

Kakadu Tourism Draft Master Plan – Comments

Whole of Park Issues

- **Shade.** There are many areas in the plan which mention the provision of shaded areas for picnics, etc. This is probably the cheapest of the capital works actions. It would go a LONG way toward improving peoples' perception of the park.
- **Overnight bushwalking** hardly gets a mention. Demand is increasing and available routes are decreasing. It's almost as if this segment of the visitor market is being deliberately ignored. (More likely, it's in the too hard basket.)
 - Increasing demand and decreasing available routes means bushwalking impact may increase to the point where it could detract from the experience
- **Viewing platforms** are suggested for Jim Jim, Twin Falls and the South Alligator River.
 - Any viewing platform needs to be flood proof or it is a waste of money.
 - Viewing platforms at Twin & Jim Jim are likely to detract from the views from other spots if not carefully designed. If the view up the gorge to Jim Jim Falls has an obvious viewing platform in it, I think many people will be disappointed as that would detract from the natural experience they are looking for – the market the plan looks to attract.
 - South Alligator viewing platform. If it can be made flood proof, this would offer a SAFE place to get a view unlike anything else in the park. (Stopping on the bridge isn't safe).
 - Nourlangie Creek Crossings on the Kakadu Highway. Not mentioned in the draft. People are not supposed to fish or stop and take photos from the bridges but they do. Better to recognise this fact and put up safe platforms where people can stand before someone gets killed. (I think there was one fatality on the bridge years ago but can't find the reference.)
- **Food kiosks** are mentioned in many places. Some years ago there was a good one at Gunlom that seemed to be doing a reasonable business. It failed. Why?
- **Dump points** are mentioned in several parts of the plan. People in caravans will stay longer if dump points are provided.
- **Public input.** The short time allowed for public input suggests that public input is not being valued as much as it should be.

Visitation Goals

- The plan wants to increase the total numbers and length of stay. Without improving shoulder season and off-season access, this will be impossible.
- Long distance bushwalkers spend more time in the park than any other group.
- International tourism was declining before Covid. Why is not explained. Covid will do more short term damage but unless we know why international visitation was declining, we may never get it back in the desired numbers.
- **Carrying capacity**, p 133. can't be emphasised enough. Too many people has a major impact on the environment and would lead those who visit as part of the crowds to pass on a negative message.
- p 139. 10.4. Environmental considerations are very important. Do things wrong and a negative message will go out making it impossible to achieve the goals set out.

Money and Maintenance

- The Federal Government's \$216 million comes no where near the cost of implementing these ideas
- The plan recognises that future funding sources need to be identified.

- p 64 notes the current under-resourcing for new infrastructure and maintenance. Again on p 136. “Some actions will require recurring costs.” Maintenance has been a major issue in Kakadu (and many other NT Parks) in the past. If something can’t be maintained, it’s better not to build it in the first place as the eventual deterioration of the asset will lead visitors to pass on a negative message.
- p 121. Gunlom Road. Major flooding in the past has caused major damage to the road. Without a complete realignment or MAJOR upgrades not envisaged in this plan, it will happen again.
- Sec 9.3.5 Enabling actions for private sector investment. p 94 suggests “enabling works to be done by Parks Australia”. This could be very expensive. Where would that money come from?
- p 76. Increase in license fees needs to relate to volume of business
 - a fee for ranger guided activities seems a good idea. Only way to expand as envisioned
 - general public should pay same fee as tour operators. WW pays a per person, per night fee for people on bushwalks. Does the general public do the same?
 - p 141 Variable pricing. People expect to pay more in peak times. If the difference isn’t too great it is a definite plus as it would help spread the shoulder seasons and increase park revenue.
- p 161 paying campground fees online seems a good idea but needs some mechanism that makes it easy for campground managers to check.

Accommodation Options

The plan considers a variety of options for new accommodation. Some things need considering before anything goes further.

- 5 star accom. The Croc Hotel was originally intended to be 5 star or near 5 star. I don’t believe that was viable. Do we know why or what is needed to make something truly 5 star viable?
- Mary River precinct accom. Any future development at Goymarr (Mary River roadhouse) could affect viability of anything in the southern part of the park. Any developer will need to consider that.
- East Alligator Precinct. The plan mentions possible accom near the border store. Back in the early 1990s, there was YHA accom there. We even used it when it was closed in the wet when we had wet season helicopter to walks in the northern outliers (no longer permitted).
- Budget accommodation. The only budget accom in the park is in Jabiru. Cooinda used to offer budget accommodation. It was well used. My clients preferred it to camping but prefer camping to the more expensive motel or safari type accom. What went wrong? Any thought of reintroducing.
- p 88. Close and repurpose Malabanjbanjdju & Burdulba. Plan seems to envisage getting rid of most of the unserviced campgrounds. Worth noting that mossies often terrible at both of these. Cooinda isn’t so bad any more. Do they spray?
- Early closure of Gunlom campground this year seems unjustified. It’s one of the most popular campgrounds in the park. On a weekday (Wednesday) 7 Oct, there were about 20 people there. That should have been more than enough to pay the caretaker.

Potential New Experiences

- **Cultural tours, air boat tours, shuttle services, etc.** P 73. All good ideas. Karnamarr to Jim Jim or Twin is the obvious place to start as it would allow people with 2WD to visit
- p 74 interesting ideas
 - **luxury river cruises.** Are there any waterways long enough for this to be viable?
 - **guided tours to exclusive locations** could include bushwalking tours on routes not open to the general public.

