The Future of Work in Remote and Regional Communities

John Ayoub*
Portfolio Manager at Wilson Asset Management

Abstract
Tourism initiatives on the part of Destination NSW are constantly evolving, including efforts to promote Aboriginal and Outback Tourism. However, the NSW Outback is underrepresented in regard to receiving its share of tourists in comparison to the reported growth. Research in this paper is derived by reference to reports by Destination NSW (DNSW) calling for increased Indigenous and Outback Tourism, Statistics from Tourism Research Australia (TRA) as well as other professional academic papers supporting such measures in general. The concerns expressed by these Indigenous stakeholders include the requirement for incentives to establish newer forms of tourism and small enterprises for their improved economic benefit.

Finally, this paper lists recommendations as calls to action which would lead indigenous stakeholders in the NSW Outback to more involvement in the global tourism trade.

Keywords: Aboriginal tourism • Indigenous tourism • Indigenous enterprise • Experiential tourism • Outback NSW tourism

Introduction
International tourism is increasing however Outback Australia is missing out on the benefits of certain government policies not being implemented. The purpose of this paper is to critique the proposition by Destination NSW asserting "... research also shows that NSW is now the most popular state in Australia for international travellers to experience Indigenous tourism (350,000) ... in the year ending June 2017" [1]. Whilst this figure is not challenged in this paper, the depth and type of this experience is explored, given Destination NSW [2] also reported approximately 862 000 domestic and 11 000 international overnight visitors to the NSW outback as at the YE December 2019.

Destination NSW is the state government’s tourism promotion body and was established by an act of the NSW state parliament, known as the Destination NSW Act (2011) in which it was chartered "... to achieve economic and social benefits for the people of NSW through the development of tourism" [3].

The Future of Work
The future of work in remote indigenous communities is a challenging topic. Remote, by definition, is remote, especially in Australia. Up to 12 hours’ drive from Sydney is required, just to reach the edge of the “Outback” (Though other researchers may challenge this). There are no regular scheduled air travel flights operated to or from regional airports in the towns of Brewarrina, Bourke and Walgett as at the date of writing, according to the Amadeus GDS – Global Distribution System. Brewarrina, located 810 km from the NSW state capital Sydney as an example of a potential indigenous tourism destination, has 40 000-year-old, man-made fish traps in the Barwon river.

Thus, “Older than the Egyptian Pyramids” is the assertion to promote to international audiences as postulated by the writer of this paper.

Plurality of the tourism “industries”
Tourism is a group of stakeholder industries (e.g. airlines, hotels, restaurants, coach operators etc.) and not one rigid industry [5-7]. This growth in global tourism demonstrates a rationale behind the pluralistic reference of the tourism industries (as opposed to the singular tourism “industry”), in which services such as (but not limited to) accommodation, ground transport, tours, guiding (including indigenous services), theme parks, car rental agencies, camping grounds, information agencies and ancillary products (such as but not limited to) retail luggage and travel goods outlets, currency exchange bureaux, souvenir shops and telecommunications providers are required.

This paper serves to increase the involvement of remote and indigenous communities of the NSW outback (using the towns of Bourke, Brewarrina and Walgett as case examples) to become part of the tourism industries, which globally involved 1.5 billion travellers in 2019 which represented an increase of 4% over the 2018 figure [8].

While the DNSW (Destination NSW) claims there has been growth to the NSW Outback in terms of tourism arrivals (which the writer of this paper doesn’t dispute), there has been only one location (Broken Hill in far western NSW) identified in the Aboriginal product toolkit [9].

The DNSW documents which form the basis of this paper will be:
• Destination Networks: Driving Growth of the Visitor Economy in Regional NSW (DNSW 2017a);
• Destination New South Wales: Annual Report 2016-2017 (DNSW 2017b);
• New South Wales Aboriginal Tourism Toolkit [9].

