and thematic) model, others not so. In terms of success, many guides were successful at gaining and maintaining the audiences attention and managed to convey technical material - although it should be noted that more sophisticated techniques for delivery of technical material were not adopted. The guides used interactivity successfully and encouraged the clients to use at least three of their five senses but again this technique was not adopted at a sophisticated level. Use of eye contact and names to personalise the delivery was successful and the flow and logical sequencing of material was generally good, particularly in relation to introductions and bodies. Generally speaking, the guides were less successful in entertaining the audience and making the interpretation meaningful. Some interpretation was actually quite effortful for the audience. Finally, the least successfully applied delivery techniques were those designed to make the interpretation meaningful by using examples, self-referencing and labelling. The thematic interpretation approach was generally not successfully applied and conclusions were poorly delivered.

The interviews with tour operators brought to light a range of issues critical to the delivery of quality interpretation within the tour. The casualisation of guiding staff and high turnover were clearly an issue in maintaining quality staff. This issue did not appear to be so critical for smaller operations. More strategic recruitment of staff in terms of both the source of the employees and the skills required seems to be justified. It is a cliché to say that ‘a business is only as good as its staff’ but in the personal services industries such as tourism and tour guiding the need for quality staff is evident. The importance of ‘people skills’ means that recruitment of staff with suitable ‘personal traits’ is appropriate. Given the number of tertiary courses and other educational agencies now offering some form of guide training, it makes sense for tour operators to begin seeking staff who also have some level of training in guiding and interpretation. As in any profession, work experience is vital but it seems sensible to recruit staff specifically trained for the field or to help them access this training while employed. Similarly, the recruitment of staff who have taken the initiative to seek certification or accreditation through a system like the EcoGuide Program is warranted. Alternatively, tour operators could encourage staff to seek such certification as part of their probation.

Almost without exception the tour operators in this research study saw interpretation as an important part of their operation although they may benefit from a more in-depth appreciation for why it is important and how it can be done better. It follows that the planning, delivery and evaluation of that interpretation justifies more time and effort than was reported. Well-planned interpretation is likely to more successful and satisfying for the client leading to positive word-of-mouth and repeat visitation. More sophisticated planning and particularly audience analysis, would appear to be warranted for most of the operators in this study. In addition, the quality of delivery of interpretation was generally good but could also benefit from more skill development. Finally, the evaluations conducted by the tour operators are generally at a very informal and unsophisticated level and this area of business operation needs more attention. In this area, operators can seek assistance from research institutions such as universities via research students and staff.

Based on the findings, it was possible to make some general recommendations on the management and support of tour operators by protected area management agencies and tour operator associations. The following actions are recommended:

- Gain an understanding of the tourism industry and the particular challenges of running a business in tourism
- Establish clear and effective communication and liaison channels to ensure that administrative systems (such as licensing or permitting systems) are effective.
• Ensure that there are adequate staff in headquarters, regional offices and the field.
• Maintain a permit/license system that is transparent and comprehensible, internally and externally equitable, flexible and reduces paperwork to the minimum.
• Improve information provision systems and fill skill gaps through appropriate training activities, workshops, and information sessions.
• Consider the establishment of a system of mentoring/internships.
• Set up or facilitate a system of peer evaluation between tour operators.
• Specify messages delivery during tours in protected areas and provide materials that facilitate their delivery.

The approaches and methods used in this study would benefit from further research. First, it may be informative to replicate the study on other types of tour products and activities and in other regions of Victoria and other States and Territories. One advantage of replicating the research is that it would facilitate meeting objective 2c within a more rigorous statistical framework (that is, examining the effects of tour operator variables on interpretation). Furthermore, the study could be extended to a variety of environments including cultural heritage landscapes. Finally, there is clearly scope for research on other ways that tour operators communicate with clients (e.g. websites, brochures, videos, handouts). With further study, a clearer picture of the role of guiding and interpretation in protected areas will emerge.

The outcomes for this research for Parks Victoria, protected area managers in general and professional associations include recommendations on managing and supporting licensed tour operators, and particularly in ensuring that a process for identifying key messages for tour operators and other audiences is initiated. This is ultimately of benefit not only to protected area agencies but also to current and future tour participants. As the expectations of tour participants for a "green" tour experience within a sustainable resource increase, they will benefit from an understanding of conservation issues that may lead to more environmentally appreciative attitudes and ultimately behaviour.
Chapter 1

Introduction

This report presents the results of a detailed study of interpretation provided by nature-based tour operators operating on protected land in Victoria, Australia over the period 2000-2001. This 12-month study was conducted under the Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism Pty Ltd by an industry-university collaborative team comprising La Trobe University, Monash University, Parks Victoria (PV) and the Victorian Tourism Operators Association (VTOA). Parks Victoria is the State government agency responsible for the management of protected areas, including National Parks, in Victoria. VTOA is a non-government professional association for tour operators and others in the tourism and hospitality industry.

This research was guided by both academic and industry concerns. The research addresses a gap in interpretation research in terms of delivery and content of nature-based tours, specifically focussing on a sample of commercial tour operators in Victorian National Parks. Its broad aim was to research, develop, trial and refine a tool for evaluating the effectiveness of interpretation experiences on guided tours conducted by licensed tour operators in natural and cultural settings. As part of this broad aim, a snapshot of the current interpretive practice adopted by licensed tour operators in Victorian National Parks was gained.

Report Structure

This report begins by outlining the objectives and scope of the study and the potential research outcomes. It then provides background information on nature-based guiding and interpretation and reviews what is currently known of the evaluation of guiding operations. The characteristics of the sample of tour operators and tour products studied and the data collection techniques employed are presented in the methodology. The results of the study are divided into four parts:

- A description of the tour products and tour participants sampled;
- An evaluation of the messages delivered by tour operators and received by the clients during their tour;
- An evaluation of the delivery techniques employed by the tour operators; and
- An exploration of the tour operation business environment and its relationship to the interpretive program.

The findings are summarised in relation to seven research objectives, overall conclusions are drawn and the report concludes by offering recommendations for future research and for the management of tour operations in protected areas.

Objectives

The primary objectives of this research were to:

1. Research and develop a method and set of tools for evaluating the effectiveness of interpretation experiences on guided tours conducted by licensed tour operators in natural and cultural settings;
2. Trial the tool in selected Victorian National Parks by assessing the interpretation conducted by a sample of nature-based tour operators against established criteria; and
3. Revise and present the tool in a form suitable for ongoing use by Parks Victoria and other park management agencies.

The secondary objectives, which were achieved in the process of developing, trails and revising the tool, were to:

4. Evaluate the content and delivery of interpretive experiences offered by a sample of licensed tour operators in Victorian National Parks;
5. Assess the degree to which those operators achieve Parks Victoria’s organisational goals and objectives;
6. Explore the characteristics of tour operations which might explain or be associated with the provision of quality interpretation; and
7. Recommend future management actions and identify training needs for Parks Victoria and VTOA in relation to managing and monitoring tour operators.
Scope Of The Study

The data collection for this project was restricted to tour operators who were licensed to operate on protected land in Victoria, Australia. The study was further restricted to three specific areas of the State and to operators conducting particular types of tours during the summer and autumn of 2000-2001. The characteristics of the tour operators, the sampling methods and the limitations of the study are described in further detail in the methodology section.

Industry Involvement In The Research

The direction of the research was partly informed by the industry collaborators. The involvement of the industry partners ensured that the research addressed their questions in relation to the management, monitoring and support of tour operators. Parks Victoria is responsible for licensing tour operators who wish to conduct their business on protected lands and waters and was interested in knowing (i) about the content and delivery of the guided activities being conducted, (ii) whether those activities were furthering Parks Victoria’s organisational goals and (iii) how it could better manage and support the operators in their business. VTOA was primarily interested in the business management side of tour operations and was keen to receive recommendations on the best systems for supporting new and established tour operators conducting nature-based tours in protected areas.

Research Outcomes

The outcomes for this research are primarily focussed on providing benefits to tour operator associations, park management agencies and visitors. The benefits for the tour operators are twofold: firstly, feedback on how to improve the quality of interpretation and, secondly, how to improve management of tour operators including identification of training needs. The benefits for park management agencies include a multi-faceted evaluation tool for guided interpretation, identification of factors associated with quality interpretation and guidance on sustainable planning and management of interpretation in National Parks. The research also makes specific recommendations to Parks Victoria on managing licensed tour operators and interpretation policy and practice. The potential benefits for future visitors are more long-term but are anticipated to include improved visitor experience resulting in higher satisfaction levels and increased understanding of conservation issues leading to more environmentally-sensitive behaviour.

Literature Review

There is a growing body of research and theory on the role(s) of interpretation in relation to ecotourism, nature-based tourism and sustainable tourism generally (Moscardo, 1998; Weiler & Markwell, 1998; Weiler & Ham, 2001). The first section of this literature review examines interpretation in the context of nature-based tourism and ecotourism, and in particular the potentially important role(s) of interpretation as a park management tool. Included in this first section is both a discussion of what these roles are, and why interpretation may or may not be fulfilling these roles, that is, an exploration of the factors that might explain or be associated with variation in the effectiveness of interpretation in relation to park management goals.

This is followed by a review of Parks Victoria policy and planning documents, as these are important for clarifying the goals of this particular organisation, particularly with respect to interpretation, and for identifying the messages that Parks Victoria seeks to communicate to visitors via licensed tour operators.

The final section reviews the literature on definition and measurement issues, particularly with respect to operationalising the construct of ‘effective’ interpretation in the context of tour operators licensed by Parks Victoria. This section outlines how research evaluating interpretation and measuring tour guiding effectiveness has informed the design of the study and the methods employed.

Interpretation in the context of nature-based tourism and ecotourism

Nature-based tourism is used here to refer to experiences that occur in and are dependent on a relatively undisturbed natural environment. Most people see ecotourism as a subset of nature-based tourism. For our purposes we support the findings of Edwards, McLaughlin and Ham (2001) that one of the essential and defining characteristics of ecotourism is that it raises awareness of the environment and its natural and cultural values, that is, it has an educational or learning component. While there continues to be a lack of consensus as to what exactly this means, there is increasing acceptance that interpretation is essential to delivering such an educational or learning experience. We define interpretation as an educational activity that
seeks to develop intellectual and emotional connections between the visitor and the natural and cultural environment, by involving them, and by communicating feelings and relationships as well as facts about objects, species, sites, and areas of significance.

Various stakeholders in nature-based tourism and ecotourism might view the purposes of interpretation somewhat differently, but there is general agreement that it seeks to enrich the visitor’s experience. When conducted in protected areas, there is also an expectation that interpretation will encourage appropriate use, promote responsible management of the resource, and foster long-term conservation goals or a conservation ethic (Weiler & Ham, 2001).

There is mounting evidence that personal (face-to-face) interpretation enhances the quality of the visitor’s experience (Hughes, 1991; Forestry Tasmania, 1994; Moscardo, 1998; Ham & Weiler, 2002). There is much less evidence of the role of face-to-face interpretation in facilitating protected area management objectives, and virtually no research has examined the role of interpretation by licensed tour operators as a park management tool, the subject of the present research.

Interpretation is not just about face-to-face communication by guides, however; it includes non-personal or ‘static’ interpretation such as printed materials, signs, exhibits, self-guided walks, pre-recorded tour commentaries on cassettes or videos, virtual tours, and other electronic media. Many of these interpretive media can be effective in enhancing visitors’ understanding and appreciation of the environments being visited and the various natural and cultural phenomena experienced. As compared to the dearth of literature on evaluating personal interpretation from a park management perspective, there is a body of literature on the evaluation of non-personal interpretation (Machlis, 1986; Ryan & Dewar, 1995; Knudson, Cable & Beck, 1996), perhaps because variables can be more easily controlled and even manipulated. Such studies typically examine the effectiveness of park-based interpretive signs, materials and displays. As summarised in the ANZECC Report Best practice in park interpretation and education (Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DNRE), 1999), most protected area management agencies acknowledge the need for such evaluation, and do a limited amount, but they publish almost none of what they do.

Face-to-face interpretation is widely acknowledged as the most powerful form of interpretation, largely because it can draw on communication techniques that cannot be used in non-personal approaches. Moreover, there are many reasons why visitors may be entirely dependent on personal interpretation, such as their limited language or literacy skills or lack of time. For those who visit a national park as part of a commercially-run guided tour, the only information they get about the park or about the management of protected areas may be from their tour operator or guide.

Thus, protected area managers are increasingly reliant on the interpretation provided by licensed tour operators to deliver park and conservation messages. Land managers are also increasingly dependent on tour guides and operators to monitor their own and their clients’ impacts on the natural environment, and to articulate and model minimal impact practices for their clients (DNRE, 1999). For these reasons, it is important to examine not only what effect licensed interpretive tour activities have in achieving park management goals, but also why particular operators and products may or may not be succeeding in delivering effective interpretation. The following paragraphs address each of these two questions in more detail.

There is virtually no published research examining the extent to which commercially-provided interpretation meets park objectives such as encouraging appropriate use, promoting responsible management of the resource, and fostering long-term conservation goals. There has been limited research on the factors associated with a high quality experience on commercial ecotours, especially from the visitor’s perspective (Haig, 1997; Ham & Weiler, 2002). This research is quite recent. Ten years ago, the Australian nature-based tourism industry, including most tour operators and guides, had little or no idea of the meaning or methods of interpretation (Weiler, 1993), let alone what benefits quality interpretive services might engender for individual companies and the tourism industry as a whole. This has changed in Australia for at least two reasons. First has been the inclusion of interpretation skills as units of competency in the National Competency Standards for Ecotour Guides (ANTA, 2001) and as a major part of accredited training programs and training resources developed for heritage and nature tour guides (Ballantyne, Weiler, Crabtree, Ham & Hughes, 2000; Black & Weiler, 2001). Second, improved awareness and understanding of the role of interpretation has occurred through programs such as the Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP) and the recently launched EcoGuide Certification Program (Crabtree & Black, 2000), the latter based on the Ecotour Guide competencies. The inclusion of ‘interpretation’ as essential criteria in both programs was a direct result of a series of research studies in Australia on ecotour guiding (Weiler & Ham,
Much of the research in Australia to date on nature-based and ecotourism operators has focused on the quality and performance of the tour guide and their impact on the visitor experience (Weiler & Crabtree, 1998; Weiler, 1999). Research suggests that the quality of the visitor’s experience is very much affected by the quality of the guide’s performance (Geva & Goldman, 1991; Haig, 1997; Weiler, 1999). From this research we know that ecotour guides in Australia tend to be very competent with respect to site knowledge, tour management and basic customer service and interpersonal communication skills, but do not perform as well on indicators pertaining to interpretation methods and conservation themes, particularly: (1) delivering organised and thematic interpretation (e.g., evidence of a theme, sequencing, introduction and conclusion) and (2) providing messages on ecologically sustainable practices and behaviours (e.g., monitoring group behaviour and communicating minimal impact themes, both on-site and post-tour). Doherty and Newton’s (1998) findings in their audit of commercial tour operator activities in western Victoria closely parallel these findings. They found that visitor interpretive programs conducted by commercial operators were deficient in the quality of their interpretation, in the promotion of Parks Victoria and environmental impact messages, and in monitoring impacts, which they refer to as ‘stewardship’. They identify the need to continue to evaluate tour operator interpretation in order to develop a model for best practice for licensed operators.

These studies have been valuable in drawing attention to the role of the guide, and particularly in examining the effects of the guide on the visitor’s experience. The present study extends this focus to include other factors that might account for variation in the quality of the ‘product’ being delivered, especially from the perspective of the protected area manager. Notably, as stated earlier, there has been no published research examining why these operators and products may or may not be effective in meeting specific park management objectives relating to appropriate use, responsible management of the resource, and long-term conservation goals. In other words, what factors are associated with the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the interpretation?

A review of the tour operations literature (Weiler, 1993; Economic Planning Group of Canada, 1999; Ham & Weiler, 2000) identified the following factors as potentially contributing to the quality of the interpretation being delivered by tour operators. These will be measured in the present study, primarily through in-depth interviews with tour operators:

- **The operator’s background and product.** For example, operators with more years in the business, more experienced staff, a higher client-staff ratio, lower staff turnover, and so on may be more (or less) effective in delivering interpretation that meets park management goals.

- **The target market.** For example, the price of the tour, the market segment targeted and the operator’s level and type of accreditation might play a role in the effectiveness of the interpretation.

In addition to examining what effect commercial interpretive tour activities have in achieving park management goals and why these are or are not achieved (that is, what variables are associated with effective interpretation), this study extends previous research by examining the content of the messages delivered and, using visitor surveys, the messages received by visitors. The methods used in previous research evaluating face-to-face interpretation are discussed in the final section of this literature review.

**Parks Victoria planning and policy context for interpretation and tour operators**

The second body of literature reviewed is Parks Victoria’s policies and procedures, including those that relate to the organisation’s goals, the planning and delivery of interpretation including the identification of key messages, and the management of licensed tour operators by Parks Victoria.

