

# “Geotourism, Ecotourism and Regional Development - Challenges and Opportunities”

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# Today's Agenda

- Chinese Tourism to Australia
  - Ecotourism, Geotourism and Scenic Areas
  - Pre-Aspiring Geopark Development in Australia
  - Etheridge 'Defacto Geopark' Community Issues and Concerns
  - Sustainability and Community Engagment
  - Take Aways
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# Chinese Tourism to Australia

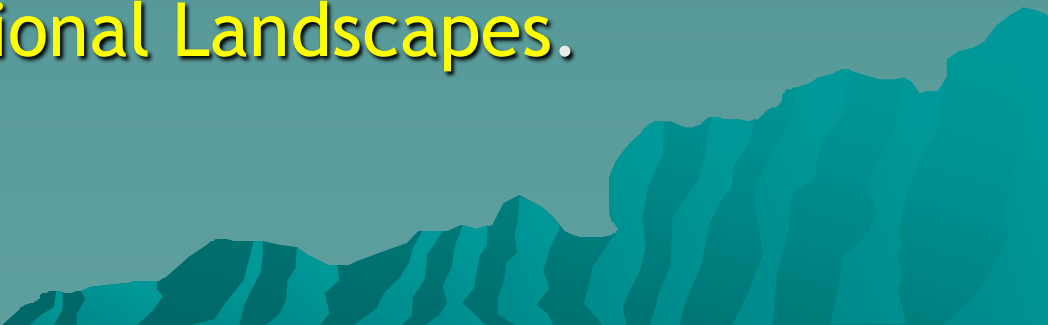
- In 2016, 1.2 million Chinese visited Australia, some 1% of total outbound from China of 122 million.
  - The most popular other destinations were mainly nearby Asian countries.
  - The top 10 outbound tourism countries were: Thailand, South Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Singapore, United States, Malaysia, Maldives, Vietnam and Philippines.
  - Capacity constraints aside, why such a low level of interest in Australia?
  - Why are Chinese tourists not visiting our iconic landscapes located in regional, continental landscape areas of Australia?
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# Australia's Tourism Marketing Strategy


- 'There's Nothing Like Australia' is Tourism Australia's global consumer marketing campaign, highlighting some of the very best attractions & experiences Oz tourism has to offer.
- Designed to be long-lasting and flexible, the campaign is evolving to stay relevant for target consumers.
- The campaign currently has **three key areas of focus: youth; aquatic & coastal; and food and wine.**
- However, TTF now claims that **nature-based tourism is an important contributor to the economies of regional Australia.**
- **Natural assets are often the primary drivers of visitation** to a region and are the catalyst for jobs and economic growth.

# Nature Based Tourism Strategy 2025

- Ecotourism Australia & others have been working with key industry stakeholders to prepare **Australia's Nature Based Tourism Strategy 2025 & Action Plan**.
  - There is currently **no collaborative, nation-wide strategy** to maximise and realise the potential for nature-based tourism.
  - However in June 2017, the **Tourism & Transport Forum (TTF)** released a paper urging governments to refocus on Australia's National Landscapes.
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# Ecotourism and Geotourism Concepts

- Ecotourism is **ecologically sustainable tourism** with a primary focus on **experiencing natural areas** that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation.
  - But **ecotourism** per se is too narrowly defined and is increasingly seen as a **niche market**, particularly from a chinese perspective.
  - However, **geotourism** is tourism which focuses on an area's **geology & landscape as the basis** for providing visitor engagement, learning and enjoyment.
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# Repositioning our 'Nature Based' Tourism Marketing

- The Chinese market is not attuned to marketing which promotes ecotourism, geotourism, nature-based tourism, and even terms such as national landscapes.
- Chinese tourists just want to visit iconic 'Scenic Areas' and take photos.
- Geotourism is simply a process that drives visitation to iconic 'Scenic Areas'.



# Geotourism

comprises the following features of natural & cultural heritage:

1. **Abiotic** - non-living aspects such as the climate & geology e.g. landscape and landforms: **GEODIVERSITY**
2. **Biotic** - the living parts eg. fauna (animals) and flora (plants): **BIODIVERSITY**
3. **Cultural** - past & present, non-living & built

Holistic in scope, **geotourism is the key driver** for Geoparks, Geotrails and even World Heritage Areas.