Additionally, research to which this paper relates is derived by reference to the academic and professional literature which call for newer forms of tourism, including remote and indigenous experiences. Such forms of
tourism having been increasingly recommended in recent literature [10-12]. Some of the major concerns of the writer of this paper are epitomised as follows:

• The DNSW [1] Destination Networks report highlights new reforms being established in the DNSW structure, however that report makes little discussion in regard to Indigenous tourism, nor even indigenous stakeholder involvement in the decision-making and consulting processes;

• The DNSW [9] Annual Report discusses the potential for a DNSW network office in the City of Dubbo, which according to the DNSW map in section 3.1 is on the periphery of the Outback of NSW. The writer of this paper suggests this measure is geographically unbalanced;

• The DNSW Aboriginal Toolkit [8] asserts the prevalence of 16 Indigenous owned and operated tourism enterprises, with only one such venture in Outback NSW.

International Tourism statistics to Australia: an overview

According to the TRA [13] International short-term visitor arrivals to Australia, YE December 2019 were 8.7 million persons, an increase of 2% over the YE December 2018. The total visitor nights remained unchanged at 274 million nights during the same period. Expenditure by visitors increased by 3% which closed at $AUD45.4 billion (approximately $AUD5218.40 per capita). The same TRA (2019) report identified 4.008 million persons of the visitors (approximately 46.0%) as tourists. Finally, the TRA (2019) reported 4.384 million international visitors (approximately 50.3%) as having visited the State of NSW (Figure 1).

Tourism statistics to the NSW Outback

According to Destination NSW (2020), Outback NSW received approximately 1 054 000 visitors (overnight and day trips; international and domestic). The total visitor numbers were a 37.4% increase over the 2018 total visitations of 767 000 persons, however total nights stayed decreased from 2 544 000 nights to 2 257 000, representing a –11.3% difference from 2018 to 2019 (reduction). Contrastingly, total expenditures rose from $AUD236 000 000 to $AUD446 000 000, representing an 89.0% increase.

That same report asserts 673 000 visitors were both international and domestic overnight visitors (an increase of 23.3% over the 2018 figure of 546 000 visitors). Of the 2019 total, 11 000 were international travellers and 662 000 domestic travellers, staying 2 257 000 nights (a reduction of -11.3% and spending a total of $AUD394 million. Contrastingly again, while over nights reduced the expenditure rose from $AUD210 million (87.0%) in 2018 (Figure 2).

Holiday purposes accounted for 41% of visitations. Domestic daytrip data for the region was reported as “statistically unreliable”. Given the data reports a total of 1 054 000 persons of which 673 000 were overnighters (international and domestic), it could be deduced 381 000 visitors were domestic day-trippers.

NSW Export ready indigenous tourism products

According to DNSW[9] a total of 16 ‘export ready’ (i.e. tourism products deemed ready for export to the market outside NSW for visit to that state) Indigenous Tourism enterprises exist across NSW and are depicted in diagram 5 (p. 8). In the diagram, the area referred to as the “Outback” is coloured pink and covers most of the State of NSW. As depicted in the diagram, the majority of export ready products are rather metro-centric, with over half the enterprises located within geographical proximity to the NSW state capital Sydney. Outback locations, especially Northern NSW lack such opportunities. (Further discussion regarding metrocentricity in section 4).

Furthermore, the Destination Networks report (DNSW 2017a) states the DNSW plan is to dedicate resources to further promote various types of tourism including Indigenous tourism. This is a positive measure, however the requirements for this to occur lie beyond mere resources (as will be discussed in the recommendations section) (Figure 3).

These enterprises conduct export-ready tourism products which represent “more than 80 different Tribal Groups each with a unique story to tell. With such cultural diversity on offer, New South Wales can offer visitors some of the most accessible and vibrant Aboriginal cultural tourism experiences in the country” (p. 2). Moreover, the toolkit is a component of the overall New
South Wales Aboriginal Tourism Action Plan which (as discussed in the toolkit, p. 2), recognises the importance of developing partnerships which:

- Encourages understanding through cross-cultural exchange
- Broadens target audiences;
- Boosts travel packaging opportunities;
- Augments value to the overall tourism experience.

The Destination Networks report [1] expresses the NSW Government's goal to double overnight visitor expenditure by 2020. This would imply doubling expenditure in the Outback of NSW, in a period of 2.5 years. The State (including the Outback) would be geographically divided into DN's (Destination networks, as per diagram 5, with 3 staff each: A General Manager, A Business Development or Marketing Manager/Officer; and an Administrative Assistant, p.12). However, some serious concerns are presented in the discussion section (four 4 of this immediate paper).

