

**TOURISM STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVES
ON CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY IN NEW ZEALAND**

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ABSTRACT

In response to growing greenhouse gas emissions associated with tourism in New Zealand, 14 possible strategies centering on sustainable tourist types, energy-efficiency and educational campaigns were developed to reduce emissions. The strategies, along with some information on greenhouse gas emissions from tourism, were discussed with eight members of an Advisory Group (private and public sector, and marketing agencies) for a research program on international tourists' energy use. Each member was interviewed separately to gain individual perspectives on climate change in general and the proposed strategies in particular. Climate change was not of high priority to those tourism stakeholders interviewed, but they expressed concern about the planned carbon tax to be introduced in 2007. Notwithstanding this, the interviewees stressed the importance of sustainability, triple bottom line reporting, and resource efficiency. They felt that to deal effectively with tourism's greenhouse gas emissions some legislation would be required, and that this should allow for a partnership between Government and industry that provides sufficient room for industry initiatives, such as voluntary benchmarking and certification. Tourists could also play a role in this process, for example by participating in carbon-offsetting schemes, supporting new technologies (e.g. hydrogen cars) and by actively engaging in energy-efficiency measures (e.g. switching off lights in their hotel). Overall, competition and the economic imperative dominate decision making and, therefore, climate change strategies need to provide multiple benefits, particularly financial, to be effective. Existing competition makes it hard for individual companies to take the lead, which demonstrates the need for concerted initiatives by a critical mass of companies, supported by a favorable policy framework.

KEYWORDS: *Climate change policy, Tourism stakeholders, Greenhouse gas emissions, Partnerships*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a contributor to climate change by its use of fossil fuels and emission of greenhouse gases, especially carbon dioxide. In New Zealand, tourism contributes 6% of the national carbon dioxide emissions (exc. international travel), and this share will increase with international arrivals growing at about 5–6% annually (1). Despite the increasing recognition of tourism's role in climate change (2), research on tourism's greenhouse gas emissions and policies remains limited. Moreover, the debate mostly takes place at an academic level and rarely in the arena of policy makers and key tourism stakeholders. It is therefore unclear to what extent tourism stakeholders recognize the importance of climate change for their industry, and whether they are interested in particular mitigation actions. It is possible that the specific characteristics of climate change, as a complex and uncertain environmental phenomenon with large temporal and spatial scales and irreversible impacts (3), will result in conflict and differing value judgments within public and private sector decision-making processes. This research explores the level to which tourism stakeholders in New Zealand perceive a need and potential for climate-change-related strategies within tourism. To this end, possible strategies for reducing carbon dioxide emissions from tourism were developed and discussed with selected tourism stakeholders.

METHODS

The current study builds on work undertaken on energy use and tourism in New Zealand over the last four years, which has been brought together in a summary report (4). The focus of the report was to better understand international tourists' travel behavior, energy use, decision-making, benefits sought and underlying values. From this report, 14 strategies for reducing carbon dioxide emissions were derived (Table 1). These comprise marketing strategies for sustainable tourist types, energy-efficient itineraries and transport modes, accommodation and transport energy-efficiency measures, and educational campaigns for businesses and tourists. The summary report and strategies were sent to eight tourism stakeholders; interviews were conducted with individuals to discuss the findings and propositions. Stakeholders were also asked about their concern regarding climate change, and who should be responsible to deal with it, including the desired level of government regulation. The members (senior staff or chief executive officers) were chosen to represent the public, private and marketing sectors (Ministry of Tourism, Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority (EECA), Tourism New Zealand, Tourism Industry Association New Zealand (TIANZ), Christchurch and Canterbury Marketing, Air New Zealand, Tourism Holdings Limited, and Real Journeys). When necessary, interviewees were asked to specify whether their answers reflected personal opinions, the position of their institution, or the attitude of the whole tourism industry. The interviews were conducted between September and November 2003 and took

Table 1: Strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from tourism in New Zealand based on previous research (4)