Parks Victoria has a range of published and unpublished resources that administer and inform the management of tour operators in protected areas. The brochure entitled *Information for prospective tour operators on public land in Victoria* (Parks Victoria, 1999) outlines the licensing process and informs operators of Parks Victoria’s interest in meeting management objectives through licensing. Parks Victoria uses this brochure together with an *Application for a tour operator permit* (Parks Victoria, 2001a). The application form requests detailed information about the tour business and the tour including location, length, number of clients, frequency, nature of the activity and type of accreditation held by the operator. It also outlines conditions imposed as part of the permit. Neither the brochure nor the application form indicates that interpretation or the delivery of key Parks Victoria messages are conditions of licensing. Once licensed, resource information about particular parks is available to operators via one-page information sheets called Park Notes. Despite Park’s Victoria stated interest in meeting management objectives through licensing, tour
operators and their clients are not provided with key messages by Parks Victoria or informed in any formal way which messages they could be delivering.

Parks Victoria also has a range of formal and informal policy instruments pertaining to their general information, education and interpretation role in protected areas (Missing Link Tourism Consultants, 2000; Parks Victoria 1994, 2001b, 2001c).

Based on analysis of the full range of documents, the website (Parks Victoria, 2001d) and discussions with staff, it was concluded by the researchers that Parks Victoria seeks to use interpretation to:

- Minimise visitor impacts in protected areas;
- Communicate its roles and actions as a protected area management agency;
- Communicate its laws and regulations with respect to resource protection;
- Convey the significance or heritage value of particular protected areas;
- Raise awareness and understanding of general conservation issues; and
- Encourage conservation action by individuals.

Interpretation delivered via tour operators might be expected to assist in meeting one or more of these agency goals.

In 2000, a set of key themes or messages was drafted by a group of Parks Victoria staff with the aid of a consulting firm (Missing Link Tourism Consultants, 2000). Interviews with staff, however, reveal that the concept of ‘messages’ is a new one to Parks Victoria, and that these draft messages are not generally well known, understood or used within Parks Victoria. Moreover, because these were not developed within a strategic planning framework, the messages are not targeted at particular audiences and the exercise did not include the identification of particular media (such as guided tour commentary) to convey those messages. In other words, a set of messages have not been identified for licensed tour operators and their clients (who are clearly a key audience for Parks Victoria), and tour operators are certainly not told in any formal way which messages they should be delivering. For this reason, the delivery (by tour operators) or receipt (by visitors) of Parks Victoria messages is often a happy accident rather than a strategic outcome of the interpretation delivered by tour operators.

In summary, an examination of Parks Victoria policy and planning documents reveals that Parks Victoria has broad goals, an interpretation policy aimed at meeting those goals, and a draft set of key messages, but is communicating its management objectives for interpretation to tour operators in only a very general and ad hoc way. There are no requirements within the licensing system regarding the content and delivery of interpretation by licensed tour operators.

In the absence of a well-established set of agency interpretation standards and messages against which to evaluate the licensed tour operators, the researchers took two actions. First, we collected data on the messages being delivered by licensed operators, in order to assess their accuracy and relevance to both the audience and to Parks Victoria’s conservation/minimal impact goals, and, second, we collected information about the quality of the interpretation delivery, using information from the published literature on what constitutes best practice interpretation in the context of nature-based tourism.

**Defining and measuring the effectiveness of interpretation**

The ANZECC report *Best Practice in Interpretation and Education in Parks and Protected Areas* (DNRE 1999) provides a starting point regarding approaches and methods for evaluating interpretation, and their relative strengths and weaknesses. The literature review conducted for this report looked closely at who is doing what kinds of evaluation, how interpretation has been evaluated in various contexts, and how interpretation should be evaluated. It included evaluation of all forms of interpretation, but for our purposes we focus on the methods for evaluating face-to-face (personal) interpretation.

Beckmann’s (1999) doctoral research took up the challenge of evaluating guided activities in a range of national parks. Her research did not focus on commercially-based guided tours, thus she did not look at what variations in the tour operation or product might explain variation in the quality of interpretation delivered. However, her approach, using multiple methods and visitor perspectives, has informed the present study. Our research goes beyond the visitor perspective of Beckmann’s research, however, and looks in particular at the perspective of the protected area manager and the tour operator.

Since the present study is focused in particular on the evaluation of commercially-based interpretation in relation to park management goals, we searched for methods within such a context. The only methods of direct relevance were in an unpublished Canadian study by Finlayson and Husby (n.d.), which developed a three-part evaluation of commercial tour operators in British Columbia Parks, including analysis of a pre-tour planning document, on-tour assessment, and post-tour evaluation via an interview. One of their two main objectives was to assess the program’s success in relation to an individual park’s messages and
resources. Selected aspects of the methods and instruments used in their study were adapted to the present study.

Based on our literature review, we found our focus on evaluating interpretation delivered by commercially-based tour operators and on the messages being delivered by these operators (and received by visitors), in relation to the protected area management agency’s goals and desired messages, to be original and new. Indeed the need for delivering messages that are relevant to park management is not a focus of either the National Competency Standards for Ecotour Guides, nor the NEAP nor EcoGuide Program, probably because all of these are driven largely by the needs of the private sector rather than protected area managers. Our methodology and measurement instruments for this aspect of the study are therefore largely untested. The study provided an opportunity to pilot and evaluate these methods, particularly the methods and instruments for examining message content.

In addition to message content, this research is concerned with the quality of message delivery (i.e. the quality of the interpretation). This led us to adapt the methodology and instruments used in research evaluating tour guides. We were aware that the methodology for research conducted by Weiler and Crabtree (Weiler 1999) was underpinned by a review of the literature on evaluating interpretation (Machlis, 1986; Fishbein & Manfredo, 1992; Ryan & Dewar, 1995; Knudson, Cable & Beck, 1996; Moscardo, 1996), workplace performance evaluation (Rumsey, 1994), and best practice tour guiding (Geva & Goldman, 1991; Hughes, 1991; Forestry Tasmania, 1994).

It was not the intention of the present study to evaluate tour guide performance, nevertheless the methods developed, tested and refined in Australian-based research (Weiler 1999) provided a good foundation for this study. Leaving aside the other elements of tour guide performance in the Weiler and Crabtree study (they also looked at other aspects of communication, leadership/group management, and minimal impact), we identified a number of variables that contribute to the quality of delivery of face-to-face interpretation. The variables seen to be indicative of quality interpretation in the Canadian parks study (Finlayson & Husby, n.d.) were also included. These dimensions of face-to-face interpretation that contribute to the quality of the interpretation (message delivery) were then packaged within categories that align with the four qualities or principles of interpretation originally developed by Ham (1992). The model is known as EROT and is widely accepted and applied in interpretation planning and delivery:

- Engaging and accessible (interpretation must be enjoyable for visitors)
- Meaningful and personal (interpretation must be relevant to what visitors know and care about)
- Organised (interpretation must be well organised so visitors can follow it)
- Thematic (interpretation must communicate messages rather than just topics).

Detail on how each of these were operationalised in the research can be seen in the various research instruments (Appendix 1).
Chapter 2

Methodology

This research project adopted three methods to collect data – observation and audio recording of tours, self-complete visitor surveys and in-depth interviews with the tour operator.

Selection And Development Of Research Methods And Tools

Participant observation was chosen as the most appropriate method for evaluating the content and delivery of interpretive experiences offered by a sample of licensed tour operators in Victorian National Parks and protected areas. The observation of the tours was designed to focus on two aspects – content and delivery techniques.

Parks Victoria was particularly interested to discover the content of the tour commentary in relation to natural heritage values, protected area management issues, conservation and tour and visitor impacts and content analysis of the tour was restricted to these types of messages. These data were used to ascertain the extent to which licensed operators through their guides delivered messages consistent with Parks Victoria’s organisational goals and objectives. The second aspect of the tour observation, which was of particular interest to the University project partners, was the adoption of specific delivery techniques by the guide. The full tour observation tool is provided at Appendix 1.

A self-complete visitor survey (Appendix 2) was adopted as the most appropriate method for gathering a profile of the tour participants and their motivations for participating in a tour. The survey was also designed to gauge the messages received by visitors and their reactions to the tour.

The in-depth interview with tour operators was designed to explore the characteristics of the tour operations that might explain or be associated with the provision of quality interpretation. The interview was guided by a set of semi-structured questions and was conducted in person (Appendix 3).

Pilot Study

The methodology was piloted on two tours in early January 2001 to ensure that the instruments and fieldwork operations were effective. The recording operations, visitor survey and observational instruments were revised as a result of the pilot.

Population, Sampling Frame, Recruitment and Sample Size

The population for this study comprised Victorian nature-based tour operators who held a current permit issued by Parks Victoria to conduct tours in protected areas. The contact details for the population were available on the Tour Operator Management System (TOMS) which is a permit database maintained by Parks Victoria. At the time of sampling there were 275 licensed tour operators on the TOMS database.

After consultation with Parks Victoria, the study was restricted geographically by focussing on tours in three regions of Victoria:

1. The Grampians National Park and Mt Arapiles-Tooan State Park
2. The Great Ocean Road and associated protected areas (Angahook Lorne State Park, Otway National Park, Port Campbell National Park)
3. The Yarra Valley and proximate protected areas (Map 1).
Map 1: Geographical regions used in the study

These regions were chosen because they receive significant visitor numbers and could be expected to attract a reasonable number of tour operators. The areas were also significant to Parks Victoria in terms of visitor servicing issues including the provision of interpretation and education. The restriction to three geographical areas reasonably proximate to Melbourne was also governed by the resources available for fieldwork. A complete listing of the protected areas that featured in the tours in this study are:

- Alpine National Park
- Angahook Lorne State Park
- Bay of Islands Coastal Park
- Grampians National Park
- Kinglake National Park
- Mt Arapiles–Tooan State Park
- Otway National Park
- Port Campbell National Park
- Port Phillip Bay
- Yarra Ranges National Park

The sampling frame was then further restricted by the type of activity offered by the tour operator. The tour operators licensed by Parks Victoria offer a diverse range of activities (Table 1).
Table 1: Activities offered by operators listed on the TOMS database ranked from most to least frequently offered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Bushwalking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Four wheel drive tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Abseiling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Rock climbing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Canoeing/kayaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Horse riding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Mountain bike riding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Rafting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Coach/bus tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Ski touring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Caving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Fishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Bird watching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Trail bike tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Boat tours (motorised and non-motorised)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Dolphin watching tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Sea kayaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Bicycle touring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Snowshoe tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Fossicking/prospecting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Surfing/surf education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Camel riding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Heritage tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Horse-drawn wagon tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Spotlight tours/night walks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Ballooning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Hang gliding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data collection season for this project was January to June 2001 so seasonal tours (e.g., snow-based activities) were effectively excluded from the sample. After consultation with Parks Victoria and VTOA it was decided to concentrate on five key activities - bushwalking, vehicle-based sightseeing (including mini-bus, 4WD and coach), canoeing-kayaking-rafting tours, rock climbing-abseiling and horse riding. These tour types were the most frequently offered and were seen as representing a larger volume of tour operations. Studying a small range of activity types was seen as offering greater depth of analysis compared with attempting to evaluate a wide range. They were also considered the types of tours that would most likely deliver interpretation to visitors – that is, they presented classic interpretive opportunities for tour operators. Finally, the sampling frame was restricted to tours of one day duration or less to minimise the amount of field work and subsequent data input.

Sampling and Recruitment

Potential participants for the project were selected using a random number generator. The operators were contacted by telephone or mail, informed of the project and the duration of the tour product checked to ensure it met the criteria for sampling. At this stage in recruitment many operators were discarded because (i) they offered ‘unsuitable’ tours (more than one day duration, presented in a language other than English, offered outside the sampling period), (ii) their permit had expired, (iii) they had ceased to conduct a tour business or (iv) they had ceased to operate in that region. Several operators had also had a negative experience with involvement in research projects and displayed ‘participant fatigue’. The ‘over-researching’ of nature-based tourism operators is a well-known problem amongst the Australian research community.

If the operator expressed willingness to be involved in the project, the project was described in detail and they were sent an operator information sheet and consent form to peruse (Appendix 4). If the operator was also the guide, as was commonly the case with smaller businesses, they were also sent the guide information sheet and consent form (Appendix 5). The operator was contacted one week after the documentation was sent to answer any questions and confirm their interest in being involved in the project. If the operator was willing to participate, a suitable tour for observation was scheduled. Tours were either
regularly scheduled events where individuals and groups could book in or ‘charter’ operations where tours were designed for a client based on their requirements.

The final sample of 20 tours was unevenly distributed across both the three regions and the five types of tours due to all of the factors outlined above (Table 2, n = 20). However, we estimate that the total population of licensed tour operators running day tours in the three regions in the five activities in 2001 was not much more than 24, and certainly no more than 40, making the sample fraction at least .50 and maybe as high as .83.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Yarra Valley</th>
<th>Great Ocean Road</th>
<th>Grampians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle-based sightseeing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bushwalking (day and night-time)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canoeing/kayaking/rafting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse riding</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock climbing/abseiling</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Types of tours according to region**

**Data Collection And Analysis**

The first step in data collection was observing the tour. On most tours there were two researchers. The researchers acted as participant-observers, that is, they participated in a natural manner in the tour experience whilst observing and audio recording the proceedings. Researchers wore name tags at all times during the tour. At the beginning of the tour, the visitors were informed of the research activities by the guide and/or researchers. The commentary provided by the guide was recorded using a wireless lapel microphone worn and controlled by the guide and a receiver and mini-disc recorder operated remotely by a researcher. Recording was undertaken with the guide’s permission and as discretely as possible to limit the intrusion of the technology on the guide and visitors. Digital photographs served as a memory aid. To avoid an intrusive ‘clipboard look’, which had the potential to diminish the visitor experience and intimidate the guide, written notes were recorded immediately after the tour. At the end of the tour, visitors were invited by the guide and researchers to complete a short optional visitor survey and the guide was provided with feedback.

An in-depth interview with the tour operator (which in some cases was also the guide) was conducted either directly after the tour or at another convenient time. The duration of the interviews varied from 30 to 90 minutes and they were audio recorded.

The data was analysed using SPSS and NVivo (a qualitative software tool).

**Methodological Limitations**

Despite efforts to use random sampling, the participants were in effect volunteers for this research. This may have resulted in a bias towards operators with strong interest, opinions and/or performance in interpretation. However, the large sample fraction (.50 - .83) gives confidence in the representativeness of the results. It would be methodologically unsound to draw inferences beyond the regions and activities included in this study until such time that the findings are replicated on a wider scale.

Operators, guides and visitors were informed of the general purpose of the research, creating a second potential limitation of the study. Simply by their presence, the researchers may have influenced guide and visitor behaviour. The guide may have endeavoured to ‘be on their best behaviour’, deliver ‘eco’ content and make a special effort in delivery skills. The visitors may have made an effort to listen for ‘eco’ messages in the tour or adjust their responses on the survey to meet the perceived needs of the researchers and guides. Triangulation of methods helped to reduce this bias.

The study did not measure a range of other visitor-related factors that could influence message receipt, such as ability to hear, ability to understand (e.g. level of fluency of the respondent in English and in Australian accent, jargon and slang), fatigue and concentration level. Several of the tours were lengthy and some were held at night and this may have also affected message receipt.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to report data beyond the actual words communicated by the guides. Para-verbal and non-verbal communication such as tone of voice and body language can also communicate messages. Moreover, messages delivered pre- and post-tour, for example through the operator’s website or tour brochure or by verbal communication with visitors prior to the start of the tour, were not analysed.
Chapter 3

Results

The results of the study are presented in four parts:

• A description of the tour products and tour participants sampled;
• An evaluation of the messages delivered by tour operators and received by the clients during their tour;
• An evaluation of the delivery techniques employed by the tour operators; and
• An exploration of the tour operation business environment and its relationship to the interpretive program.

Profiles Of Tours And Tour Operators Sampled

Due to the sensitive nature of the data collected on the tour operators and to protect confidentiality, operators are not identified in these findings and only a basic description of the tour operations is presented to provide context for the results (Table 3).

