

**LAUNCH OF TOURISM ENVIRONMENT FORUM OPERATIONAL PLAN: 29
MARCH 2000**

SUPPORTING STATEMENT FROM ROGER CROFTS

TOURISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT: JUST BEGINNING

Argue that the environment is the most under developed part of the tourism product in Scotland. This may seem surprising coming from the Chief Executive of a natural heritage agency but it is nevertheless true. There are some areas at or near carrying capacity from ecological and/or physical and/or perceptual points of view, but there are many others where this is not the case.

Emphasise the natural heritage of Scotland has tremendous diversity:

- around the country and therefore it is a world beater in terms of its size;
- through the seasons in terms of species available and the texture and colour of the landscape; and
- in turn of some major wildlife spectacle such as marine diversity, over wintering geese, white tailed sea eagles, blanket bogs, especially the Flow Country.

Emphasise that Scotland's Natural heritage is accessible for all interests for a number of reasons:

- there is a great deal of land in public or environmental;
- charitable trust ownership;
- new access legislation with a fundamental responsible right of access legislation to land is about to go before Parliament, and
- there are new opportunities in terms of National Parks and the rejuvenated National Nature Reserve.

On National Parks express concern about perception that these are "tourism development areas" and also express concern about the fact the Government's legislative proposals need some further amendment from an environmental perspective.

On NNRs emphasise, in particular, better promotion of existing sites and possibility of new ones.

Emphasise that existing and potential customers are seeking much closer engagement with the environment and a much more refined product. Also emphasise that competition from other parts of the world, particularly developing countries (where other sources of income generation are restricted), are developing their environmental tourism product rapidly.

It is clear therefore that better connection between the customer and the product in innovative ways which create jobs, improves business viability and results in sustainable use of environmental assets is the way forward. Therefore the Tourism and the Environment Forum and its Operational Plan for the next three years are vital ingredients in this process.

I spell out the seven critical ingredients which I see as needed to be taken forward if we are to make much more of the environment as an essential element of the tourism product in Scotland whilst ensuring its sustainability.

- 1) **Know the resources** we need to be absolutely clear about the nature of the resources and, most especially, about their carrying capacity, otherwise we will not be in a position to advise on sustainable use of these environmental assets. A good deal of work is already underway but more still needs to be done.
- 2) **Customer requirements** we need to be much clearer about what different customers want in terms of environmental tourism in Scotland. The days of the educated guess have long gone and have to be replaced by a much more sophisticated customer-driven approach.
- 3) **Know what the competition provides** given the increasing competition globally on environmental tourism we need to be much clearer about what other countries are providing and what is best practice. Make references to best practice investigations for instance by Bill Taylor (SNH) in Australia.
- 4) **Provide infrastructure** emphasise the importance of the right type of infrastructure in the right place. Criticise the continuing developments of more visitor and interpretation centres in places like Loch Lomond and emphasise the importance of a much wider range of infrastructure including paths, upgraded and repaired mountain footpaths and interpretation boards in appropriate places.
- 5) **Provide appropriate information** emphasis the importance of electronically available information through, for example Ossian, in accommodation providers and particularly on www.
- 6) **Train and certify guides** emphasise the importance of a professional environmental guiding service in Scotland. Other countries do it, use the example of Cuba for the surety of service and the enhancement of enjoyment which this gives to visitors. Emphasise the good practice which already exists but also express concerns about the cowboy operators and those who take no heed of the fact that they are gaining a living from the use of other peoples resources, eg on private land.
- 7) **Encourage awareness and responsible behaviour** no point in promoting environmental tourism if visitors themselves are not aware of the impact of their activities directly or indirectly and what they can do about them.

Very substantial agenda: Therefore express strong disappointment that environmental tourism is hardly mentioned at all in the new Scottish Executive Tourism Strategy for Scotland. In other words, we have the under selling of an under developed product and we must get this position changed.

Roger Crofts
12 April 2000

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