Strategy	Uncertainties	Impact on energy use	Implementation
1. Market (target) auto tourists, camping tourists and backpackers in overseas marketing campaigns. They were the most energy-efficient tourist types.	What is the real (sustainable) yield associated with those types?	Potentially significant	TNZ and RTOs, tour operators
2. Make marketing less icon-dependent and diversify tourist icons (one in each region). Visiting the major tourist icons in New Zealand results in large travel distances.	What makes an icon?	Potentially significant	TNZ and RTOs
3. Develop regional itineraries, particularly aimed at campers, backpackers and auto tourists. Regional itineraries involve less travel per day than nation-wide touring itineraries.	Do tourists take up suggested routes? Does it make them drive more or less?	Potentially significant	RTOs, operators, wholesalers, ITOs
4. Promote packaged special-interest tourism instead of mainstream coach tours.	How big is the market for special-interest tours?	Minor	ITOs, TNZ and RTOs
5. Market two-week holidays on one island for Australians. This has the potential to reduce the need for transport.	Would TNZ change their marketing strategy for Australia?	Minor to medium	TNZ, RTOs, wholesalers
6. Monitor fast-growing markets (e.g. China, South Korea) in terms of (a) length of stay, (b) travel distance and transport mode, (c) expenditure. Speed up development process of maturing.	What is the potential to increase length of stay, to reduce dependency on icons, and to encourage FIT travel?	Medium	TNZ, TRCNZ?
7. Assess price structures that encourage auto tourists, campers and comfort travellers to travel less distance with rental vehicles.	What is the price-elasticity for rental vehicles? Does travel distance depend on costs?	Minor to medium	Rental vehicle companies
8. Improve public transport system for tourists (mainly backpackers and comfort travellers).	How can barriers be overcome so that tourists use public transport?	Minor to medium	MoT, EECA, regional councils, RTOs
9. Encourage rental vehicle companies or other businesses to build an energy-efficient fleet.	Are companies interested?	Potentially significant	EECA, TIANZ, companies
10. Include advice on travel distances in travel agent training programs in Australia and elsewhere.	Would TNZ consider this issue important enough to be included?	Minor	TNZ, RTOs
11. Target hotels to increase energy efficiency in accommodation sector.	What are the barriers to improving energy efficiency?	Minor to medium	EECA, TIANZ, hotel associations
12. Review air links into and within New Zealand to avoid unwanted travel through Auckland or other hubs.	What is more energy-efficient overall, the hub-feeding principle or the direct-link principle?	Medium	Air New Zealand
13. Educate tourism businesses, visitor centres (VIN), and RTOs about sustainable itineraries.	Do they want to be educated?	Minor to medium	TNZ, MfE, TMT, TIANZ, RTOs, companies
14. Educate tourists about sustainable itineraries and carbon off-setting opportunities (e.g. planting trees).	Tourists are more interested in nature in general than in greenhouse gas emissions.	Medium	MfE, TMT, Air New Zealand, RTOs, companies

Abbreviations: EECA- Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority, FIT - Free Independent Travel, ITO - Inbound Tour Operator, MfE - Ministry for the Environment, MoT - Ministry of Transport, RTP - Regional Tourism Organisation, TIANZ - Tourism Industry Association New Zealand, TMT - The Ministry of Tourism, TNZ - Tourism New Zealand, TRCNZ - Tourism Research Council New Zealand, VIN - Visitor Information Network.

about one hour each. The interview was semi-structured to allow the interviewee to elaborate about their institution's (business) situation and experience.

RESULTS

CONCERN ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

The eight interviews showed that concern about climate change was comparatively low on the part of stakeholders, who also reported little interest from the tourism sector as a whole (a number of operators have benchmarked under the GreenGlobe21 standard and are aware of climate change). Tourism operators have more concrete and immediate concerns (e.g. investment decisions) and they are simply unaware and uninformed about climate change. While greenhouse gas emissions and climate change were not of great importance, the need for a sustainable tourism sector, triple bottom line reporting, and resource efficiency was stressed in most interviews, often because these provide direct benefits to the businesses. The statements made by stakeholders indicated that climate change is conceptually not closely linked to the better-known concept of sustainability, and confirmed Wilbanks' (5) statement that 'sustainable development...is more of an ambiguous integrative slogan than an operational term'. All interviewees were concerned about the carbon tax, because the emission charge (\$25 per tonne of carbon dioxide) created by the government for 2007 (6) could put a financial burden on the industry (NZ\$36 million per annum, (7)), especially on the small and medium enterprises (SME). An important part of the government's policy package are Negotiated Greenhouse Agreements (NGA) for competitiveness-at-risk firms or sectors. As tourism consists largely of SMEs that currently do not have the same means to negotiate NGAs as do the large companies, the Government is currently investigating further policies for SMEs in cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR GREENHOUSE GAS REDUCTION MEASURES