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# UNITED NATIONS

Founded in 1945 - 193 member states

## UNESCO



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



## World Heritage Areas




## Man and the Biosphere






## UNESCO Global Geoparks

# The Geopark 'Problem' in Australia - 2008

1. The concept of global geoparks **not supported by** government planning and tourism agencies; the concept **did not fit well into the prevailing public land management arrangements**, underpinned by a two tier federation.
  2. Concept not embraced or understood by the geological professions - **no constituency support**.
  3. **Government Geological Surveys were not supportive of geopark development** and geotourism generally, with concern about **impact on access to lands for exploration and mining**.
  4. Kanawinka UNESCO Global Geopark **withdrawn through lack of government support and approvals**.
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# UNESCO Programs (after Dowling, 2016)

Program	Sites	Countries
 <b>World Heritage</b>	<b>1052</b>	<b>165</b>
 <b>Man and the Biosphere</b>	<b>669</b>	<b>120</b>
 <b>UNESCO Global Geoparks</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>35</b>

# Australia's UNESCO Sites (after Dowling, 2016)

Program	Sites
 The logo for UNESCO World Heritage, featuring a circular emblem with a stylized 'W' and 'H' inside, surrounded by the text 'PATRIMONIO MUNDIAL', 'WORLD HERITAGE', and 'PATRIMOINE MONDIAL'.	22
 The logo for UNESCO Man and the Biosphere (MAB), featuring the letters 'MAB' in a stylized font with a green and blue design element.	14
 The logo for UNESCO Global Geoparks, featuring a green circular emblem with a stylized 'G' and the text 'UNESCO' below it.	0



# Australia's 16 National Landscapes - 'Scenic Areas'





# Australia's National Landscapes Programme

Partnership between tourism and conservation that aims to:

- Promote world class, high quality visitor experiences
- Increase the value of tourism to regional economies
- Enhance the role of protected areas in those economies
- Build support for protecting our natural and cultural assets
- Engage local communities