As indicated previously, the activity-focus of the tours sampled included five broad categories (Figure 1, n = 20), with nine tours sampled in the Great Ocean Road region, six in the Grampians region, and five in the Yarra Valley region. This is largely a reflection of the distribution of tour product rather than sampling bias.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle-based sightseeing</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bushwalking</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canoeing/kayaking/rafting</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse riding</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock climbing/abseiling</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Types of activities undertaken by the tour operators

The majority (60%) of tours had one staff member managing the tour and they frequently undertook guiding activities as well as controlling any transport used (vehicles, rafts, canoes, horses) and providing catering services if included. In fact, the driver/guide/operator combination was the most common business arrangement, that is, the business owner or operator was also the driver and guide for the tour. Thirty per cent of the tours had two staff and the second staff member was usually responsible for controlling additional rafts/canoes or horses and/or providing backup in catering and crowd control. Just 10 per cent of tours had three staff members and these were generally tours with greater than 20 participants and/or activities with safety issues requiring closer supervision of participants (e.g. rock climbing/abseiling). However, the largest tour with 35 participants had a single driver/guide.
### Table 3: Basic profile of tour operators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tour no.</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Nature of activity (duration)</th>
<th>Type of audience (size of group)*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yarra Valley</td>
<td>Night walk with wildlife viewing and interpretation focus (3 hours)</td>
<td>Domestic tourists/day trippers (medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Great Ocean Road</td>
<td>Canoe tour and wildlife watching on lake with interpretation focus (5 hours).</td>
<td>Domestic tourists (small)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Great Ocean Road</td>
<td>All day minibus sightseeing tour of the Great Ocean Road departing Melbourne (12 hours).</td>
<td>International tourists (medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Grampians</td>
<td>Canoe tour on lake with activity and interpretation focus (3 hours).</td>
<td>Domestic tourists (small)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Great Ocean Road</td>
<td>All day coach sightseeing tour of the Great Ocean Road departing Melbourne (12 hours).</td>
<td>International tourists (large)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Grampians</td>
<td>All day 4WD sightseeing tour with some bushwalking (5 hours).</td>
<td>Tourists (small)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Great Ocean Road</td>
<td>Horse riding tour with skills focus (3 hours).</td>
<td>Domestic tourists/day trippers (medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Great Ocean Road</td>
<td>Horse riding tour with skills and sightseeing focus (1 hour).</td>
<td>Domestic tourists/day trippers (medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Yarra Valley</td>
<td>Vehicle-based bird watching tour with interpretive focus (11 hours).</td>
<td>International tourists (medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Great Ocean Road</td>
<td>All day minibus sightseeing tour of the Great Ocean Road departing Melbourne (14 hours).</td>
<td>International tourists (small)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Yarra Valley</td>
<td>Canoe and rafting tour on river with adventure focus (4 hours).</td>
<td>Domestic tourists (medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Great Ocean Road</td>
<td>Horse riding tour with skills focus (2 hours).</td>
<td>Domestic tourists/day trippers (medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Yarra Valley</td>
<td>All day bushwalk with activity focus (5 hours).</td>
<td>Domestic tourists/day trippers (medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Great Ocean Road</td>
<td>Night walk with wildlife viewing and interpretation focus (4 hours).</td>
<td>Domestic tourists (medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Grampians</td>
<td>2WD vehicle-based sightseeing tour with some bushwalking (8 hours).</td>
<td>Domestic tourists (small)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Grampians</td>
<td>Overnight bushwalk with activity and group work focus (24 hours).</td>
<td>School groups (medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Grampians</td>
<td>All day rock climbing and abseiling with activity, teamwork and individual challenge focus (7 hours).</td>
<td>School groups (medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Yarra Valley</td>
<td>Overnight bushwalk with activity, teamwork and individual challenge focus (24 hours).</td>
<td>School groups (medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Great Ocean Road</td>
<td>All day minibus sightseeing tour of the Great Ocean Road departing Melbourne (13 hours).</td>
<td>International tourists (small)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Grampians</td>
<td>All day rock climbing and abseiling with activities focus (7 hours).</td>
<td>Domestic tourists (small)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Size of group - small = < 10 participants, medium = 10 – 20 participants, large = > 20 participants

A third of the tours sampled were half day experiences up to 3.5 hours and a further third were full day up to 8 hours. Bushwalking (including spotlight walks), boating, rock climbing and abseiling and horse riding tours mostly fell into these two categories. About 25 per cent of the tours were classified as ‘long’ full day tours (up to 14 hours) and these were mostly sightseeing tours along the Great Ocean Road departing Melbourne, the capital city of Victoria. About 10 per cent of tours were overnight experiences of up to 24 hours duration and these were bushwalks as part of school outdoor education programs.
Despite efforts to achieve an even distribution of tours across the three identified regions in Victoria, tours based on the Great Ocean Road and associated protected areas were slightly over-represented (45%) with 30 per cent in the Grampians National Park and surrounds and 25 per cent in the Yarra Valley and surrounds.

Most tours were small with the average being 11 participants (the largest had 35 participants). Almost half of the tours sampled (45%) attracted 10 or fewer participants with one tour running with just one participant. Thirty five per cent had between 11 and 15 participants and 20 per cent between 16 and 35. The larger tour groups were generally vehicle-based sightseeing and bushwalking tours. Almost all tours were restricted in numbers due to transport constraints (vehicles, boats, horses). There were a total of 264 participants on the 20 tours.

**Tour Participant Profile**

The following profile of tour participants is restricted to the survey respondents (n = 102) who account for 39 per cent of all participants. The remaining participants were children and those who did not complete the survey due to low light levels at the end of evening activities. One tour operator did not give permission for the visitor survey to be administered (35 participants) and there were also a few refusals.

Female respondents outnumbered male respondents (5:3). The most common age categories were 18 - 29 years (27%) and 40 – 49 years (27%). Nineteen per cent of respondents were 30 – 39 years and 12 per cent were 50 – 59 years. Fifteen per cent of respondents were older than 60 years with three respondents being over 70. Younger respondents (18 – 39 years) were significantly more likely to be on the vehicle-based sightseeing tours and 40 – 49 year olds on the canoeing/rafting and horse riding tours ($\chi^2 = 80$ on 20 degrees of freedom, $P = 0.001$, $V = 0.45$).

The respondents were highly educated in comparison with the general population, with almost three quarters having studied at the tertiary level. Thirty per cent had done some tertiary study or had completed a TAFE college qualification, 20 per cent had completed an undergraduate degree and 22 per cent a postgraduate degree. The remaining respondents had completed some high school.

A range of life stages were present on the tours with the exception of young families with children under 6 years who were under-represented, perhaps because the nature of some of the tours may have excluded young children (horse riding, rock climbing, abseiling and some rafting/canoeing). There was an over-representation of young singles and young and older couples on the vehicle based sightseeing tours ($\chi^2 = 138$ on 28 degrees of freedom, $P = 0.001$, $V = 0.6$) (Figure 2, n = 100).

![Figure 2: Life stages of tour participants](image-url)

Over half of the respondents were from Australia (56%) (Figure 3, n = 101) and international tourists were significantly more likely to be on the vehicle-based sightseeing tours ($\chi^2 = 83$ on 4 degrees of freedom, $P = 0.001$, $V = 0.9$) (Figure 4, n = 100).
The majority of tour participants (61%) were travelling with a spouse, partner, relative or friend, although it is interesting to note that over a quarter were travelling alone. This group was primarily made up of backpacker-style travellers (Figure 5, n = 100).
Young singles and couples were significantly more likely to be on a vehicle-based sightseeing tour and friends and relatives travelling together were more likely to be boating or horse riding together ($\chi^2 = 107$ on 28 degrees of freedom, $P = 0.001$, $V = 0.5$).

Ninety per cent of the respondents had not been to the area visited by the tour before, however the respondents were reasonably experienced users of commercial tour operators with 75 per cent having been on a tour with an operator in the past. Of those respondents it is interesting to note the small percentage of repeat users of tour operators - 80 per cent had not been on a tour with the particular tour operator before. In summary, many respondents were new to the area visited and new to this particular tour operator but generally experienced tour purchasers.

**Visitor motivation to participate in tour**

The respondents displayed an array of motivations for participating in a tour (Figure 6, n = 102).

![Figure 6: Relative importance of visitor motivations to participate in a tour](image)

Clearly, the most important motivation for the majority of respondents was simply to have fun and enjoy themselves (mean score 4.5) and this is no surprise when researching in a field associated with people’s leisure time. However, the wish for enjoyment was accompanied by a strong environmental ethic with 83 per cent of respondents indicating that doing a tour that was environmentally responsible and/or did not adversely affect the environment in which they were touring was extremely or very important (mean score 4.4). The motivation to learn new things may be linked to the respondent’s decision to participate in a guided tour in that many respondents saw having a guide on a tour as a key motivator (mean score 4.3). This suggests that they saw a guide as an important source of education and knowledge about particular aspects of the natural and cultural heritage of the touring environment. A similar percentage of respondents were also highly motivated to attend a tour in order to learn something new – to gain knowledge and understanding. It would appear that the tour was perceived as an opportunity for an educational experience (mean score 4.3).

Of slightly lesser importance was the opportunity that a tour presented to visit a place or have an experience that you could not on your own. This finding is not particularly surprising given that a number
of the tours involved special equipment (e.g., climbing and abseiling equipment, canoes), resources (e.g., horses) or special skills (e.g., wildlife watching) that would be more difficult to access for the general holiday maker (mean score 4.2).

Of similar importance for the respondents was a direct and active involvement with the natural environment (mean score 4.1). This finding is somewhat surprising given that all the tours were nature-based and conducted in natural areas. Seventy two per cent of respondents rated involvement with the environment as extremely or very important.

The motivation to be with people with similar interests was not as important (mean score 3.4) and neither was spending time with family and/or friends (mean score 3.3). The finding regarding motivation to spend time with family and/or friends may have been affected, however, by the large proportion of respondents who were travelling alone (26%) and hence attending the tour alone.

Physical challenge was not a key motivator for the majority of respondents (mean score 3.3). This finding is somewhat contradictory to the earlier finding that many respondents wished to be actively involved with the natural environment. The response to this question is also affected by the respondent’s understanding of the term ‘physically challenged’, which can be interpreted widely depending on fitness levels. As might be expected, the respondents involved in bushwalking and boating were the most motivated by physical challenge. Australian respondents were significantly more motivated by physical challenge than international tourists ($\chi^2 = 22$ on 4 degrees of freedom, $P = 0.001$, $V = 0.5$).

Similarly intellectual challenge was not rated particularly highly as a motivator for attending a tour (mean score 3.2). Again, what is meant by intellectual challenge will have been interpreted in a variety of ways by the respondents but it is interesting to compare this result with the much higher mean score for the motive to learn something new.

Best aspect of the tours and satisfaction levels

Respondents reported via open-ended responses the best aspects of their tours and these responses were collapsed into six broad categories (Table 4, $n = 92$).

Table 4: The best aspect of the tour identified by the tour participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BEST ASPECT OF TOUR</th>
<th>% OF PARTICIPANTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A feature of the natural environment (e.g. landscape, wildlife, tranquillity, scenery)</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An aspect of guiding practice (e.g. guide was informative, friendly, had a sense of humour)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The social aspects of the tour (e.g. sharing, interacting with others)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The diversity of attractions on the tour</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sense of challenge and achievement from completing the tour</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The tour was fun and enjoyable</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, the natural environment and its characteristics and features were a source of satisfaction to many visitors and this is appropriate given they were participating in nature-based tours which featured protected areas. Two visitors indicated they enjoyed the whole experience and summed it up - ‘The beauty of our environment’ ‘the birds, the bush, the views, the walk’ and ‘the diversity of landscapes, habitats and animals we saw’. Other responses included the physical aspects of being in the natural environment – ‘Trek through Grand Canyon and walk to MacKenzie Falls’, getting more than one expected – ‘It included things such as the rainforest and koalas not just the 12 Apostles’, and ‘seeing kangaroos so close’.

We went with a small group, got a lot of history and also music from the guide. Because of this it was not boring at all despite all the hours we were driving. We got to see all the interesting sights in one day ... great trip! The guide was really funny and nice.

Appreciation of the guiding practice and skills was frequently reported and underlines the earlier finding regarding the importance of having a guide. One visitor simply appreciated ‘Having a guide to
explain things’ and another found the guide reassuring ‘I felt [the tour] was very well conducted and any fears I initially had were eased by the guide’. The personalisation of the tour was important for two visitors - ‘The flexibility of the whole tour. The personal feel to it all. Oh, and the choice of music is excellent.’ and ‘Small number of people and personality of director [guide].’

A lower percentage of respondents reported on the social aspects of the tour and this aligns with the lesser importance placed on these characteristics in motivating attendance on the tour. One visitor appreciated ‘Having pleasant travelling companions and friendly staff’. Similarly, the number of respondents reporting satisfaction with the sense of challenge and achievement from completing the tour was lower.

An unexpected finding from this question, however, is the large difference between the number of respondents reporting fun and enjoyment as the best aspect of the tour (3%) and the number reporting that ‘having fun’ was an extremely or very important motivation for attending the tour (89%). One interpretation of this finding is that while ‘not having fun’ would presumably result in dissatisfaction, fun is a necessary but not sufficient ingredient for satisfaction. Similarly, tour logistics such as keeping to the itinerary, maintaining the health and safety of the group, ensuring that equipment is in good running order and so on are all ‘must-haves’ to avoid dissatisfied customers but are not sufficient to produce a satisfying, high quality experience (Weiler & Ham, 2002).

The enthusiasm with which the visitors reported the best aspects of the tour was mirrored in their satisfaction levels. Nearly 90 per cent of the respondents were somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with the tour experience. These results, and others pertaining to visitor profiles, were particularly beneficial to the many tour operators who do not regularly evaluate their performance or the views of participants (Figure 7, n = 101).

![Figure 7: Levels of satisfaction with the guided tour](image)

**Recommended improvements to tours**

Consistent with the high levels of satisfaction was the finding that 34 per cent of respondents did not make any recommendations for improvement. The remaining respondents, although on the whole satisfied, contributed ideas about improvements that could be made to the experience. Their open-ended comments were collapsed into four categories (Table 5, n = 48).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>% OF PARTICIPANTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An aspect of guiding practice</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved vehicle or equipment</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporate games and activities</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporate more natural features</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentages in this table do not total 100% as some respondents identified more than one area for improvement.

The importance of the guide as a motivator for attending a tour is reaffirmed by the frequency of visitors’ recommendations for improvements in guiding practice. Almost half of the visitors felt that certain
aspects of how the guide managed the group, delivered material and set the pace could be improved. Many
visitors commented on the pacing of the tour and wanted more time at icon attractions – ‘fewer stops so that
you could have more time to spend in an area of particular interest’ and ‘more time at the sights – there
wasn’t enough time to enjoy it or see it all’. The importance of the introduction of the tour was stressed by
three visitors who wanted more information on scheduling – ‘information about what will happen during the
day at the beginning of the trip’ and ‘schedule should have been told in the morning’ and ‘clearer instruction
about time schedule and program’. On the same theme, one visitor was keen for the tour to be ‘more
personal’ with introductions between the participants facilitated by the guide. Two visitors felt that the
guide did not provide enough information – ‘more information from guide’ and ‘to have a more humorous
and informative guide’. The guide’s commentary was also of concern to one visitor with English as second
language – ‘guide should try to speak clear English – no dialect [assume the respondent means accent or
slang]’.

‘Repair the loudspeaker’

The tour logistics in terms of equipment and vehicles were also seen as an important component and
worthy of extra attention. Most respondents in this category were from vehicle-based sightseeing tours.
Several visitors commented on not being able to hear the guide and requested ‘better technical equipment
(microphone)’ and ‘working PA [public address system]’. Several visitors commented on the comfort
levels in the mini-buses and coaches – ‘more space in the bus’ and others on a rafting and canoeing trip
asked to ‘have water bottles accessible during the day’. One visitor on a night walk asked for ‘more light
for walking on return trip’.

On the theme of fun and socialising, a number of the respondents were keen to have more games and
activities in the tour and this response came mainly from international backpackers on vehicle-based
sightseeing tours and canoe tours - ‘more time for swimming on this wonderful beach’ and ‘more games
together outside’. Finally, a small percentage of respondents wanted to see more natural features on the
tours.

Messages Delivered By Guides

An important aspect of this research was to observe and record the messages delivered by guides to ascertain
the extent to which they were delivering ‘conservation’ messages. Parks Victoria was interested to discover
whether tour operators were helping to achieve the agency’s organisational goals and objectives in relation to
the goals listed in the section ‘Interpretation in the context of nature-based tourism and ecotourism’.

Over the 20 tours approximately 60 hours of commentary were recorded. This is less than the total
duration of the tours because recording was suspended when the guide was not speaking. Notes taken
immediately after the tours and the recorded commentary were content analysed for messages that aligned to
the goals previously identified in Parks Victoria’s policy and planning literature. During analysis, a further
category emerged – messages about minimising tour operator impacts in protected areas – and, given how
important these types of messages are in differentiating ecotourism products, this was included in the
analysis (Table 6, n = 18).

Table 6: Types and frequency of messages delivered by tour operators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category Of Messages</th>
<th>No. Of Tour Operators Delivering This Kind Of Message</th>
<th>Total No. Of Messages Delivered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Messages about minimising visitor impacts in protected areas</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages about protected area management in relation to roles and actions of management agencies</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages about the significance or heritage value of the protected area</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General conservation messages</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages about minimising tour operator impacts in protected areas</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages about protected area management in relation to laws and regulations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages encouraging conservation action by individuals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N=18</strong></td>
<td><strong>108</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This category emerged from the analysis of tour commentaries.
In the 60 hours of commentary, 18 tour operators delivered 108 messages in the identified categories. Two tour operators did not deliver any messages that could be categorised. Hence, the majority of content that was delivered by the tour operators was unrelated to Parks Victoria’s goals. The maximum number of messages delivered by an operator was 19 and the minimum zero. The mean number of messages delivered per tour operator was 5. The tours delivering the fewest messages (two or less) tended to be horse riding, rock climbing and longer coach tours.

**Specific examples of message delivery**

The following sections discuss eight categories of messages and provide illustrative examples. A quote or reference to a particular guide or tour is indicated by a superscripted number (e.g., \( \text{20} \) refers to tour number 20 in Table 3).

**Messages about minimising visitor impacts in protected areas**

The most frequently observed messages delivered to tour participants were about minimising their impacts on the natural environment, that is, messages about what visitors should and should not do. Ten guides delivered this type of message with a total of 29 messages delivered to clients. One guide delivered seven separate minimal impact messages to his visitors clearly indicating his concern for their actions and behaviour in the environment.