Despite a general disagreement with the carbon tax and issues around NGAs, stakeholders felt that some legislation (e.g. for energy efficiency) and policing would be required to deal effectively with tourism's greenhouse gas emissions. Industry representatives stressed that a partnership between government and industry should be envisaged, leaving room and providing support for industry initiatives, such as voluntary certification through GreenGlobe21. Industry stakeholders, in particular, pointed out that companies already addressing climate change should be exempt from the carbon tax, or receive other compensation for their voluntary efforts. Several interviewees suggested a 'bottom-up

strategy' that encourages early adopters. As a result of peer pressure more operators would be encouraged to follow such energy champions. However, industry representatives also admitted that it is hard for individual operators to invest in new technologies, products or itineraries, or to engage in voluntary self-regulation, because this results in a competitive disadvantage for the company. Interviewees could not agree on which government agency should act as lead agency for implementing greenhouse gas reduction strategies (i.e. those in Table1). The Ministry of Tourism, for example, currently has no formal policy on climate change. The Climate Change Office within the Ministry for the Environment does not treat tourism differently from other sectors, and therefore integrates it into their wider programs of sustainable development and SME policies. As a marketing agency, Tourism New Zealand does not feel responsible for educating tourists or conveying environmental information. TIANZ is concerned about an energy-efficient sector, but has a limited member base (about 20% of all tourism businesses) and its primary task is to ensure that the interests of members are met. Most interviewees believed that tourists could play a role in mitigating climate change effects; however strategies should increase visitor experience (e.g. learning about nature), rather than compromising experiences and causing a feeling of guilt. Both public and private stakeholders saw potential for 'green marketing', which would increasingly attract 'green tourists' who are more likely to participate in greenhouse gas reduction strategies.

PROMISING STRATEGIES

The interviews showed that a number of the suggested strategies are already taken up to some level for reasons other than reducing greenhouse gas emissions. For example, the current national marketing campaign of 'interactive travelers' promotes regional travel and 'going slow', which could potentially lead to more energy-efficient itineraries (Strategies 1, 2, 3 and 4). Similarly, regional tourism organizations increasingly promote regional attractions and seek to increase the length of stay in their particular region (Strategies 2 and 3). There are opportunities for public sector – private sector partnerships including the administration of energy efficiency tools developed by EECA (e.g. energy-efficient fleet management, Strategy 9) through TIANZ to its members. Overall, there is a clear need for more and better information on energy efficiency and climate change that contains concrete suggestions about how tourism operators could improve their environmental bottom line without compromising their economic viability (Strategy 11). Similarly, tourists should be informed better about travel distances in New Zealand and the regional density of attractions to avoid misconception

and dissatisfaction resulting from long travel days (Strategies 10 and 13). Tourism New Zealand's travel agent programs already consider this issue to some degree.

STRATEGIES NOT LIKELY TO BE IMPLEMENTED

Stakeholders agreed that the geographical dispersion of tourist icons in New Zealand and the desire of tourists to visit many of them may lead to substantial travel, but changing the dominance of existing, well-established and continuously reinforced (by word-of-mouth and promotion) icons would be extremely difficult and a long-term process (Strategy 2). Moreover, there is a perception among some within the industry that 'packed itineraries generate high-yield', although the stakeholder who made this comment agreed that such a belief lacks foundation because too little is known about yield. Several interviewees noted that the current promotion of regional itineraries (see above) does not help efforts by EECA to promote public transport, because public transport typically connects the main centers. Public transport (except within cities) in New Zealand was not seen as a viable option for tourism, because it is too expensive, too inconvenient and not flexible enough (Strategy 8). The trend of increasingly cheaper airfares and convenient electronic booking counteracts both public transport initiatives and the promotion of regional travel.