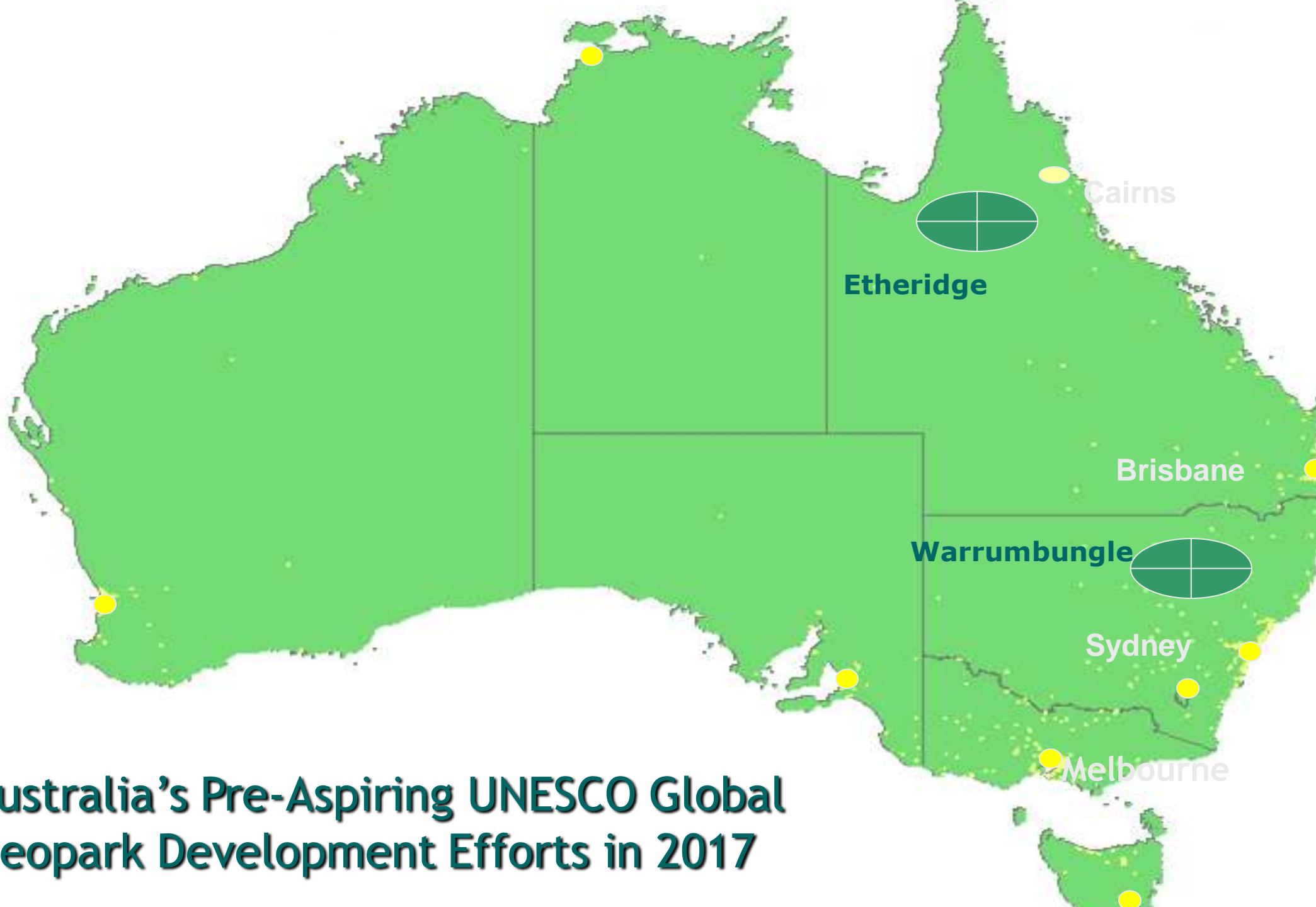
A long term strategic approach

*‘To differentiate **Australia’s iconic natural and cultural destinations** from anything else available in the world’*

# Key Factors

## Geopark Development In Australia - 2017

- Pre-Aspiring Geopark development needs to be state/local government agency initiated and supported.
- A high level of community (including other land-user) engagement is essential to meet UNESCO requirements.
- The key driver of geopark development must be focused on regional development - i.e. jobs and growth and demonstrate economic benefit to offset perceived political risk.
- The approval of Government Geological Surveys for individual projects is an absolute necessity.
- Australian Government approval for UNESCO nomination may well be achieved if state/territory government endorsement and funding is clearly established.



**Australia's Pre-Aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark Development Efforts in 2017**



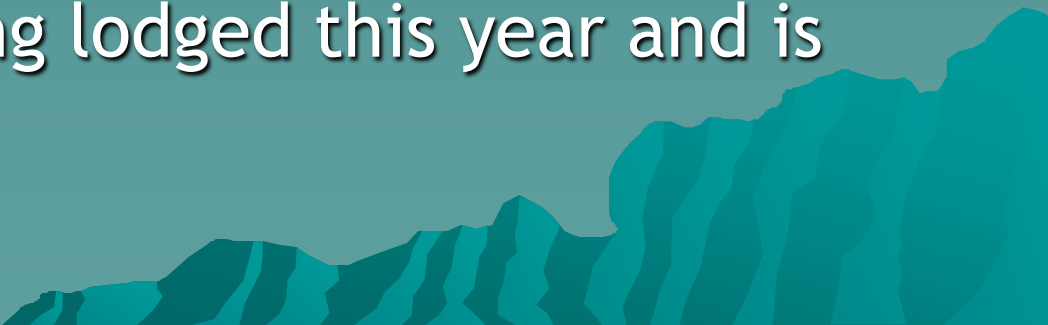
# Geological Society Assumes Role of Vetting UNESCO Global Geopark Proposals

In May 2017, the Governing Council of the Geological Society of Australia decided to assign the Geotourism Standing Committee the role of **assessing the international geological merit of the current (and any future) pre-aspiring UNESCO global geopark proposals**, based on the advice provided by the appointed geoscience/mining heritage reference groups.

It was also decided that that any assessments are to be endorsed by the Governing Council before they are made known publicly.



## Status of Pre-Aspiring UNESCO Global Geoparks

- Pre-Aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark proposals are those undergoing assessment to obtain community & government support **PRIOR to any application**.
  - **Etheridge** Scenic Area is a 'defacto geopark' and is now **NOT** subject to any assessment process.
  - **Warrumbungle** Pre-Aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark is currently subject to discussions with the State Government as to the scope and size of the project; the application is not being lodged this year and is **on HOLD**.
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# Etheridge 'Defacto' Geopark, Queensland

Comprising the entire Shire of Etheridge, and including areas of outstanding volcanic and mining heritage - some 40,000 sq km in area.

Embracing 1.7 billion years of geological history.

Only 950 people, mainly cattle farmers.





# Lava Tubes, Gems and Gorges Trail

Dramatic gorges, lava tubes and brilliant gemstones are the highlights of the Lava Tubes, Gems and Gorges Trail which loops from the Savannah Way through the Etheridge Shire. Experience the Australian outback and its wildlife on an adventure taking in the McBride Volcanic Province where eruptions millions of years ago formed a spectacular landscape and left behind a rich mineral heritage.