Furthermore, the Destination Networks report [1] in reviewing the various RTO’s (Regional Tourism Organisations) states: “Extensive consultation was conducted with over 93 stakeholders including local Government, the tourism division of the NSW Business Chamber Advisory Council, key tourism industry associations, the NSW Office of Local Government and RTO’s themselves”. The writer of this paper raises the question regarding the seeming lack of consultation with Indigenous Stakeholders leading to joint decision making, a process which Scheyvens [14] posits is important for the purposes of achieving both conservation of the ecosystems as well as sustainable tourism development.

Current tourism operations to the NSW Outback.

Tours carrying international tourists to the NSW Outback are not new to state tourism. These include extended overland coach tours, private air charters from major cities (e.g. exSydney) and day trips based in regional locations such as Lightning Ridge and Bourke. As discussed, there are 16 export ready Indigenous tourism enterprises in Outback NSW. Identifying the number of the total actual operators (indigenous and otherwise) and their specific operations is beyond the scope of this paper and the resources allocated to it.

NSW’s need for remote and indigenous tourism

The Aboriginal Tourism Toolkit reported, approximately 364 000 visitors to NSW (domestic and international) experienced some form of Indigenous Tourism as the YE SEP 2016. This would suggest (extrapolating from the outback portion, any outback component of this figure would be experienced either predominantly in Broken Hill or with non-export ready enterprises (in other parts the Outback).

The emerging interest among travellers and academics in regard to remote and indigenous tourism is prevalent in the corpus of academic and professional literature. Some of the main reasons for such tourism development include (but are not limited to):

- A measure to offset the disruptions to traditional lifestyles of indigenous communities [15].
- The promotion of mutual understanding through equitable tourism without discounting the requirement for leisure and in which economic development and cultural growth may be attained through aspects such as education [16].
- Remote/Indigenous stakeholder involvement in the development of quality relationships through tourism [17] (Table 1).

The Future of Work in remote communities

The Brundtland [15] report stipulates “Tribal and indigenous peoples will need special attention as the forces of economic development disrupt their traditional life-styles” (p. 19). The report further establishes some indigenous communities are threatened with extinction due to insensitive development and unsustainable (and bureaucratic) policies, practices, rules, laws and regulations over which the communities have no or little control.

Target [12] supports the claims of the Brundtland [15] report by concluding “Aborigines have an inner life of deep spiritual power, an understanding of their harsh world that most Westerners fail to appreciate” (p. 182). Such a statement could suggest there is an opportunity (e.g. spiritual tourism) which has been an overlooked niche and which globally (perhaps for centuries) has been a major reason why people travel to remote destinations.

Furthermore, the head of the Catholic Church Pope Francis coins the term “rapidification” as a process in which humanity’s pace of life and work continually intensify and “… moreover the goals of this rapid and constant change are not necessarily geared to the common good or for integral and
sustainable human development. The speed with which pace of human activity (Western civilisation focus) has developed contrasts to the naturally slow pace of biological and (ecological) evolution.” [18].

Additionally (also from the Holy See), Pope Francis’ predecessor, Benedict XVI in the encyclical Caritas in veritate” (2009) stressed “international tourism can be a major factor in economic development and cultural growth. We need, therefore, to develop a different type of tourism that has the ability to promote genuine mutual understanding, without taking away from the element of rest and healthy recreation. Tourism of this type needs to increase, partly through closer coordination with the experience gained from international cooperation and enterprise for development” (p. 40).

The writer of this paper postulates an important link between the Popes’ assertions and the Brundtland [15] report’s conclusions regarding the adverse effects on indigenous peoples.

**Discussion**

Remote tourism is not new in NSW or the rest of Australia. However, the writer of this immediate paper resolves many international tourists to Australia are not receiving optimal experiences further than mere metrocentric experiences centred on the likes of the State Capitals and other major urban locations. The DNSW [2] statistics demonstrate the attraction the outback has to some international tourists, proving increased tourism to the NSW outback is a potentially viable alternative to metrocentric tourism.

Having considered the lack of focus on tourism (and associated employment opportunities) to the remote NSW outback; having established the demands for newer forms of tourism; having predicated the spiritual outlook through which indigenous peoples view tourism; having identified the DNSW’s charter “to achieve economic and social benefits for the people of NSW through the development of tourism” [9] this section discusses some of the major concerns of the writer of this paper.