Major impediments to reducing carbon dioxide emissions are the high capital costs that prevent energy efficiency measures for vehicles (Strategy 9). For example, coaches are rarely adapted to group sizes, because it is too expensive for the operator to have both large 50-seater coaches and minibuses. The expectation of space and comfort by tourists plays an additional role in decisions about coach sizes. Several interviewees noted that overseas wholesalers and national tour operators are major players in the tourism sector focusing on satisfying market needs and not on sustainable tourism development. Hence, an emerging market is seen as a business opportunity – irrespective of its sustainability – and products are developed that are demanded by this market (e.g. package tours for Chinese, Strategies 4 and 6). Because tourism depends on international companies and markets, there is little control over product supply and demand from within New Zealand, unless severe regulatory measures were to be taken, for example limitation of visitor visas.

DISCUSSION

Tourism has not yet been specifically featured in New Zealand's climate change policies and strategies, and, possibly as a result, there is little concern about climate change itself on the part of tourism stakeholders. Overall, there is little evidence both of linking climate change

and sustainability strategies (the New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2010 briefly mentioned carbon neutrality), and synergies between policies (so-called ancillary benefits) are not exploited (8). This seems a missed opportunity given the relatively high recognition of sustainability among stakeholders. Stakeholders are concerned that climate change policy focuses on large and energy-intensive companies (see also 9), whereas SMEs as part of the 'general energy users group' (10) are charged emission taxes. This decreases the profit margins of SMEs and diminishes competitiveness compared with non-Kyoto tourism destinations such as Australia. All interviewed stakeholders stated that a successful climate change initiative must not harm the economic bottom line. Thus the New Zealand tourism sector shows weak sustainability, i.e. one that places human needs at the center, around which environmental concerns are accommodated. Existing structures make it hard for individuals to take the lead, which demonstrates the need for concerted action by a critical mass of companies, supported by a favorable policy framework.

At this stage no single stakeholder feels it is their responsibility to individually implement strategies just for the sake of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Instead, it was evident that a multi-stakeholder (public and private sector) approach is needed where there is regulation as well as room for voluntary initiatives. Voluntary agreements, however, require the specific adaptation to a target group (tourism businesses) with clearly specified targets that are not too ambitious, but provide incentives to effectively decrease greenhouse gas emissions. Such agreements have to be embedded in a broader policy mix that guarantees support for the businesses, as well as compliance with the agreement (9). Partnerships between government and industry need to accept that policy makers and entrepreneurs have contrasting perspectives with regard to time frames, degree of individualism and control, flexibility, innovation and planning, continuity, rationality, and level of risk taking (11). While not explicitly mentioned in the interviews it appears that participatory approaches as practiced in the European Commission Climate Policy Process (3) would provide a promising avenue to distribute knowledge among stakeholders, and thereby derive policies acceptable to all parties.

New Zealand is one of a few countries that have invested in research on how tourism contributes to climate change. There is potential to implement some of the strategies resulting from this research, given the structure and responsiveness of institutions and a general awareness of New Zealand's image of being clean and green, but it will not be easy. Comparing the New Zealand situation against the propositions made in the *Djerba Declaration* (2) one can conclude that some progress has been achieved. However, the

existing initiatives (e.g. energy-efficiency road-shows by TIANZ) have not resulted in significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and a change in tourist behavior seems a major challenge. For this reason, the notions of ‘encouraging’ and ‘calling upon’, as used in the *Djerba Declaration* and as – at first – was practiced in New Zealand, are not strong enough to achieve significant reductions. It seems necessary that the sector – possibly in the form of a partnership between the Ministry of Tourism, the TIANZ and the Ministry for the Environment – work on refining the policy framework, to improve the sector’s energy efficiency, incorporate renewable energy sources, change tourist behavior and invest in carbon sinks to offset emissions that can not be reduced.

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