



# COMM1150 Sustainability Lens - Final Assignment (Individual Component for the Group Work)

Global Business Environments (University of New South Wales)



# Sustainability Lens:

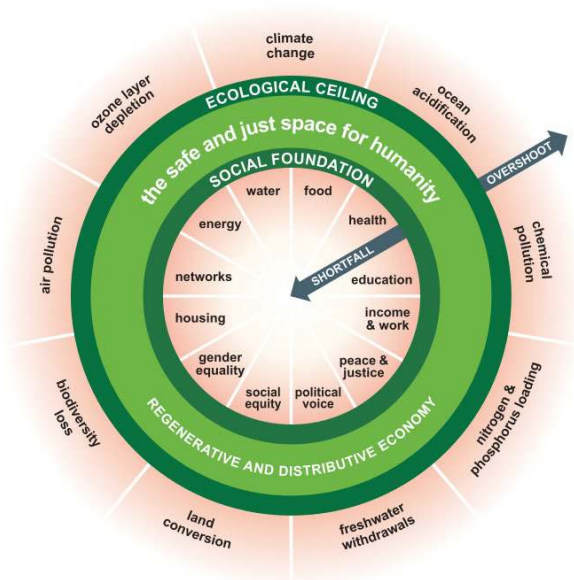
Impact of the 2019-2020 (Black Summer) bushfires on the tourism industry in NSW, Australia

— [Composed by Cindy Law \(z5361479\)](#)

Group 4: Popcrastinators

In this section, the impacts of the 2019-2020 Australian bushfires on the New South Wales tourism industry will be examined through a sustainability lens. Central to the sustainability lens is acknowledging the interdependence of the socio-cultural, economic and political systems whilst practicing alternative models of thinking to promote sustainable development. Drawing from the ecological framework in the doughnut economics model (Figure 1), it is evident that the bushfires have further accelerated a violation of several key planetary boundaries such as air pollution and biodiversity loss. While the wildfires may seem to be an regional local event, effects of transboundary atmospheric pollution, loss of endemic species alongside its undeniable links to climate change have imbued global significance. Given that optimal environmental and climatic conditions are crucial for tourist sentiment, the bushfires' adverse implications for nature-based tourism sites and health severely challenged NSW's tourism operations. Emerging from a post-disaster climate, pertinent sustainable development goals (SDGs) that the tourism industry should target include a stronger protection of 'life on land' and an acceleration of 'climate action.'

**Figure 1: Doughnut Economics Model (Raworth, 2012)**



As per the doughnut economics model, air pollution is a key element of environmental sustainability impacted by Australia's wildfires as subsequent health hazards increased the difficulty for NSW tourism organisations to attract prospective tourists. According to 2019's World Air Quality Report, NSW emerged as Australia's most polluted state for annual average particulate matter (PM2.5) concentrations with segments of Sydney reaching nearly  $400\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  (IQAir, 2019). This is defined by the World Health Organisation to be hazardous as the

bushfire smoke exposure can increase risks of cardiovascular problems, respiratory disease and premature death (Neil, 2020). Given that tourism engagement within NSW became socially unsustainable due to these health risks, government bodies from a global level responded by advising against travel in Australia. Notably, Australia's 3rd largest tourist source (The United States) altered their travel advisory for Australia to a level 2 warning to urge visitors to 'exercise increased caution' and consider postponing travel plans until bushfires subside (Snape, 2020). The ensuing increase in holiday cancellations from the US alongside other key tourist markets like Britain and China during the most popular holiday season undoubtedly harmed NSW tourism operators, overall costing Australia's tourism industry approximately \$4.5 billion (Thiessen, 2020).