- Little is being addressed for the NSW outback beyond Dubbo and the limited activity in Broken Hill for economic and enterprise development;
- Dubbo should not be included in the outback geographically, due its status as a city [19]. Additionally, Dubbo is relatively close to Sydney in comparison to Outback communities such as Bourke, Brewarrina and Walgett which have indigenous and spiritual tourism to offer and where which the indigenous populations exceed 30% and 60% respectively;
- The statistics claim 662 000 domestic tourists and 11 000 international tourists visited the NSW Outback YE December 2019. However, the writer of this immediate paper questions (among other points) if these were passing tourists (e.g. itineraries traversing locations such as Dubbo), visiting the Western Plains Zoo or passengers on the Indian Pacific train stopping to visit Broken Hill? Or tourists wishing to visit the Outback itself as a final destination? Much is open to interpretation;
- Personal communication between the writer of this paper and Indigenous stakeholders from Brewarrina and Bourke contend there has been little (if any) consultations with at least two indigenous enterprises regarding potential tourism products which could be included in the DNSW toolkit, which are export ready (i.e. to ready for international promotion) if provided sufficient marketing support to be promoted to the international markets;
- There is a limitation on the number of export-ready tourism products in the Outback (only one product if the DNSW depiction in diagram 5 of the outback is considered and that is the product - number 17 - in Broken Hill, far western NSW; the pink shade in the map), despite the plethora of potential tourism opportunities in the Outback which could be better developed and maintained (thus leading to increased Indigenous/remote employment).
- The writer of this paper considers this to be an under-representation of the potential (to cater to international visitors);
- Underutilised airport infrastructure. E.g. a shortage and/or underutilisation of scheduled air services to the Outback airports located in traditionally indigenous locations such as Bourke and Brewarrina (it is acknowledged regional operator Air Link had operated flights to Bourke, Walgett and Lightning Ridge commencing late 2019 with suspensions due to Coronavirus in early 2020). These airports are empty of aircraft, except perhaps for generalaviation services (i.e. aviation services other than scheduled passenger and freight operations). Such airports are potentially underutilised;
- Can three DNSW staff promote to the effect of doubling expenditure in 2.5 years and consult with Indigenous stakeholders in the process;
- There is an under-representation of NSW’s reception of international visitations to its Outback, i.e. 11 000 international visitors of approximately 673 000 visitors in 2019;
- The Aboriginal Tourism Toolkit (2017c) reported, approximately 386 000 visitors to NSW (domestic and international) experienced some form of Indigenous Tourism as the YE SEP 2016. This would suggest (extrapolating from the outback portion of diagram 5), any outback component of this figure would be experienced either predominantly in Broken Hill or with non-export ready enterprises (in other parts the Outback). Either way, more research is required into the locality of these experiences (and the types of experiences themselves) and/or more recognition of export-ready products (in which funding may be required as per the DNSW. A concern here is, if 80 indigenous nations are benefiting from these export ready products, of which only one exists in the outback, the question arises, how many other indigenous groups are missing from the benefit? I.e. how much more potential is there?

**Recommendations**

Having discussed the concerns of the writer of this immediate paper, the following recommendations are made as suggestive measures to address the challenges identified in the literature (it is acknowledged some of these suggestions may be planned for future implementation by the DNSW and/or its relevant stakeholders. It further acknowledged these suggestions and many other potential suggestions may require further studies and research to be undertaken):

**Future vision in alignment with NSW Government policy**

It is a policy of the NSW government to “Establish a strong network with non-Aboriginal services*. Additionally, establishing strong international tourism marketing networks will be required to meet the targets set in the Destination Networks report i.e. doubling the expenditure in the NSW regional during the period 2017-2020.

Networks may include (but not be limited to): employment agencies, government employment services, indigenous community elders, potential tourism enterprises in and serving Outback locations (for example accommodations, theme parks, museums, information centres, tour operators – indigenous and otherwise, tour guides – indigenous and otherwise). The communication applied may include (but not be limited to) regular formal and informal meetings; indigenous tourism events (for example public fairs), international and domestic tourism industry roadshows, mutual visitations by the identified stakeholders and professional seminars.