The most frequently delivered message to participants was about keeping themselves and, on some occasions, their horses to the track. Sometimes the guide would simply ask the visitors to ‘…. try to walk in single file, and don’t go off the track …’ \( \text{1} \). Other guides would give a reason for the request - ‘I would ask that you please do at all times stay on the tracks, these are National Park regulations and it’s also a fragile environment so it can be damaged easily …’ \( \text{10} \) and ‘…. it’s always important to try and stick to the track … it protects the environment …’ \( \text{6} \) and ‘…. please don’t step on the vegetation, it already gets a bit of a hammering because there’s lots of people come here so make sure you stand well away from that …’. \( \text{17} \).

Messages about noise levels were also frequently delivered, particularly in relation to watching wildlife such as platypus, glow worms and koalas. ‘We’ll go down to the river very quietly … try and keep quiet …. ’ \( \text{1} \) and ‘…. if you can keep the noise level down that would be wonderful …. ’ \( \text{14} \). One guide commented on the behaviour of two fishermen with a radio - ‘Scare all the fish away for miles!’ \( \text{2} \). In addition, guides supported their verbal messages with behavioural cues (e.g. lowering the volume of their voices, treading carefully) \( \text{2,14} \).

Messages about appropriate techniques for successful wildlife watching were also recorded - ‘Try not to point if you can avoid it …’ \( \text{1} \) and ‘Don’t shine your lights on the entrance itself … the glow worms are in there and they don’t like the light, or they turn themselves off if they cop a bit of light.’ \( \text{1} \) and ‘If you can shine your torches on the floor of the mine … don’t touch the walls and don’t shine your torches on the glow worms …’. \( \text{1} \). Most messages were aimed at protecting the wildlife, enhancing the wildlife watching experience and increasing the chances of a successful viewing - ‘…. again kill the lights, [glow worms] are just so much better without lights …’. \( \text{14} \).

In addition to messages about keeping on tracks and hence protecting flora, several guides also asked the participants to avoid picking foliage - ‘…. and try not to pick much of the native foliage as well.’ \( \text{1} \) and asked the visitors to prevent their horses from eating vegetation or breaking the vegetation adjacent to the track \( \text{12} \). A school student on the way to a rock climbing wall asked the guide if they could pick a flower on their way up and the guide promptly answered ‘Absolutely not’. \( \text{17} \). One guide also asked the tour participants not to feed the birds at a morning tea stop. \( \text{6} \).

Messages about littering and smoking were also delivered – ‘…. if during the course of the day you have any rubbish or litter … please do the right thing and pop it in a rubbish bin … help us keep Australia beautiful.’ \( \text{10} \). One guide indicated that visitors should not smoke in particular areas due to possible fire hazard and another said ‘…. feel free to smoke in the car park, but I would ask you not to smoke in the forest itself as it’s a very clean and crisp air environment here. People do come here to appreciate that and it’s a shame to taint that in any way …’. \( \text{16} \). The latter guide successfully delivered a behavioural message and provided a reason or justification for the behaviour.

The school groups on overnight bushwalks were given detailed messages on minimal impact camping including toilet etiquette, campfires, staying on tracks and littering. One guide stressed that ‘…. while we’re bushwalking we’re also going to use a practice called minimal impact bushwalking …. ’ \( \text{16} \) and proceeded to explain the various dimensions of that practice. ‘Whatever we carry in, we carry out, we put all our rubbish
in a bin with us...'. Another guide also adopted the code - '... we’re not burning plastic so that cellophane is not to be burnt, so it has to go back to the rubbish...'.

Toilet etiquette was particularly well presented with all the primary school students involved in hole digging and covering. The instructions to the secondary school students were a little different - '... so you don’t do a wee within twenty metres of any kind of watercourse, any creek, and our poos we do them a hundred metres away ... so you need to dig yourself a hole ... put your toilet paper into the bag then you basically bring it back with you and throw it in a big garbage bin ...'.

**Messages about protected area management in relation to roles and actions of management agencies**

Eleven guides spoke about the roles and actions of management agencies with 20 messages delivered. There was a range of neutral, supportive and critical messages. Several guides pointed out tangible examples of management actions that enhanced the visitor experience and explained the reasons behind the action - '... it gets quite wet here, and of course these little sort of duckboards are really good to protect the environment, you can walk through without slushing it up ...' and '... the rangers do [a control burn] every year, they burn little areas. They burn for two reasons, one is fuel reduction, to minimise the impact of wild fires so you don’t get the whole park burnt at once ... and of course for nature to do its thing ...'. On a rafting and canoeing trip, the guide spoke about the impact of willows on rivers and the efforts being made by land managers and volunteers to remove them from the river banks.

Site hardening was a popular topic - 'This is actually a very new car park here [referring to the Twelve Apostles car park] ... they’ve torn up the old car park, or are in the process of doing so and constructing new paths ...' and '... they put that pile of rocks there to sort of stop people [deviating from the track], but it doesn’t really work ...'. Another referred to the track work at the base of a popular rock climbing and abseiling face and explained that it was done to reduce erosion from foot traffic. Another guide explained the background to a visitor management problem and the solution - '... we used to have 4 wheel drivers using [the protected area] as a kind of hill climbing venue and coming down here basically ... pooping near the water way ... so they put the new track in and composting toilets and everything else.'

Other supportive comments dealt with changes in conservation practices and funding issues - 'Back in the 1980s the State government altered the forestry practices significantly from what they’d been before, they expanded the National Park areas and reduced the logging rate to a sustainable level. Before that it was a very short-term thinking.' and '... one of the sad things is of course that the Fisheries Department has been reduced in number over the years ... and they just don’t have the money or the manpower now to get out there and police [crayfish and abalone poaching] ...'.

Guides were sometimes critical of the actions or attitude of management agencies. One guide indicated '... if I had a criticism at all of Parks Victoria, and I have very, very few, it’s that birdwatchers aren’t seen as very important ... bird watching is not a big priority...'. His concern for the natural environment and bird habitat was evident in his comments on the actions of the Road Transport Authority in widening the Princes Highway - 'See all this timber is being reduced down here just to widen the road ... magnificent trees like this being chopped down.'

Another guide was more strongly critical of Parks Victoria - 'The Parks people had the place blocked off doing some work since the last time I was here, and the time before that the Parks people were doing official vandalism, so we’ll see what they’ve come up with this time.' The guide went on to discuss the removal of overhanging branches by Parks Victoria for visitor safety as ‘official vandalism’.

**Messages about the significance or heritage value of the protected area**

Twenty messages about the significance or heritage value of the protected area were delivered by nine tour operators. One of the key aspects of the practice of interpretation is its ability to reveal the significance of the natural and cultural landscape so the relatively low number of messages was somewhat surprising.

The value of national parks and protected areas were regularly identified by guides with most naming the area that the tour was visiting. So, for example, guides identified that the group was bushwalking in a National Park or flora and fauna reserve. Other guides referred to the values of protected areas - 'I think it’s one of the most special things about the Grampians National Park is the fact that the animals [referring to kangaroos and emus] are so accessible ...' and '... fortunately through the Otways now we have quite an extensive range of National and State Parks and flora and fauna reserves which to this area is very essential. We’ve got some extremely unique ecosystems ...'. He went on to expand on the significance of extensive systems of protected areas – 'All our National Parks system, all our State Park system are, is just so
important to our future generations … Victoria’s fortunate, we’ve now got something like 15 per cent of our State locked up in National and State Parks and special reserves …’ 14.

The importance and significance of protected areas for biodiversity was also mentioned frequently. Guides referred to the existence of a particular species, for example ‘… in this particular area [Maits Rest] we find a type of snail called the Otways Black Snail…’ 10 or to an entire system ‘Biodiversity in the Otway [National Park] is probably still in pretty good shape as far as we know …’ 14. Another guide explained ‘… the Grampians are one the most diverse places, you know, in Australia. [There are] 50 separate sorts of communities here and there’s lots of different topography …’ 6.

The importance of particular species or ecosystems for animal habitat were also stressed. One guide explained “…these trees [Manna Gum] are very important in the forest because they have hollows and that’s where the greater gliders that we saw before … can shelter in safety during the day and sleep and breed.” 1 Platypus habitat and aquatic systems were also a popular topic - ‘… this is the Yarra River, and it actually starts in a sort of rainforest up on Mt Baw Baw … back then the river was a lot higher, hadn’t been dammed and there would have been hundreds and thousands of platypus, and … native blackfish and eels, and all the original inhabitants would have been living in the river. Not anymore, but we’ve still got a healthy little platypus population, which is really good, says a lot for the water quality.’ 1 Another guide explained why the lake that the group was canoeing on is ‘… ideal for platypus.’ 2

The significance and formation of geological features formed part of some commentaries. The sea cliffs and stack formations of Port Campbell National Park were common topics for the guides working in that region 10 as was the significance of the geological history of the Grampians and its link to the current geomorphology for the Grampians guides. 12 Significant prehistoric finds were also identified by one guide - “… they’ve discovered something like eight new species of sub-polar dinosaurs just from the diggings around the Otways alone ….” 14.

The Aboriginal cultural heritage of the areas visited by the tours was rarely explained although one guide began his commentary by identifying the original Aboriginal inhabitants of the area and giving a traditional welcome. 14

General conservation messages

Seven guides delivered general conservation messages in their tour commentary with 18 messages in total. Introduced flora and fauna and their impact on the natural environment were an important topic for four guides and visitors were also clearly interested in this subject. As one guide explained ‘… the introduction of trout really decimated the native fish and eels and that, and even the frog population along the river as well.’ 1 and another ‘…[deer and rabbits] are introduced animals, they’re not native they were introduced in the 1880s for hunting and of course now they’re unfortunately right through the park …’ 6. One guide referred to the book Feral Future by Tim Lowe while outlining the issues ‘… and [the author] talks about the McDonaldisation of global ecosystems – they are all starting to look the same … with the amount of plant material and that is swapping around.’ 1 The guide then went on to talk about Australian plants and animals that are now pests in other countries. 2 Other popular topics were the impacts of agriculture and logging of native forests on natural environments. The sustainability of early timber cutting practices were often contrasted with modern methods 10 and the impact on old growth forests - ‘… of the two and a half million hectares of the Otway forest, there is less than a thousand hectares of old growth forest left …’ 14. Another guide linked hydrology with logging by explaining ‘… we’re looking at water restrictions this summer … one of the effects of logging the forests here is that it reduces the water runoff into the dams. A fast growing new forest uses up a lot more of the water that would otherwise run off an old forest and into the water storages, so it’s definitely one strong argument against logging.’ 3 The issue of habitat loss from agriculture was also outlined by one guide - ‘… it is a bird [referring to the Australian Bustard] that lives on the open plain and as a result they’re threatened because of agricultural intrusion.’ 9

Given the natural heritage context of the tours, many guides spoke about the ecology of the native flora and fauna. The ecology of glow worms, koalas, platypus, kangaroos and a variety of birds was explained in varying levels of detail depending on the nature of the tour. Other guides took a more holistic approach and outlined the ecology and origins of whole ecosystems such as cool temperate rainforests and eucalypt forests.

Messages about the impacts of tour operators in protected areas

The fifth most frequently recorded messages concentrated on the impacts of tour operators in protected areas with 8 guides delivering 15 messages. This category is the only one not pre-identified in the analysis of Parks
Victoria’s organisational goals; rather, it emerged as a category during data analysis. Several guides were obviously keen to indicate how their business practices were sustainable and had minimal impact on the environment. This was particularly evident in wildlife watching with the impacts of spotlighting a common topic - ‘Now this light’s less than 50 amps, and that’s sort of accepted eco-tourism type stuff, because we don’t want to upset the possums too much. And if we do see a possum, we don’t stand there for 10 hours with the light right on it, I’ll take it off and we’ll just try to point it out as discreetly as we can … the light may daze them and we don’t want to leave them open to predation and stuff like that.’ ¹ and ‘… we use a white light [on spotlighting tours] but when you get near an animal or you know something’s near you can slip the red filter on and that just protects the animals eyes …’ ⁶. A chance sighting of a koala caught in the headlights at the side of the road prompted one guide to say ‘Yeah, we won’t sit and hassle him too long.’ ² One guide indicated ‘…I try not to feed [swamp hens] because it’s not a really good thing …’ ⁹. On a couple of occasions one guide picked vegetation to demonstrate a particular property to the participants (e.g., a fragrant part of a plant). Although this adds tactile and olfactory dimensions to the interpretation, this kind of behaviour is generally in opposition to typical guidelines for visitors to protected areas.

Through verbal messages and discussion of their own actions two guides delivered messages about rubbish in the natural environment - ‘Mmm, more fishing line, I cleaned up some this morning.’ ² and ‘… I tend to pick up little bits of paper myself.’ ⁶. Several guides used fuel stoves and non-disposable crockery and cutlery for refreshments although did not specifically draw the visitors’ attention to these practices by speaking about them ², ⁹ and one guide indicated that he ran the vehicle on gas ‘which is better for the environment.’ ⁶ Finally, one guide talked about how his tour operation worked with groups like Coastcare teaching children about biodiversity. ¹⁴

**Messages about protected area management in relation to laws and regulations**

Four guides delivered messages about laws and regulations in protected areas. Most such messages were about visitor behaviour. One canoeing guide indicated that camping is not allowed next to Lake Bellfield as it is a source of drinking water and also indicated that by law motorised boats are not allowed on the lake. ⁴ Another guide indicated to the participants that they were not allowed to remove any materials from the National Park and justified the statement by indicating that ‘… everything here [in the National Park] is protected … it’s all protected under the law …’ ¹⁰. In response to a question, another guide indicated ‘You shouldn’t [eat yabbies] here because it’s a National Park, but yes you can [eat them].’ ³ The only guide who explained the tour operator permit system to the participants indicated ‘I’m the only one with a permit to [operate paddling/wildlife watching] … occasionally people have dragged kayaks in.’ ²

**Messages encouraging conservation action by individuals**

It has been argued that one of the key reasons for delivering interpretation in natural environments is the opportunity it presents for encouraging individuals to change their behaviour in some way to directly or indirectly benefit the environment (Blamey, 2001). So, for example, the guide may encourage donations to conservation groups, involvement in revegetation or weeding activities, being careful with water or undertaking domestic recycling or composting. In this study only one guide referred to post-tour actions that the participants could take to benefit the environment. He outlined the opportunity for volunteer involvement in monitoring net traps in a platypus trapping survey being conducted by the Platypus Conservancy. ²

**Additional findings based on participant observation**

The number of tour products examined was too small to attempt generalisations from the statistical analysis of differences in messages delivered between types of tour products and audiences. However, observations regarding differences among operators and tours are worth noting. Messages related to protected area management tended to be delivered more frequently to domestic audiences who may have been perceived as understanding the context better. Messages related to visitor impacts were particularly strong for school groups; this may have been related to curriculum requirements and the regular use of certain areas by the groups. The more adventurous tours (rock climbing, abseiling, horse riding) were frequently activity- and skills-based, leaving less time or opportunity for environmental message delivery and much of the tour commentary focussed on skill acquisition and safety messages. No relationship was found between the number of messages delivered and variables such as the type of tour, duration of tour and region.

The researchers observed a variety of message delivery techniques. Some guides reinforced their messages by repeating them on numerous occasions throughout the tour. The specific language of the message changed but the underlying meaning remained the same (e.g., minimising use of torches around
The use of positive reinforcement was also evident with some guides praising and thanking visitors for following their lead and ‘obeying’ the rules and guidelines set down. Again this was particularly evident in wildlife watching and visitor impact messages. From observation, the guides who were most effective in delivering messages that elicited an appropriate response from the clients reinforced their messages through their own actions and by providing behavioural cues. So, for example, while platypus-watching one of the most effective guides began by verbally delivering messages about quiet, non-intrusive watching techniques and demonstrating a subtle clock face system for locating the animals. He then proceeded to reinforce the message by lowering his voice and reducing all extraneous noise and bodily movements.

The justification of certain types of messages was also evident. In delivering messages about visitor impacts some guides gave reasons and justifications for why the visitors should adopt certain behaviour. So, rather than just saying ‘no walking off the track’ they gave concise and logical reasons for avoiding that type of behaviour.

Based on fundamental communication skills, one of our main criticisms of guiding technique was the tendency of some guides to say one thing but do another and hence deliver mixed messages. For example, a guide would deliver a message about staying on the path and then proceed to stand off the path to deliver commentary. Another example of mixed messages was the confusion created by asking clients not to pick foliage and then proceeding to do so to demonstrate a particular floral characteristic.

Messages Received By The Visitors

A question on the visitor survey asked tour participants to identify two key messages that they received from the tour. Unlike the previous analysis of the guide’s commentary for conservation messages, the data requested were not limited to environmental messages. Of the 204 possible responses (each of the 102 respondents had two chances to respond), 33 per cent had no response or the response was illegible or unintelligible. This may indicate a lack of emphasis by guides on take-home messages of any kind, or it may be due to the visitors not understanding the question and what constituted a message. Anecdotally some respondents mentioned to the researchers that they didn’t think the guide actually delivered any key messages at all and subsequently left the question blank rather than have a ‘go’ at a response. This is consistent with the researchers’ observations that the majority of the guides did not structure their content thematically and hence the tour frequently left the researchers (and it would appear some of the visitors) asking the question ‘so what?’. This point is addressed later in this report.

The types of messages received by the visitors who responded to the question (n = 137) are listed in rank order in two groups in Table 7. Those categories that correspond with Parks Victoria’s goals are presented first.

