

Sustainable eco-tourism understands firsthand the pressures placed on the environment by human society, we also understand and recognise the very limited funding to get conservation work or research completed, with many organisations relying on government grants.

In an effort start mitigating this we incorporated a not-for-profit organisation, as a registered charity. The purpose was clear, help improve the health of the ocean through research, education, conservation, and plastic recycling.

We created a research advisory board, consisting of University Professors to ensure any works undertaken would be done in an ethical manner, and to this point we have collaborated with a wide range of university bodies, parks authorities and industry partners.

The concept is widely accepted and is increasing awareness and understanding of the positive impact a levy can have for the health of our local marine environment.

How our environmental levy works; each client partaking in any of our tourism or education services, will pay a set levy or will have proceeds of the sale then donated to our not-for profit. With this revenue we then utilise it to support on the ground actions. As we are not bound by the red tape that often comes with larger organisations or government bodies the results from the levy generate far greater impacts to the environment.

What we are proposing is that an environmental levy becomes a legislated permit requirement. Permitted organisations must make a financial or in-kind commitment to support outreach programs. We wholeheartedly feel this should be directed towards 'friends of groups', NGO's, research bodies such as Universities or research organisations where tangible outcomes can be measured. The benefit of funding to these organisations can be enormous as many are volunteer based. We not proposing this as a revenue generation exercise for government, as we fear if this becomes a government revenue stream there will be a significant push back from industry and the benefits to the environment would become watered down due to red tape and the higher overheads associated with delivering tangible outcomes.

Looking at the impact of this levy from an industry perspective, if conservation groups such as friends of groups or research groups are supported, the benefits to the environment will be substantial, many of these organisations are screaming out for support and a few thousand dollars means the world to them. This action will help to then set Victoria as a leader in 'Regenerative Tourism' which is the next evolutionary step from 'Eco Tourism' with tourism operators now helping to support the environment in a measurable way. We, as an organisation can vouch for this system, as our actions in implementing a levy push toward 'Regenerative Tourism'. Furthermore, we are now seeing similar procedures utilised by Tourism Australia to sell our Australian Tourism story through the 'Sustainable Story Tellers' program. It will also help shift the perception of tourism operators as being environmental leaders for our communities, creating further value to the industry's image. This shift will help further differentiate Victorian Tourism from other destinations which will increase visitation from all enviro-conscientious demographics globally and as such improve many regional economies.

Once again, this is not about government revenue raising, it is about creating and directing a revenue stream into community focused organisations that will deliver substantial tangible benefits to the environment on a small budget.