



## **GUIDELINES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF GEOREGIONS**

As an outcome of the National Geotourism Strategy, the Australian Geoscience Council Inc has recommended that groups wishing to establish potential geoparks should explore various alternative options for geotourism development, such as by first establishing GeoRegions.

In Australia, GeoRegions can be single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of geological significance are linked together around a central natural or cultural value. Their intended 'bottom-up' approach of combining conservation with sustainable development aims to involve local communities. The establishment of GeoRegions as a first exploratory step has now been accepted by the State/Territory Geological Surveys, through the auspices of the Geoscience Working Group.

It is also strongly recommended that the development of GeoRegions should include the establishment of geotrails between sites of important geodiversity, such as robust geoheritage sites, geological 'monuments' and landforms, or features recognised in state or national heritage registers.

The GeoRegion mechanism provides a framework to undertake comprehensive consultation with the full range of interested or impacted community groups (including Aboriginal communities) and to resolve any identified land-tenure conflict issues that may arise. The following provides a guide to establishing a geotourism project using this mechanism.

As a first step, a full audit of natural and cultural heritage attributes in the region is strongly recommended, as well as preliminary discussions with state-or territory-based Geological Surveys, Planning and Environment agencies, and any other designated state/territory government agencies. This early planning will help focus the work to a defined area and reduce effort by identifying localities unlikely to be suitable for geotourism purposes, having regard to land and resource management considerations.

**The GeoRegion Assessment Process** can be commenced by a proponent, which might include a local Council, a grouping of Councils or a Regional Development Authority, or alternatively a community or special interest group interested in geotourism development. Having completed basic scoping works, preferably including an approved tourism Destination Management Plan (DMP), the proponent now needs to seek agreement from State/Territory Government agencies to select a defined area — i.e., a GeoRegion — to be recognised as an area of special natural and cultural heritage highlighting outstanding geoheritage features within which proposed geotrails and other attractions can be developed in support of geotourism.

### **Stage 1: GeoRegion Assessment**

The aim of this phase is to seek endorsement by way of a letter from the relevant State/Territory Geological Survey simply confirming that there is nationally or internationally significant geology in the GeoRegion. Based on this endorsement, in principle approval should then be sought from appropriate land managers and Councils, as a way to confirm and formalise this designation.

This process should consist of early consultation with the following groups:

- relevant state/territory agencies that have land and resource management responsibilities (e.g., stock route administration, Crown Lands administration), and/or planning and environment responsibilities within the proposed GeoRegion, including the relevant Geological Survey;
- Local Councils with jurisdictional responsibilities;
- any private landowners or pastoral leaseholders to determine approval of access arrangements;
- any and all Native Title holders or applicants within the chosen area to discuss potential access and heritage concerns;
- other potential government stakeholders (e.g., those cited in any Tourism Destination Management Plan (DMP));
- other stakeholders, such as interested environmental / cultural heritage groups, mining and other primary industries, and Aboriginal community groups; and
- professional societies with expertise in elements of natural and cultural heritage.

Consultation with the local, regional, and state/territory tourism organisations should also be undertaken by any special interest group that has not already been involved in the preparation of a DMP.

### **Stage 2: Geotrail establishment**

This phase consists of developing attractions within the GeoRegion. Potential attractions will have already been identified during the initial region audit, or through consultation with various stakeholders during GeoRegion establishment.

The works in this phase include:

- Development of geotrail concepts, geosites, and heritage sites etc., in association with affected LGA protected area and crown land management authorities. Objectives include obtaining approval for proposed routes and works, identifying any specific requirements relating to public safety and access, determining funding sources, developing geotrail maintenance arrangements, and finalising geotrail nomenclature requirements.

- Continued consultation with community groups including Aboriginal Land Councils, Native Title holders and communities, and environmental and heritage groups.
- Continued consultation with other interested environmental/heritage and Aboriginal community groups, and professional societies that have expertise in elements of natural and cultural heritage, to help develop content to meet interpretation needs.
- Consultation with local school groups with an interest in using geotrails for outdoor educational purposes, as a method to support curricular requirements.
- Continuation of consultation with land-use managers to obtain final approval for implementation of the agreed works. This will need to include an assessment of the location of any identified geological hazards.
- Consultation with the designated state/territory manager for uploading of site/geotrail location and descriptive information in the online *Australian Geotourism Discovery Portal*.

### **Stage 3: Next Steps**

Assessment and input into the further development of established GeoRegions are the responsibility of individual States / Territories, as legislation and tenure arrangements for land access are quite different in each jurisdiction. Any group wishing to establish a geopark from within an established GeoRegion will need to make representations to the designated State/Territory government agencies to determine how a proposal can be assessed, and the types of works to be undertaken within a GeoRegion before it can be processed for approval.

**Dr Jon Hronsky OAM**  
**Chair, National Geotourism Strategy Steering Committee**  
Australian Geoscience Council Inc

**8 December 2023**

**NOTE: Guidelines approved by a meeting of the Geoscience Working Group of Australian government geoscience agencies on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2023**