Table 7: Types of messages received by respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of message *</th>
<th>Frequency of messages received</th>
<th>% of responses (excluding non-response and invalid responses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Messages related to Parks Victoria’s goals</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General conservation messages</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages about the significance or heritage value of the protected area</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages about the significance or heritage value of the protected area</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages about protected area management in relation to roles and actions of management agencies</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages about minimising visitor impacts in protected areas</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages encouraging conservation action by individuals</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages about minimising tour operator impacts in protected areas</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages about protected area management in relation to laws and regulations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other messages</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and awareness of the natural environment</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social aspect of attending a tour</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and awareness of another aspect of Australia (non-environmental)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages about the merits of physical exercise</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages about skills</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety messages</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some respondents provided a response by nominating a particular topic (e.g., nature) as opposed to a message and these have been coded into the above categories where possible.

In the messages received by visitors, there was some evidence of respondents providing an answer that they may have perceived the researchers wanted. For example, a horse riding experience was assessed by the researchers (based on observations and content analysis of recorded messages) as not providing any messages according to the message categories outlined in the section ‘Messages delivered by guides’. However, one respondent responded to the messages question by writing ‘Trust nature’s intelligence’ and ‘Respect environment’.

Of the 137 messages reported by respondents, only 35 (26%) could be allocated to the seven categories of environmental messages identified earlier in this report. As these messages are our focus in this research they were extracted from Table 8 to produce a graph that compares their frequency with the observed delivery of messages, illustrating the difference between the two (Figure 8).

![Graph comparing messages delivered vs. messages received](image)

**Figure 8: Types of messages delivered by guides compared with messages received by visitors**

Despite the reasonably high number of messages about the environment that were delivered by guides (section ‘Messages delivered by guides’), it seems that the respondents did not respond to the messages to the extent where they would recall them as key messages or even part of a larger message. This may have been caused by a number of factors. First, some of the guide’s messages analysed in the commentary were fairly minor in the context of the whole tour and the question on the survey did ask for key messages. Second, message receipt is dependent on a range of factors for the receiver including fatigue, volume of transmission, language and literacy skills of the respondent and concentration level. As indicated previously, several of the tours were lengthy and some were held at night and fatigue and other factors may have also affected message receipt. Finally, the timing of the survey may have affected message recognition and recall. Potentially more messages may have been recalled post-trip when discussing the tour or looking at photographs.

Examples of the environmental messages that were received by the respondents are provided in Table 8. Three examples demonstrate, in some cases, good matches between the environmental messages delivered by the guides (as assessed by the researchers) and those received by the visitors (Boxes 1, 2 and 3).
Table 8: Examples of environmental messages received by respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type Of Message</th>
<th>Examples Of Responses (Verbatim)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Messages encouraging conservation action by individuals</td>
<td>• How we should do our utmost to protect and conserve the environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General conservation messages</td>
<td>• Preservation of nature is very essential for the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Adverse effects of man on ecosystems, e.g. rainforest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages about the significance or heritage value of the protected area</td>
<td>• That Victoria is a beautiful, diverse State.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• That we have some lovely areas to enjoy close to the city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages about protected area management in relation to roles and actions of</td>
<td>• The government is taking the preservation of the natural environment very seriously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>management agencies</td>
<td>• How work is being done to preserve the environment, the river.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages about minimising visitor impacts in protected areas</td>
<td>• Do not destroy the beauty and display [glow worms].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Look after the inhabitants.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Box 1: Matches between message delivery and receipt on tour 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Messages delivered by guide on tour 1</th>
<th>Messages received by five visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During a night walk which featured wildlife watching (platypus, possums and glow worms) the guide</td>
<td>Do not destroy the beauty and display [glow worms].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regularly emphasised appropriate <strong>visitor behaviour</strong> to ensure that the wildlife watching was</td>
<td>Not to disturb environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>successful and the animals were not disturbed. He gave the following messages to the participants:</td>
<td>Look after the inhabitants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘We’ll go down to the river very quietly…try and keep quiet…’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Try not to point [at the Platypus or suspected Platypus] if you can avoid it…’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘What I’ll get you to do is just stick to the track here, but keep sort of as far away from the river</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as you can…’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘…try to walk in single file, and don’t go off the track, okay, and try not to pick much of the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>native foliage as well.’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Don’t shine your lights on the entrance itself, okay guys…the glow worms are in there and they don’t</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>like the light, or they turn themselves off if they cop a bit of light.’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘If you can shine your torches on the floor of the mine…don’t touch the walls and don’t shine your</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>torches on the glow worms…’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘…try not to touch the cave, the wall at all…’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Box 2: Matches between message delivery and receipt on tour 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Messages delivered by guide on tour 10</th>
<th>Messages received by 17 visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| During an all day minibus sightseeing tour of the Great Ocean Road, the guide covered a range of environmental topics and general **conservation issues** including:  
- the koala’s habitat requirements and behavioural traits  
- the sustainability of the Otway Ranges for timber cutting with special reference to the early timber cutters  
- Australia’s Gondwana origins and the loss of cool temperate rainforests  
- the structure of rainforests with a focus on maintenance of canopy and identification of different forms of rainforest vegetation  
- Eucalyptus classification and regeneration at Maits Rest. | Preservation of nature is very essential for the future.  
Protection of the environment!  
How fragile the environment is!  
Adverse effects of man on ecosystems, e.g. rainforest. |

Box 3: Matches between message delivery and receipt on tour 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Messages delivered by guide on tour 14</th>
<th>Messages received by five visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| During a night walk to view glow worms on the Great Ocean Road, the guide emphasised both the need for conservation and protection of the environment and how it was being done with protected area agencies. The guide spoke about:  
- the issue of logging native forests- ‘...of the two and a half million hectares of the Otway forest, there is less than a thousand hectares of old growth forest left...’  
- how his tour operation worked with groups like Coastcare teaching children the message of biodiversity  
- introduced species and the damage they inflict upon the environment  
- the ecology and behaviour of the glow worm. | Look after environment. Preserve as much as possible for next generation.  
Preserve the country.  
Look after the country. |

However, such matches were more the exception than the norm, as respondents generally reported far fewer ‘key messages’ (35) than the number of environmental messages delivered (108).

**Delivery Techniques**

In addition to assessing message delivery and receipt, the researchers observed the delivery techniques used to communicate material to the tour participants. An observation-based checklist was completed immediately after the tour to note the use of particular delivery techniques (Appendix 1).

Five of the twenty tours were assessed as not being interpretive in the way in which material was communicated to the visitors – the guide presented an informative commentary but the type of communication did not meet the accepted definition of interpretation (section ‘Interpretation in the context of nature-based tourism and ecotourism’). This section of results is based on the 15 tours in which the guide actually *interpreted* the environment according to the accepted definition.
Key Strengths And Weaknesses In The Delivery Of Interpretation According To The EROT Model

E - Is the interpretation enjoyable, engaging and accessible?

In this study, gaining and maintaining attention were treated as separate and distinct phases in interpretive delivery and both were considered important for effective communication. They were observed and recorded separately.

Gaining the attention of the group

Sixty per cent of the guides successfully gained the attention of the tour group from the outset and the visitors appeared to be motivated to pay attention to the material presented. The process of gaining attention was more straightforward for some guides as the logistics of the tour facilitated this process. In a canoeing, rafting, horse riding or rock climbing tour visitors were potentially unfamiliar with the skills required and it was almost compulsory for the visitor to attend to the guide in order to get the most out of the experience and learn the required skills. The guides who were best at gaining attention used eye contact, people’s names, a personal, warm and enthusiastic voice, humour and a structured introduction.

Another 20 per cent of guides were assessed as partly achieving this criterion with 20 per cent failing. Some of the weaknesses displayed by these guides included problems with equipment (e.g., public address systems) and hence not being able to be heard by the majority of the group, and dropping into a monotonal, script-based presentation that sounded a little ‘tired’. For guides in this latter group, this does not mean that the attention of the group was never gained but rather that the guide missed an opportunity to make a strong first impression.

Maintaining the attention of the group

The maintenance of the audience’s attention is a key guiding skill, particularly when the group may become dispersed in an activity or the tour is lengthy. As indicated previously, a number of the tours observed were very long. The maintenance of the audience’s attention by the guides was reasonably successful with 60 per cent of guides maintaining the attention of most visitors for the whole experience. Again, some tours lent themselves to the maintenance of attention simply by the nature of the activity. When visitors were out of their ‘element’ whilst rafting, canoeing, horse riding and rock climbing they were reasonably easy to manage physically, mentally and socially. A key strategy adopted by a number of guides was the packaging of material into sections (or chunks) rather than providing a continuous commentary. One guide was particularly skilful at using music as a focussing tool for the particular topics he addressed. The lyrics were directly or indirectly associated with the topic and that served to focus the attention of the audience on the next ‘parcel’ of information. Silence and quiet time was also used effectively. Short and pithy material rather than information overload or longwinded explanations seemed to be most effective in maintaining attention.

Twenty per cent of the guides managed to partly maintain the visitors’ attention and 20 per cent did not maintain the visitors’ attention. Again, some guides were severely constrained by equipment failure and trying to maintain attention while not being able to be heard was a difficult task. This also occurred for some guides who were not using amplification. Lack of tonal variation in the voice and use of a continuous commentary was also an issue for some guides with a few falling into a ‘tour patter’, which was a weakness in their delivery. The tendency to return to the patter with questions like ‘Now, where was I?’ was particularly off-putting. Some problems with maintaining the visitor’s attention were linked to visitor fatigue. Some tours were extremely long and others were held at night. Furthermore, some visitor groups were primarily made up of children and their attention levels fluctuated.

If appropriate, does the interpretation entertain the audience?

Just over half of the guides observed (53%) entertained their audience and this was evident in the attentiveness of the group and their physical and verbal response to the material. Most guides who successfully entertained their visitors did so using stories, anecdotes, jokes, humour and interaction. One guide was particularly skilful at weaving appropriate stories, jokes and poetry into the tour. The remaining guides were either partly entertaining or did not entertain their audience. This is not to say that the presentation was dull but that they lacked a certain ‘edge’ and as a result they lost their audience’s attention.
Does the guide make technical information accessible?

One of the biggest challenges for an interpreter of the natural environment can be the presentation of technical information in an accessible way. On the whole, 70 per cent of the guides managed to present technical information in an accessible way. Most guides did not tackle overly technical subjects and hence could keep the concepts simple and the explanations short. The avoidance of jargon and use of plain English helped in the transmission of material and one guide used questioning skilfully to ascertain understanding. Very few guides used props or documents to help explain technical material, however, one effective guide made extensive use of field guides and documents to allow the visitors to choose their own level of information. A small percentage of guides regularly used technical terms without explanation (e.g., biomass, biodiversity, Gondwana) and clearly expected a technically and scientifically literate audience.

Ham (1992) proposes various techniques for making technical information more accessible for visitors (Box 4). Not one guide observed on the tours used any of these techniques in their presentations.

Box 4: Techniques for making technical information more accessible (Ham, 1992)

- Showing cause and effect
- Linking science to human history
- Using a ‘vehicle’ (e.g., exaggerating size, exaggerating time scale)
- Using an overriding analogy (e.g., an analogy that the whole presentation revolves around ‘today we will visit the world’s best-stocked supermarket – the rainforest’) 
- Using a contrived situation (e.g., ‘What if there were no predators?’)
- Using personification by giving human qualities to non-human things (e.g., ‘If trees could talk …’)
- Focusing on an individual (e.g., ‘let’s follow the life of a single drop of water and see where it ends up’)

Does the presentation allow the audience to participate verbally and/or physically in the experience? Does it promote interactivity?

The interaction between the guide and visitor can be a key part of the face-to-face interpretation experience. Verbal or physical participation in the experience is one way to promote interactivity. Two thirds of the guides observed in this study successfully promoted interactivity in their tours however this was primarily in the form of encouraging questions from the visitors and providing answers. A few guides successfully incorporated more meaningful physical and mental engagement in the experience by encouraging visitors to watch for wildlife, look out for flora and handle objects. The remaining guides either did not encourage participation or were constrained by the nature of the tour. Conducting a vehicle-based sightseeing tour while driving is not conducive to audience interaction.

Does the interpretation use all five senses?

Visitor interaction in the experience can often be linked to the extent to which the interpretation encourages visitors to actively use all five senses. A small percentage (7%) of the tours managed to successfully use all five senses by encouraging visitors to look out for particular features (e.g., the change in vegetation zones), stop and listen to a distinctive environmental sound (e.g., possum and bird calls), touch an interesting texture (e.g., the soft surface of a blanket leaf, rough sandstone), smell a fragrant plant (e.g., native mint bush) and taste a plant (e.g., prickly currant bush). A reasonable percentage of tours (27%) managed to cover four senses (usually excluding taste) and a third (32%) covered three senses (usually excluding smell and taste). A third of tours encouraged the use of only one or two senses (sight and hearing).

R - Is the interpretation relevant to the visitor? Is it meaningful and personal?

In comparison with the first part of Ham’s model, most guides had limited or no success at making their interpretation relevant to visitors.

Does the guide use eye contact and names?

That said, in two aspects of this part of the model, almost all the guides were completely successful. First, almost all guides (93%) managed to use regular eye contact to be inclusive. Some guides were constrained in the use of eye contact by driving vehicles, riding horses or being at the back of rafts or canoes but used it as often as possible. Some guides failed to use eye contact even when standing in front of the group or walking along a trail. Occasionally guides walked and talked with their backs to their visitors.

Sixty per cent of the guides constantly addressed the visitors by their names and this practice definitely added to the inclusiveness and personalisation of the tour. Another thirteen per cent occasionally addressed visitors by their names or only knew the names of some of their tour group. Generally speaking, guides with
smaller groups were naturally more successful in using names than those with larger tour groups. Some guides made no effort to learn names even with reasonably small groups.

**Is it meaningful? That is, does the interpretation connect the information to something the audience knows about?**

An effective method for making interpretation relevant to visitors is making connections between the material and something the audience knows about. Almost half of the guides used this method successfully or partly successfully. For example, one guide in addressing German visitors made connections with European fauna and another guide related some Grampians National Park history to locations that two participants had visited.

**Does the interpretation link the familiar and unfamiliar by using examples, comparisons or analogies?**

Another method for making material more meaningful is by using examples to link the familiar and unfamiliar. This technique was regularly or occasionally used by 30 per cent of the guides. Only one guide used comparisons to show the similarities or differences between an object and a related object/concept. Similarly, only one guide successfully used an analogy by showing numerous similarities between the object and a very familiar object (in this instance the similarities between koala mating behaviour and Australian males!).

**Is it personal? That is, does the interpretation connect the information to something the audience cares about?**

The use of self-referencing as a method of making the interpretation personal to the visitors was very rarely used by the guides. The technique involves addressing the visitors by referring to their experience of the world (e.g., ‘Think of the last time you …’ ‘Have you ever …’). Only 14 per cent of guides regularly or occasionally used this technique during their presentation.

**Does the interpretation use labelling to personalise the material?**

Another method for personalising material is labelling. In this technique, the interpreter may classify people in positive, negative or neutral ways so the visitor either associates or disassociates themselves with that group. This technique was not used by any of the guides.

**O - Is the interpretation organised?**

**Is the interpretation packaged in 5 or fewer units if appropriate?**

Ham (1992) argues that interpretation should be packaged into five or fewer units of material to make the information manageable and memorable for the audience. Since most of the tours were not organised around a single theme (see below), the idea of presenting five or fewer main ideas or sub-themes was irrelevant. Furthermore, the structure of some tours was contingent on wildlife watching and so the material presented was spontaneous and reactive rather than pre-organised.

**Is the interpretation easy to follow? Does it flow? Is it logical?**

Almost all of the guides (93%) presented material that was easy to follow. The flow of some tours was sometimes ‘interrupted’ by sightings of wildlife as the guides seized the interpretive opportunity and would have benefited from an approach that more effectively accommodated that style of tour. All guides were assessed as successfully presenting logical material.

**Does the interpretation take a lot of effort from the audience?**

Despite success in logic and flow, there were still instances where the presentation required effort from the visitors to follow. In three tours, the observers and visitors had to strain to actually hear the guide and some visitors were using English as a second language, which compounded the problem. It was observed that this was very frustrating to the visitors and most ‘gave up’ despite being interested to hear the presentation. One guide gave a ‘pat’ presentation and, although easy to hear, was actually difficult to listen to due to issues with tone and content – like listening to a script. None of the tours used written or audio-visual aids to help their visitors follow their tours.
Did the interpretation take advantage of sequential techniques? For example, did it have a clear introduction, body and conclusion? Did it make use of transitions and pragnanz (linking the conclusion to the introduction)?

More than half of the guides (60%) did not present the material with a clear introduction, body and conclusion. Generally introductions and bodies were well executed but the tour was not properly concluded and that often left the group ‘hanging’ – not sure if the experience had finished and without a sense of closure. Several guides were very skillful at introducing themselves and the tour experience thus ensuring that the visitors knew how the experience would unfold and generating a sense of expectation. As indicated previously, many tours involved more than five units of material (five mini-bodies as such) and some guides very skilfully packaged the material and made linkages (transitions) between each ‘package’. No guides managed to link the conclusion to the introduction of the tour.

Is the interpretation thematic?