For all services and attractions  
see the Gulf Savannah Visitor Guide



Drive North  
Queensland



# Etheridge Scenic Area - A 'Defacto' Geopark

- **Geosites** - In abundance, with Undara as a global icon.
  - **Geo villages** - Four small townships, all with community engaged geosites (including agate, sapphire and gold fields); key established **ecotourism resorts** of Undara & Cobbold Gorge.
  - **Geotrails** - The Savannah Way (Lava tubes, Gems and Gorges Trail) with connections to nearby mining heritage locations.
  - **National Parks** - Undara Volcanic Park & six other park areas.
  - **TerrEstrial Mineral/Fossil Museum**- Most significant mineral museum in Qld.
  - Many **heritage mining sites** & small gold mining operations underscores Etheridge's status of one Australia's most diversified mineralised areas.
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# Kalkani Cone, Undara





# Undara Lava Tubes





# Hawaiian Lava Flows



lava tubes



# Undara Lava Tubes









# Cobbold Gorge





# Tallaroo Hot Springs - Ewamian Aboriginal Corporation





# TerrEstrial Museum and Global Peace Monument



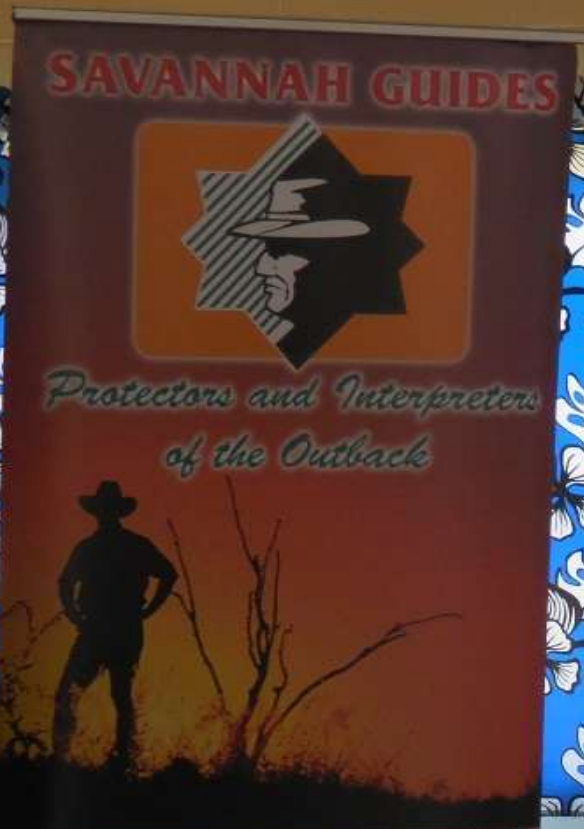
# Assessment Process - Etheridge Project

1. Appointment of Steering Committee and **Geoscience & Mineral Heritage Reference Group**.
2. Consultation with all key stakeholders (e.g. **indigenous communities**, national parks, tourism resorts, and the **Savannah Guides**).
3. Consultation with key State Government agencies.
4. **Community consultation** - information bulletins, public meetings involving Shire Councillors.

**A relatively short 12 month period allowed for the assessment and application completion process.**


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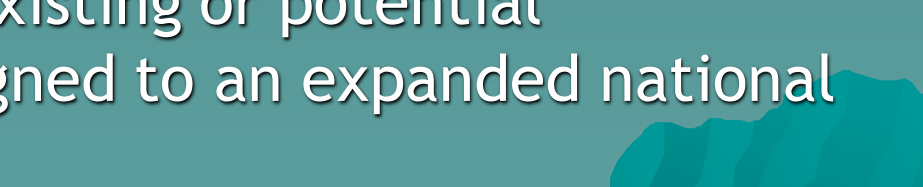


Savannah Guides Workshop, Forsyth, April 2017: Presenter Russell Boswell

# Community Raised Issues - Etheridge Project

1. National Parks, indigenous groups, the Savannah Guides, and residents of townships are very supportive, because they understand the economic benefits of tourism.
  2. However, agricultural, small scale mining groups & gemstone fossickers not supportive with a vigorous program implemented to dissuade Council from finalising the application because a Global Geopark upsets the status quo!
  3. Issues raised were essentially fears of UNESCO control, more environmental regulation and increased levels of tourism.
  4. The labels of UNESCO, GEOPARK, Ecotourism etc raised a range of concerns and fears.
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# Basis of Landowner Resistance to the then Pre-Aspiring Etheridge Global Geopark