**Increased international indigenous tourism marketing education**

Increased support for indigenous and remote tourism (small enterprise) development for inclusion in cooperative marketing ventures, working with specialist universities and vocational education colleges and indigenous tourism enterprises. This would include familiarisation tours for educators to outback to develop export ready ventures.

**Mandatory immersion trips to outback locations for policymakers**

Policymakers include staff from DNSW, the Prime Minister’s Office and...
Federal and Indigenous Affairs staff (to name a few). Such trips may include day trips to sites of indigenous importance in destinations to be agreed with tribal elders, where interested stakeholders are immersed in indigenous culture in which a greater understanding of their world view and their employment concerns are explored.

**Increased indigenous involvement in legal decision-making**

Increased indigenous involvement in tourism decision-making, including law and regulation making in local councils that “Represent the interests of the aboriginal sector to partners and other stakeholders”. This could include establishing local NFP’s (Not for profit) indigenous tourism councils, as members of the WINTA (World Indigenous Tourism Alliance) which could possess particular powers to approve legal aspects of indigenous tourism (e.g. intellectual property rights to artefacts such as boomerangs and dingeridoo’s). Additionally, cultural corroborees which have international cultural significance.

**Increased bureaucratic accountability**

Increased accountability of public servants including bureaucrats and parliamentarians in their annual reports is increasingly important. For e.g. the DNSW annual report 2017 discusses little about indigenous or remote communities. Current DNSW reports when discussing the “outback” only note Broken Hill and Dubbo. Protraction into other regions such as Bourke, Brewarrina, Lightning Ridge and Walgett (to name a few) is strongly suggested.

The aforementioned towns (to suggest a few) potentially have unique tourism features which could attract international visitors with correct international marketing and small enterprise support. DNSW must network more with potential stakeholders in these locations.

**Newer self-employment incentives**

A new form of self-employment incentives for indigenous stakeholders to have more ownership and inclusion in international tourism opportunities is required. Some suggestions for this could include (but not be limited to):

- Turn funding away from welfare and towards actioning co-operative marketing within self-employment outcomes. This may include private consultancies as agencies and mentors. Again, consultations with indigenous elders will be required.
- The incentives for increased income must exceed the welfare penalties (such as poor health, drug/alcohol abuse, domestic violence etc.) for being long-term unemployed;
- Incentives may also include tax benefits in which meaningful consultations between the Australian Taxation Office and DNSW would be required, as well as (potential) tax reforms to permit implementation of entrepreneurial potential of Outback communities to flourish.

**International best practice guidelines**

For the NSW outback to be included in the UNWTO sustainable development goals (and in particular the alleviation of poverty) may require funding from external sources, including corporate and philanthropic foundations to develop social enterprises.

The World Indigenous Tourism Alliance (WINTA), as a relatively new industry support stakeholder, could also be consulted for international indigenous tourism best practice. This could include a global awareness campaign within WINTA’s objectives.

**Call to Action**

Priority action is required to resolve the issues at hand and increase international awareness. Some measures to address this call to action include (but are not limited to):

- Indigenous tourism presence at the Australian pavilions of world expos (including international expos);
- DNSW should work with future Corroboree Project planners and promote the event as a NSW indigenous event which serves to promote immersive tourism to the named outback towns;
- Increased indigenous involvement (such as podium speakers, performers and welcome staff) at international tourism events such as Get Global, Travel Industry Exhibition and various Tourism Australia and DNSW events internationally.

**Conclusion**

It’s been established international tourism is a growing group of industries, however despite the annual growth, the beneficiaries of the economic injection to the nation have geographically been unchanged (for the most part) over recent years. Most of these beneficiaries are geographically metrocentric for the most part being located in relatively urban areas of Australia.

Given personal consultations between the writer of this paper and indigenous entrepreneurial stakeholders seeking to benefit economically from tourism (and exit their welfare reliance) it is concluded more needs to be done to promote tourism to less privileged communities in the NSW outback.

This paper has discussed some of the initiatives of DNSW in regard to improving tourism to the Outback and acknowledges some of these successes; however the writer remains concerned with many of the measures being planned by DNSW and assert more can be done.

**References**

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