The final feature in Ham’s (1992) model of interpretive communication centres on themes. The concept of designing interpretation around themes rather than topics is a relatively new approach in Australia and thematic interpretation was only used by two guides out of the 15. In one instance, the guide divided the Great Ocean Road region into differentiated zones (e.g., surf coast, green coast, shipwreck coast) each with a ‘sub-theme’. The Great Ocean Road itself was the foundation or overarching topic. Another guide did not actually state a theme but the researchers perceived that the overall message was that the conservation of biodiversity is important. This theme was regularly revisited throughout the tour.

Thus, only those two tours came close to answering the questions ‘So what?’ and ‘Big deal?’ at the end of the experience. The lack of thematic interpretation may be the reason for the lack of match between messages delivered (as ascertained by the observers and from the recorded tour commentary) and messages received by visitors. There was an obvious lost opportunity in terms of thematic interpretation as all of the tours lent themselves to powerful themes.

The Characteristics Of The Tour Operations

In-depth interviews were conducted with tour operators up to three weeks after the tour. The interviews provided the opportunity for the researchers to explore the characteristics of the tour operation that might explain or be associated with the provision of quality interpretation. The interview was guided by a set of semi-structured questions and was conducted in person (Appendix 3).

Staffing and training

Number and type of staff

Almost half the businesses interviewed had between two and five staff working in the tour operation (45%). The positions ranged from full-time, part-time, contract or casual. Thirty per cent of the business had between 6 and 15 staff and 15 per cent had over 20 with the largest operation having 110 staff ‘on the books’. The latter was a school education tour operator. Only one business was a solo operation with the owner doing all the guiding and administration. There was a high level of employment of casual staff to deal with the inherent variability of client numbers on tours and seasonality of business. This was not a particularly surprising finding given this is an acknowledged characteristic of the tour operator business and tourism in general.

There was clear evidence of ‘family businesses’ with 25 per cent of the tour operators having a structure usually comprising a husband and wife team. Some tour operators also had second jobs as they found that the tour business was not financially viable due to income and/or seasonality.

Experience level of guides

Generally speaking the owners of the tour operations (who in most cases were also the ‘head guides’) were experienced guides with an average of 11 years guiding. One owner guide had just 6 months experience and the most experienced guides had between 18 and 25 years experience. The combined experience of some tour operations was impressive. One climbing operation, for example, had at least 36 years experience and a horse riding operation had 31 years.
Recruitment of guides

A large percentage of the tour operations did not actively recruit guiding staff, as they were regularly approached by guides seeking work or they recruited from a pool of voluntary workers. The latter case was particularly evident in the horse riding operations. Similarly, many operators used word of mouth to recruit staff. Educational institutions also played an important role in placing guides. The institutions either provided guides for work experience, which led to a position or responded to the tour operators’ requests for suitable staff. One operator dealing with outdoor education for school groups often selected the best students from the TAFE diploma courses.

A few operators used advertising and employment agencies to seek staff but this tended to be the exception. If advertising was used it was often focussed on a local catchment area, as it was found that employees who were sourced locally tended to stay in the business for longer periods. Some tour operators did not need to recruit guides due to the size of their operation (e.g., small solo operations).

Some tour operators were concerned about the size and quality of the pool of guiding talent that they could access. Due to shortage of staff in the Halls Gap area, for example, one tour operator felt he was forced to recruit from a small pool rather than being able to pick and choose staff - ‘…what can occur up there [the Grampians] and I’ve noticed it occurs with all companies is that people tend to employ less presentable staff than you normally would because there isn’t that much choice up there…’

Another tour operator tended not to employ guides because ‘…most bird watchers I would employ to help me with 30 people, aren’t switched on to the tourist thing, they’re more switched on to themselves and birds, so they’re having a great time but they’re not really feeding enough information to tourists, or not in the way I would want them to do it…’

In terms of attributes and skills, most tour operators looked for a range of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ skills. The adventure-style and outdoor education tour operators sought ‘hard’ skills in their particular activity (e.g., rock climbing, horse riding, canoeing, environmental education, teaching, leadership) and expected a level of competency that would not be compromised by attending to visitors. They were most likely to seek formal qualifications or guide accreditation. Almost all operators expected first aid skills (or were willing to provide training), safety consciousness and driving skills for those using a vehicle.

Some knowledge about the touring area was considered important by a few tour operators but there was general agreement that a willingness to learn and familiarise oneself was more important. A passion for the bush was mentioned as an important attribute by two operators. No tour operators specifically sought tour guiding qualifications but indicated that they would be a ‘bonus’.

Amongst the soft skills, the most frequently sought were ‘people skills’ revolving around dealing with clients. A friendly, outgoing, extroverted, gregarious and ‘chirpy’ nature was very highly valued - ‘…you don’t want a shrinking violet trying to run a tour’.

Guide turnover

With the exception of the smaller operations (solo or two person operations), most interviewees reported medium to high levels of guide turnover. This situation was seen as normal - ‘… the nature of the industry is that it does attract people who [move on] - three seasons, for example, is quite a long time…’

One tour operator commented that ‘… [outdoor recreation] is a very transient workforce, and we do rely on people who are not in the industry or the business for very long. And if we get people for two years that’s fantastic…’ The other outdoor education operator also found a high level of turnover in field staff with most staff ‘burning out’ after two to three years. One operator mentioned the frustration of spending six months training someone and then they just leave the company. One tour operator indicated that he carefully selects staff that demonstrate ‘employment longevity’ in order to control staff turnover in his business.
Two operators had achieved much lower turnover rates. One operator reported that ‘… most of [the driver guides] don’t last more than about twelve to fifteen years…’ 5. The other commented that his low turnover was a reflection of good working conditions 10.

One respondent made an interesting observation about guide turnover. She felt that many guides tend to move out of guiding completely (as opposed to moving between employers) because it was too casualised and/or there was too little work. 17

Guide accreditation

One tour operator was in the process of applying for tour guide certification under the EcoGuide Program, a system of transferable certification for nature-based and ecoguides. Two operators had heard about the new system and were interested in seeking certification. The remainder of operators had not heard of the Program.

Interpretation in the tour operation context

Defining and understanding interpretation

When asked to explain the meaning of ‘interpretation’, almost half of the tour operators were able to accurately define the term and explain their understanding. Five tour operators had some understanding of the concept and the remainder were not familiar with the term. However when the interviewer explained the term they responded that they were familiar with the concept but tended to apply different names to it (e.g., commentary, script).

Three tour operators gave noteworthy responses to this question and their answers provided an insight into their understanding and use of interpretation in their tour operation:

It means when we take people out not just simply rambling on about what’s here, you really try to get them to experience their surroundings in terms of their sight, hearing, smell, touch and we always get people to shut their eyes during the walk so they can hear what is going on around them, like the Boobook Owls or Yellow Bellied Gliders. It’s just not simply taking people on a bush walk, it is about getting them to feel what it is like to be out there and feel the vegetation and to hear the animals and to see the animals and we try and relate back to what it was like for the people who came up here originally to be out there without torches and 4 wheel drives so it is very important ... it [interpretation] is something that we are very conscious of and we try and do a good job of. 1

Interpretation is not just looking at something, it's looking at something and saying look at what is around it, what has led it to be there. So when people look at a bush it’s a bush but the minute you point out to them that it is edible and that the aboriginals used to use it for [medicinal purposes] all of a sudden that bush means something else to them.

Accurate and informative interpretation that isn't delivered in a way that barrages people with information overload and is entertaining and gives people an opportunity to have fun whilst getting those messages across is absolutely imperative [to our business]. 14

The last tour operator went on to explain the underlying philosophy for the tour operation - 'That you do not baffle them with bullshit if you can't dazzle them with brilliance.' 14

Aims in providing interpretation

With the exception of four operators who reported that they had no specific aims in delivering interpretation, all tour operators had a wide range of reasons for delivering interpretation during tours. The most common reason was to provide information and encourage understanding of the natural and cultural environment (eight operators). Six operators extended this by emphasising the importance of interpretation in helping clients’ value and appreciate the environment. One tour operator indicated:

It is really because I want people to appreciate Australian history and the history we have around here - I want them to start to appreciate that and then they become more fond of the area because they have more feeling for it. ... I feel a bit sort of pleased about that because I have helped them to discover the beauty of the area.. value it because of the landscape and the features. 8

Three operators extended this idea by indicating that one of their aims was to achieve the sometimes elusive ‘wow factor’. In interpretation circles this refers to the moment when the ‘light bulb goes on’ or the ‘penny drops’ - the moment when important connections are made in the client’s brain about an aspect of their environment. Transformational steps in personal development and life changing experiences are also linked to the achievement of the ‘wow factor’. Tilden (1977: 8) also refers to the ‘revelation of a larger truth that lies behind any statement of fact.’
Three tour operators mentioned that one of their aims in providing interpretation was to encourage clients to recommend the tour to others and also to encourage repeat business. From this response, it is assumed that the operators felt that interpretation added something to their tour operation, which made it more attractive to clients. Other operators were more specific in this area – they provided interpretation on the tour because they felt it:

- was simply part of professional guiding and an essential part of a tour
- was part of delivering curriculum
- contributed to everyone having a enjoyable time
- added interest and enjoyment
- added value
- increased the client’s perception of value for money
- sharpened observation skills.

Interestingly, only two tour operators mentioned using interpretation to deliver sustainability messages – a low occurrence given the findings on message delivery (section ‘Messages delivered by guides’).

**Importance of interpretation for tour operations**

The majority of the tour operators (16) felt that interpretation was very important to their operation. In talking about the level of importance they used words such as ‘essential’, ‘fundamental’, ‘vital’ and ‘integral’. One tour operator explained:

> It is very important … it’s integral. … It is like getting people into a zone. We try and get them out there to really absorb where they are and to experience it. Rather than just going for a walk and not worrying about it, you try and get them really focused onto where they are and what they are doing and so that they can learn about the bush and history and really take it away and if it comes to it one day they might think about where we were and … it might make a difference to them in the long run. ¹

The remaining operators felt that interpretation was not particularly important to their operation. Some tour operators felt that interpretation was secondary to their main guiding activity such as horse riding or climbing. They were happy to deliver interpretation but it depended largely on how the activity was progressing and who was in the audience as to whether any interpretation was delivered.

**Analysing the characteristics and needs of the audience**

The tour operators were first asked about their particular markets - which could also be expressed as ‘interpretive audiences’. They were then prompted to outline how they analysed the characteristics and needs of their identified audiences. Half of the tour operators simply relied on their own observation and interaction with the clients at the commencement of the tour and throughout the experience to analyse their audiences and understand their needs. They engaged the clients in conversation, took their cue from interest levels and body language and noted fitness and skill levels. Five tour operators made an effort to find out more about their clients prior to the tour through questioning the clients during booking (e.g., reason for coming, level of skill, interests) and the schools operators worked closely with teachers on curriculum issues. Only two tour operators did more formal market analysis using market research (e.g., visitor segmentation studies) and by attending relevant seminars. Four operators used the results of post-tour evaluations to inform their next tour activity. This will be discussed in the section on evaluation.

**Communicating specific resource management policies, practices or issues**

Just over half of the tour operators (65%) indicated that, to varying extents, the content of their interpretation dealt with specific resource management policies, practices or issues in the areas that they visited. The most frequently cited topics were human impacts on the environment (mentioned by 8 tour operators) and this aligns with the findings on the delivery of messages (section 3.3). The next most frequently mentioned topics were protected area management (seven operators) and general conservation and sustainability (two operators). Feral animals and weeds were mentioned by four tour operators and forestry and logging issues and management were mentioned by three – mostly working on the Great Ocean Road. Operator impacts were mentioned by three tour operators with one horse riding operator indicating that he frequently mentions to clients that he has responsibility for track maintenance in the Flora and Fauna Reserve that he uses. ⁷

One tour operator stressed that he gives both sides of any controversial issues (e.g., logging, water management) to allow visitors to form their ‘own interpretation’. Two operators mentioned that they actively encourage people to join Friends Groups ¹¹ or support volunteer conservation groups themselves ¹⁹.
The remaining tour operators did not have content that specifically dealt with resource management. Either they left it up to their guides to devise their own commentary or they relied on client’s questions to guide the content of commentary.

Planning interpretation

All of the tour operators indicated that they carefully planned their tours but the response to the more specific question about interpretation planning was less clear. At one extreme, several tour operators devoted time and effort to planning the actual interpretation of the natural and cultural environment. So, for example, they would consider their aims and objectives, site resources, audience characteristics and needs, potential story lines, themes and use of props – all typical ingredients of an interpretive plan. At the other extreme, several tour operators did not plan their interpretation but used their background knowledge to present a spontaneous and question-led interpretation. In between these two extremes there was a range of concentration on planning.

The range of sources used to plan the interpretation (and to plan the tour in general) was diverse. The most frequently used resources were reference books (including field guides and guidebooks) and local knowledge (mentioned by 17 and 11 operators respectively). Parks Victoria documentation (Park Notes, management plans, brochures) and staff (rangers, park information centre staff) were the next most popular. Websites, tourist information centres, newspapers, conferences and journals were mentioned by a few operators.

Training in interpretation

Most of the tour operators employed guides who did not have any formal training in interpretation and they did not have any formal training themselves. The exception was three operators with interpretation training from formal educational institutions and one operator who had attended a Parks Victoria workshop. In terms of training for new guides, seven tour operators (usually the larger business operations) provided on-the-job training or induction programs, which featured staff manuals, tour manuals, tests, apprenticeships and mentoring.

Evaluation

The majority of tour operators (65%) used informal methods to evaluate the quality of their tours and gauge the satisfaction of their clients. The most frequently used was simple observation of verbal and body language during and particularly at the end of the tour. One operator extended this simple method by explaining - ‘We discuss amongst ourselves any negative comments we might hear and we try to analyse why so that if we can find that there is a fault we rectify it.’ Some operators also directly questioned clients about their experience. Five operators used a visitors/comments book and actively encouraged clients to use it at the end of their tour. Several tour operators mentioned that they had previously used a comments book but found, as other researchers have, that the comments were so overwhelmingly positive and uncritical that the results, though gratifying, were useless. One tour operator received calls from clients after the tour and one made follow up calls to ensure satisfaction. One tour operator reported relying on really unhappy clients ringing up with problems as a form of evaluation.

Just 30 per cent of the tour operators used formal evaluation methods such as post-tour surveys and debriefings – the latter primarily used by the school education groups. Surveys were not necessarily used on every single tour.

Although the interview question concentrated on visitor evaluation, three tour operators indicated that they regularly conduct self-evaluation to gauge their quality. This was primarily by doing tour reports and keeping a personal journal. Furthermore, four operators indicated that they regularly used peer evaluation to check quality – either by using employees within the business or inviting tourism industry members to attend a familiarisation tour. Three tour operators expressed an interest in inviting peer evaluation and this was particularly attractive to solo or very small operations.

Business Accreditation

Half of the tour operators held no business accreditation although many were members of VTOA and/or working towards some form of accreditation. The most popular form of business accreditation was the Better Business Tourism Accreditation Program (Tourism Accreditation Board of Victoria Inc. c. 2000) (25 per cent of operators). The adventure-style tour operators were more likely to hold accreditation relating to their
particular activity. Two horse riding operators held Australian Horse Riding Centres accreditation and two climbing operations were under the Australian Climbing Instructors Association. Only one tour operator was accredited with the Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP) although some other operators were interested in pursuing membership. One of those operators said 'Accreditation is a must especially for our credibility and we also want to do the right thing.'

Feedback On Parks Victoria And Victorian Tourism Operators Association

During the interviews the tour operators were asked to describe any particular issues that they had with Parks Victoria and VTOA in relation to their tour operations. They were also asked how they felt the organisations could expedite their business operation. Some of the material provided was sensitive and has been outlined in detailed, confidential reports to the respective organisations. Only the main points have been provided here.

Parks Victoria

Issues
- Equity issues in relation to permit system (group size, basis for charging fees, access)
- Number of permits issued in relation to carrying capacity of sites (cap on permits)
- Need for flexibility in the permit system (need for pre-planning restrictive to tour operations)
- Nature and extent of liaison and communication with tour operators
- Policing of permit conditions
- Level of staffing and field officer presence
- Value of transparency in decision making (permits, access)
- Need for recognition of training and allocation of preferred status
- Concern about the potential for discrimination against certain users (e.g., horse riding operations).

Solutions recommended by operators
- Improved liaison, communication and staffing
- Booking systems for climbing cliffs
- Involvement of Parks Victoria in accreditation and standard setting
- Reconsideration of fee basis and charges
- Reduction of paperwork for renewals
- Provision of interpretation and other training
- Encouragement of mentoring and internships

Victorian Tourism Operators Association (VTOA)

Issues
- Value for money and membership benefits
- Image projected by the organisation
- Credibility of accreditation
- Lobbying role and representation

Solutions recommended by operators
- Development of an impartial accreditation system
- Increased business guidance
- Lobbying and liaison with Parks Victoria
- Provision of training and coordination of a peer evaluation system
Chapter 4

Discussion and Conclusions

Primary Objectives: The Methods and Tools

The primary objectives of this research were to develop, trial and revise a method and set of tools for evaluating the effectiveness of interpretation experiences on guided tours conducted by licensed tour operators in natural and cultural settings. Methods and tools for collecting data from tours, visitors and operators (Appendices 1 to 3) were developed, trailed and revised (objectives 1a, 1b and 1c).