- **Mountain bike trails**, p 82. Potentially a great idea. At this point there is no overlap with bushwalking routes. Best that it stays this way. Karnamarr to Jim Jim car park has great potential. Worth noting that Willis's Walkabouts and the Darwin Bushwalking Club both used to be able to use bikes on the Jim Jim road when it was closed to the general public.
- plan mentions birdwatching in many places. Some birds, e.g. partridge pigeons are much less common than in the past. If this is promoted, it will mean that more people will pull off the roads and wander some distance into the bush if they spot an interesting bird.
- **Heritage Trail**, p 101. Good idea, mentioned in several places. Needs a fair amount of work before it can be even partly opened.
- **New Activities – Ziplines**, p 156
 - most trees in Kakadu aren't big enough; maybe some paperbarks
 - don't want to impact views in escarpment areas
 - zipline from top of Jim Jim would be a disaster for people looking for a natural environment. Would attract a new market at the expense of the existing one and much of those the plan wants to attract. Needs a LOT of careful research.
- **Night cruises** could be good but need to think about mossies
- **A paperbark forest boardwalk**, p 182, seems like a good idea, a new experience. BUT, if done, it needs to be flood proof and it needs regular maintenance. If either of these conditions cannot be met, it's better left undone until such time as they can be guaranteed.

Precinct Plans

West Alligator

- There is potential for a short (1-3 night?) walk if a route could be approved, possibly with off-season helicopter access. It's a different environment to the other walking routes which would make it a good combination on a multi-walk trip. We looked at this with one of the traditional owners some years ago. It never happened. I'm not sure what went wrong.

South Alligator

- South Alligator precinct. Manmalarri is mentioned. Is it currently accessible or permit only to use that track.
- Black Jungle used to be a good spot for birdwatching. It's been closed for some years now. Why? You can still find references on the web. Any chance it will reopen?

East Alligator

- Ubirr car park. Ensure peak capacity. The peak crowds detract from the experience. At some point increasing parking becomes counter productive.
- Paperbark wetlands boardwalk. Is this intended to be a free experience? If so where does the money to build and maintain come from?

Jabiru

- **Jabiru as a services hub** needs some minimum population to be viable without a permanent subsidy. At least in the short term, I'm not sure if this is possible. The selection in the supermarket is not as great as it was a few years ago. Without that store, Jabiru is not viable as a tourist hub.
- **Realign the Kakadu Highway through Jabiru**, p 192. While this would encourage more people to stop, it needs to be done so that it is on the edge of town (probably on the road that goes between Aurora and Anbinik). Putting it right through the middle would detract from the attractiveness of Jabiru as a tourism hub.

Burrungkuy (Nourlangie)

- p 201. Kubara Road realignment. A fairly large realignment has already taken place. Is more planned?

Yellow Water

- If budget accommodation is potentially viable, it should be considered.

Jim Jim and Twin Falls

- Most of my comments about this precinct are in other sections.
- Overnight bushwalking doesn't get a mention. A lot of the existing routes are in this area.

Mary River Precinct

- p 119. MR-3. Maguk is already at or near its carrying capacity at peak times. Too many people destroy the kind of experience the plan wants to sell. Some of the ideas here sound very expensive and would require ongoing maintenance expenses.
- The top pools at Maguk don't get a mention. If visitation is to increase, they need to be reopened. This should be included in some form. It is possible to work out access to top pool without crossing the creek. Not all that hard. (But harder than existing route). Perhaps this could be opened for licensed tour operators before the lower pool has been opened to the general public.
- MR-8. Koolpin walking track. Any upgrades need to be flood proof. I don't think it's possible to do more than remark the creek crossing every year as it changes every year we get decent rain.
- Overnight bushwalking doesn't get a mention. A lot of the existing routes are in this area.

Misc

- p 48. Kakadu Brand DNA; Reason to Believe #3 is abundant wildlife. The reality is that small mammals have been declining for at least 30 years. Not just the seldom seen small mammals, birds like the partridge pigeon are no where near as abundant as they were 20-30 years ago
- p 69 notes the diversity of target markets and that different messages are needed for the different markets. Very important and needs to be done in a way so that a message to one market doesn't turn off others.
- p 72. Tour operators are encouraged to employ Binninj/Mungguy as tour guides. We've been trying to do so for more than 20 years. Little success. What's best way to go about this?
- Step on guides. The plan mentions using step on guides in a number of different places. How many are there now? What was the level of interest before Covid?
- On ground vs aerial burns. More effective, more employment, more like original burning patterns. One of the senior Jawoyn traditional owners once suggested allowing the public to come along on some traditional burning walks. This was knocked back for safety reasons. If there were some way to do this, it would go a long way toward explaining burning practices in Kakadu and could become a major attraction in its own right.

Bushwalking

- p 38. First real mention of Kakadu tracks & walking routes
- p 46. Bottom right. Bushwalking mentioned as a special interest
- Visitor Precincts, p 57-59. Remote bushwalking is only mentioned under Burrungkuy, not at Jim Jim or Mary River where more remote bushwalks take place
- P 103. Walking Strategy implementation 4-10 years. Nothing sooner? A lot of work went into this.