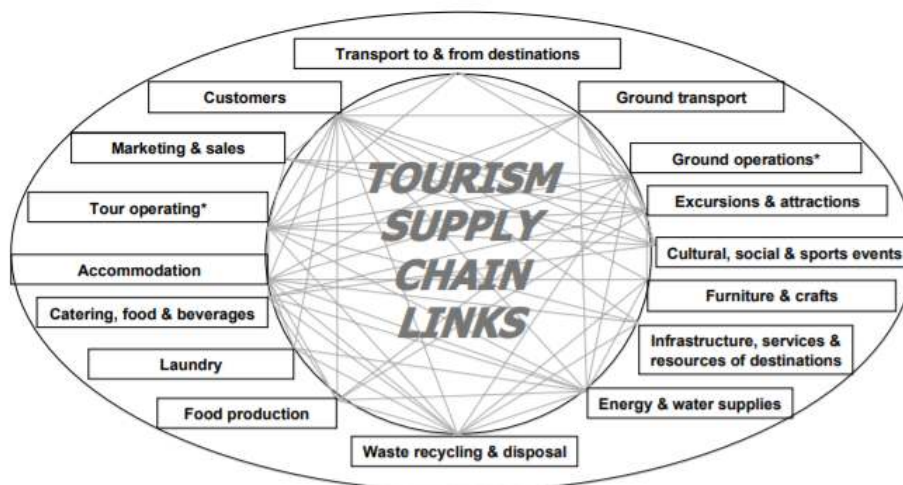
Another key dimension of environmental sustainability impacted by the bushfires is biodiversity loss at a regional level which has deteriorated the appeal of nature-based tourism destinations marketed by NSW tourism organisations. Overall, the wildfires have burnt 5.5 million hectares of NSW with preliminary assessments surmising that approximately 327 threatened species have at least 10% of their distribution in fire impact zones (Climate Council, 2020). Resultantly, much concern has surrounded the conservation status of Australia's national tourism icon -koalas- whose populations in some bushfire affected regions of NSW have dropped by up to 71% (Gailberger, 2020). Notably, viral video footage of a koala's rescue from the fires sparked global activism as donors across more than 95 countries raised over \$1.9 million to support Port Macquarie Koala Hospital's rehabilitation of injured koalas (F&P, 2019). Meanwhile, the federal government injected \$200 million to support wildlife via measures like establishing insurance populations of threatened species, seed banking and on-ground support for affected regions inclusive of World Heritage areas.

Since Australia is one of the only 17 'mega-diverse' nations hosting a high proportion of endemic species, wildlife is a strong motivator for tourism as  $\frac{2}{3}$  of annual international visitors engage with some form of nature-based activity (Ecotourism Australia, 2020).

Thus, the tourism industry has an interest to align with the SDG 'Life on Land' and partake in biodiversity conservation since it heavily relies on cultural ecosystem services like aesthetic appreciation and recreational experiences to deliver visitor satisfaction. Instead of perceiving destinations as commodities for consumption, they must be treated as natural and social assets that must be optimised to preserve intergenerational equity. Hence, as a recovery initiative, the tourism organisation 'Ecotourism Australia' collaborated with the World Wildlife Fund for Nature Australia (WWF) to provide a 2 year \$30,000 package for 6 bushfire-affected destinations to join an Eco Destination Certification Program. This internationally recognised certification program advances Australia's transition towards sustainable tourism by providing a regenerative framework for destinations to commit to ecological sustainability, natural area management and provision of quality ecotourism experiences.

The Black Summer bushfires have necessitated for the tourism industry to radically re-examine its supply chain management to enhance strategies to further build sustainable tourism in response to future bushfire and climate change risks.

**Figure 2: Tourism Supply Chain Links (Tapper, 2003)**



As observed in Figure 2, tourism involves a multitude of supply chain components inclusive of but not limited to tour and travel operations, accommodation provision, food production and waste disposal. While every activity in the tourism value chain is bound to generate emissions, an appropriate integration of businesses through local sourcing

and partnerships will facilitate carbon emission reductions in alignment with the 'climate action' SDG. Amidst the growing climate crisis, some individual tourism enterprises such as hotels, resorts, airlines and operators have subsequently begun transitioning into the circular economy by embracing a shift towards renewable energy initiatives. An example is the Blue Mountains based ultra-luxury conservation resort '*Emirates One & Only Wolgan Valley*' which has committed itself to using 35% renewable energy sources, purchasing over 100 solar panels to power hot water systems and exterior lighting. The resort is currently a participant of an ongoing bin-trim program which is targeting a conversion of food waste into water and it continues to leverage innovation to further design waste out of its tourism based products and services (Luxury Lodges of Australia, 2021). Despite these sustainable development initiatives within segments of the tourism industry, the federal government needs to incentivise stronger involvement by setting a precedent by further committing to the SDG of climate action to preserve its leading service export industry.

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