The study proved to be a valuable experiment in methodology. The transparent agenda of the researchers was well received by most operators. However, some operators saw the project as too invasive, potentially compromising the client experience, intrusive on intellectual property and consuming valuable business time. Consequently some refusals arose from these concerns.

Participant observation, although not always easy and certainly resource and labour-intensive, proved effective in gathering the required data. The audio-recording of commentary was very successful under, at times, trying circumstances (e.g. on horseback, in a canoe) and all guides reported forgetting about the microphone after a few minutes of use. The remote recording approach was definitely an important ingredient in discrete data gathering in these circumstances. Both of these techniques provided more detailed and accurate results regarding message content than previous research (Weiler, 1999).

There appeared to be few instances of bias due to observation, although a couple of times the guide’s commentary seemed to be directed at the researchers. One participant’s response on the survey seemed to be based on what the researchers might want to hear rather than what was actually communicated by the guide. Furthermore, there may have been some difficulty with respondents understanding what was meant by ‘key messages’ in the visitor survey. Open-ended comments regarding messages received were an innovation over previous research and proved superior for the present study’s purpose to methods used in previous research (e.g., pre-post testing of isolated fact recall). The construct of ‘messages delivered’ was operationalised somewhat differently to ‘messages received’. In the case of ‘messages delivered’ even very brief mention of relevant content was recorded and included in the analysis.

It is recommended that in future replications of this research the methods and tools for observing tours and surveying visitors be used in the form presented in Appendices 1 and 2. The section of the visitor survey regarding messages received, however, requires modification. It may be more effective to either indicate in more detail what types of messages the researchers are interested in or provide a series of categories of messages with a tick box and space for an example. Furthermore, expansion of the criteria to cater for the delivery of non-thematic interpretation may provide a clearer view of message delivery. Finally, the interview tool in its current form (Appendix 3) is not recommended for further use as a way of evaluating licensed tour operators use of interpretation. Only those questions specifically related to interpretive practice gathered useful data for this research.

Secondary Objectives: Evaluation of a Sample of Operators

The secondary objectives, which were achieved in the process of developing, trailing and revising the tool, were to evaluate the content and delivery of interpretive experiences offered by a sample of licensed tour operators in Victorian National Parks (2a), assess the degree to which those operators achieve Parks Victoria’s organisational goals and objectives (2b), explore the characteristics of tour operations which might explain or be associated with the provision of quality interpretation (2c) and recommend future management actions and the identification of training needs for Parks Victoria and VTOA in relation to managing and monitoring tour operators (2d).

Content of tours (objectives 2a and 2b)

To differing extents almost all of the tour operators in the sample (18 out of 20) delivered at least some messages consistent with the goals identified from Parks Victoria policy and planning documentation. As Parks Victoria has not indicated a priority for the types of messages, it is not possible to evaluate the frequency of tour operator message delivery against the agency’s goals. Analysis found no particular type of
tour to be more or less likely to deliver messages and there was no regional bias in message delivery. Furthermore, the duration of the tour did not affect the number of messages delivered.

Looking at the 20 tour products as a whole, it is notable that two tours delivered no environmental messages in the seven identified categories despite the fact that they claim to be nature-based or ecotour operators and they are operating within a protected area. Most tours featured only a few messages with the exception being two exemplary operators who delivered 19 and 17 messages respectively. If viewed as a single audience, tour clients were exposed to numerous messages about minimising their on-site impacts (27%), followed by messages about the roles and actions of protected area managers (19%), and the significance or heritage value of the area (19%). The fewest messages were those encouraging conservation actions by individuals (1%), while general conservation messages were delivered somewhat more frequently (17%). This leads to the conclusion that tour operators as a whole are delivering more minimal impact messages and less long-term conservation messages. This is consistent with previous research that found that very few guides employed by ecotour operators in Australia delivered conservation messages (Weiler, 1999).

Overall, the number of environmental messages delivered to clients on the observed tours and the amount of time delivering them were both relatively low compared to the total number of hours of tour commentary. Given that Parks Victoria does not actually require tour operators to deliver specific messages or provide materials that would facilitate their delivery, the fact that any messages relevant to protected area management were delivered is likely to be the result of a happy accident. That said, it is clear from this research that tour operators and guides are a potentially important vehicle for message delivery to tour clients and it is advisable that protected area management agencies seriously consider these resources in their management plans.

From the visitor’s perspective, tour guides are clearly important deliverers of messages as indicated by the types and frequency of messages reported by the visitors. Although there was some evidence amongst the tour audiences that they did not receive a clear message/s from their guide, most visitors could readily identify messages. The nature of those messages was diverse but, despite the lack of prompting for environmental topics in the visitor survey, environmental messages were received by a reasonable number of visitors. Furthermore, 26 per cent of responses to the question aligned to the message categories gained from Parks Victoria’s policy and planning documents.

As shown in Boxes 1, 2 and 3 three tours clearly demonstrate how a tour commentary with an emphasis on message delivery can result in a good ‘match’ between messages delivered and received. These are examples of the power of the guide in promoting the goals and aims of protected area management while still conducting their business. It is also interesting to note that two of the guides (Boxes 2 and 3) were the highest rating in terms of delivering thematic interpretation.

The differences between the frequency of the specific conservation messages observed by the researchers and those reported by the visitors (Figure 8) are likely to be a result of structuring of the content of interpretation, emphasis on the message, the style of delivery, audience fatigue and other factors, which affect message receipt in communication. The researchers were also clearly ‘attuned’ to the message content and had the advantage of replaying the tour commentary. Conservation messages and messages about significance and value seemed to be ‘getting through’ to the visitors but the discrepancy between observed and reported messages about minimising visitor impacts in protected areas should be of some concern for both the tour operators and protected area managers.

The frequency of messages about the social aspects of the tour, guiding practice, skills, safety and knowledge about non-environmental aspects of Australia may be interesting concepts for further research about tour guiding and the responsibilities of tour operators.

The responsibility for delivery of appropriate messages by tour operators licensed to conduct tours in protected areas does not, however, lie simply with the operators. Protected area managers have a role to play in communicating to operators and guides those messages that they would like delivered and this is discussed in the next section. It seems likely that this would increase the delivery and receipt of appropriate messages.

The links between the motivations of the participants and the messages delivered are interesting. Being on an environmentally responsible and/or minimal impact tour was very important for most participants (mean score 4.4 on a 5 point scale). Yet, tour operators delivered very few messages about how their tour operation tried to be environmentally responsible or impact minimally on the natural environment (13% of messages delivered). So, although this may have been a motivation for the participants, they may have left the tour wondering if the experience had actually met their needs or desires (Weiler & Ham, 2001). On the other hand, the tour operators delivered numerous messages about minimising the impact of visitors on protected areas and these messages may have helped the participant feel positive about their personal impact on the environment.
The participants also indicated a reasonably strong interest in being directly and actively involved in the natural environment. Although all of the tours occurred in a natural setting, few involved more than passive recreational use of the natural environment. The delivery of messages about personal conservation action seems to be even more important in these circumstances and yet only one guide gave any pointers to future conservation behaviour. This would seem to be a significant oversight by the guides especially given the accepted definitions and characteristics of interpretation (Weiler & Ham, 2001).

**Delivery techniques (objectives 2a and 2b)**

There was wide variability in the quality of delivery amongst the 20 tour operators. Some were exemplary in terms of Ham’s (1992) EROT model, others not so. In terms of success, many guides were successful at gaining and maintaining the audiences attention and managed to convey technical material - although it should be noted that more sophisticated techniques for delivery of technical material were not adopted. The guides used interactivity successfully and encouraged the clients to use at least three of their five senses but again this technique was not adopted at a sophisticated level. Use of eye contact and names to personalise the delivery was successful and the flow and logical sequencing of material was generally good, particularly in relation to introductions and bodies. Generally speaking, the guides were less successful in entertaining the audience and making the interpretation meaningful. Some interpretation was actually quite effortful for the audience. Finally, the least successfully applied delivery techniques were those designed to make the interpretation meaningful by using examples, self-referencing and labelling. The thematic interpretation approach was generally not successfully applied and conclusions were poorly delivered.

One delivery technique that became obvious to the researchers was the pattern in the verbal commentary. Some guides tended to ‘batch’ their commentary. They would deliver the commentary in distinct ‘chunks’ followed by breaks with no commentary. Through observation this encouraged the audience to focus and give their full attention to the commentary in the knowledge that it would be followed by a break during which they could observe the environment and talk amongst themselves. This ‘batching’ system appeared to work very well on the long tours. At the other extreme, guides would provide a fairly constant commentary that would ‘demand’ the attention of the audience throughout the tour. Although this may be acceptable on tours of very short duration (e.g., 30 minutes) this was clearly not suitable for longer tours and resulted in loss of concentration and fatigue. Ham’s (1992) recommendation of five or less units of material is relevant to the structuring of material.

**The business of tour operation (objective 2c)**

The interviews with tour operators brought to light a range of issues critical to the delivery of quality interpretation within the tour and these have also been explored by McKercher (1998). The casualisation of guiding staff and high turnover were clearly an issue in maintaining quality staff. This issue did not appear to be so critical for smaller operations. More strategic recruitment of staff in terms of both the source of the employees and the skills required seems to be justified. It is a cliché to say that ‘a business is only as good as its staff’ but in the personal services industries such as tourism and tour guiding the need for quality staff is evident. The importance of ‘people skills’ means that recruitment of staff with suitable ‘personal traits’ is appropriate. Given the number of tertiary courses and other educational agencies now offering some form of guide training, it makes sense for tour operators to begin seeking staff who also have some level of training in guiding and interpretation (Black & Weiler 2001). As in any profession, work experience is vital but it seems sensible to recruit staff specifically trained for the field or to help them access this training while employed. Similarly, the recruitment of staff who have taken the initiative to seek certification or accreditation through a system like the EcoGuide Program is warranted. Alternatively, tour operators could encourage staff to seek such certification as part of their probation.

Almost without exception the tour operators in this research study saw interpretation as an important part of their operation although they may benefit from a more in-depth appreciation for why it is important and how it can be done better. It follows that the planning, delivery and evaluation of that interpretation justifies more time and effort than was reported. Well planned interpretation is likely to more successful and satisfying for the client leading to positive word-of-mouth and repeat visitation. More sophisticated planning and particularly audience analysis would appear to be warranted for most of the operators in this study. In addition, the quality of delivery of interpretation was generally good but could also benefit from more skill development. Finally, the evaluations conducted by the tour operators are generally at a very informal and unsophisticated level and this area of business operation needs more attention. In this area, operators can seek assistance from research institutions such as universities via research students and staff.
Protected area managers, professional associations and tour operators (objective 2d)

Based on the findings in relation to Parks Victoria and their management of tour operators in projected areas and the role of VTOA, it is possible to make some general recommendations on the management and support of tour operators.

In the researchers’ opinion, one of the most useful things protected area managers can do when dealing with tour operators is to gain an understanding of the tourism industry and the particular challenges of running a business in tourism. Similarly, tour operators would be well served in gaining an understanding of the particular challenges of protected area management. As mentioned above, tour operators would benefit from a better understanding of the roles of interpretation (in protected area management and other areas) and ways of making it more effective. Clearly, protected area managers could play a role in both, as could tour operator associations such as VTOA, the Ecotourism Association of Australia and Interpretation Australia Association.

Protected area agencies and tour operators also need to establish clear and effective communication and liaison channels to ensure that administrative systems (such as licensing or permitting systems) are effective. Adequate staff in both head quarters, regional offices and in the field are an important requirement for the administration of any system and the findings from this research definitely underline the need for adequate staffing and policing of a permit system.

From the tour operators’ perspective, a permit/license system needs to display a number of characteristics. First, the decisions made in the administration of the system need to be transparent and comprehensible. A number of tour operators indicated that they weren’t necessarily unhappy with certain decisions but they simply didn’t know why they had been taken in a particular way. Second, the system needs to display internal and external equity. That is, all users internal to the system need to be treated equitably (or at least perceive that they are being treated equitably). Two examples illustrate this point. Internal equity was a particular issue in relation to horse riding operators feeling that they were getting a ‘raw deal’ based on the type of activity they conducted. Second, some operators were concerned about other operators exceeding the upper limit on visitor numbers that are set as a condition of the permit. The system also needs to display external equity. This response was prompted by tour operators who were concerned that they were being treated differently from other users of the same natural resource who had no conditions placed on their use. Third, the policy guiding the permit system needs to be flexible so that issues in the system can be dealt with rapidly and effectively as they arise. One issue where some flexibility in policy may be warranted is in the area of daily use fees. The permit system which was the subject of this research charges a flat daily use fee per head regardless of the duration of the tour activity and this was seen as unfair to operators of shorter tours. Fourth, the permit system needs to reduce paperwork to the minimum particularly in relation to trip returns and renewal of permits. Tour operators felt this would also be important for the protected area agency. Finally, if the permit system is designed to support accredited businesses by providing some form of incentive (e.g., lower fees, extended permits), then the protected area agency needs to get more involved in the actual accreditation systems.

The quality of the interpretation provided by the tour operators in this study was generally good but there were clearly some areas for improvement in both content and delivery techniques. Protected area managers and tour operator associations can play an important role in improving knowledge and filling skill gaps through appropriate training activities, workshops, and information sessions as well as the provision of information packs and mentoring/internships. Parks Victoria has indicated that they are currently developing a Tour Operator Manual and a Tour Operator Induction Program which will be implemented in 2003 (Russell Mason, Parks Victoria, email, 16 April 2002) and this action is welcomed.

Training could potentially be offered at staff training events to encourage exchange between staff and tour operators. These would need to be well targeted in terms of the audience, timing, location and cost. Protected area agencies could consider participation in training or guide certification as (i) a condition of licensing or (ii) a criterion for providing preferential treatment such as longer licenses or special access permits. It is clearly in the interests of protected area managers to take on this role if they wish to delegate to tour operators/guides some of their responsibilities for delivery of interpretation and conservation messages to the public.

Another area that may be pursued by protected area managers and tour operator associations is setting up or facilitating a system of peer evaluation between tour operators. Agency staff could be available to attend tours and provide constructive feedback to tour operators. Similarly, protected area managers and professional associations could assist those businesses seeking peer evaluation by facilitating contact between similar but non-competitive businesses.
Overall, the number of environmental messages delivered to the clients on the observed tours and the amount of time delivering them were both relatively low. Parks Victoria needs to specify messages and provide materials that would facilitate their delivery. It is recommended that a set of messages be identified for licensed tour operators and their clients who are clearly a key audience for Parks Victoria. These need to be developed in relation to Parks Victoria’s goals and priorities and may require customisation for individual parks or sites.

In the first instance, it is recommended that tour operators be encouraged to integrate a simple set of messages into their tour experience. The range and number of messages should not be overly onerous in recognition of the complexity of the guiding role. As indicated, different types of tours offer very different opportunities for the delivery of messages and this needs to be recognised by the agency. At a more advanced level, protected area agencies may consider some form of monitoring for message delivery. The latter would be very time consuming and expensive, however, and co-operative and collaborative education, training and mentoring of tour operators is preferable.

In summary, protected area agencies and tour operator associations can facilitate more effective message delivery through a range of activities. At a basic level, the agency could ensure that the licensed tour operator and guides receive comprehensive information and resource materials on their protected areas and activities. These resources could be supported by on-site assistance from staff in the regions with regular communication to tour operators, mentoring, workshop and incentives to complete training and certification.

Further Research and Conclusions

As stated at the outset, the primary objective of this study was to develop a set of tools and the secondary objective was to test these on a snapshot of operators. This study has started to address a clear gap in the literature about the role of interpretation and tour operators in protected area management – both in terms of management of visitors and the resource. It has critically examined and enumerated messages delivered by tour guides and operators to get beyond the anecdotal and limited research evidence that has been used to inform protected area management to date. It has also compared those findings with message receipt by the audience, a focus that could definitely be explored in greater depth in further research.

The study has also looked at delivery mechanisms – a more commonly researched phenomenon in interpretation. The development of a comprehensive instrument for measuring delivery is an important step in encouraging greater emphasis on delivery techniques in guiding. The study looked at the business side of tour guiding – an area with significant implications for how interpretation is done on tour – and from those interviews came insights into the relationship between protected area managers, professional associations and tour operators.

The approaches and methods used in this study would benefit from replication. First, it may be informative to replicate the study on other types of tour products and activities and in other regions of Victoria and other States and Territories. One advantage of replicating the research is that it would facilitate meeting objective 2c within a more rigorous statistical framework (that is, examining the effects of tour operator variables on interpretation). Furthermore, the study could be extended to a variety of environments including cultural heritage landscapes. Finally, there is clearly scope for research on other ways that tour operators communicate with clients (e.g. websites, brochures, videos, handouts). With further study, a clearer picture of the role of guiding and interpretation in protected areas will emerge.