1. The proposed UNESCO affiliation promoted a **fear of further regulation and restrictions** curbing current and future activities and potentially leading to a World Heritage Listing.
  2. The large area of the application across the whole Shire which included large land tracts which were considered unlikely to be of interest for tourism.
  3. **The use of the term 'geopark'** which was interpreted by many to imply some form of existing or potential environmental protection (aligned to an expanded national parks network).
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# Basis of Gulf Cattleman's Association Objections Pre-Aspiring Etheridge Global Geopark


- Don't trust the Council regarding the costs.
- Don't trust the State and Federal Government not to introduce further regulation as a consequence of achieving Geopark status.
- Don't want to expose themselves to tourists.
  - getting lost
  - driving onto their property
  - bringing weeds into the area etc.

Note: Graziers appear uninterested in small township development because they source supplies and services directly from large regional centres.

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# An Alternative Strategy for the Etheridge 'Defacto Geopark'

- Council has now approved the development of an alternative major geotourism initiative which captures the aspirations of a pre-existing tourism strategy, providing additional natural and cultural heritage content.
  - Through collaboration with other local government areas, the establishment of strong geotrail linkages with geotourism attractions outside of the Shire.
  - Engaging graziers in geotourism pilot projects.
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# Etheridge Scenic Area - The Rationale for A 'Defacto' Geopark

Council recognises that a 'geotourism' project should take account of 'georegional' characteristics based on geological and mining heritage and embraced principles that could serve to pre-qualify the area for a UNESCO application at some future time, in other words meeting the designated requirements of a 'defacto' geopark.

By raising awareness of the importance of the area's geological heritage in history & society today, Council believes that this project must provide local communities with a sense of pride in their region and strengthen their identification with the area.

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# Sustainability & Community Engagement

## Etheridge 'Defacto Geopark'

Emulating a program being undertaken in the United Kingdom, it is proposed that a **'geovillage' approach be adopted for the Shire of Etheridge**; thus enabling individual townships to take unique ownership of any activity e.g. community operated museum which has a natural or cultural heritage characteristic.

Two of the small townships have strong associations with agates and gems, and another has strong mining industry heritage. The main township, Georgetown, already has the **TerrEstrial Centre mineral and fossil museum** which might benefit from even a higher level of community involvement and the recently established **Peace Monument** has already made its mark.

# UNESCO Global Geopark and Sustainability

‘Even if an area has outstanding, world-famous geological heritage of outstanding universal value **it cannot be a UNESCO Global Geopark unless the area also has a plan for the sustainable development of the people who live there.**’


‘**Unless a UNESCO Global Geopark has the support of local people it will not succeed.** UNESCO Global Geopark status does not imply restrictions on any economic activity inside a UNESCO Global Geopark where that activity complies with indigenous, local, regional and/or national legislation.’

Source: UNESCO Global Geopark Brochure

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# Take-Aways - Sustainable Community Engagement

- More focus needs to be applied to communicating the 'georegional' nature of geoparks; the application of the UNESCO brand is a 'two edged sword'.
  - More work is needed to overcome perceived fears about the detrimental impact of geoparks on other existing land users such as miners and farmers.
  - Geopark proposals must be supported by Geological Survey communities.
  - More time must be allowed to gain community engagement/support to ensure geopark sustainability.
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# Take-Aways - Future Issues for Tourism Development

- It cannot be assumed that outside of national parks that nature based tourism is welcomed by graziers.
- National parks are not generally supported by Councils for a range of reasons which include loss of rateable land & the cost of providing access services.
- Many cattlemen equate 'ecotourism' with more environmental controls from city based 'greenies'.
- Based on the success of several families in FarNQ, there is a realisation that ecotourism & geotourism ventures can deliver additional farm revenue.

# Take-Aways - Tourism from the China Region

- To attract a higher level of 'geotourists' from China, we must consider marketing the concept of Australia's iconic 'Scenic Areas' with geotourism as the principal driver.
  - Much developmental work is needed in regional Australia to meet Chinese tourism expectations and needs.
  - The Australian tourism industry needs to understand that tourists from North Asia are now accustomed to a digital platform which is currently unavailable in Australia.
  - Researching product development options for the 18-25 age, soft adventure/nature focused, overseas market segments might be well worth pursuing.
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## Contact Details

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<http://www.leisuresolutions.com.au/index.php/geotourism-industry-groups/>

Information about Australian Geotourism and Geopark Development Activities:

<https://tinyurl.com/yb7yceyh>