

# Research Briefing Note

Take nothing but photos, leave nothing but footprints: how tourists perceive environmental impact in natural areas.

**Hillery, M., Nancarrow, B., Griffin, G. & Syme, G.**

(1998). *Range Management Newsletter* 98: 8-12.

## BACKGROUND

One of the paradoxes of tourism in natural areas is that, as a place increases in popularity, the concentration of tourism can cause detectable environmental degradation. This in turn may degrade the quality of the visitor's experience.

## AIMS

1. To investigate whether the measured degree of impact on the environment at tourist attractions is in proportion to their annual visitor numbers.
2. To explore visitor awareness of these measured impacts and their attitudes toward them.

## RESULTS

- Although the study area environment - the west MacDonnell Ranges in central Australia - was relatively unchanged by tourism, sites with higher visitor numbers tended to have a greater level of environmental impact.
- There was a spectrum of visitor awareness of environmental impact:
  - **74%** suggested management strategies to address specific environmental impacts.
  - **56%** identified aspects of tourism and introduced species as threats in the area.
  - **15%** were aware of different levels of impact due to specific causes at different sites.

## IMPLICATIONS

A broad awareness of the impacts of tourism among visitors to natural areas is a first indicator of the importance of the state of environment in visitor destination choice. This issue could increase in significance for the management of natural areas, as visitor awareness of the environmental impacts of tourism appears to have increased over the past 20 years.

## FUNDING SOURCE

CSIRO Multi-Divisional Program on Tourism

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