The outcomes for this research for Parks Victoria, protected area managers in general and professional associations include recommendations on managing and supporting licensed tour operators, and particularly in ensuring that a process for identifying key messages for tour operators and other ‘audiences’ is initiated. This is ultimately of benefit not only to protected area agencies but also to current and future tour participants. As the expectations of tour participants for a ‘green’ tour experience within a sustainable resource increase, they will benefit from an understanding of conservation issues that may lead to more environmentally-appreciative attitudes and ultimately behaviour.
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Victorian Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DNRE) (1999). *Best Practice in Park Interpretation and Education*. A Report to the ANZECC Working Group on National and Protected Area Management Benchmarking and Best Practice Program. Melbourne: DNRE.
## Appendix 1 - On-site Evaluation Instrument

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<tr>
<td>MESSAGE CATEGORIES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages about protected area/heritage ‘values’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the area – specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples - The area is a national park. The area is the home to Australia’s rarest bird. The area is also a world heritage area. Reference to the importance of the area to the local aboriginal community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the area – general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples - The area is part of a network of parks and reserves for conservation purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages about minimal visitor impacts in protected areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General visitor impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages about what visitors can and cannot do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example – Please don’t smoke while we are … Please keep your voices low when we are …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specifically operator related impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples - We keep our vehicle on established tracks so we don’t damage the bush. This company takes their responsibility for minimal impact very seriously. For example, on our spotlighting tours we never travel in a group larger than X and we don’t walk the same track every night, so the animals get a bit of a break from us.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Messages about protected area management (other than minimal impact messages covered in 2 above)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laws and regulations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examples - Park regulations prohibit the use of firearms in the park.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Land manager roles or actions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examples – That area is fenced to prevent people ‘cutting’ the corner and opening up the old track. Parks Victoria manages this area. Policies and plans related to the area. Parks Victoria attributed with no involvement when there is involvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generic conservation messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples - Value of biodiversity. World conservation issues and organisations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encouraging conservation action by individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples – revegetation programs, donations to local conservation groups, domestic recycling, being careful with water, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Key Concept</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>**Engaging and</td>
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<tr>
<td>accessible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relevant -</td>
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<tr>
<td>meaningful and</td>
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<td>personal</td>
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<td><strong>Using comparisons</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Organised</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Thematic</strong></td>
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</table>
Appendix 2 – Visitor Survey

La Trobe University, Monash University, Parks Victoria and the Victorian Tourism Operators Association are conducting research on guided tours in Victorian National Parks. As a tour participant, we would greatly appreciate a few minutes of your time in completing this survey. The survey is voluntary and your response will be completely confidential. If you have any questions about the survey, please do not hesitate to ask one of the researchers in attendance.

1. On this tour, how important to you were each of the following motives? Please rate each statement by circling a number between 1 and 5, 1 being ‘not at all important to me’ and 5 being ‘extremely important to me’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motive</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>Extremely important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to be directly and actively involved with the natural environment</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to visit a place or have an experience you could not on your own</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to spend time with family and/or friends</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to have a guide during the tour</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to be with people with similar interests</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to learn something new</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to be physically challenged</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to be intellectually challenged</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to have fun</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to do a tour that was environmentally responsible/did not adversely affect the environment.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. What two key messages do you feel you received from the tour?
   i. ___________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________

   ii. ___________________________________________________
    ___________________________________________________
    ___________________________________________________

3. How satisfied were you with the guided tour?

   Very dissatisfied ▶
   Somewhat dissatisfied ▶
   Neither dissatisfied or satisfied ▶
   Somewhat satisfied ▶
   Very satisfied ▶

4. What did you think was the best thing about the tour?
   ___________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________

5. How do you think this tour could be improved?
   ___________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________

6. Is this your first visit to this Park?
   Yes ▶
   No ▶

Please turn over …
7. Is this the first time you have been on a tour with a commercial tour operator?
   Yes ▶ (Please go to question 9)
   No ▶

8. Is this the first time you have been on a tour with this commercial tour operator?
   Yes ▶
   No ▶

We would now like to ask some questions about yourself.

9. What is your sex?  F ▶  M ▶

10. How would you describe your travel party?
    Are you …
    travelling alone
    with a spouse or partner
    in a group of immediate family members
      – parents and children
    friends or relatives travelling together
      – with children
    friends or relatives travelling together
      – without children
    in an educational group
    other - please specify __________________

11. Which age group do you belong to?
    18 – 19 ▶
    20 – 24 ▶
    25 – 29 ▶
    30 – 34 ▶
    35 – 39 ▶
    40 – 44 ▶
    45 – 49 ▶
    50 – 54 ▶
    55 – 59 ▶
    60 – 64 ▶
    65 – 69 ▶
    70 + ▶

12. What level of formal education have you reached?
    Up to Year 10 (or less) ▶
    Up to Year 12 ▶
    Some tertiary study ▶
    Completed TAFE level qualification and advanced certificate (trade, diploma, associate diploma) ▶
    Completed undergraduate degree ▶
    Completed postgraduate qualification ▶
    Other – please specify __________________

13. Which lifecycle category best describes you?
    young single ▶
    young couple/no children ▶
    young family (youngest child less than 6 years) ▶
    middle family (children 6-15 years) ▶
    mature family ▶
    older couple/no children at home ▶
    mature single ▶

14. What is your country of residence?
    Australia ▶
    Other – please specify ______________

15. If Australia, what is your postcode? _____

Thank you for your time today. Please pass this survey back to the researchers.

RESEARCH PARTNERS

MONASH UNIVERSITY

Parks Victoria

VTOA
Appendix 3 - Questions for in-depth interviews with tour operators

Introduction
- Introduce project and my role in project
- Thank for participation
- Request permission to tape record interview and reiterate information about confidentiality
- Reiterate approximate time of interview (eg, no more than 1 hour)
- Request signature for Informed Consent Form
- Outline the format of the interview
- Any questions before commencing?

Business
Could you describe the nature of your tour operation business?
Prompt questions
- number and type of tour products offered
- 100% operating in Parks/protected areas?
- length of time in this business (and other closely related businesses if relevant)
- location of tour products (multiple sites, single site)
- frequency of product offerings (are there seasonality issues?)
- price range of tours
- market niche (leader, unique, mainstream, etc)
- size of tours (range)? What guide to participant ratio do you aim for in tours?
- what percentage of your total personal income comes from this business?

Staffing and training
How many staff do you employ (including full-time, part-time, casual, on contract)? Interviewer - break down staff numbers into guides and others.
How experienced are your guides in terms of number of years guiding (in total)?
How do you recruit your guides? Methods? What do you look for?
What is your recruitment policy in terms of the education level of potential guides? (give example)
Try to get an impression of guide turnover.

Marketing/client/audience groups
Do you focus on a particular target market/s for your products? If so, which one/s? How?
How do you analyse the characteristics and needs of your audience?
Prompters
- Do you compile a detailed profile of your standard audience – age groups, origins, ethnic background, expectations of length of program, level of difficulty of information? How?
- Do you identify the needs of your audience including levels of understanding of topics, familiarity with the site and fears and aspirations? How?

Interpretation in the tour operation context
Brief discussion of the ‘interpretive product’ that has been observed previously – stress positives and promise more detailed feedback when it is processed.
What does ‘interpretation’ mean to you?
What are your aims in providing interpretation?
How important is interpretation to your operation? (prompt for underlying business philosophy)
Focussing on the interpretive product we have observed:
What specific messages do you wish to transmit to the audience during <name of interpretive product observed>?
How do you transmit those messages? (prompt – ask about media, eg, guides, brochures, websites etc)
Back to general questions ....
Have you/your guides received any training in interpretation? What type and level?

Do you provide training?

Do you actually plan the interpretation you deliver? (that is, do what is known as interpretation planning?) (give examples if needed to clarify meaning)

Does the content of your interpretation communicate specific resource management policies, practices or issues in the areas you visit? (give example)

What sources do you consult when you are putting together the interpretation for a tour?

How do you verify the accuracy of the information you provide to participants?

**Evaluation**

How do you evaluate your tours? (peer, self, client?)

In particular, how do you evaluate your interpretive program?

**Prompts**

- Form of evaluation
- Frequency of evaluation
- Implementation of results
- If no evaluation, why not?

**Accreditation**

Check that our details about accreditation/s held by the business are correct.

If accreditation held - > why did you seek accreditation?

If no accreditation held, why not?

Are any of your guides certified under the Ecoguide Program? Would you encourage your guides to apply for certification?

**Agency issues/support mechanisms**

Could you describe any particular issues that you have with PV and the licensing systems as it is currently run?

**Prompts:**

- Negative/positive aspects
- Transparency of decision making?
- Level of fees?
- Contact with field officers?
- Contact with HQ?

How can PV expedite the operation of your business?

**Prompts:**

- Changes to licensing system
- Training in interpretation delivery
- Assistance with content for interpretation

How can VTOA expedite the operation of your business?

**Prompts:**

- Lobbying role?
- Training in interpretation delivery?
- Other forms of training?

Thanks again for participating.
Appendix 4 – Information Sheet for Operators

Project - IMPROVING THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE: EVALUATION OF INTERPRETATION COMPONENTS OF GUIDED TOURS IN NATIONAL PARKS.

Researchers

• Ms Kate Armstrong, La Trobe University
• Mr Tim Phillips, La Trobe University
• Associate Professor Betty Weiler, Monash University

Industry partners

• Mr Russell Mason, Parks Victoria
• Mr Mark Hancock, Victorian Tourism Operators Association

Project overview

Tour operators providing nature-based, guided interpretive activities are the focus of this research which is being conducted in Victorian National Parks and protected areas in 2000/2001. The aims of the research are to:
(i) develop, trial and evaluate a set of tools to measure quality interpretation;
(ii) assess the interpretation conducted by a sample of nature-based tourism operators using the set of tools; and
(iii) explore the factors which might explain or be associated with quality interpretation.

During summer 2001, the evaluation tool will be developed and trailed on a sample of the tour operators currently licensed to operate in Victoria’s National Parks and protected areas. Data will be collected on individual operators to assess the park management messages being delivered, the satisfaction of visitors with the tour and the factors associated with quality interpretation.

Commonly asked questions

Following are some answers to the most frequently asked questions about this project.

What is interpretation?
The Interpretation Association of Australia defines interpretation as ‘a means of communicating ideas and feelings which helps people enrich their understanding and appreciation of their world and their role within it.’ Interpretation is often used in national parks, museums, zoos, botanic gardens and historic sites and guided tours are just one way of communicating ideas. Interpretation includes both verbal and written materials which are provided on-site and pre- and post-tour.

So, why have I been selected as a potential participant in this research?
Your company has been selected from the Tour Operator Management System (or TOMS), a database of licensed tour operators maintained by Parks Victoria as part of its permit system. You have been selected on the basis of location and type of activity offered.
What is involved?
After consultation with you, we would arrange to join a day tour (preferably half day or less due to time constraints).
Before the tour we would look at any pre-tour material provided to clients. During the tour we would (i) make notes on our observations as discretely as possible using a clipboard, (ii) record the verbal communications of the guide using a small lapel radio microphone and mini-disk recorder (the recorder is handled by a researcher) and (iii) take a few photographs. The audio recording of the tour would only occur if the guide agrees. At the end of the tour we would invite the tour participants to complete a short, confidential survey. Finally, we would conduct an in-depth interview of approximately one hour with yourself to explore the operational aspects of running a tour company and their impacts on the interpretation program. The interview would be conducted at a time and place convenient to you and would be recorded on audio tape.

In the above process, the guide must be informed in advance that this project is in progress and their participation must be voluntary.

So, how will the researchers use all that data?
The results from this project may be published in academic and industry publications and presented at seminars and conferences. Your anonymity will be maintained at all times and tour operators will only be identified as Operator A, B etc.
The team members from La Trobe and Monash Universities are researchers and the industry partners, VTOA and Parks Victoria, are providing industry input and guidance. They are not involved with the data collection and analysis and identifying results will not be disclosed to either party. They will only be informed of aggregate results and broad findings which do not identify specific operators. The results will help with future decisions about provision of park information for tour operators, operator licensing and operator and guide training.

Storage of data
During the project, the data, including documentation, computer files, audio tapes and photographs, will be kept in a secure location with access restricted to the researchers. Following completion of the study, the data will be kept in a secure location at La Trobe University for five years following publication as required by University guidelines. The data may be used in future research.

And how will I as a tour operator benefit?
Involvement in this project has a number of significant benefits to you as an operator. The most tangible benefits include (i) general advice and feedback on elements that could be improved in your interpretation program, (ii) objective customer feedback on the tour product and basic demographic data on a small sample of your clients, and (iii) acknowledgement of your contribution in research publications. We will also provide you with a summary report of the project at the end of the study.

… and the tourism industry in general?
The tourism industry is integral to Australia’s economy and is in a strong growth phase. Tourism businesses are becoming more professional in their operations and this projects aims to assist in improving the professionalism of nature-based tourism and guiding and the achievement of quality environmental interpretation. Ultimately, environmental interpretation aims to change attitudes to the natural environment and, therefore, this project potentially encourages conservation of the natural environment for the benefit of all humanity.
Furthermore, heritage management agencies and professional associations will benefit by a clearer understanding of operations and, hence, a foundation for intelligent policy development and implementation.

Can I withdraw from the project?
You are free to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation in the project at any time up to 6 weeks following the completion of data collection. If you choose this option all traces of your participation in the project will be erased from documents and records.

What if I have more questions?
Any questions regarding this project can be directed to either Tim Phillips (9816 1133) or Kate Armstrong (9479 1126) of the School of Tourism and Hospitality at La Trobe University.

If you have any complaints or queries that the researchers have not been able to answer to your satisfaction, you may contact the Ethics Liaison Officer, Human Ethics Committee, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Victoria, 3083; Ph: 9479 1443; email: humanethics@latrobe.edu.au
I, ________________________________, have read and understood the information above, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the project, realising that I may withdraw at any time. I agree that research data provided by me or with my permission during the project may be included in a report, presented at conferences and published in journals on the condition that my name, business name or features identifying my business are not used.

**Participant’s name**  
(Please use BLOCK letters)  
____________________________________________

**Signature**  
____________________________________________

**Date**  
______________

---

**Researcher’s name**  
(Please use BLOCK letters)  
____________________________________________

**Signature**  
____________________________________________

**Date**  
______________
Appendix 5 – Information Sheet for Tour Guides

Information Sheet for Tour Guides

Project - IMPROVING THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE: EVALUATION OF INTERPRETATION COMPONENTS OF GUIDED TOURS IN NATIONAL PARKS.

Researchers
- Ms Kate Armstrong, La Trobe University
- Mr Tim Phillips, La Trobe University
- Associate Professor Betty Weiler, Monash University

Industry partners
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So, why have I been selected as a potential participant in this research?
Your employer has been selected from the Tour Operator Management System (or TOMS), a database of licensed tour operators maintained by Parks Victoria as part of its permit system. The organisation was selected on the basis of location and type of activity offered. We approached your employer first to see if they were willing to be involved in the project and your employer has nominated a specific guided tour product and, hence, guide. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary.
What is involved?
We will be joining a tour product which is led by yourself. During the tour we will (i) make notes on our observations as discretely as possible using a clipboard, (ii) record your verbal communications using a small lapel radio microphone and mini-disk recorder (the recorder is handled by a researcher) and (iii) take a few photographs. The audio recording of the tour will only occur if you agree. At the end of the tour we will invite the tour participants to complete a short, confidential survey.

So, how will the researchers use all that data?
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And how will I as a tour guide benefit?
Involvement in this project has a number of significant benefits to you as an guide. The most tangible benefits include (i) general advice and feedback on elements that could be improved in your interpretation program, (ii) objective customer feedback on the tour product and basic demographic data on a small sample of your clients, and (iii) acknowledgement of your contribution in research publications. We will also provide your employer with a summary report of the project at the end of the study.

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Furthermore, heritage management agencies and professional associations will benefit by a clearer understanding of operations and, hence, a foundation for intelligent policy development and implementation.

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Informed Consent Form for Tour Guides

Project - IMPROVING THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE: EVALUATION OF INTERPRETATION COMPONENTS OF GUIDED TOURS IN NATIONAL PARKS.

I, _____________________________________, have read and understood the information above, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the project, realising that I may withdraw at any time. I agree that research data provided by me or with my permission during the project may be included in a report, presented at conferences and published in journals on the condition that my name, business name or features identifying my business are not used.

Participant’s name _____________________________________
(Please use BLOCK letters)

Signature _____________________________________

Date ________________

Researcher’s name _____________________________________
(Please use BLOCK letters)

Signature _____________________________________

Date ________________
Authors

Ms Kate Armstrong
Kate Armstrong is a lecturer in the School of Information Management and Tourism at the University of Canberra where she teaches a range of tourism management subjects. Her research interests focus on natural and cultural heritage management, nature-based tourism, guiding and interpretation, and visitor management. Prior to joining academia, Kate worked in natural and cultural heritage management in policy, legislative, management and consulting roles. Email: kate.armstrong@canberra.edu.au

Dr Betty Weiler
Dr Betty Weiler is a Professor in the Department of Management, Monash University, Australia where she teaches postgraduate and undergraduate courses on ecotourism, tour guiding and tourism planning and management. She has published over one hundred journal articles and book chapters, presented 15 invited addresses and plenaries, and delivered dozens of symposia papers and workshops. In the past ten years, she has become a world leader in ecotour guide research and training as a means to sustainable tourism development. Dr Weiler has managed or co-managed over a dozen major research projects and seven international and national consultancy projects related to ecotourism and tour guiding. She has developed and written guide training standards, curricula and training resource materials, and has trained guides throughout Australia and in more than a dozen other countries since 1998. Email: betty.weiler@buseco.monash.edu.au